



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part One**

**by Valerie Hope**

MORNINGS HIT HARD AT CROWHILL Station, home of the glorious company of Ladder 14. The great firefighters, the heroes of the working man. It was around the back of the sturdy but well-used House with the big garage doors where the unsung lifesavers stayed, filling out their endless reams of paperwork and living their busy, sleepless lives. It was in the back where the big, yellow truck lived. Medic 21. The paramedics.

After 9/11, firefighters were all the rage. Featured everywhere as handsome, rugged figures out of romantic stories, rushing into the flames with no regard for their own safety, pulling helpless victims out of life-threatening situations with no need for thanks or repayment.

Sure, the firefighters cut people out of cars. It was the paramedics who cleaned them up when they wet themselves, towed the blood off of them, gave them medicine and held their hands, rushing through the insane traffic of the city to get them to the emergency room at Memorial in one piece, breathing and hearts beating. Hell, it was the medics who gave the firefighters oxygen and IV fluid when they dropped from smoke inhalation from working past their SCBA limit.

If only EMS had a decent public relations department. For the firefighters, they had the glory movies: Backdraft and Ladder 49, the tear-jerkers that portrayed them as noble heroes in desperate situations. What did EMS get? Bringing Out the Dead. The crispy-critter burnouts featured in TLC's Paramedics being disrespectful and rude to their patients.

No wonder people didn't call us heroes. At least that's what I, Nick Lightman, licensed paramedic, thought as I pedaled my bicycle to my temporary home for the next twenty-four hours. I chained the bike to the outdoor barbeque pit that the medics never had time to use and walked in, using my prox-card to gain access to the secure facility. I cast a look at the narcs locker beside the door. The eight or so vials of medical morphine in that locker were the only reason that the door had to be locked with a high-tech security system. What people were willing to do for a high was beyond me.

I stepped into the cramped locker room, separated into genders by a tattered pink flowered shower curtain strung up with IV administration tubing, and changed into my uniform from the shorts and t-shirt I'd worn on the bike ride. Navy blue pants with multiple pockets filled with shears, scissors and hemostats, black tactical boots which cost me a fortune but put years back on my iffy soccer knees, and a white uniform shirt with the patches of my EMS system and the Department of Health on either sleeve. I stowed a pen, penlight and my ID on the breast pocket and went into the lounge. C-shift was due to come on in ten more minutes.

Frank Jessup, the B-shift veteran of sixteen years, was sitting bleary-eyed on the couch watching The Today Show and slurping the defibrillation-grade coffee they made at the House. He grunted as I entered and picked up the clipboard containing the previous shift's logs, knuckling his graying walrus mustache and coughing.

"Busy?" I asked, flipping pages.

"Eighteen calls in twenty-four hours," Frank grunted. "It was a bitch. Six-car MVA on the freeway at rush hour. Twenty patients, two airlifted. It was a mess."

"Saw it on the news," I said. "Where's Staci?"

Frank returned his attention to Katie Couric and jerked a thumb towards the door of the ambulance bay. Chuckling at the burned-out old medic's gruff exterior – I knew it was an act from the time he ran a pediatric call with me two months ago. Frank cried in the EMS entrance at the emergency room for ten minutes over the eight-month old with full thickness burns over 40% of its little body. The baby didn't make it – you couldn't save them all, no matter how much you wanted to – but it showed me what kind of man Frank really was. No matter how gruff, how distant, how apathetic Frank tried to act, I knew him for the soft touch he really was.

I walked out into the bay, giving my truck – Medic 21 – the once-over by eye. Tires looked good, and she'd been recently washed and scrubbed. I grinned again. Staci was that kind of medic – type A personality all the way – and was a stickler for professionalism. That meant a clean, starched, pressed uniform and a shiny clean unit. And, I thought, it saved me the trouble of hosing it down first thing in the morning.

Staci was leaning over her knee, her foot propped up on the back step of the big Type I ambulance, talking softly with Jaclyn Campbell, her probie paramedic. Jaclyn was a second-year paramedic student at the local college and only a few credits shy of her associate's degree. She was a young, vivacious blonde with a ready smile and a deep, healthy-looking tan from long hours in the booth at the tanning salon. Her shoulder-length hair was coming out of its meticulous French braid, the sign of a long and sleepless shift.

Staci saw me and smiled. She was the best part of working here for me, a slender dark-haired beauty with sparkling dark eyes and the cutest little giggle I'd ever heard. Her dimples made my blood pressure go up ten points, and I was not immune to the effects of her magnificent superstructure – firm C cups, the firefighter's pool said – and her trim, athletic legs and behind. I didn't pursue it, though – she was way too good a medic, I had too much respect for her to hit on her in uniform. And there was precious little time outside the House for me to get to know her. But given the chance, I'd hook up with Staci in a hot second.

"Hey, what's up?" I said casually.

Staci blew out a long breath. "Crazy shift."

"I heard," I said. "Did y'all get any sleep at all?"

"'Bout an hour," Staci replied.

I mock-punched Jaclyn in the arm playfully. "How'd your girl, here, do?"

"Did her first RSI yesterday. Hit it on the first try," Staci bragged.

“Nice work,” I commented, impressed. RSI stood for Rapid Sequence Induction. It was for patients who desperately needed to have the airways controlled with an endotracheal tube, but who were awake or had a gag reflex. First we shot them full of succinylcholine which paralyzed their entire bodies except for heartbeat. We also had to push Versed to make them forget all about it – being completely paralyzed like that had to be horrible, akin to being buried alive. Once paralyzed, the medics had only thirty seconds to intubate them. It was nerve-wracking to say the least. I remembered my first one in the field and shivered.

“Thanks,” Jaclyn said in her bubbly, happy soprano. “I’m pretty proud of myself.”

“You should be,” I said. “Frank needed two tries.”

“I did not!” came the rumbling yell from the lounge, and the three other medics laughed.

“Friday, huh?” Staci asked. “You must be a masochist.”

I shrugged. “Another glorious fun-filled day in my beloved EMS,” I said. “Now if I can just find my damn partner, we can go start saving lives.”

“Ask, and ye shall receive,” a warm baritone boomed across the ambulance bay. David Cupertino strolled in out of the slightly foggy, damp morning wearing his uniform already, holding the ever-present Playmate cooler full of whatever fad diet lunch he was eating this week. Not that he even really needed to lose weight – he was just as vain about his body as the firefighters next door. He was the resident partier at the station, out to the clubs and the bars every chance he got, looking for the latest and greatest in his – at least how he told it – endless line of hook-ups. His dark hair was meticulous, gelled and perfect, his face shaven smoother than any razor had ever done for me, his uniform neat and almost tailored to his trim, athletic build.

I met him first and gave him the quick “guy hug” - leaning forward across our shaking hands with two quick, very hard pats on the back to say “I love you but I can still kick your ass” and then a rapid separation.

“Ladies,” he bid the other medics. Staci rolled her eyes. Dave had been merciless in his attempts to impress her with his suave confidence. She didn't buy it for a second.

“Hey,” Jaclyn said, ever the flirt. “What's up?”

“Getting ready to sell my soul for twenty-four hours,” Dave said. He ran a hand over the shining exterior of the ambulance. “How's my girl?”

“Passenger side bearing is going, sounds like,” Staci said. “Groans like hell when I turn, and the hub feels hot when we stop. Maintenance is due to come by at the end of your shift with a ready reserve unit while they look at it.”

“Great,” I grumped. “I freakin' hate ready reserve.” Ready reserve units were usually ambulances that were due to be retired soon, and they tended to be uncomfortable rattle-traps with bad suspension and questionable air conditioning. Many of them had some very memorable odors in the patient compartment.

“Sucks to be A shift,” Dave commented.

Staci looked at her watch. “Well, boys, I'm done. Gotta go home and take Michael to day care. Have a safe shift.”

“Will do,” I said, stepping up into the open back of the ambulance to start the morning checklist. Batteries in the defibrillators and monitors, make sure all the IV supplies and saline were topped off, adequate run forms, gas – if I'd known that there was so much paper involved in EMS, I probably would have been a business major.

“Bye,” Jaclyn chirped, smacking her gum. I wished – not for the first nor the last time – that I could bottle some of that youthful exuberance and drink it in the mornings. Even though I was only 28 years old, the mileage of my drunken college days and the long hours associated with nine years in EMS, the sleeplessness and poor nutrition, made me feel more like Frank most days.

David and I went into the silent, almost telepathic mode we'd developed after four years of being partners. I didn't have to see him or talk to him to know he was doing inventory on our med box and dutifully disposing of the meds that were reaching expiration and replacing them from the locker. I didn't have to tell him that I was checking the O2 levels in the big K cylinder in our truck and then the smaller cylinders in the airway bag and on the stretcher. We prayed that we wouldn't have a call until we were done – most mornings had us blazing out the front doors Code 3 – lights and sirens – after a patient who was a little too rushed in morning rush – with our truck half-inventoried. Luckily, the Gods of Friday Drive-Time were smiling on us that day. We loaded the cab with blank care forms and our caffeine supply – David's and my Playmate coolers full of sodas and then two industrial-strength thermal travelers full of our paint-stripper coffee and then hit the road. It didn't pay to stay around the House – we could never really get comfortable anyway. I hoped that I'd manage forty-five minutes of sleep in a chair with my boots still on tonight. It would be a busy shift.

We drove to get some breakfast burritos from a little hole-in-the-wall Mexican place near our House. They were fantastic, as only Mexican food served from a place one step ahead of the health inspector could be. Hopefully, there would be plenty of non-emergent trauma today, so we could take them to the Level II hospital on Front Street. They kept peanut-butter crackers and sodas in a mini-fridge for EMS drop-offs. We loved Southern Memorial. I think all the medics in-district secretly hoped that they would put a full-time neurologist on staff so they could be a Level I trauma center and we could just take all our patients there.

“Man, we have to get ourselves a probie,” David said from behind the wheel of the Big Bitch – our pet name for Medic 21. “Jaci is way too hot to be with Frank and Staci.”

“Oh, please,” I said, leafing through the free liberal paper that was in a bin at the restaurant. “You don't have a prayer, old man. Jaci's too young for you. You'd never be able to keep up.”

“Bullshit,” David shot back. “I eat girls like her for breakfast.”

“And then you kick them loose,” I countered, “because you can't keep the pace. Face it. You're a one-night stand guy because you don't have the endurance.”

“Spoken like a true lonely heart,” David said. “When's the last time you had a date, kemo sabe?”

“When did this become about me?”

“When I stopped wanting to hear you preach about my sex life.”

“Then you shouldn't keep bringing it up all the time.”

He laughed. “This is going to be a long shift if we don't save the heated arguments for the evening,” he told me.

“Agreed. Best... I dunno. Best 'eighties comedy movie.”

He screwed up his handsome face in thought. “Single, or top five?”

“It's early. Single,” I replied.

“Tough one. Let's see. Best 'eighties comedy movie. I'm gonna have to go with Caddyshack. All the other 'eighties comedies just tried to chase that high.”

“See, I would've gone with Stripes. I thought Caddyshack was the knock-off. But both were just vehicles for Bill Murray. I never saw much substance in either of them. I think the seminal 'eighties comedy was Ferris Bueller's Day Off. That was the groundbreaker.”

“Oh, yeah. I retract my earlier.”

“Your turn,” I said, flipping the paper.

“Best break-up song.”

“Too broad, man, too broad. Give me a time-frame.”

“Okay, then, late seventies.”

Saved by the bell. The tones dropped – scientifically designed to get the attention of exhausted paramedics, the ringer on the dispatch pager sought out a nerve bundle at the base of the paramedic spine and made us jump, even after having been around it for as long as we had.

“Medic 21, dispatch. Medic 21, dispatch,” the crackly voice called. “Respond to a Priority Two Unknown at 803 West 11th Street. 37-year-old male down at a construction site. Tac-channel is MedComm South with Ladder 37 and Engine 37.”

We sighed. And so it begins. It wasn't even 7:30 yet.

I grabbed the handset. “Dispatch, Medic 21. Responding.”

David flipped on the wailers and hit the gas. I scarfed the last of my breakfast and put a fresh blank report on the clipboard.

“Medic 21, dispatch. 0724.”

I copied down the time we got the call from dispatch and started wondering just how hurt this guy was. I couldn't help that – would this be the epidural head bleed that took every trick we had just to get this guy to a doctor still alive, or is it just a sprained ankle that takes longer to fill out the paperwork than to actually treat the patient?

The traffic parted for us – mostly, cars were too good at keeping out road noise these days and people didn't pull over for emergency vehicles the way they used to – and we made our way through.

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Gotta love your first call being a 275-pounder who can't move his legs. Plus, the construction site was muddy, so my uniform was already trashed by 8:30. All the hallmarks of an absolutely beautiful shift. We'd moved from best 'seventies break-up song ("Love Stinks") through reality show concept most encouraging of deep-seated emotional issues ("Flavor of Love") to best ass on the St. Mark's ER nursing staff (Alanna Jeffereys) and were busy debating our choices for most unorthodox stand-up comedian (I wasn't giving up on Eddie Izzard, but David definitely had a point about Billy Connolly). While that had happened, we'd done an elderly slip-and-fall that needed a hip reduction, a supraventricular tachycardia that we were able to manage on-scene, a minor fender-bender that refused transport and a diabetic crisis that didn't take but thirty minutes to deal with. Lunch was peanut-butter crackers and apple juice from the mini-fridge and a piece of home-made peach cobbler that one of the nurses offered us, and there was a nice stretch where I got to flirt with one of the ER techs at St. Mark's while David hit the bathroom and filled out paperwork. High call volume, and evening drive-time was still four hours away. I stretched out my aching back and loaded up with more caffeine. David was cleaning and re-making the stretcher when the tones dropped.

We looked at each other with alarm. We hadn't even called into dispatch to say we were back in service. The only way that the tones would drop and we weren't in service was if there was something big going on. Really big.

"All available units, dispatch. All available units, dispatch. Implement ICS at 101 East Lawrence."

ICS. Incident Command System. Nobody called those letters out unless we were having one of our once-a-quarter mass disaster drills or something unspeakable was happening. ICS was reserved for things like plane crashes and building collapses or terrorist attacks. We stuffed the stretcher back into the rear of the Big Bitch and I jumped behind the wheel. I jammed it into gear and called up the lights and sirens while David informed dispatch that we were en route to the location. I checked the electronic map on the computer screen that sat between us. We were the closest unit – EMS or fire – by about seven minutes. I tapped the screen as I carefully made my way through a crowded intersection against the red light. David whistled. We'd probably be first on scene which meant we'd be in command until the Mobile Command Unit got there and got set up and we were relieved by someone who outranked us.

I rounded the corner in a screech of overtaxed tires and powered down Lawrence Avenue, the big diesel engine growling in protest of my rough treatment. We were in the far west end of the big industrial complexes that powered our county's economy, kept well away from residential and commercial zones due to the high volume of dangerous materials that went in and out of the manufacturing facilities. Microchips and semi-conductors needed some next-level nasty shit to make. This place was a hazmat crew's worst nightmare.

David was on the horn, begging dispatch for any further information, when I found 101 E. Lawrence. The place was in some kind of lockdown mode, with yellow flashing lights at all the gates, and three police cruisers were parked next to the main entrance. The sign said simply, "United Imaging Company." That could mean anything was in there.

I pulled up and lowered the window and waved frantically at the officer wearing sergeant's stripes on scene.

"What do we got?" I yelled over the engine.

“Started out as an alarm call. Evening shift was just coming on, nothing looked out of the ordinary, but then horns and sirens and lights started going off in there and the safety officers started calling an evacuation.”

“We're going to stage over there, by that portable building,” I told him, pointing. “Send me somebody who knows what's happening.”

“Got it. Medic 21 has command,” the cop said, trotting to his men to spread the word. We pulled Medic 21 into a safe, remote location and got out.

Streams of panicky people were starting to converge on the outdoor evacuation rally points in the parking lots. One of the orange-hats (so called because of the hunting safety-orange ball caps they wore during emergencies) passed close to us, and I flagged him down.

“What's going on?” I asked him.

To his credit, he never took his eyes off the staff members he was responsible for evacuating. “I don't know. I'm admin. The alarm got pulled in R&D, clear across the compound from us.”

“Where's your safety officer?” I asked.

“Over there, somewhere,” he said, gesturing at the press of frightened people. Damn. Only the cops could find him in that mess.

“Show me where R&D is,” I told him.

He pointed to a section of the plant marked by a long corrugated aluminum wall punctuated every twenty yards or so by a roll-up garage door. I nodded and ran back to the unit.

“We'll call this triage for now,” I said to David, who was talking to one of the police officers, a freckle-faced kid that couldn't have been more than a few weeks out of the academy. He looked really terrified but tried to hide it as best he could. Badges were really bad about that. I hoped the kid didn't get crazy post-traumatic stress problems later.

“Okay, any new EMS that comes in stops here first, got it?” David said. “Me and my partner are going to get a little closer. Send hazmat straight to us when they get here. They're going to set up the perimeters. Once they get on scene, they're in charge. Got it?”

The terrified cop nodded.

David smiled and laid a hand on his shoulder – medics knew that touching could really bring a panicky person back to earth. It worked like a charm on this kid.

“Breathe, officer. We're going to be okay,” David said. “Now tell me what I just said.”

The officer gulped some deep breaths and started looking a little less pale and shell-shocked. “All EMS stops here first when they arrive. Send hazmat straight to y'all when they get here, and then they're in charge.”

“Good man,” David said, patting his shoulder. “We need your sergeant to know this stat, okay? Thanks.”

The officer nodded, grateful for something concrete and practical to do, and sprinted away. David smiled knowingly at me.

“I was the same way, my first big one,” he said to me.

“Yeah,” I agreed. “I damn near shit myself. Chemical spill on the freeway during rush. Seventy-five patients and a fire.”

David whistled. “Mine was that big gas main fire over on Chilcott, remember?”

We started walking, carrying our trauma and airway bags and a backboard. We weren't technically supposed to be out to rescue anyone – that was hazmat's job and not ours, the ICS wanted us far away from the shitstorm and treating patients in safety after decontamination. But we had to know what was going on so we could make a report to ICS, and if we happened to find somebody while we were out there, then we were damn well going to bring them back. I didn't sign up for this job and go to school for three years just to leave somebody hurt and wait for a fireman with a fancy license and a big plastic suit to haul them to me.

“The underground one?” I asked him. We always started chatting like this about nothing when we got under stress. Just that much distraction helped us keep our heads for some reason. We didn't ask questions. We just did it because we knew it worked.

“Yeah. They were hauling firefighters out of there in twos and threes. It was crazy.”

“I remember that. You were on Medic 18 back then. Y'all ran out of burn sheets.”

“Yep,” he said. “I can still smell that smell sometimes.”

“Oh, yeah, me, too.”

We approached the building under cover, like we were trained to do – we didn't know if something in there was getting ready to explode or not, so we wanted something heavy between us and it in case it went off. The warning sirens on the plant were starting to fade out into the background. I checked my watch. Seven minutes on scene.

“Where the fuck is everybody?” I asked.

“I thought fire would be here by now,” David shot back. He leaned his chin to one side and keyed up the radio clipped to his shoulder. “Command, Medic 21. Command, Medic 21. Status on additional units.”

There was a brief pause. “Medic 21, Command. Fire and EMS units on alternate approach due to 18-wheeler overturned on Lawrence. Will be at your location in ten minutes.”

I sighed heavily. “Great,” I said. “Knew I shouldn't've gotten out of bed this morning.”

David patted my shoulder. “Think we can risk getting closer?”

I scanned the perimeter for any hazmat placards on the exterior of the building and saw none. I shrugged. “I think we can even risk going in.”

“You're senior medic on-scene,” David said, gesturing me forward. I shouldered the backboard and started walking briskly. We made it to the personnel door next to one of the garage doors and tried to peek in.

“Looks deserted,” I said. I tried the handle, and the door opened easily.

I stuck my head in.

“See anything, Nick?” David asked from where he was trying to see through the panels in the garage door.

“Nothing,” I said. “Looks clear.”

“This is a huge place,” David commented. “What the hell do they make in there?”

I shrugged. “It's called United Imaging. I'd assume it was x-ray machines, MRIs, that kind of thing. We could be dealing with a radiation hazard.”

David chuckled. “And the nearest Geiger counter is stuck in traffic ten minutes out.”

“I don't see any hazard signs yet,” I said. “I'm going in.”

David followed me. We were seriously flouting procedure, here, since technically we'd left the police sergeant in charge of the scene, but we had to know what we were up against. I felt a momentary twinge of regret for the ass-chewing I'd get from Commander Holloway and the medical director, Dr. Jennings, but I really didn't care at this point. They weren't here right now. They were probably in a meeting someplace with air conditioning, or on a manicured golf course someplace. This was my ass on the line, and I wanted to know what the hell I was dealing with.

Our footsteps clumped loudly on the concrete floor and echoed in the big shop floor. There were all kinds of benches and tool boxes and equipment in various states of assembly. We were just starting to make our way to the elevated walkway along the back of the shop when we heard the clank and moan.

We didn't even have time to think. We just ran. Behind one of the benches was a young man, about my age, with raised red lesions all over one side of his face. He was snoring while still awake – a good sign that his tongue was swelling and he wasn't going to be able to control his own airway much longer.

“Hi, there, sir, my name is Nick. I'm with EMS,” I told him, kneeling next to him. He'd obviously been flailing around a little, due to the clutter around him on the floor. Seizures? This didn't look good. “What's your name?”

He gurgled something that sounded vaguely like “Matt.”

“Matt, we're going to take you out of here,” I told him, starting my assessment. Respirations labored and rapid, but his skin said he was getting enough air for now. No obvious mechanism of injury other than those weird lesions on his face and left arm. His pulse was strong but really fast. I ran my hands over his skull and neck and started a hands-on assessment of his whole body while David set up the backboard.

“Did you hit your head when you fell?” I asked him. “Does anything hurt?”

He grabbed my shirt and pulled me close to rasp, “We have to go now.”

I looked at David. “Get him packaged.”

We log-rolled him and put him on the backboard quickly and started high-stepping back to the personnel door. I started to hear a funny hissing sound from behind us.

“What the fuck is that?” David said, looking around.

“Not sure,” I said. “Let's not find out.”

We started running, something we're never supposed to do with an immobilized patient, but Matt didn't seem to mind so much. A whitish mist began to flood across the floor, enveloping our ankles and making our footsteps sound muffled, as if coming from a long way away.

“Go! Go!” I urged, pushing against David's butt with the backboard to speed him up.

“What the hell is this shit?” he yelled. I heard a touch of panic in my partner's voice.

In retrospect, it didn't really sound like an explosion. In my sillier times of recollection, it actually sounded more like a really loud, really dry fart than anything else. I never turned around to see what had happened, I just booked it towards the door as fast as I could.

We weren't a foot and a half from the door when David lost his footing and went down heavily to his knees in the white mist. Using the backboard I pushed him to the doorway and then hopped both him and the patient and dragged them the rest of the way. David was groaning and clutching his knee, so I stabilized him as best I could. I got on my radio and hollered for help. To my joy, Medic 13 responded. At least there was another unit on scene to bail our butts out for being such idiots. I couldn't help but look at the patient on the backboard. This person wouldn't be alive if we hadn't been such idiots. I guess it all works out in the end.

The patient had a film badge on his lapel, the kind that people who worked around radiation wore to detect the amounts of their exposure. His was completely exposed.

Think, Lightman, think I bade myself. You trained for this. We're not burned. What does that mean? No contact burns, nobody puking – that means exposure of less than 150 rem, probably. Not lethal but still dangerous. We have to get cleaned off. Cut the clothes, get everybody decontaminated.

I grabbed my radio “Medic 13 from Medic 21. Where is hazmat?”

“Medic 21, hazmat is on scene now.”

“We're positive for radiation here. We need a decontamination shower by this entrance right now, positive exposure of three patients.”

“Medic 13, direct. We'll be right there.”

Okay, that's handled. Now I have to find out what this shit is and how much of it we got. I went to work on the backboarded patient. “Matt, I need to know what this stuff is,” I told him. “What did we get exposed to, Matt?”

“Not sure,” Matt groaned. “I think it's some kind of cesium.”

Cesium. Good news. Far from the nastiest shit we could've been exposed to. Think. Cesium is absorbed through the lungs and is excreted by the renal system. They're going to put us on Prussian Blue at the hospital. But right now I have to make the kidneys work. Start I.V.s, Lightman. Flush that shit out.

I went on auto-pilot starting the lines. I'd done it so often that I didn't even participate consciously in the process any more. I'd selected a vein and swabbed it, said “you're going to feel a stick in your arm on three, Matt,” and poked it in before I even realized what I was

doing. With David, I didn't even bother telling him he was going to feel a little stick. He and I both knew the score. David had already swabbed the area and pointed out a nice vein in his arm for me anyway. He probably would have stuck himself if he hadn't been in so much pain.

I stripped out two liter bags of normal saline and started a line on Matt and on David, who was still coughing but tried to help me as best he could by spiking the bags and priming the administration lines for me. I hung them running wide open, to inundate their bodies with fluid and hopefully dilute the nasty inside our bloodstreams. I used the next couple minutes to get Matt and David moved a little further away from the door and into partial cover behind a dumpster. I could hear the hazmat truck pulling up from across the vast parking lot.

“Almost home, guys,” I told them. “Here comes the cavalry.”

I ran back to the doorway to get the drug box and the IV kit so I could start my own line and get myself medicated. I knelt quickly, glad to hear the familiar fire department wailers. They'd have the shower set up soon and we could start decontamination. I'd get David to work cutting Matt out of his clothes and then he and I could disrobe manually. We should be on our way to treatment in fifteen minutes, which gave us about a half-hour contamination at under 150 rems. We should only feel sick for a week or so and then be right back doing what we're doing.

We really dodged a bullet, I thought.

It's the last thing I thought before the door blew off and I lost all track of the world through a boiling wall of white, choking mist.

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Probably the most frightening thing about the whole trip to the hospital was that I remembered everything. The icy cold water of the decontamination shower and the skin-scraping rubdown I got from the hazmat techs. Not being able to move, restrained on a backboard and staring straight up due to the restrictions of the cervical collar. The pain of the line being started in my arm and the coldness of the drugs going up my veins, drugs I didn't know and didn't administer. It was bad enough that I was a control freak and a paramedic, but being a control freak at the mercy of other paramedics was all but unbearable.

I knew my airway was swelling from the contact with the unknown gas, and I knew I was due to be intubated or I'd stop breathing. It would be rough – since I was already in a C-collar, it would be an in-line intubation so as not to compromise my spine. Those were much rougher than the norm, and I hoped that they knocked me out for it. They didn't. I was a little surprised that my gag reflex wasn't there as they passed the tube down my throat and inflated the balloon at the end. After that, there was only the panic borne of nothing I could do and the straight-ahead stare at the bottom of the bag-valve-mask that was currently breathing for me. Dimly, I realized that I was in very bad shape. I wished I could speak around the tube in my throat, to ask about David and our patient I thought was named Matt, about everybody else on the scene, hell, even what the hell I was hit with. Patience in my situation was hard to come by.

Come on, dammit, I thought at the medics urgently. Knock me the fuck out, already.

A guy in a white lab coat with a very expensive suit underneath leaned over me, obscuring the fitful light of the fading sun and casting his face in ominous shadow. He shone a penlight in my eyes.

“Nobody’s ever gotten a dose that big before,” I heard him say.

A dose of what, you fuck-stick? C'mon, you have to know I'm conscious. Fucking talk to me. Jesus, I hate doctors, I thought.

To my joy, I saw the haggard-looking face of David Cupertino lean over across from the nameless white-coat and pat me roughly on a shoulder that didn't even seem like mine anymore, it felt so far away.

“Hang in there, buddy,” he said.

I guess he read the question in my eyes. He looked down at the tag on my chest, tied to the straps of the backboard. “You're stable. Pressure's holding at 140/88 and you're a little tach-y at 110. Probably stress. No burns, kid. You're not burned.”

I must have cried a little, because David patted my shoulder again.

“We don't know what the hell we got exposed to,” David said. “The hazmat guys are in there now, but it's nothing they've ever seen before. Some suit from the company has to come down and explain it to them.”

I raised one eyebrow questioningly. David would know what I was wondering.

“Matt's fine. Other than those weird superficial burns on his face and a swollen airway which they intubated, he's as stable as you are,” David said.

Commander Josie Holloway came into my field of view. She was as rough and hard-assed as they come, being a petite woman fighting her way all the way to command level in a male-dominated field like EMS had turned her out as twice the man any of her colleagues were. Most people were scared shitless of her, but me and David loved her. I braced myself, prepared for the gargantuan ass-chewing I was about to get for going into a hot zone unprotected without hazmat, and totally shredding every single ICS protocol she'd ever given to me.

“I can't believe you,” she said flatly, her eyes welling. “Don't you dumbasses know anything? Why in the name of Jesus Fitzgerald Christ did you two thumb-dicks go into that fucking building?”

She squeezed my hand, hard enough to hurt even through the dissociated haze I was living in. She really did care about us, and me and David in particular. The three of us had always seemed to have an understanding that no one else shared.

“We were just looking for patients,” David explained.

“You let fucking hazmat look for patients,” she growled. “You're medics, dammit. I need my medics where they can do some good, not tied to some fucking backboard.”

“Sorry, Commander,” David said. I nodded assent as best I could in the C-collar and squeezed her hand back.

“You boys. Goddammit, what am I going to do with you boys?” she asked the sky. She sniffed and wiped her eyes roughly.

“Time to roll,” a disembodied voice said from somewhere above me.

“Memorial?” Commander Holloway asked.

“David and the employee,” the voice answered. It sounded a little like Kevin Arnett off Medic 8. Good man. “Nick's going to Stuart James.”

Stuart James? The Army base hospital? I wondered.

“They have a chem facility there,” David said. “You got dosed good, brother. They're putting you there until we know what we're dealing with.”

Commander Holloway pulled David away from me. “Get going,” she ordered in that don't-ask-questions tone we all knew so well. “We'll see you there, Nick.”

My world became a swirl of sky, faces, bumps, thumps and the all-too-familiar sound of sirens through the box of an ambulance. I'd never stared up at the cheap fluorescents on the ceiling before or felt how the cot bounced you around like a pinball everytime the unit hit a bump.

I didn't like it.

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Two**

**by Valerie Hope**

WHAT I WOUND UP WISHING more than anything else was that I didn't have a tube in my throat so that I could talk, and tell the medic looking after me how to do his job. It was Eric Meadows, a decent guy who had the misfortune of treating another medic.

That would put me on Medic 8, I remembered. A not-so-busy truck on the east side of town, far enough away from the major freeways that they didn't see a whole lot of the weenie-shrinking action calls. Still, Eric was a decent medic and he had the common decency to talk to me while they prepped me for my helicopter ride to Stuart James hospital, some 120 miles away at Fort Kendall. And he had the forethought to give me a pad and pen so I could communicate a little. After giving him my medications and allergies – which he needed in order to treat me – I asked him in my most polite handwriting to please knock me the hell out.

He read my shaky note – penmanship while tied to a backboard in a bumping, thumping ambulance was not the best – and smiled. Without another word, he drew up ten milligrams of Versed and pushed it through my IV. The world faded out into a series of weird, disconnected images that I knew I would never remember.

It was ten milligrams' worth of calm and ease, which only blotted me out for the chopper ride and the nurses' report. Some wrinkle-faced doctor deconned me again and then led me into a very clean, very modern-looking treatment room.

“Medic Lightman,” the doc said in a mellifluous bass. “I'm Dr. Col. Richards. I specialize in toxic exposure and I'm going to be looking after you. We've shot you full of cortisone to take the swelling down in your airway so we can get that tube out. Once you're extubated, I'll be back in so we can talk. Until then, is there anything I can get you?”

I scrawled My partner? on the pad.

“As far as I know, he's fine. The flight crew said no exposure but a wicked dislocated knee. Looks like you and your partner get an unexpected vacation,” the doctor said, patting my shoulder. With no gloves. I'm not contaminated, I thought distantly.

“That was an extremely brave thing you did, young man,” he told me and his voice sounded honest. “I don't know many people that would have gone into a situation like that to save somebody. If it was up to me, I'd give you a medal.”

I tried to shrug. I think I looked like a grub.

“We're in the process of getting the specifications of whatever the hell you were exposed to,” Dr. Richards said, rearranging instruments on a table out of my field of view. “The lab you and

your partner entered was working on some kind of electronic scanner for directly reading DNA. Really high-tech magic stuff. I couldn't begin to understand the science of it, but I don't need to. I just need to know what kind of nasty stuff they used in it so I can get you fixed up and out of here.”

Ah, Army. Patch 'em up and get 'em back out on the lines. My kind of people.

I wrote Ballpark guess? on my pad.

“Couldn't give you one right now, son,” Dr. Richards said. “I can tell you there's cell damage. We have to run tests to figure out what extent. I can hazard enough to say you're probably going to be bald for the rest of your life and possibly have extremely sensitive skin from now on. I've seen a lot of exposure in my day, and that damage looks permanent to me. I'm sorry.”

If that was the worst of it, then I'm one lucky sonofabitch, I thought.

“All we really know for sure is that some of your epithelial cells – particularly in your lungs and your skin – are mutating. The good news is, they don't appear cancerous. The bad news is, they don't appear like anything we've really encountered before. United Imaging is flying in a couple specialists to help us figure out what the hell's going on.”

Thanks, I wrote on the pad.

“It's my job, son,” he said, patting my shoulder.

\* \* \*

The dreams I'd been having were well worth going without sleep, but sleep was hard to come by in my particular hospital room. Aside from the sleepless comings-and-goings of a hospital, there were techs and nurses and doctors in my room all hours of the day or night, taking blood or buccal swabs or injecting this or that down my I.V.

The cortisone hadn't really helped with the swelling in my airway, but rather than stick me on a ventilator the doctors had decided to see how I'd do going it on my own. I was a wheezing wreck and got winded turning the pages of a magazine, but at least I was breathing on my own and didn't have that damn tube down my throat anymore. I could even manage to gasp out a few words occasionally. I still relied on the dry-erase board they'd given me to replace my notepad for most of my communication. Good thing I could write quickly.

It was several days later when Dr. Richards came back in, holding his everpresent clipboard, with a few new faces in white lab coats. Selina, the really cute brunette nurse who flirted with me when she came in, was with them. She strode to my bed in her peppy, swaying stride, and gave me her customary hug.

“Hey, doc,” I managed to rasp.

“Nick, how are you feeling?”

I gave him a so-so motion with my left hand.

“I wanted to introduce you to Drs. Heller and Washington,” he said, gesturing to the white-coats. “They're down from New York. United Imaging sent them to study your case.”

I waved, pointing to my throat and shrugging to apologize for my lack of verbal greeting. They nodded in response.

I scribbled what have you figured out? on my whiteboard.

“You were exposed to a new type of radiation we engineered, called rho waves,” Dr. I-assumed-it-was-Heller-because-he-nodded-when-Richards-said-it said. “Very high energy radiation. At tiny doses, we discovered that different nucleotides – the A's, C's, T's and G's of DNA – absorb it at different rates. We were using it to find a way to map a genome visually.”

Tiny doses? I scribbled.

“You received more than two hundred times the amount we use for research,” Dr. Had-to-be-Washington-if-the-other-was-Heller said.

Fantastic, I wrote.

“We accelerated the particles using magnets. It was created with a cesium isotope, but it was far from your typical alpha, beta or gamma radiation. It's unlike anything modern medicine has really dealt with.”

So give me the bad news, I scrawled.

“In layman's terms, it's 'deactivated' your DNA. Rendered it completely inert. Your body has lost its ability to create new proteins or divide its cells. Have you ever heard of the field of epigenetics, Mr. Lightman?”

I shrugged, still coping with the whole 'inert DNA' concept.

“Epigenetics postulates that all DNA is the same,” Dr. Possibly-Heller said. “We're all made of the same basic building blocks and they're the same between individuals and species. It's all just A's, C's, T's and G's.”

“Think of it like a computer,” he continued. “Your physical DNA is the hardware. The processor, the hard drive and the monitor. Epigenetics is the software. It's a series of methyl markers, tiny little proteins, that literally switch your genes on and off, like lights. It tells the cells what characteristics to express and which ones to repress.”

“Got it,” I whispered. “What does it mean?”

“We're convinced by your cell samples that your entire epigenetic slate has been wiped clean,” Dr. Washington-by-process-of-elimination told me. “The methyl markers, they're put in place by our environment. Family history, upbringing, childhood exposures to disease and toxicity, many other factors than we can possibly know about right now. Epigenetics is a very new field.”

“As far as we can tell, Mr. Lightman --”

I scrawled Please call me Nick on the board and held it up in interruption. This 'Mr. Lightman' shit made me feel like I was talking to the phone company.

“Nick, then,” Heller-by-fiat said. “As far as we can tell, all your cells are functioning as undifferentiated stem cells. Like those in a fetus. Without an epigenetic 'master plan' to tell

the cell what to be and when to be it, they're reverting to what they were before there were any epigenetic cues to be had, what they were while you were still in the womb.”

So I'm turning back into an embryo? I scrawled, wide-eyed.

“More or less,” Five-bucks-says-you're-Washington said. “A very big, extremely specialized one, to be sure, but for all intents and purposes, yes.”

This is probably going to make it hard to get dates, I wrote. So what now?

“We're certain that if we can replace your epigenetic 'software,' either with your original one or one very similar, then you'll suffer no long-term effects,” Y'know-he-kinda-looks-like-a-Heller-now-that-I-think-of-it said.

Just like that, I wrote.

“Precisely,” Dr. Richards broke in. “We don't even really know what goes into making an epigenome. Science hasn't even identified all the markers yet, much less what they mean. I'm afraid you're going to be our guest for a very long time, Nick. We've got to keep you isolated, kept apart. If your cells are truly becoming embryonic again, then you're barely going to have an immune system and we're afraid your bones will start breaking down, turning to cartilage. You're already losing body mass.”

If that's what's got to happen, I wrote. Can I at least get cable?

He smiled. “I'm sorry we don't have better news, Nick.”

Not your fault.

“We're going to do everything we can for you, Nick,” Just-gonna-call-him-Heller-because-I'm-sick-of-thinking-about-it said. “I promise.”

Thanks, I wrote, and leaned back. Much as I hated to admit it, sitting up for all that time really wore me the fuck out.

The doctors filed out the room and I rubbed my eyes in frustration. At least I'd gotten David and the patient out. At least they wouldn't have to go through this, to cope with the fact that they were gonna revert to cellular sludge unless two guys who didn't even know enough to introduce themselves properly could suddenly open up an entire new field of science in a week or two.

A warm hand touched my shoulder. Selina, the cute nurse, was still in the room. She smiled down at me.

“Those are smart guys, Nick,” she told me. “You're gonna be okay.”

Wish I had your confidence, I scribbled.

“You're a brave one, Nicholas,” she said, leaning down and giving me a friendly peck on the lips. “Besides, you'd make a really cute baby if it comes to that.”

Breastfeeding? I wrote.

“You're so nasty,” she said, and left the room giggling.

\* \* \*

Strange as it seemed, that night I dreamed of that kiss. It was like I could still taste it, as brief and chaste as it had been. It felt like it was spreading through me, like a cloud, across my face and down my throat and into my belly.

\* \* \*

I was on a sterilized computer, sheathed in plastic and wheeled into my room, reading *The Onion* and lazily doing my Continuing Education online. My license was up in a month, and I still needed a course in Pediatric Trauma Assessment and one in Advanced Airway Management to hit my goal for the year. If I was doomed to be a big pile of protoplasmic sludge, then at least that pile of protoplasmic sludge was gonna be a goddamned paramedic when it slopped over the sides of the petri dish that would be my final resting place. At least my throat didn't hurt as much as it had, but I still didn't want to chance talking just yet. The whiteboard was still my best friend.

The techs came in and took blood and cheek swabs, just like they did every morning. I'd won ten bucks from Eddie, the big phlebotomist, who'd been fool enough to bet against the University of Texas in yesterday's football game. It had been a humiliating blowout. He couldn't give me the money, of course, but I didn't really need it right now anyway. It was worth it just to give him a good needling – kind of poetic, considering how much of my blood he'd drawn – and I gave him a triumphant “Hook 'Em Horns” when he came in the room.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said through his mask. “Bad enough I gotta change clothes just to come in and see your scrawny ass, now you gotta rub it in.”

I playfully punched his shoulder and he wrapped the latex tourniquet around my bicep. “Grabbed the big fucking needle this morning, Nick. This is gonna be fun.”

He pierced my abused veins with a smooth, practiced motion, the way the pros did it that the patient barely even felt. When I'd gotten out of school, I'd volunteered at the Blood & Tissue Center downtown to practice venipuncture. Even after nine years on an ambulance, I still had a long way to go before I was as good as Eddie. He filled the tubes quickly – a red-top, two greens, a blue and a tiger-top. He pressed the gauze onto the wound and withdrew the needle. I barely felt a thing.

“You look good today, buddy,” he commented. “Looks like you got some color back.”

I feel better, I wrote, my left arm bent to my chest to keep the gauze in place and stop the minimal bleeding from Eddie's vampirism. Believe it or not I'm actually hungry.

“That's real good news,” he said, his mask deforming around his hidden grin. “I'll tell Doc Richards. High time you stopped eating through a tube.”

Tell me about it.

“I'll go tell him.”

He left in his normal rush, pocketing the blood samples and giving me a sardonic salute. I couldn't help it. I flashed him another “Hook 'Em.” He gestured back at me with a very rude finger.

Richards and Selina were in my room not ten minutes later. I waved.

“Eddie tells us you're hungry,” Richards said, looking at my chart on the sterilized computer. He'd been all right with my using it for internet access as long as I didn't go fucking around with my chart.

I nodded.

He gestured to the screen where I'd been taking my Pediatrics test. “Number fourteen is wrong. Babies get mottled when they shunt to central circulation, not pale.”

I nodded to him by way of thanks. I actually knew that. I just hated taking tests. They made me nervous.

“Interesting,” Richards said. “You've put on weight.”

I quirked an eyebrow questioningly.

“You've been dropping body mass pretty steadily since you got here,” he explained. “Three or four pounds a day, without fail. Last night you actually put on a pound.”

So much for Atkins, I wrote. He chuckled.

“I need to take this to Washington and Heller,” he said, tapping on the keyboard. “It's possible they miscalculated and you're stabilizing. We'll need to run some more tests.”

Naturally.

“Wiseass,” he commented. “This is good news. In the meantime, I'll try you out on some broth and crackers. If you can keep it down, then we'll talk about something a little more solid, okay?”

I gave him a thumbs-up. Seline offered me a long-lashed wink over her mask to say congratulations.

He bustled out of the room quickly. I went back to my test, just finishing and hitting 'Submit' before the tech came in with a tray. It smelled better than a steak from Morton's to me. I was stuffing crackers in my mouth before the tech even got the lid off the top of the plate.

After the meal I took a short nap trying to watch Entourage reruns on HBO. I was woken up by Heller, Washington and Richards not long after. They were at least wearing picture IDs with their names on them now. Turns out I'd been wrong after all. Washington was Heller and Heller was Washington. Oh well. At least I'd bet on the Longhorns and not that.

“Nick, how you feeling?” Richards asked.

I gave him a cheerful thumbs-up.

“We have some news,” he told me.

“It's incredibly interesting,” Washington said.

“It seems you've acquired an epigenome,” Heller said, scarcely able to contain his excitement. “You're getting methyl markers in your cells. We estimate they're in approximately twenty percent of your cells. Your liver function is starting to return, which makes sense. All the body's blood goes through the liver for filtration, it's logical that any new genetic material is going to wind up either there or in your kidneys.”

How? I mouthed.

“We don't know,” Washington said. “We're fairly certain it's not yours.”

“We need to know who you've had contact with since you were exposed.”

I scribbled furiously. My partner David Cupertino. The patient. Cmdr. Josie Holloway, Medic Kevin Arnett on Medic 8. Whoever his partner was. The Hazmat Team, and the United Imaging Doctor who examined me on the ambulance. You. Eddie. Selina. Martin. Ricky. Heidi. John Mendoza.

“I need you to think hard, Nick. Anyone who might've made contact with a permiable site, like mucous membranes or eyes?” Richards pressed.

Arnett started an I.V., Eddie pokes me every day. And Selina gave me a kiss.

“A kiss?” Richards said. “Where?”

Right here.

“Where on your body?”

I pointed to my cheek and my lips.

Richards leaned out the door and yelled to the orderly outside. “Get me Nurse Davis, right away, and get Eddie Salinas as well.”

“Interesting,” Dr. Heller said, rubbing his chin through his mask.

\* \* \*

I didn't get any more company that day, so I just watched TV and drifted in and out of sleep. They came in for blood and buccal swabs around midnight, but it was a tech I wasn't familiar with and there wasn't a lot of interaction. I wished that someone would come in and tell me what the hell Dr. Heller thought was so damned 'interesting,' but it didn't happen. I fell into a fitful sleep and didn't open my eyes again until morning sunlight was slanting through the slats of my blinds.

I felt strange, to say the least. Ravenously hungry but queasy at the same time, dizzy and lightheaded. I pressed the call button clipped to my bed-rail, but this time it wasn't Selina and her pert butt that answered the light outside my door, but Heller, Washington and Richards.

What is it? I scrawled.

Richards rubbed gritty eyes. “We've been up all night, Nick. I'm not sure how to even begin to explain what we've found.”

Just tee it up.

He sighed. “We found out that Selina has chapped lips,” he said. “Which means that skin cells from her lips slough off. We're certain, now, that when she kissed you she transferred several of those cells to you. Your body broke them down, as it's designed to, and the cells were absorbed by the mucous membranes in your gums.”

So I've got her epi-thing? I wrote.

“Epigenome,” Heller corrected. “That’s correct. Apparently your cells were desperate for one, it took up her epigenome almost immediately. As soon as your cells had a viable copy to use, it began distributing it to every other cell it could find. Your cells have been dividing very rapidly since then.”

How rapidly?

“As rapidly as the cells of any embryo,” Washington said. “We estimate that her epigenome is present in its entirety in approximately thirty-five to forty percent of your body’s active cells. By tonight, at the rate you’re going, we expect that number will be between fifty-five and sixty percent.”

Dr. Richards was fiddling with my I.V. He screwed a syringe into one of the administration ports and started pushing a drug. I grabbed his sleeve and rasped, “What is that?”

“It’s a mild sedative,” Dr. Richards explained. “To help keep you calm.”

“Calm?” I managed, half-choking. My throat felt better, but it was still raw and my voice was a whisper at its most forceful.

“You have Selina Davis’ epigenome,” Washington explained. “It’s telling your DNA which genes to express and which to keep silent. You’re going to have all of her genetic tendencies, Nick – eye color, hair color, resistance and susceptibility to diseases, all of it.”

So why sedate me? I wrote angrily. I could already feel the creeping cold tingle of whatever Richards had shot me full of, making my reactions slower and my mind full of cotton wool.

“Because there’s more to it than just the color of your eyes, Nick,” Richards said, looking over my shoulder as I wrote furiously. “There’s much more.”

Tell me, I wrote.

“You see, Nick,” Dr. Heller said gently, “Selina Davis’ epigenome is female.”

I started to write something, but the marker fell from suddenly wooden fingers.

“We’re going to do everything we can,” Washington promised.

“Go,” I hissed. “Get out.”

They did.

\* \* \*

It took all the strength I had to get out of bed, to swing my legs over the side and force them to take my weight. My feet dangled off the floor. I knew I’d lost weight, but it looked like I’d lost some height as well. I forced my legs – once hardened and strong from six years of constant bicycling – to take my minimal weight. The three steps to the sink were the struggle of my young life. I braced my skinny arms – once pleasantly well-muscled and covered with fair hair – against either side of the sink and gazed in the small mirror above the basin.

I’d gotten used to being as hairless as an egg, much as I disliked it. The smooth skin of my scalp and eyebrows wasn’t what I was looking at. I gazed at my gaunt face, searching it deeply. Was it my imagination, or was my once-narrow face starting to take on the heart shape of Selina Davis? Were my once thin and largely bloodless lips starting to swell, imperceptibly,

into the adorably sexy bee-stung pout of the nurse who changed my sheets? Were my blue eyes starting to slide, slowly, down the spectrum towards her rich sable brown?

I stared at my depilated, emaciated body. I couldn't have weighed more than about 110 pounds, soaking wet, and I estimated with my practiced paramedic's eye that I probably topped out at about five foot seven or so. Selina was a tiny thing, slender and short, and apparently I was headed merrily down that same road. Unless the brainiacs in the lab down the hall could do something about it, it's possible I could end up at about 100 pounds and a can't-reach-the-top-shelf-without-a-stepladder five foot three, if Selina was any indication.

Plus, what else about Selina was going to influence me? Was she susceptible to cancer, diabetes? Tooth loss? I had only the barest thumbnail sketch of what epigenetics was all about, but I'd read enough on the internet to know that it was a brand-new science, in its infancy, and it studied how environmental factors and the tendencies of father, mother, and grandparents influenced development. Maybe Selina wasn't prone to depression or lupus, but what about her maternal grandfather? Was any of my genetic predisposition going to be left to me.

With a wry chuckle and a caress of my smooth scalp, I remembered that the men in my family tended to go bald early in life. There was no telling how the two epigenomes might intermingle, how much of me and how much of her would be expressed.

A shy, childlike thought popped into my head: Am I going to be pretty?

Tears leaked out of my eyes, big fat warm things that slid unbidden down my smooth cheeks. I'd had enough of the mirror and turned away roughly, scrubbing at my eyes roughly with the heel of my hand.

"There is literally nothing about this that doesn't suck," I muttered.

To prove my point, I vomited noisily into the sink and then collapsed.

\* \* \*

"Maybe the sedative was a bit much," Dr. Richards commented dryly as the techs helped me back into bed. "Or maybe it was the solid food."

I was back to writing on the whiteboard – my reverse digestion had scraped my poor throat back to raw and unresponsive. That, and I was pretty sure when I'd spoken, my voice had sounded higher. I really didn't want to hear that again if I could help it. Not without a lot more of those ill-advised sedatives on board.

I want to know what's going to happen to me, I wrote. Even my handwriting seemed angry and scared somehow.

"I wish I knew," Dr. Richards said. "Nothing like this has ever happened before, Nick, not in human history. We're breaking completely uncharted ground."

Then give me a damn guess, I wrote back.

He rubbed his chin, which was covered with stubble. He'd missed his shave this morning, probably because he'd been working all night, and his chin and cheeks were covered with rough, salt-and-pepper hair. Lucky son of a bitch, I thought bitterly.

“Okay, best estimate,” he said finally. “We’re taking you in for an MRI later this afternoon so we can see how your body is changing. So far, we’ve marked a 97-percent decrease in your serum testosterone levels and a 67-percent increase in your serum estrogen. Your endocrine system is starting to convert itself over. Dr. Washington tells me that in his last DNA swab around 17 or 18 percent of the genes that express female characteristics were starting to activate, or at least accumulate epigenetic methyl markers, and upwards of forty percent of your genes that express male characteristics are starting to shut down. Your metabolic rate is increasing, so the changes are happening very rapidly.”

Meaning? I scribbled, impatient.

“Meaning, your body is taking on more and more female characteristics and giving up more and more male characteristics. We’re not sure how it’s going to end up, Nick, we’re just not. You have a Y-chromosome. You’re genetically male. But the epigenome can systematically shut that Y-chromosome down until it can’t express anything, which is what it appears to be doing. All the genetic changes are coming from your X-chromosome, your female chromosome.”

So I’m turning into some kind of freak stuck in the middle between sexes.

“I’m not sure about the word ‘freak,’ but it’s more complicated than that. You’re expressing no male traits, Nick. None whatsoever. You’re not going to be a hermaphrodite or a she-male, as best we can determine. If the epigenome has its way, then you’re going to be, for all intents and purposes, a female in about three weeks.

“Understand, Nick, the human body starts out female in the womb,” he went on. “All our boy bits are essentially mutations of the girl bits we develop with. You have a uterus, you always have. In you, though, it functions as the seminal vesicle. You’ve always had a uterus, a vagina, a clitoris, milk ducts and mammary glands. Your Y-chromosome sent the genetic signals that told your Fallopian tubes to become your vas deferens, or caused them to atrophy in the case of your mammary glands. But they’re there, Nick, they always have been. Without your Y-chromosome telling them to stay that way, your X-chromosome is now telling them, ‘It’s time to wake up.’ Strangely enough, you’re going through reverse male puberty at the same time you’re going through accelerated female puberty. The good news is, you’re healthy.”

So no second, evil head. I wrote.

“Not according to our tests,” Richards chuckled.

Just a chick, I wrote. Fabulous. When does the eighty pairs of shoes gene kick in? I’ve only got the flip-flops you gave me.

“Half the world’s human beings are female,” Dr. Richards said. “It can’t be that bad.”

I just have no idea how. Can we stop this?

“We’re still working, ‘round the clock, Nick. I promise. But your cells aren’t interested in another epigenome. We’ve tried several times to introduce a new epigenetic template, a male one, and your cells won’t pick it up. They got a hold of Lieutenant Davis’ and they’re running with it. But we’re nowhere near done trying, I assure you.”

What do I do in the meantime? I scrawled, defeated.

“We're bringing in another specialist, from D.C.,” he told me. “A behavioral therapist, Major Ken Forbes. He's the best we've got, does bleeding-edge experimental psych work with post-traumatic stress at Walter Reed. He's been ordered to find a way to help you through this while we look for a solution. He's going to be here tomorrow.”

Can't wait. Girl school.

“I'm so sorry, Nick. We never saw this one coming.”

Promise I'll tell you all about the girls' locker room, I scrawled, attempting a weak smile. He patted my hand.

“Bright side,” he said briskly, snapping himself out of the dark mood that was overtaking him visibly. “You get to get out of here. United Imaging is going to front the money to get you a nice place in town, a living allowance, all kinds of stuff while we're working on this.”

I'd rather go back to my place, I wrote.

“We'll see what we can do,” Dr. Richards said, patting my hand again awkwardly before he left the room.

\* \* \*

I wound through the rest of the day in a haze, desperately trying to think about anything except what the tiny little cells in my body were doing to me. I finished all my CE's for this year and most of them for next, I did the better part of a sudoku book and watched an entire three-hour marathon of Keeping Up With the Kardashians on E!, hoping it would melt my brain entirely. I wondered how long it would be before I stopped wishing I could see Kim Kardashian naked and started wishing I looked like Kim Kardashian naked. How long it would be before I was drooling over her clothes instead of drooling over other parts of her.

I'd just begun drifting off into a fitful sleep when a tall, slender man with a ruddy orange mustache and military issue high-and-tight haircut walked into my room in his Class A's. He set down a briefcase and a cup of coffee on my bedside table and flashed me a warm and sincere smile.

“You must be Nick Lightman,” he said in a booming, jovial bass. He extended a powerful hand. “I'm Major Forbes, but I'd rather you called me Ken.”

“Hi,” I croaked, shaking his hand.

“Colonel Richards tells me you're in for a rough few days,” he said, taking the seat by my bedside without being asked.

“You could say that,” I managed in my froggy croak, which was perceptibly climbing into the alto range. I coughed at the effort of speaking.

“Don't push too hard,” Ken told me. “We've got time.”

I grabbed my whiteboard and scribbled Time for what?

“To get you used to this. Look, Nick, we got two options here, and we're exploring one of them with all the resources we have. We can fight this tooth and nail. But I gotta tell you, it doesn't look too good that they're gonna get this knocked before you got to make some serious

changes in your life. So consider me the other option. Getting to a place where you can be okay with this.”

Fuck that, I wrote.

He grinned. “Richards told me you might react that way.” He sat forward and gave me a level gaze, unblinking. “Look, Nick, this is happening. Whether you like it or not, it's happening. You need to start getting used to the idea or it's gonna mess you up good and mess you up permanent.”

I didn't ask for this.

“Of course you didn't,” he said, chuckling. “Nobody's accusing you of that. It was an accident, but it's not the end of the world. Read me? Not the end of the world. Unless you let it be.”

It's the end of my world, I wrote, squeaking the marker in my anger.

“Doesn't have to be,” he said, sitting back. “It all depends on you.”

I raised an eyebrow, questioningly.

“I read up on you on the plane,” he said, jerking a thumb at the briefcase. “Top of your class in paramedic school, a four-year pre-med degree from State with a 3.3 GPA, and to top it all off this happened to you because you rushed into a dangerous situation to save the life of somebody you didn't even know. That tells me you're smart, you're determined, you're resourceful and most of all that you're a goddamned hero.”

I blushed.

“All those things, taken as a whole, add up to you being a pretty damn impressive man,” Ken said, folding his arms across his broad chest.

Your point? I wrote.

“My point is simple. If you have it in you to be a damn impressive man, then likely you have it in you to be a damn impressive woman, too. You just have to make up your mind, are you going to let this accident own you, sit in this room and sulk and bitch about how it's not your fault and you never asked for it, or are you gonna get up off your ass and start making the best of it? You're not dead, Nick. You're not maimed or confined to a wheelchair or blind or anything horrible like that. If you'd lost your sight, wouldn't you be learning to read Braille right now? If you'd lost the use of your legs, wouldn't you be working with your wheelchair? Would you be feeling sorry for yourself like this?”

Probably, I wrote. Ken caught my sardonic look and laughed.

“The hell you would. Every word I read about you tells me different,” he said. “You'd be learning to work around it and I have no doubt you'd find a way back to a life you could be proud of. This is the same thing, Nick, the same thing exactly. You'll have to learn some new things, relearn some old things, but in the end you can get back to a life you can be proud of, no matter what's between your legs. Correct me if I'm wrong, but those uniforms you medics wear come in women's sizes too, don't they?”

I looked at my hands, a little ashamed. He was right, but I didn't want him to be. I wrote as much on my board.

"I get it, I really do," he said. He lifted a leg and pulled up the cuff of his trousers. The ankle underneath was aluminum and plastic.

"Gulf War," he said. "Didn't even get to be a hero – I lost it unloading a cargo plane. Not what I tell people in bars, but that's what happened. I learned it all back, Nick. If somebody like me can, then so can you."

I stared at my hands for a long time, thinking. Finally I looked up and met his eyes as levelly as he'd met mine.

"So what now?" I croaked.

"Only life you can learn to lead in a hospital room is a patient's," he said softly. "First step is to get you the hell out of here."

I took a deep breath and nodded.

to be continued...



SUMMARY:

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Three**

**by Valerie Hope**

IT DIDN'T HAPPEN AS QUICKLY as Ken had let on. I was in the hospital for at least another three weeks, they told me, doing physical therapy and speech therapy and behavioral therapy and therapy therapy, whatever Ken and Dr. Richards and the lab geeks could come up with.

But I couldn't say that life wasn't interesting. Between long spells on the stationary bike and the elliptical trainer, longer (and much more painful) stretches on the free weights, and endless reading about epigenetics and their effect on the human genome, there was always the little 'surprise' that my condition gave me every morning or afternoon, another little chip off the block that used to be my masculinity and my sense of self. First was the disappearance of my Adam's Apple. The next day I woke to a queasy, kicked-in-the-gut feeling that Dr. Richards explained to me was the aftereffect of menstrual cramps. The day after, it was the tiny little swell of a mons veneris just over my pubic bone, and the noticeable loss of much of my penis' length and girth. Plus, it was turning a vivid pink instead of the muted purple I'd come to know and love. The urethra was moving, too, down the bottom of the glans and towards the shaft. I peed straight down now. I estimated it would be about a week before it was just a big clitoris. My scrotum was receding, as well, and the flesh was beginning to tuck into my body, forming a brownish-pink set of lips. I had to press quite hard to feel the tender lumps of my balls inside them now.

So, in addition to all the therapy, I spent a lot of time locked in the bathroom, crying. Part of me said it was the estrogen in my system, this hormonal stranger that had never flowed in my blood in any strength before, making me so weepy and emotional, but I was pretty sure that the utter hopelessness of watching my masculinity dwindle away in front of my eyes might have had something to do with it as well. I wouldn't have even recognized myself if I'd passed myself on the street. The changes had been very gradual, but drastic when taken all together.

Finally, at the end of two weeks, they said my apartment was ready and let me move in. I'd tried to be adamant about my old place – my bachelor pad – but Ken was just as adamant that I make a clean break with my old life. He had a way of making me being adamant sound like me being unreasonable that usually left me feeling half-ashamed and half the victim of an elaborate con. I guess I could've pushed, but it was Dr. Richards' argument that finally won out. I lived in a bad part of town and only had a bicycle for transportation. I kept crazy hours. It wasn't safe for me there anymore.

That particular realization sent me off for another 45-minute crying jag in the restroom. Ordinarily, I didn't have any fear in me from the crack dealers and general smash-and-grab car burglars that lived in my neighborhood. Hell, I'd run 911 calls on some of the meth-heads out there so often that some of them were becoming friends. I'd never had to

measure my life in terms of where I might or might not be kidnapped and raped. My life had changed beyond my control, and now I could very easily wind up a target just by going back to the place I'd lived comfortably (and cheaply) for three years.

And it drove home the point I'd been trying to make to Ken Forbes in my last three sessions with him: I fucking hated this shit. I hated that my dick was only an inch long and wouldn't become erect any more. I hated my slender neck and my silky alto voice, husky and whispery from my exposure to the gas and unconsciously sexy, like a cheerleader who'd worn her voice out yelling on sidelines her whole life, or a sleepy-eyed torch singer who lived on bourbon and cigarettes. I hated my smooth bald head and my slender, delicate fingers. I hated having to live someplace else and having to reconsider my brand loyalty to things like soap and antiperspirant. I hated that the nurses on the floor were recommending things like moisturizer and exfoliants to me now, instead of flirting with me. I hated that Eddie Salinas wouldn't call a defensive end who missed a tackle a motherfucker in front of me anymore when he used to call them nothing but, and I hated that the girls in the beer commercials still looked as good to me as they did before but I was utterly incapable of doing anything about that feeling even if they'd been naked with legs spread wide. I hated having to stand on tip-toe to get a fresh roll of toilet paper off the top of the cabinet, I hated how fucking heavy everything was getting, I hated how I had to swivel my hips just to walk, I hated that I was ten times as flexible now as I'd ever been in my life.

But most of all, I hated that I was scared all the time.

Everybody tried to help, and I felt bad because nothing they did really got through the haze of misery and frustration surrounding me every waking hour. Hallmark hadn't gotten around to making a "Sorry You Got Transmogrified Into a Girl" card yet. Nobody knew what they were doing, and their walking-on-eggshells attitude towards me made everything worse, somehow. How I longed for somebody to punch me in the shoulder, or fart and not say "excuse me" or see a girl on television or in a magazine and comment about how much they'd like to hit that. But it wasn't going to happen, not on Ken or Dr. Richards' watch. Everyone was unfailingly polite to me and oh so P.C. I couldn't stand it. As a result, everything about me was taking a definite turn for the worse: my language, my attitude, my hygiene.

They let me get away with it for a little while – a few days – but Richards and Forbes came into my room without knocking, always a bad sign, with very much the read-Nick-the-Riot-Act looks on their faces.

"Nick, this is getting out of control," Richards started.

I was eating. My appetite had returned with a vengeance, my body starved for the raw materials to make the proteins that would have me ovulating and caring about home décor and designer purses. My stomach was half the size it had once been, so to make up for it I didn't eat more per meal, but ate six times a day. Food had dribbled down onto my hospital gown. I looked, chewing with my mouth wide open, and didn't bother to stifle a belch. "What's out of control?"

"You are," Forbes said coldly. "You're not taking care of yourself. Your physical therapist is the only one saying you're trying, everyone else is reporting that you're showing up late, you're not bathing, you make feeble stabs at the tasks they set you and then give up."

“Sounds about right,” I said. God, I hated my voice. The pitch was still climbing, and if it got any higher everything I did was going to sound like whining. It still had that husky rasp that made it unintentionally sexy, too. I wished I could go back to my whiteboard, but who knew if my handwriting would stay the same or if I'd start dotting my i's with little happy faces and hearts?

“This isn't the person I read about in that file on the plane,” Forbes scolded.

Person. I was really starting to hate that word, too. Everyone had stopped saying “man” or “guy” days ago. “That guy died in an industrial accident, remember?” I said, picking my nose with a slender little finger. “I'm the twin sister.”

Richards cleared his throat. “Nick, this isn't healthy.”

“I'm sure it isn't,” I said. “My health isn't my main concern right now.”

“Dammit, son...” Richards started, but I cut him off with a harsh bark of a laugh.

“Son? You gotta be fucking kidding me, Doc...”

“All right, that's enough, young lady!” Forbes snapped. Hearing that – the tone of voice, that word... it galvanized me. Whatever acid retort I'd had in my brain for Richards' accidental use of the term 'son' died there.

He bowled over me when I tried to object. “All I hear about is how sad it is. All the nurses, the doctors, the researchers, 'Oh, it's such a pity..!' But that's horseshit. For one thing, you don't need people feeling sorry for you, you're doing more than enough of that for yourself. And for another thing, you dodged a bullet, sweetheart. I'm about ten seconds away from plopping your curvy little ass in a chair and wheeling you down to the burn unit or into the ICU with the quadriplegics and amputees. You can tell them all about how your life is ruined.”

“Go fuck yourself,” I hissed.

“Oh, well said, missy,” he shot back. I flinched at the term. He was pulling out all the stops. “So refined, so ladylike.”

“I'm not a fucking lady!” I half-yelled. It hurt my throat and bordered on a shriek.

“And you never will be at this rate,” he said. “No, instead of that, you've chosen to be a bitter stuck-in-the-middle freak. You disappoint me.”

“Well, I'm so fucking sorry you're disappointed, Major,” I said, giving him a mock salute. “But I'm not one of your goddamn soldiers.”

“That much is very clear,” he said back levelly. “I've had enough. People here are bending over backwards for you. Staying up nights, weekends, not seeing their families, all because of what happened to you. And you lie there, filthy and sweating and stuffing your face and going on and on about how unfair it all is.”

“So you think this is fair?” I shouted.

“I think it's an accident. But you're bound and determined to find someone to blame for all of this. I have a modest suggestion for you, then. Why don't you blame the dumbass short-sighted paramedic who willingly ran into a hazardous materials hot zone, unprotected and

with no earthly idea what the exposure was, and caused all of this shit to happen in the first place?” he shot back.

“Kiss my ass,” I told him.

“Cute as it's getting, I just might,” he said, turning on his heel. “Call me when you grow up, Nick.”

He and Richards left and I threw my meal tray as hard as I could against the wall, shattering in a rain of plastic fragments and pre-packaged beef stroganoff. “Thought you were gonna tell me to grow a pair!” I screamed at him, and then tears overtook me. Not just the little sniffling weeping stuff I'd been doing in the bathroom where nobody could see. I mean the big shoulder-shakers, the wracking sobs that felt like they were coming up from your toenails, complete with hiccups and snot and bawling into a pillow at top volume. It felt like swallowing razor blades, my throat was so raw, but I couldn't have stopped if I tried. I don't even know how long I bawled like that. All I know is I cried until there was nothing left to cry out and then passed out into my sodden pillow, exhausted.

The next morning I was at speech therapy ten minutes early, showered and ready to go. Forbes and I never talked about it again, but the words young lady echoed in my ears day in and day out.

Well, if it was to be young lady, then a young lady I'd be.

\* \* \*

The new place wasn't half bad, considering that I'd really had no say in picking it out. I'd graduated from an efficiency to a 1/1 with a balcony in a downtown apartment complex. It was actually weird to have walls. It was still just a place to drop my stuff and grab a little sleep, in my head – that's all my old place had been, just a storage locker with a shower and a toilet – but Forbes was insisting that I have a place to call my own. It took me all of about thirty minutes to grab the stuff from my old place that I wanted and put the rest in sacks for Goodwill. My DVDs, my porn, my exercise cycle and hand weights, my textbooks, my boom box and my CDs, my dishes, my uniforms and my ironing board and iron. I'd grabbed a couple of the milk crates I'd used for furniture, just in case I needed some impromptu shelving. Everything else went to Goodwill or the dumpster, including my sweaty futon, an old bookcase that was not going to survive another move, a bunch of paperbacks I knew I'd never read again, and every stitch of clothing I owned. That was odd. The t-shirt and sweats I was wearing were all I had left, and that's a very cold and lonely feeling.

My old Adidas bag that contained all my toiletries got a thorough going-over, as well. I, like a lot of paramedics and firefighters, stayed packed all the time. We worked 24 hours on, 48 hours off (unless you were one of the crazies like me who took a lot of overtime, in which case it could be 48 hours on, 24 hours off). I kept basically the razor, the toothbrush and four Tide stain pens, my nail clippers and a first-aid kit. Everything else from the Old Spice stick deodorant I'd worn since my pits first started making their voices heard at the age of 12 to my hairbrush to my nose-hair trimmer went to Goodwill or the trash. It was like giving my entire life away.

We drove for about half an hour through midtown rush. As we stalled completely, waiting for my species to discover the ability to merge without standing on their brakes, an ambulance shot by on the shoulder, lights flashing and sirens wailing. It flashed by too fast for me to get

the unit number, but I knew we were in Medic 23's district and it was probably George Rippen and Jennifer Burgess hauling ass to St. Luke's, near the county line. My nose was pressed against the glass trying to see.

"You'll be there soon enough, I promise," Dr. Richards said, noticing my reaction to the lights and sirens. After nine years as a paramedic, driving Code 3 – lights and sirens – was every bit as cool as I thought it would be when I was five years old. No matter how much the job wore me down, how tired I got from the endless hours, I missed that job when I was away from it.

The new place was in a much nicer part of town, to be certain – not every flat surface had been tagged yet, and I didn't spot a single meth dealer on my street. People even trimmed their yards instead of putting non-functioning washers, dryers, refrigerators and cars with no tires in them. Not that I'd minded the junkyard décor, honestly – I was never that into gnomes and pink plastic flamingoes anyway – my only thought, then as now, was whether or not it would be easy to get an ambulance or a stretcher into the residence. Still, it made me a little sad. I'd been strangely proud that nobody ever wanted to come to my place before I moved. It was a Mother Teresa/Black Hole of Calcutta kind of feeling. And I actually did live near the people I helped. It gave me a weird kind of pride to say that. Now I was middle-class urban, white-flight bound, and I couldn't help but feel like I was selling out a little. I said as much to Forbes.

"Relax," he told me. "Once we get you back under your own steam, you can find a place with as much local flavor as you want, princess."

He'd started using terms like that – princess, sweetheart, missy – since the blow-up. I still hated them, but at least they didn't make me want to run and hide any more. There was a part of me that never wanted to get acclimatized to being called ma'am, but the logical angels shouted that part down. It was going to happen, and I might as well get used to it. If I'd been into heraldry at all, I would've made myself a crest; something triumphant, like a phoenix or a griffin, clutching lightning bolts or fire arrows and wrapped by a banner emblazoned with "It's going to happen, you might as well get used to it." That, or I was going to have it translated into a cool language like Latin or Irish Gaelic and have it tattooed on my body someplace.

Immediately I pictured it in the small of my back and shuddered. I was still coming to grips with princess. The tramp stamp was gonna take me a while. At least it was only a short hop from there to Girls Gone Wild. I figured once I got slobbering drunk and flashed a cameraman in public, I would be 100% girl and my transition phase would be officially at an end.

Which raised another point I'd been meaning to ask Ken. "Where am I, developmentally, as of this morning?" I asked him.

I must have startled him. He was miles away when I spoke, and jumped a little when I broke the silence. "Hm? Oh. Last report was, your body is approximately 75 to 80 percent female epigenome," he told me.

"So, doesn't that mean I should be... y'know, growing?"

"No," he said, obviously having left his ability to parse subtext somewhere next to his coffee cup in his sink at home. "You've shrunk, but we don't expect any growth."

"No, Ken," I said pointedly. I pointed both hands at my nonesuch chest. "I mean growing."

He missed my gesture, eyes on the road, trying to find my new apartment. A light rain was beginning to fall and visibility was becoming problematic. "I told you," he said distractedly,

“you've reached your target height and weight. Don't expect any more drastic changes in body mass. You're not craving protein the way you were, and your appetite is returning to normal. Well, normal for Selina Davis, at any rate.”

I let loose a long-suffering sigh. “No, Ken. Growing. Breasts. Tits. Knockers. Cans. Funbags. Headlights. Bazongas. Sweater meat.”

“I get the point,” he said, chuckling.

“Cause right now, I got nothing. This is not a complaint, I'm in no hurry to have any, don't get me wrong. But I expected something. I just learned to walk again, I'm not looking forward to have my center of gravity change again and for me to start knocking things off of tables and bookshelves with 'em.”

He cleared his throat and took a sip of coffee from a Starbucks' traveler. “I'm not sure, actually. That's probably a question for Colonel Richards, not me. I've had much more to think about the last few days than the state of your rack.”

“I guess I just equate that with the transformation,” I said. “And I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

“I understand,” Ken said, eyes still searching the lightly wooded street for the address on his sticky note, my new place. “I do know that Selina Davis has breast implants, that she was naturally flat-chested as a girl and young woman, but that her mother was very full-figured and so was her grandmother. We're not sure of paternal influence yet. If you'd like, if you're worried about your balance, we can get you a prosthetic bra so you can practice.”

“Falsies?” I said, laughing. “Gotta love the irony. Have to get phony boobs so I can look more like a girl.”

“Yeah, that's pretty rich,” Forbes said, chuckling. He pointed. “Ah. Here we are. 2200 Jefferson Mill Road. We're looking for Building Seventeen, you're in Apartment 1710.”

We found a covered parking slip right next to the breezeway and hustled under it to be out of the worsening rain. I almost fell twice in the ten-yard distance. Physical therapy was going well, but I was a long way from passing the department's physical agility test. Hell, I was a long way from passing the department's field sobriety test, to be honest. I could just barely walk.

The apartment was the first one on the right – the place smelled like most new cookie-cutter apartment complexes, all fresh paint and new carpet and venture capital. It had blanched white walls, a nondescript beige Berber carpet and badly-done crown molding that somebody figured was worth more per month in rent. At least there were ceiling fans in the front room and the bedroom.

They'd furnished the place, and once again I hadn't really had much of a say. The furniture was what, I supposed, was suitable for a single girl about my age: a burgundy sofa, a small pink recliner, some art-by-the-pound landscapes framed on the walls, a little glass-top coffee table, some terra cotta lamps and a little butcher-block dining table with four screw-together ladderback chairs in the little breakfast nook.

I despised it the instant I saw it. My first chance to get away, I was going to scour the flea markets and swap meets for some shit that was a little less Rooms to Go and a little more

me. At least a neon beer sign on the wall, or a battery-operated singing fish. I had to have something tacky in here or I was going to scream, and I'd proved I was real good at that now.

"What do you think?" Ken asked.

"Honestly?" I asked flatly. "It's not me."

"Well, there's time for that later. We just wanted you to have the basics," he said briskly, obviously disappointed at my reaction. I supposed I was supposed to jump up and down and clap my hands, thrilled to be living up among the high society for the first time in my young life. Unfortunately, I liked shabby. I was a big fan of 'needs work.' The government, apparently, didn't get that.

"I can live here," I said by way of apology.

"Good," Ken said. "'Cause you don't really have a choice."

\* \* \*

Selina Davis sat in her own apartment, half a city away, and cried again. It seemed like she couldn't stop crying these days. She'd only meant to give the man just the slightest bit of human contact, just a little peck on his lips to remind him that he was still alive. It had been so innocent in intention. She kissed her patients all the time.

Colonel Richards was right. There had been no way to know. She really wasn't to blame for this, but she felt responsible nonetheless. They'd done a full work-up on her, blood and tissue and everything imaginable, and grilled her for hours about her family medical history, as far back as she could remember. Richards had dragged it out of her, inch by inch, making her remember things she'd last heard when she was three and four years old, from her grandmother.

But she'd held something back, something she couldn't bear anyone knowing, and that was what tore at her insides and kept her sleepless at night. She'd tried so hard to put that part of her life behind her, and it was hard enough for a woman in the United States Air Force without something like that being common knowledge around the O-Club and the mess.

She grabbed the magazine in front of her and a fresh spate of sobs escaped her. It was six years old, the copy of the Adult Video News, but it was still recognizably her. The hair was longer, the tits bigger, and the skin a little better cared-for, but it was unmistakably Selina Davis. Or Seleena Sparx, AVN's Startlet of the Year and winner of Best Girl-Girl and Best Anal for the year. She crumpled the thick publication as best she could and tossed it into the wastebasket, but she knew she'd get it back out and smooth it, the same way she'd done a thousand times since she'd found out what she'd done to Nick.

Some of it had been environment, she was sure. It had to be. As far as she could remember, she'd been a darling of her father and her two uncles. Sometimes their play and tickling went places she hadn't liked, but her mother was long gone and her grandmother told her that she shouldn't tease them if she didn't want them to play with her like that. Trying to stay away from them, to dress differently, none of it got them to leave her alone. She took it, because if she let them do what they wanted to her, then they left her little sister alone. By the time of her first period, it was almost intolerable. She'd called the cops, alone and terrified at a pay phone six blocks from her house.

CPS had come, and lots of people asked her questions no one should ever ask a thirteen-year-old girl. She didn't remember much about that time, only that she and her sister went to separate foster homes. Her foster parents had been nice people, but strict. What she'd come to believe was normal, they would ground her or spank her for. But something had awakened inside her, and it wouldn't go back to sleep no matter what she did, how she prayed or tried to keep her mind off of it. She'd been the first girl in her eighth-grade class to lose her virginity to a boy four years older. They called her slut and whore, but she didn't care. She wore those words like a badge, letting them make her different, more powerful. None of the cute little cheerleaders or the prom queens were never as popular as she was, never as wanted.

She'd left her foster home at seventeen, dropping out of high school to move into the city. She'd moved in with a drug dealer – her drug dealer – and started stripping to make her money. She'd turned a few tricks, but didn't like the risk, so from there it went to Internet porn and from there she moved to Los Angeles and broke into mass-market porn. She'd made a lot of money, because she was willing to do anything. She'd been dubbed the “Gang Bang Queen” by the company publicist because of her ability to take on rooms full of guys at the same time. Her record was twelve.

It wasn't her third time in rehab for prescription drug abuse and alcoholism that she'd met Dr. Willis. He was an old man, a sweet guy with a quick grandfatherly smile and the softest, most calming voice she'd ever heard. He never judged her, he just sat there and listened, asked questions about what he didn't understand and let her talk. And talk she did. Days and nights of nothing but talking, telling the sad abusive story of her life to a man who never said things like slut or whore. When she was done, he would pat her hand and tell her she did everything right, she survived, she was a champion. Selina loved him for saying that, loved him more for meaning it.

He'd been honest, too. He never blinked or looked away when he told her the truth, that she was a drug addict and an alcoholic. She'd heard those before, but he added the third one – she was addicted to sex, she needed it to prove she wasn't broken, that she was a woman and she was in control. She used the crazy stuff she'd done to get back at a father who was beyond her reach, getting him back over and over and over because, as Dr. Willis had told her truthfully, it would never be enough to balance what he and his drunken brothers had done to her when she was a child. Selina lost count of how many nights she'd cried in that sweet old man's arms. And once she'd cried all she could cry, ruined every shirt in his closet with her tears and snot and mascara, he'd picked her up and dusted her off and started helping her get better.

It had taken no time to get past the booze and the pills. To be honest, Selina had never liked them much anyway, it was just a way to help her sleep that she took way too far. Her addictive personality had grabbed them tight, though, and made it so that she couldn't quit on her own. She went to her meetings and her group dutifully, but she never felt like an alcoholic. She didn't feel sick inside when she was with the other substance abusers. She didn't feel sick inside, and around people who knew what she was going through, until she started going to Dr. Willis' sexual dysfunction group.

The porn industry was very fond of the word nympho, but nymphomania – or the more modern term, paraphilia – was not a fun or a pleasant thing. It was like compulsive gambling or compulsive eating, a desperate attempt on the part of the sufferer to fill a hole inside, a hole that whatever they were chasing could never fill. That hole could only be filled up by things like

self-worth, real love, a sense of being necessary and vital to the world. Dr. Willis had shown her that, but he had also told her that the sickness was in her blood. It was a part of her, and she would never be cured.

She was terrified that she'd passed that on to Nick, but it was her deepest secret. After rehab, she'd stopped doing porn and settled down to a monogamous boyfriend. He'd dumped her once he found out who she was and what she used to do, and Selina swore she'd never tell another soul. She got her GED and joined the Air Force. They'd sent her to nursing school and made her an officer, and Selina knew all too well what would happen to her if the officers who made her struggle for every scrap of respect she'd earned ever found out she used to be a porn star. She'd never be taken seriously again, and those bastards would put the temptation back out there, the seductive pull back towards her sickness. Even the little bits of respect she would be able to salvage from having her secret known would be gone forever if she started giving head in supply closets again.

It was tearing her up inside, but she was desperate to keep her secret. She just hoped that Nick didn't suffer too terribly from her weakness.

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It had been two weeks since they'd first told me that I had a terminal case of being a girl, and my body still wasn't done messing with me. I was peeing out of the base of my penis, but it was still definitely a penis. My scrotum had elongated and stretched backwards, dividing into a reasonable facsimile of labia majora, but there was nothing between them except pink, sensitive flesh. I was kept awake nights by the strange shifting of things in my belly. My hips still hadn't finished widening and every day was a struggle to find my balance and overcome the raw, sore pain that walking and even sitting up brought about. I was still smooth and hairless – my follicles killed by the radiation I'd been exposed to – and aside from a slight amount of swelling and the tripling in size of my nipples and areolae, I still had no breasts to speak of. I had the shape of a twelve-year-old boy, and the feeling of being 'stuck' between sexes was overwhelming. I'd decided to take Ken Forbes' advice and get serious about the business of being a girl. My body hadn't taken the cue, though, and seemed to be taking its own sweet time about it, if it hadn't stopped the process altogether. I was starting to get upset about it. I really didn't want surgery.

The shapely black master sergeant who served as Col. Richards' aide-de-camp gave me a wide smile as I walked in. I only knew her last name – Mitchell, it was on her name-tag – but she always had a smile and a kind word. I felt ridiculous – I was wearing pink yoga pants with 'Juicy' broadly displayed across my ass, white flip-flops and a ribbed white tank top which accented the lack of every curve. I had a pink bandanna tied over my bald head and normal-sized aviator glasses which were so big on my face that it made me look like a little kid trying on my parent's shades. But Mitchell was unfazed, and told me I looked cute. I thanked her, even though what I really wanted to do was punch her.

She handed me a thick envelope which I took in a slightly trembling hand. I was scared to open it, knowing what was inside. It was like if I didn't look, then it wouldn't be real. But I knew I had to. A lot hinged on it.

The first was an amended birth certificate. My fingerprints hadn't changed, so the footprints on my original birth certificate were still good. But the gender on the sealed document was now female. My Social Security number hadn't changed, either, except now the IRS knew me

as a girl. And the drivers' license – no photo, thank god, just one of the paper temps – showed that Nicholas Julian Lightman was now, irreversibly and forever Nicolette Julianne Lightman, sex female. I sighed heavily. It was like being handed irrefutable proof that there was no going back. I tried not to cry. I was sick of crying.

Mitchell was looking over my shoulder. “Nicolette is pretty,” she commented.

“Thanks,” I said thickly. The huskiness was always going to be a part of my voice, but it was now a very sweet soprano. “I picked it because it was close to my old name. I think I'm gonna go by Nicky, though.”

“That's cute,” she said, putting a warm hand on my shoulder. “How you gonna spell it?”

“The usual way,” I said. “N-I-C-K-Y.”

“Oh, you shouldn't. You should spell it cute, like you. With an i or something. Like that model, y'know, back in the '90's. She spelled it 'N-I-K-I.' That suits you better. It's cuter and sexier.”

I groaned. “I'm not really into 'cute' and 'sexy' right now.”

She giggled. “I don't care what you do. I'm spelling it 'N-I-K-I' on all your paperwork. Girl, I'm gonna convince you your'e cute if it's the last thing I do.”

I dug through the envelope some more, finding my credit cards and bank paperwork, all dutifully changed. My retirement account and the few shares I owned. Finally, at the bottom, I found the thing that mattered the most: my paramedic's license, now issued in the name of Nicolette Lightman. I breathed a sigh of relief, just holding it in my hands. Whatever else happened to me, I was still a medic. I didn't expect it to make me feel that good.

“You can spell it however you want,” I said, just basking in how good it felt to have that little laminated card in my hands again. It was the only thing about me that hadn't changed, and now I had something to cling to again.

Mitchell grinned at me. “You look better, now you got that back.”

I let out a breath I hadn't realized I was holding. “Yeah. I feel better.”

“Good enough to be 'N-I-K-I?’” she teased.

“Sure, why the hell not?” I laughed back. “But it's gonna cost you.”

“Cost me? What?” she said.

“You gotta tell me your first name,” I said with a lopsided grin.

She laughed, loud and rich. “It's LaShonda,” she told me. “But everybody just calls me Shon.”

“Shon. Nice to meet you. I'm Niki,” I said.

She gave me a hug. “Good to meet you, Niki,” she said. “Dr. Richards won't be back for a little while, he had to go down to Radiology for a minute. Is there anything you need?”

I sighed. “Some hair would be nice. Boobs. You name it.”

She sat back behind her desk. “Let me see what I can do.”

\* \* \*

“We don't have a lot of options where the hair is concerned,” Dr. Richards told me. “I've talked to some people, and transplants seem to be the best we can do. If you like, I can schedule you for that as early as next week.”

I scrubbed a hand over my soft scalp. “Doesn't that stuff look like doll's hair?”

“When it's done badly,” Richards countered. “This will look better, I promise. Dr. Stanley Kirkpatrick is one of the best in the world and he produces some very natural-looking results. I'm thinking of making an appointment with him myself – I'm going a little thin on top. He recommends synthetic for you, since your scalp doesn't have any way to nourish natural hair.”

“So it's basically a permanent wig,” I said. “It won't grow or anything.”

“No,” Dr. Richards told me. “But we can lengthen it, if you like, and it can always be cut and reshaped or recolored if you get bored with it. And he tells me the procedure can also get you some eyelashes and eyebrows, and pubic hair as well.”

“Great,” I said. “Let's do it. I'm sick of looking like I just stepped out of chemo.”

He wrote something on the white legal pad that was his auxillary brain. “I'll set it up as soon as he can get here. It will likely be three or four procedures before it's done. I'm sorry to say, the procedure can be quite painful.”

“What about the rest of it?” I asked, ignoring him.

“Breast formation takes years in a pubescent girl,” he told me. “Developmentally, you have to remember you're only a few weeks old. You have to be patient.”

“Doc, I'm just about out of patience,” I told him. “Gimme options.”

“Well, there's conventional implants, saline or silicone. But I wouldn't recommend that for developing breasts. Who knows what shape you'd wind up with after introducing all that scar tissue into undeveloped tissue. I really recommend that you wait.”

“If I have to,” I said. “But I'm not happy about it.”

“I'll tell you what,” he said. “We'll try some fat injections. If they don't take, then it's probably safe to say that your body has done all it's going to do up there. If that's the case, then we can discuss implants.”

“Sounds fair,” I said. “What about the genitals?”

“Well, we have an idea about that,” Richards said. “I've been on the phone with Johns Hopkins and Bethesda Naval Hospital. Their assessment of your blood work is that you don't have enough raw protein to complete the job.”

“I'm eating as much as I can, every day,” I told him. “I just can't hold food the way I used to, and I have diarrhea all the time. And if I overeat, I just get nauseous and bring it all back up.”

“I know. We're talking about supplements – amino acids, like the bodybuilders take – and injections,” he said. “Give your body what it needs, where it needs it. It's a much better idea than any kind of surgery. Your body wants to have the proper genitals, we just need to let it do

what it wants and try to stay out of the way. If this works, you should have fully functioning genitals in a week or so.”

“That's great news,” I said. “So I guess all that leaves us is the head stuff.”

“Major Forbes assures me he's got you on a very strict schedule,” he said. “You're actually a little ahead of schedule, according to him. He's ready to take you to the next phase, actually.”

“Do I want to know what the 'next phase' is?” I asked him.

“I'm sure he'll tell you everything you want to know,” Richards said. “To be honest, I can't understand half of what he tells me and maybe a tenth of what's in his reports. He's brilliant, that's for sure, but behavioral neuroscience is not my field.”

“Just a simple country doctor, hm?” I teased him.

“Something like that,” he shot back with a sly grin. “Now get out of here. You're late for physical therapy.”

I wended my way through the halls of the hospital that was now my second home, down two floors – I took the stairs dutifully, even though I'd been sore and off-balance since I'd woken up this morning – and into the physical therapy wing. I greeted some of the soliders there, fresh back from Iraq, struggling to learn how to walk again after IED's had claimed feet and legs. My heart went out to them.

“Hey, Niki,” Carl Preston called to me as I walked in, dropping my gym bag. “How you doing?”

“Ready to not be sore and bumping into shit,” I said. “Any ideas?”

“Actually, yeah,” he said. “Niki, I want you to meet Caitlin Hobbes. She's gonna be helping with your physical therapy.”

I took the slim hand that the athletic, healthy-looking brunette extended. “Call me Katy, everybody does,” she told me.

“So what do you have in mind for me, Katy?” I asked her.

“I've looked over tapes of your therapy, and tracked all the developmental stuff you've been going through,” she said. “You shouldn't be having the problems you're having, plain and simple. Even with the small, gradual changes in center of gravity and all the loss of muscle mass, you shouldn't be so sore and you definitely shouldn't be having all the problems with balance.”

“So what's the problem?” I asked.

“Believe it or not, it's your posture and gait,” she told me. “You still try to stand, sit and walk like a guy, and your body's not designed for that any more. We're going to work to correct that.”

“Hard habits to break,” I told her.

“I tell you what, I'll bet you a steak dinner that once you feel how much more centered and less sore you'll be, you won't walk or stand any other way. We just got to get some muscles strong enough to keep you there.”

“Okay, so what do I have to do?” I asked her.

She reached into a gym bag beside her desk and drew up a white satin contraption of hooks and laces and braces. The satin threw me, until I noticed the lace edges and the decorative embroidery around the hem.

My eyes got really wide, and I gasped. "That's a corset."

"I know. It's really pretty," Katy said. "And it's about to become your new best friend."

to be continued...



SUMMARY:

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Four**

**by Valerie Hope**

I WIPED SWEAT OFF MY smooth forehead as I pumped my legs up and down, breathing through pursed lips as I fought the Stairmaster. The digital timer on the control panel said I had five minutes left to go. The corset was digging into my armpits viciously and kept me from taking a deep breath. I felt like I was working harder than I'd ever worked in my life, but Katy and her staff were incredibly encouraging. I'd always been an indifferent exerciser in my past life, relying on my bicycle to keep me in shape. I was beginning to see the upside of working out. I had muscle definition now, for the first time in my life – although the loss of nearly all my body fat from the accident probably helped, too.

But the hard part, the part I didn't particular want to admit, either to myself or anyone else, is that I was starting to look good. A flat, well-muscled stomach and tight, bouncy bubble-butt, slim tight legs, a gorgeous 'christmas tree' of muscles across my upper back, rounded shoulders. I was a portrait of female health, a thoroughly gorgeous piece of work if not for the utter lack of breasts.

And Dr. Richards hadn't been lying about the pain of the hair transplants, either. Each session took about two and a half hours, and even with the local anesthetic I could feel the little needles driving into my scalp, over and over and over, threading the clear plastic 'hair' into the little follicles they'd made to attach to the skull underneath my smooth skin. The doctors had a little 'sewing machine'-type device they used that made a godawful noise while it drove synthetic fibers into my skull by the thousands. I had the last two treatments this week, one tomorrow and one three days later. The last one would be interesting – that was the one that was going to give me eyelashes and eyebrows, and pubes as well. And to top it all off, my hair was completely clear. Transparent. It looked for all the world like someone was pouring water over my head. I hadn't thought much about color, to be honest, I had other things on my mind. But the time for that choice was drawing near, and I was getting suggestions from everybody that I really didn't want.

The fat injections that Dr. Richards had given me in the chest were rejected almost immediately, so I was also in the running for breast implants. I wasn't thrilled about the prospect of a boob job, but I did want to at least have a woman's figure if I was forced to be a woman. With the gorgeous muscles and the adorable little six-pack swell, I would probably be a fucking knockout. The prospect didn't thrill me.

The protein injections to speed my development seemed to be working, according to Dr. Richards, but I couldn't feel much of a difference. All I had noticed was how fast they made my nails grow. I had to trim them daily and they still managed to protrude past the ends of my fingers. They were thick and healthy, and some of the girls around the hospital were pestering

me to get a manicure. I wasn't so sure about that. I was easing into this whole girl thing, and that seemed a little too girly.

Not that Ken Forbes was letting me ease into anything at my own speed. He kept telling me that immersion was the key, that I should go home to a life that contained no vestige of masculinity whatsoever. The apartment, which I'd never really liked to start with, was now a real pain in the ass to go home to. My bed was pink satin sheets with frothy lace trim, teddy bears and little red satin heart-shaped pillows, my bathroom was a solid wall of moisturizers and lotions and exfoliators and things that smelled pretty. I could barely stand to take a dump in there, with all the potpourri and scented candles and tissues mingling with one of the smells I strongly associated with my old life. The music in my car was girly stuff, Beyoncé and Britney and stuff I'd never given the time of day in my previous life of Nickelback and old Bob Seger. I was sent home with 'chick flicks' and romance novels – and I was actually tested on them to see if I'd read or watched them – and magazines like Elle, Vogue, Cosmo, Glamour and Allure. And slowly but surely they were starting to take hold. Against everything I would have laid money on in the beginning, I was actually starting to like looking at all the glamorous expensive clothes in Vogue and watching Sandra Bullock movies for the plots instead of her ass. I knew I was doomed when I actually started to care what was happening in a Danielle Steel novel and didn't answer a phone call because I was so engrossed.

Such was the way of Forbes' 'Phase Two.' There was nothing about my life that wasn't feminine. Even the new cell phone I'd gotten to replace my battered, irradiated one was pink and had a pair of intertwined rhinestone hearts dangling from it by a pink ribbon. It played Beyoncé's "Check Up On It" whenever anyone called me. Still, I heard Dr. Richard's commentary on Forbes' brilliance in my head whenever I had my doubts, and tried to bear it. At least Forbes' prediction was correct – it did get easier with time, and familiarity, and the now-certainty that no one was going to laugh at me about it. That had been the real problem, behind and underneath it all: the fear that someone would laugh. Luckily, everyone at the hospital was probably under orders of being hauled against a wall and shot by Dr. Richards and Ken Forbes personally for cracking anything that could be loosely interpreted as a joke about my condition. I hoped he would be able to do the same thing for EMS, when I went back to work. Those assholes were gonna be merciless.

Still, I thought as I finished up the torture on the Stairmaster, I wish we could ease up on the girly stuff. I don't know how much more I can take.

I hopped down and toweled myself off. Just a the hand weights now, ten more sets of repetitions between me and a night vegetating on my couch. I had to admit, of all the girly stuff, I was really liking the corsets. I'd taken to wearing them during the day, under my clothes. Even after all the muscles had been trained, strengthened up, I still liked how they helped me move and stand comfortably. I hadn't lost my balance once since they'd laced me into my first one. I owned about twelve of them now, and found an antique lacing bar on eBay that helped me get them nice and tight the way I liked.

I powered through my upper body workout, barely resting between sets, I was so excited about getting home and having a brief, one-night-only end to the girly stuff. I had snuck Batman Begins onto my Netflix queue and I even had a macho-man movie to sneak in amongst the chick flicks

Oh, it was going to be a good, manly night for a change.

I walked towards the locker room, unable to keep a spring out of my step from the prospect of my evening. Ken Forbes met me halfway, carrying a huge bag.

“Hey, Ken,” I said, almost flirtatiously in my husky soprano. “What’s in the bag?”

“Your next new project,” he told me, smiling. “Makeup. From here on out, you don’t leave the house without it. I have DVDs, books, everything you need to help you get started, and a couple professionals who’re going to work with you tomorrow morning.”

My face fell. “Can’t wait.”

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So instead of my manly-man night, I spent that evening sitting cross-legged on my floor in front of my coffee table, watching Alexis Vogel and Kevin Aucoin on DVD, reading book after book about face shapes, skin care, foundation, eyes, lips, cheeks. At the very least it was something I’d never done before – growing up with two brothers, there wasn’t even makeup in the house, so the extent of my knowledge was playing around with greasepaint on Hallowe’en and occasional moulage – injury make-up, blood and gore – for mass disaster drills and mock collisions at local high schools to try and convince kids not to drink and drive around prom time. So there were some interesting bits.

I spent about an hour staring at the pots, tubes and little trays of scents and colors laid out on the table in front of me like they were poisonous snakes. My mind simply wouldn’t accept the simple fact that Ken Forbes expected me to smear this shit on my face every day from now on. It smelled funny, it tasted funny and it felt heavy and weird, like my skin wasn’t really my skin.

I’d finished my take-out sesame chicken – still pounding down the protein – and opened a beer from my fridge. Michelob Ultra, unfortunately, instead of the heavy darks like Guinness I’d favored before. I just couldn’t hold the stuff like I used to, either, rushing to the bathroom to piss like a racehorse after two. And I didn’t even want to know how many it would take to get me drunk. I decided to keep my beer a secret, though – if Forbes found out I was drinking something as manly as beer, he’d have me slugging white wine and Smirnoff Ice before the day was out, ordering cosmopolitans like the girls from Sex and the City at the bars. Maybe he’d let me get away with the occasional margarita.

With a loading dose of liquid courage on board, I finally had the fortitude in my intestines to pick up a compact full of mousse foundation. I noticed that the color was a bit off, a little darker than my actual skin tone, but I grabbed the little wedge-shaped sponge from the big plastic sack of them Forbes had given me and smeared a little on my cheek. It had a strange smell, heavy and cloying but not unpleasant. Rewinding the DVD to the part about foundation, I started my first effort at makeup.

At the end of forty-five minutes, I looked like a circus clown. I washed it off.

At the end of two hours, I looked like a hooker. I washed it off again.

At the end of four hours, I looked like another hooker. I washed it off again.

At the end of six hours, I was passed out on my floor with shit smeared all over my face. I looked like a hooker who’d gotten beaten and left for dead in an alley.

The next morning I cleaned myself up and tried again. I was finding that the mineral makeup, the powder stuff, was much easier to apply than the cream foundation, so I started there. Carefully I lined my eyes with a sable brown pencil and smudged it with my finger the way the DVDs said. I applied a coat of pink gloss to my lips and decided that was enough. I pulled my transparent hair into a pink baseball cap that proudly decryed my status as 'Spoiled' in glittery rhinestones and dressed in workout clothes – white yoga pants with the waistband folded over and a yellow tee over my new sunflower-yellow corset with the padded cups, and my everpresent flip-flops – and walked down to the parking lot. It was a bright, sunny morning, so I put on a pair of clear wraparound sunglasses and walked down the street towards the bus stop. I was halted by the sound of a honking horn. Forbes, in his nondescript government car, was waiting outside my apartment for me. I climbed in the passenger door and he passed me a cup of coffee in a plastic traveler with a cardboard jacket.

“Black, right?” he asked.

“Can't take it black any more,” I said. “Heartburn. I'm a two creams, two sugars guy now.”

“Guy?” he asked with raised eyebrows.

I sighed. “Two creams, two sugars girl,” I said. “Damn, this is hard. I have the damnedest time remembering all the little stuff. I walked into the men's room at the Chinese place last night – again. It's so frustrating.”

“You'll get it. Just be patient.”

“Not my strong suit,” he told me. “Your makeup looks nice.”

“Really? You should've seen my early attempts. Bozo would have been proud.”

“It's to be expected,” he told me. “You're in a hell of a position, Niki. Everything you do – literally everything you do – is the first time you've ever done it. I'm in awe of your courage, you need to know that. I wouldn't have been able to do what you're doing.”

“Thanks,” I said, my eyes stinging. Damn estrogen, I thought. Makes me cry whenever anyone tells me anything. “But I have lots of support. I'd be a mess if it wasn't for you – well, I'm a mess anyway, but I'd be a much bigger mess if you weren't helping me. I don't know if I could do it without you.”

“Sure you could,” he said, waving dismissively. “But I appreciate the sentiment.”

I sipped the coffee after I'd lightened and sweetened it. The bitterness still stung my raw throat, but I didn't care. I just wanted the caffeine. Once I had the lid back on, Forbes pulled the generic car into traffic. “So why the limo service?” I asked him.

“I thought I'd take you someplace for breakfast,” he said. “Before you get started today.”

“Just tell me,” I said, seeing through his lame attempt to butter me up.

“There's a problem,” he said simply. “Developmentally.”

“What?” I said, all levity forgotten.

“It appears that your testes aren't changing the way we thought they would. Everything else is almost finished, but you don't have ovaries.”

“Almost finished?” I asked. “I haven't seen or felt a change in over a week.”

“You're a girl,” he said. “All the changes are happening internally. Your last MRI shows only a thin membrane covering the opening to your vagina. Your Cowpers' glands have become functioning Bartholin's glands and you have a fully functioning uterus and cervix. Just – no ovaries.”

“So up here,” I said, pointing to my belly, “I still have balls?”

“Not in the traditional sense, no,” he said. “They don't produce viable sperm, for one thing, and they're releasing estrogen in the amounts necessary to maintain female homeostasis. But they still produce a high level of testosterone, as well, and no eggs.”

“So I'm sterile,” I said. “That really isn't much of a surprise, considering it was radiation exposure. The ability to reproduce is usually the first thing to go.”

“But it means you'll never be a whole woman,” he said. “It means what we feared – that you're going to be stuck somewhere in the middle.”

“So what are you saying, you want to look into some kind of transplant?” I asked.

“No,” he said. “At least, not now. You have enough on your plate. But I am going to put you on testosterone blockers. All that male hormone is going to adversely affect your development. It was great when you were building muscle, but your body's about where it needs to be. You don't want to wind up looking like some kind of steroid freak.”

“Would that be so bad? Those female bodybuilders are kinda hot.”

“But they have serious health problems, particularly if they're juicing,” he said. “We're going to try and put a stop to that before it starts. We're in a good place, physically, with you. Your last round of tests has you pegged as a perfectly normal, completely healthy seventeen-year-old girl.”

“Waitaminnit,” I said. “I'm twenty-eight years old.”

“Your brain is. Your cells are fresh out of puberty. Metabolically, your body is only sixteen or seventeen.”

“So can I not drink in public any more?” I asked.

He laughed. “No, we'll leave you at least twenty-one when we amend your documentation. But you're likely to live a decade longer than when you first started out. Actually, the medical applications of what's happened to you are staggering. You might have handed us the fountain of youth. We could make billions on just Florida alone.”

“Glad to be of service to the fantastically rich,” I said.

“You're too cynical for a teenager,” he shot back, making me snort laughter.

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The next few days blurred together in a swirl of bright colors and pain. I'd been doing makeup and hair classes in the mornings with two local cosmetologists – cute girls I'd've made passes at before the change – and also practicing at night with my books and DVDs. I had a good daytime look and was getting better at a sultrier, more glamorous evening look, and was

starting to get the hang of working my clear hair into various styles. It was short – a tousled pageboy which could be pulled back into a tiny stub of a ponytail when I worked out, but long enough to hold some styles – but it was done. But I'd lost an entire day in bed, taking Vicodin for the bitter pain and methylprednisolone for the swelling and irritation, when they'd given me eyebrows, eyelashes and a little tuft of transparent pubic hair that made my crotch look like it was oiled. They'd tried to warn me, but their words fell well short of the mark. They'd had to put me under a general to finish the procedure, the pain broke through even the local anesthetic they'd given me, which meant I'd been intubated again. My voice was even huskier, like I'd screamed it out and was perpetually hoarse. I hated the way it sounded, but everyone assured me it was still pleasant, some even went so far as to say sexy. As stoned as I was on painkillers, I didn't care if they'd said it sounded like a toad with a bowel obstruction or two cats fucking. I was much too busy watching my walls breathe.

I'd been a little better the next day, enough to slap on some Secret antiperspirant and finger-comb my lank transparent hair, lace myself into a red satin corset with black lace trim, throw on a baggy sweatshirt and loose heather-gray sweatpants, the barest lick of makeup, just enough to cover my unfortunate pallor and the dark circles under my eyes, no eyeliner or lipstick, and make my way to the hospital with small, ginger steps. The torturers waiting for me at physical therapy were not impressed with my pain, or the way my face looked as if I'd said disparaging things about Laila Ali's mother. They were much more interested at going out in the hallway to laugh at me while I attempted their newest plot at my utter humiliation and ridicule.

“We have something new for you,” Katy announced. “It's gonna be hard, but I know you're gonna love the results.”

I felt like reheated turd soup, but I tried to come up to Katy's usual level of hyperactive cheerfulness. I was sure if I tested her urine, it would come back with Smurf DNA. “Whatcha got for me?”

They brought me around into the workout room with mirrors along one wall, the step aerobics and big rubber balls all stacked neatly by the door. Katy turned around to me with a corset, all in matte black leather.

“Sorry for the color, but this kind of thing is only sold in specialty stores,” she told me. “If you really hate it, we can have another one made for you.”

“Specialty stores?” I asked.

“It's called a punishment corset,” she told me. “The hardcore S&M crowd uses them. It cinches tighter and holds your back straighter than a normal one, and it has a collar that keeps you from looking down.”

“Okay,” I said, biting one lip and sounding a little iffy about it. She smiled.

“Don't worry, we're not gonna leave you in it,” she said. “Only for about half an hour, forty-five minutes a day. It's just to help you while you're here. Afterwards you can take it off, or go back to one of your regular everyday corsets.”

“Okay. What's it for?” I asked.

“You're going back to finishing school,” she told me. “Gait training, just walking and balance and coordination. You're going to walk across the room with a book balanced on your head,

learn to sit and stand properly, and adjust your stride so it's shorter and more fluid. It's to stop you walking like a man.”

“A corset and a book are gonna do that?” I asked, disbelieving.

“A corset, a book, and these,” she said, holding up a pair of shoes with four-inch stiletto heels.

It wasn't even the estrogen that made me cry this time.

\* \* \*

The pain went away over five sore, miserable days, but in the meantime my good spirits and determination made a merciful reappearance. I fell over as much as I stood the first few days, my ankles were swollen and bruised from being bent sideways. The punishment corset was like a truss, keeping my chin pointed up and my shoulders back, my spine like a rail. It wasn't until I started taking smaller steps, swiveling my hips and placing one foot in front of the other, keeping my weight on my toes instead of my heels, that I was able to keep walking instead of falling like a sack of millet into the tumbling mats they'd placed to either side of me. A slight dip in my shoulders and swaying my hands a little soon had me able to cross the room with the book on my head. The mechanics were the key, as they kept telling me. Once I had mastered the mechanics of walking, sitting and standing, I was able to cross the room with a book on my head, or a glass of water without spilling a drop. The four-inch stilettos became five-inch, then seven-inch with a two-inch platform, finally eight-inch skyscrapers with a three-and-a-half-inch platform, full-on “stripper shoes” that I navigated in like I'd been born in them. I doubted I'd be in any marathons in heels, but at least I could make it from one side of the room to another.

They sent me home in the evenings wearing three-inch pumps instead of flip-flops and I showed up to PT in the mornings wearing the same. I only took them off to shower and sleep. I watched videos of models on the runway and by the end of three weeks I could manage a passable “catwalk strut,” even mastering the pose and the turn at the end for shits and giggles. By placing one foot directly in front of the other, I could sit and kneel in heels, and stand fluidly and gracefully. I was never gladder, however, when Katy put that punishment corset back in the box. She bade me take it home, where it was destined to gather dust on the top shelf of the closet with my neglected porn collection and Stratego. At least it made my regular corsets feel like wearing a baggy tee shirt by comparison.

The only downside was that my new, swaying and swiveling walk had the male orderlies and staff turning around to watch my ass when I went by. On the fifth floor and in the physical therapy department, it wasn't a problem, but on the other floors and in the lobby, no one knew that I was the Boy Who Would Be Girl and looked at me as just another female, albeit one with very interesting cellophane hair. I definitely didn't like the looks my new, sexy walk got me, but I didn't feel right turning and yelling at the guys who were staring, screaming What the hell is the matter with you? I'm a guy, asshole! Instead, it just made me quicken my pace and try to get out of sight.

I should've guessed that they'd throw some kind of celebration for the three months I'd been in the hospital. I just wasn't sure, with the cake and the party hats and balloons and champagne, what the hell we were celebrating. Learning to cross a room with a book on my head, or go outside in makeup without looking like a deranged mime? Having my balls migrate north into my lower abdomen? Eat and drink without throwing up? Spell my name with an i at the end

and find something to like in Christina Aguilera music (for the record, it was her voice – that bitch had pipes)?

I bore it all with as good a grace as I could muster, knowing that the celebration wasn't as much for me as it was for everyone who was working their asses off to try and salvage something approaching a normal life for me out of the colossal fuck-up that had occurred on their watch.

It was the first time I'd seen Selina Davis since it happened. She looked haggard and sleepless, with dark purple circles under her eyes and a drawn expression. She still offered me a sincere smile and a tight hug. "I need to talk to you," she whispered in my ear while we were embracing.

"Sure," I whispered back. I had a full afternoon – physical therapy and a hygiene lecture, and then Richards wanted me for another MRI, and afterwards Forbes wanted me for something. Without thinking, I whispered, "Dinner tonight?"

She nodded, and I marveled. At least the change made it easier to ask girls out.

\* \* \*

I tried not to think about how ridiculous I felt, like every eye in the restaurant was going to turn towards me at any moment and peals of laughter would sound, everyone giggling and pointing, saying look at the freak and what's that guy doing in a dress. I dreamed phantom rednecks in the parking lot, waiting to pound me into a bloodied mess for going against some random Bible passage they were using to justify their cruel ignorance. But no one gave me a second thought.

The "thing" Forbes had wanted me for was to take me out to a local shopping center to get my ears pierced. He deemed it another brick in the girly wall. I had tiny pink topaz studs glittering in each earlobe now. When he'd heard I was going out for dinner (but not with whom), he'd insisted that we find something suitable to wear instead of the sweats, t-shirt and corset I'd planned on. So here I sat beneath a sandy blonde wig which brushed the tops of my shoulders, held back with a heather-grey headband. I wore a matching heather-grey sweater-dress with a wide faux-leather belt, nude-colored pantyhose which made my hairless legs feel warm and slick as they rubbed together, and a pair of black leather ankle boots with a two-and-a-half-inch heel and a very pointed toe. He'd stood in my apartment while I struggled with my unpracticed evening look, which took me three tries to get right. At least now I could coat my transparent eyelashes with mascara which gave my eyes a more definite shape. They'd made them exceptionally long, which annoyed me but the techs assured me I'd thank them for it later. Forbes even insisted I be outfitted with a purse, another one of his girly triumphs. He watched me as I transferred all my identification and personal stuff – credit cards, licenses, certifications – into a ladies' wallet and then took my old one away. I added it to the little Dooney & Bourke hobo bag he'd bought me – on his own credit card, too, I noticed, so it was a gift from him, and I had to admit it was kinda cute, a pink and cream canvas with tan leather ends and a tan leather drawstring, covered with little D&B's. I added all the things Forbes considered sufficiently girly: a hairbrush, a compact, a lipstick, a small package of Kleenex, my cellphone and my keys. He even made me add a new keyring, a big silver lipstick kiss surrounding my name, Niki, studded all over with pink rhinestones. The dots over the i's were, of course, little rhinestone hearts.

“I'm under orders to keep it girly, too,” Selina told me. “So it's salads and white wine for us. I groaned. My eyes had been wandering lustfully over the steaks on the menu. I sulkily flipped back a page to the salads. There had to be at least one that had some red meat in it someplace.

“So what did you need to talk to me about?” I asked her airily.

She waited until the waiter brought our drinks. I didn't know jack about wine, but whatever she'd bought for me while I was running late tasted all right. I thought she'd told me it was a pinot grigio.

Selina took a deep breath. “I'm not sure how to start. It's... complicated, and I've ever told anybody about it. I'll leave it up to you if you want to tell anyone. But... you need to know.”

She was blinking back tears. I put a hand over hers. “Selina, you can trust me,” I told her, stroking the back of her hand with my thumb, a method I'd used to calm persnickety patients for years. “What is it?”

“I have a confession to make...”

\* \* \*

I'd started rubbing my temples about a third of the way into her story and hadn't stopped. I stared at the table, at the untouched food cooling in front of me.

“...I don't know if this is going to mean anything for you or not,” she finished. “I don't know a whole lot about epigenetics, but I know how the environment can affect it. So you needed to know about it.”

I sighed. “Thank you. I know that couldn't have been easy for you.”

She dabbed at the corners of her eyes with a Kleenex I'd offered her ages ago. “You can decide if anyone else needs to know about this,” she said, sniffing a little.

“If word of this got out, you'd be ruined. You'd have to be transferred, start all over again,” I said. “I can't do that to you, 'Lina. I couldn't.”

She managed a tearful but heartfelt smile. “You mean...”

I sighed. I was trembling a little. “Your secret's safe. I promise.”

“I can't believe you're not upset,” she said, blowing her nose.

I laughed and took another slug of wine. “Oh, I'm upset,” she said. “But not about this, not in particular. I'm upset about everything that's happened. Don't get me wrong, 'Lina – I don't blame you, I really don't. But I just can't help but wonder why the hell this has all happened to me.”

“Nick – I mean, Niki – you're amazing. You're already one of the coolest, best women I've ever known and you've only been a girl for a few months,” she said. “Maybe all this happened to you because you can handle it.”

“That's pretty fucked up, actually,” I said. “So I guess I should start trying to plan for this, I mean. Even if it doesn't carry across to me as any epigenetic urge, I have to figure that before it's all said and done, I'm going to be one extremely horny young lady.”

“You can control it,” she told me. “I did.”

“Look, 'Lina – I've got doctors and nurses and therapists and specialists out the wazoo. I don't need another nurse,” I told her. “But if I'm gonna get through this sane and healthy, what I am gonna need is a friend.”

She smiled a smile so genuine, so sincere that it made me melt a little bit. “You've got one,” she said. “Every step of the way.”

“I'm really glad,” I replied.

“We should eat,” she said with a sharp intake of breath, trying to change the subject away from the grinding emotional intensity we'd just experienced. “Before it gets cold.”

“Yeah,” I agreed, more than willing to talk about something else. What kind of crazy sexual beast am I gonna become? I wondered silently. I forced myself to dig my fork into my food and eat.

“Niki,” Selina said softly, hesitant to take her hand from underneath mine. “Are you sure there's nothing else I can do for you?”

I thought for a second. “Actually, there is,” I said after consideration. “You can get me really, really drunk.”

She signaled to the waiter for another bottle of wine.

\* \* \*

I tried to sit up and groaned. Some things didn't change – I really couldn't handle wine. Or margaritas, or rum-and-cokes, or whatever the hell else I downed in the giant blur of bars and people that floated in what was left of my mind in an indistinct haze. I ran my tongue over my teeth to check if they were actually furry or just felt that way. My tongue ached and felt like it weighed ten pounds, and was swollen and coated as well.

“Oh, God...” I groaned. It sounded like I had a mouth full of tapioca.

I heard an answering groan from the front room. Light streamed in through my blinds and hammered at my retinae. I forced myself upright – big mistake – and persisted until I was on my feet. I staggered into the bathroom, still wearing my clothes from the night before. I just barely caught my wig before it slid off my head into the toilet as I sank to my knees and let my dinner go. The acrid stench of half-metabolized alcohol assaulted me and made me retch even more. I'd smelled that smell a million times as a medic, and it had never gotten to me before.

Shortly before I thought my toenails would come up, the nausea receded and I sagged against the tiled wall next to the commode. I pawed listlessly at the handle, taking four tries to flush the offending substance away. The side of my head hurt, and my stomach and ass. Did I get in a fight or something? I searched the pitiful shreds of memory I'd carried home and found nothing.

“Hey,” a miserable voice croaked from the door. Selina was standing there, wearing one of my sweatshirts and her jeans from the night before. Her makeup was wrecked from sleeping on the couch.

“Hi,” I groaned. “God, what happened last night? I hurt all over.”

“Oh, girl, you had a good time.”

“Oh, God. What did I do?” Why can't I talk? What's wrong with my mouth?

“You were dancing out at Platinum,” she said, rubbing her eyes and pawing through my medicine cabinet. She found a jumbo bottle of aspirin and started wrestling with the safety cap. “I have it on my phone. We got to teach you to dance, girl, you look like an epileptic or something out there.”

“I'll put it on my list,” I croaked. I staggered to my feet and leaned over the basin, fighting the resistance of my corset, filling my mouth to rinse out the taste of last night's festivities' recent reappearance.

“You were so funny,” she went on. “You were bitching about Forbes and how he wants everything girly for you. So I say, 'he doesn't know what girly is' and you get all excited and you're, like, 'Let's do it. I'll shock the shit out of him.'”

“Let's do what?”

“Look in the mirror,” she said. I did. The first thing that struck me was that I no longer just had the two earrings. I had four in the left lobe and three in the right, plus two through the cartilage on either side. My ears were swollen and red and throbbed with pain.

“And check out the tongue, too,” she added. I stuck out my tongue and saw the silver stud driven right through the center of it, surrounded by a patch of angry red swollen tissue.

“Relax, it's not so bad,” she said, sticking out her tongue to show me a matching one. “I got one too. Drink some ice water, the swelling goes down and you can talk better. I did that last night while you were passed out.”

“Is that all?” I asked, dreading the answer.

“Oh, hell no,” she giggled. “You were on a roll last night.”

“Lemme guess. The bellybutton?” I asked, not daring to look down.

She nodded. “Actually, I talked you into that one. I said a belly as cute and tight as yours seriously needed a piercing and before I knew it you were paying the girl at the parlor and hiking up your dress.”

I sighed and groaned.

“And then there's the jewel in the crown,” she told me.

“I didn't go off with some guy, did I?” I asked, my voice funereal in its resignation.

“No,” she said, “but not for lack of guys trying.”

“I got hit on?”

“More than me,” she said. “Even for a girl who dances like she's getting electrified, you got serious play. We didn't pay for a lot of drinks last night, baby. But you kept your panties up. I thought you were gonna make out with a really cute Latino at the second – or the third, I can't remember – place we stopped, but you just flirted with him and then cooled him off.”

I breathed a sigh of relief. "I thought maybe..."

She gave me a reassuring smile. "We don't know if it's gonna carry over, Niki, and even if it did, it probably wouldn't start until after your first time."

"So I just have to not ever have sex," I said. "Doesn't sound so hard. But I have to ask, then, what is the 'jewel in the crown?'"

She pointed at my lower back. Groaning, I lifted up my dress and turned around, craning my neck over my shoulder to look in the mirror to see a black-ink, tribal tattoo surrounding a cluster of tiny red roses centered just at the base of my spine.

"You're fucking kidding me," I said.

"You got a tramp stamp," she giggled. "You said you wanted girly..."

I slumped against the wall. "I think I gotta puke again."

\* \* \*

"When I said 'girly' and 'feminine,' I was thinking more along the lines of a pink fluffy bath mat or a kitten or something," Forbes said, barely managing to hide his laughter.

"You thuck," I told him around my hideously swollen tongue.

He lost it, sagging against his desk. I couldn't help but join in after my brief flare of outrage dimmed. "Yeah, Thith was kinda above and beyond the call," I admitted.

"Yeah, I would say so," he said. "You obviously can't handle alcohol like you used to. You don't remember doing any of this?"

"Latht thing I remember wath walking into the firtht bar," I said. "After that, it'th a total blank."

He sniggered loudly. "Will you please get some ice on that tongue? I can't talk to you like this. I really can't."

"Pith off," I spat at him. He lost it again, sagging against the corner of his desk with helpless laughter. "Can you at leatht prethcribe me thome cortithone or thomething for the thwelling?"

"I thuppose I could," he answered, still chuckling.

"I thwear I'm gonna kick your ath," I growled. He was wiping tears from his eyes by the time he got the prescription written. I gave him a hateful look – it only made him laugh harder – and stomped down the hall towards the pharmacy.

"Niki, wait a second," he called, trying to force himself back to serious. He was failing. I stuck my head back around the corner of his doorway.

"Two things," he said, looking at the white legal pad where he kept his notes. "First, you've got to choose a color for the hair. The next phase of your adjustment plan involves being out in public, and your hair still looks like Saran Wrap. It's going to raise too many questions until you get it colored."

"I wath gonna talk to Thelina about it at lunch," I said. "If I can even fucking thwallow around thith thing."

“Exthellent,” he teased.

I gave him the finger. “What'th the thecond thing?”

“We're getting calls from your friends,” he told me. “Lots of calls. David Cupertino, Staci Lester, Jaclyn Campbell, even Frank Jessup once or twice. Emails, too. They want to see you.”

“I want to thee them too,” I said. “I really mith them.”

“I think it would be very good for you to reconnect with your old life a little,” he said. “They'll have to be debriefed, of course, and given a little insight into your adjustment process, but I think we could arrange a little reunion.”

“Doeth thith mean I can go back to work?” I asked.

“Not for a little while, yet,” he told me. “But it's a step in that direction.”

“Whatever it taketh,” I said. “I just want back on the ambulanthethe.”

“Tell you what. Regain your power of speech and pick a hair color and we'll talk about it. Seriously talk about it.”

“Deal,” I said, turning to go. I was late for physical therapy.

“Niki?” he asked.

“Yeah?”

“I think you'd be really pretty as a blonde,” he said with a smile.

to be continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## PREHOSPITAL CARE

### Part Five

by Valerie Hope

I WAS ALMOST AFRAID TO look, keeping my head down in the sink and waiting for the last of the stinging liquid to wash out under the warm flow of water. I'd gotten very full of myself and decided it would be best if I mixed my own hair color instead of trying to use all the swatches and software they tried to foist on me. I'd painted in college, in an art class, and mixing paint hadn't seemed so hard. After about three hours of trial-and-error, I'd come up with what I thought would be a perfectly acceptable shade of reddish-brown that would suit me well without being too flashy.

"Oh..*Oh*," Selina said from behind me.

"What?" I demanded.

"Um... what color did you try for?"

"Kinda auburn, reddish brown. More brown than red."

"You fucked up," she told me.

I stood and looked into the mirror. My short, tousled hair was wet, which would make it several shades darker, but if even the damp version was any indication I was now the proud possessor of the most shockingly blonde hair ever. It was nearly white, with streaks of gold and honey shot through it, a *va-va-voom* platinum bleach blonde that Marilyn Monroe or Jayne Mansfield would have full-throatedly approved.

"Uh-oh," I said. "This isn't..."

"Can I just tell you something first?" Lina interrupted. "It looks *amazing* on you."

"Are you kidding?" I shot back. "It's so bright you can see it from space!"

"But it *works* on you," she told me. "I mean, it *really* works. Not a lot of girls could carry that off, but somehow on you... I mean..."

"If you say sexy I'm gonna punch you in the nose," I warned.

"Well, that, too, but that's not what I was gonna say," Selina continued. "I was gonna say that hair *belongs* on you."

"She's right," the tech – I think she said her name was Kelli – behind me commented. "It does belong."

I ruffled the short, astoundingly blonde locks. “You think so?”

“Look, I can make you any color you want,” the tech said. “It's not a problem. But can I just make a suggestion? Give this color a few days before you change your mind. See what happens. If you still don't like it by, say, Thursday, then we'll change it. And this time *I'll* mix the color.”

I sighed. “Everybody gets so *prickly* when you try to do their job for 'em,” I pouted. Everybody laughed. “But, yeah, I get your point. I just thought maybe I could get a little control back by mixing my own. Should've left it to the professionals.”

“I'm still calling this a happy accident,” the tech said. “It really looks good.”

“Okay, I'll give it to Thursday,” I said. “But believe me, it's got the litmus test from hell coming up this evening.”

“What's this evening?” the tech asked.

“She's seeing everybody she used to work with,” Selina supplied.

“C'mere, then,” the tech said. “Lemme show you how to style it.”

\* \* \*

“Holy shit,” Selina said as I stepped out of the bathroom. “You look *incredible*.”

I didn't feel incredible. I felt like everyone would be staring at my hair. The tech – her name was Kelli – had blown it dry, brushed it, moussed it and gelled it and teased it out a little, curled the ends. It looked flyaway and careless, which didn't track with how long it had taken to do.

“You really do,” Forbes added.

“I don't really feel like anything spectacular,” I said.

“What *do* you feel like?” Richards asked me in all seriousness.

“I feel like everybody's staring at me. I feel like everybody's thinking, *hey, everybody, look at the boy dressed up like a girl*. I feel like my hair is too bright, my clothes don't cover enough of my body... I feel like a *freak*.”

“You're not,” Forbes said.

I held up a hand. “I know, I know. You didn't ask me what I knew, though. You asked me what I *felt*. There's a difference.”

Forbes sighed. “Niki, we have to fix this. You *are* a woman. You look like one. You sound like one. You even *smell* like one. But it's all for nothing, everything you've done, everything everyone has done for you... none of it counts if you don't *feel* like a woman.”

I nodded, my mind whirling in circles. “I don't know how to do that.”

Forbes put a warm hand on my shoulder and gave it a gentle, pulsing squeeze. “Neither do I. But we'll figure it out, Niki, I promise. We'll figure it out together.”

I nodded again.

“And you *do* look amazing,” he added.

I squared my shoulders and tossed my head to get my bangs out of my eyes, which was an all new sensation for me – I hadn't had hair in a good long while, and I'd never in my life had bangs – and went into the next room to see my friends.

\* \* \*

“I can't believe it,” Staci said, her wide eyes staring at me still, unblinking. “I just can't believe it.”

David was a little more wary, as was his nature. “And it's really *you*.”

“Yeah, it's really me,” I said. “Dave, we've been partners for years. You're madly in love with the waitress at Szforini's Pizza. You fart when you laugh too hard. Your first girlfriend was Lisa Stanz in the third grade, also the first girl you ever kissed. On our first shift together as partners, you lost a bet to me. You said I couldn't blind-stick an I.V. on a 400-pound woman in the back of a moving ambulance. I hit her right in the A.C. and you had to do all my station chores the next morning, including scrubbing the toilet. You hate driving in the rain, Indonesian food, *Caroline in the City* and wannabe cowboys. Your birthday...”

“Okay, okay,” he said, laughing and holding up his hands. “It really is you.”

He wrapped me up in a bear hug that lifted my feet off the floor. I was just *barely* used to everyone being so much taller than me, but before the change no one *ever* picked me up bodily. It scared the shit out of me, but it was David, so I was able to get over it quickly.

“It's good to have you back, partner,” he whispered in my ear, his voice thick.

“It's good to be back,” I answered him.

“Look at you,” Jaci Campbell said, eyes wide. “I mean, fucking *look* at you!”

“I know,” I said. “I got all girl-o-fied while y'all weren't looking.”

“You're beautiful,” Staci said. “I can't believe it's really Nick in there.”

“Niki,” I corrected. “I gotta get used to this girl stuff, so from now on it's Niki, okay? Y'all gotta help me out or I'm *never* gonna adjust.”

“Niki,” Staci said. “Wow. Fucking wow.”

I turned to the only silent person in the room. “Frank? You okay?”

His face was unreadable. “I... I don't know what to say to you.”

I laughed. “Shit, Frank, I don't know what to say to *anybody*,” I said. “How about something along the lines of 'hi, nice to see you.'”

“You're a damn girl,” he said gruffly. “How can you be Nick Lightman?”

“Dr. Richards gave you the medicine,” I told him. “You heard what I got exposed to, you've seen every step of this process. It's me, Frank, honest.”

He sighed. “It should've been me, Nick.”

I put a hand on his shoulder. “No, Frank, it shouldn't've been. I was there because I got the call. That's how it works. You told me that, the day I started working here. You'll get the next bad one, or Staci will, or I'll get two in a row. All that matters is that somebody's there. This was on me. I fucked up, I went into a hot zone without knowing what I was fooling with and this is the price for it. And please, Frank, it's *Niki* now. You gotta support me there.”

“Sixteen years I been doing this,” he said gruffly. “Sixteen years I been out running calls. In all that time, I've only seen a couple medics who had the touch, kid, and you were one of them. This shouldn't've happened to you.”

“Yeah, but it did,” I said. “I'm trying to be okay with that. You need to, too. Remember Rule Number One?”

He grinned. “I thought you'd forgotten that,” he told me.

“How could I forget that? I was a probie straight out of paramedic school and it's the first thing you ever told me. And it's the best fucking advice I ever got from *anybody*. I remember it every time I climb on that truck. It's kept me going for nine years of doing this.”

“What's Rule Number One?” Jaci asked.

“Rule Number One,” I quoted. “Everybody dies.”

“And Rule Number Two?” Jaci pressed.

“There's not a goddamned thing you can do about Rule Number One,” Frank and I said in unison. He grabbed me up in a hug. “Aw, fuck, Nick...”

“*Niki*,” I corrected sternly.

“I'm never gonna get used to that,” he said.

“Frank, if I can get used to having a pussy, you can get used to putting an *i* on the end of what you've called me the last nine years. Man up.”

“That's a hell of a thing for you to say,” he said.

“I know, right? Sounds better than 'girl up,’” I chuckled.

“So tell us what it's been like,” David said, kicking a chair out for me to sit. “I wanna hear everything, they've mushroomed us for months.”

*Mushroomed. Kept in the dark and fed a constant diet of horseshit*, I mused, laughing. I'd really missed David and his stupid sayings.

“Anybody want a drink?” Staci asked, picking up a bottle of champagne from the sideboard where Forbes and Company had set up a nice little spread of refreshments.

“Nothing for me,” I told her. “I'm never going to drink again.”

“What brought that on?” David pressed.

I stuck out my tongue at him, the silver stud blatantly apparent in the swollen and reddened flesh, and then discovered I had a *lot* of explaining to do.

\* \* \*

Frank and David left before the sun went down – they had a shift the next day and five a.m. was early no matter how much sleep someone got. Frank had moved over to my shift to 'keep my seat warm' until I got back, as he put it, and Staci and the newly-certified Jaci had partnered up to cover B-shift. Louis Carrera and Jason Kirkpatrick were still on A-shift.

I was reminded, as I sat there with Jaci and Staci, just how much I *missed* my job and the people I worked with. The smell of diesel and antiseptic in the mornings, the basso rumble of Medic 21's big Cummins engine, the wail of the siren and even the spine-jangling bleat of the alert pager when we got a call. But Frank had remained silent and thoughtful throughout the visit, and David had spent most of his time trying *not* to look at my legs and ass. At least Staci and Jaci weren't treating me much differently than before – we just had a lot more in common now.

They sat and drank with me, giving me all the latest gossip. Before I'd changed, I'd never been that interested in the ever-changing morass of who was fucking who and who was getting divorced or having a baby that was EMS. Now, I could see how it kept the female medics busy, kept their minds off just how hard it was to even *be* a woman in this job, run by adrenaline-fueled macho men who looked at them as not quite measuring up, or worse a likely place to park a dick.

Talk eventually wound down to my transformation and my transition, and that inevitably led to talk of my breasts. I'd been putting off that decision – even though it had been my idea in the first place, it just seemed so *irrevocable* – but Jaci and Staci were determined to force the issue.

“You look great as is,” Staci told me as she smoked a cigarette out in the hospital's 'leper colony,' a dilapidated gazebo in the middle of the parking lot where the health-conscious powers-that-be relegated the smokers (which, ironically, was more than half the staff including the doctors). We'd followed her out there with our drinks to continue the visit and watch the sun go down.

“That's what everybody keeps telling me, but I don't have enough to fill a training bra right now,” I said. “I don't really want the implants, but this girl thing is all or nothing. In my head, at least, I'm never gonna be a *real* girl until I get some boobs in my shirt.”

“I felt that way, when I was a teenager,” Jaci confessed. “I think all girls feel that way. Getting tits is, like, a rite of passage for a girl. I think you're absolutely right about getting the implants.”

“Me, too,” Staci said. “I just meant you didn't *have* to.”

“I think I do,” I replied. “*Have* to, I mean. My head's all messed up and turned around, and this crazy hormone soup that used to be my bloodstream isn't helping. I figure I either do this a hundred percent, or not at all. It's hard enough to not feel like a freak whenever I go out in public as it is.”

“How big're you gonna get 'em?” Jaci said, eyes twinkling.

“I haven't thought about it much,” I said honestly. “I don't want much. I was thinking a full A-cup or a shallow B.”

“Oh, no, don't do that,” Staci said. “Your height, you're gonna want at least a C-cup. If it was me, I'd even push it to a D. Just to get noticed.”

“Absolutely,” Jaci concurred.

“I'm not sure I want to get noticed. Not like that, anyway.”

Jaci gave my shoulder a playful shove. Before I'd changed, she wouldn't have even moved me. Now she could almost push me over.

“Sweetie, you're thinking about this all wrong,” she told me. “You're looking at being a girl like it's some kind of job.”

“You're thinking about it like a *guy*,” Staci said.

“Fact is, being a girl can be a *lot* of fun,” Jaci went on. “You're just not willing to see that, but that will probably change. It *should* change. And one of the most fun things is to work your ass off and get yourself looking so good *you'd* fuck yourself if you could, walking into a room and having every eye turn to watch you when you come in.”

“It's a really cool feeling,” Staci said. “It doesn't happen that often, but when it does, there's nothing like it.”

“And I'm gonna tell you something,” Jaci pressed. “I wasn't fucking around when I told you you're beautiful. You got this tight, hard little body and this sweet, pretty face and that oh-my-Gawd blonde hair... you add a nice big set of bazooms on your chest and you're never gonna have to pay for another drink for as long as you live.”

“You'll look like a damn Victoria's Secret model,” Staci told me.

“I don't care about that,” I persisted.

“You *should*,” Jaci said. “That's my whole point, girl! This can be *fun* for you if you let it. You've got a chance to be whoever and whatever you want, here. A total blank slate. You just gotta put in a little effort, that's all.”

“Seriously, girl,” Staci said. “You need to go a little *wild*.”

“You really think so?” I asked, uncertain.

“I know so,” Jaci said.

“I've got an idea,” Staci said. “We've got Friday off. You come over, like, around seven to my place. You put yourself entirely in our hands. Me and Jaci will dress you up, do your hair, your makeup – how we think it should, not you. You have to promise to trust us completely.”

“And then what?” I asked.

“We go out. Any bar, any restaurant, any club you like. We'll let you pick. We'll start at 'A.' For every guy that buys you a drink, you go up a cup size,” she said.

“I dunno...” I said.

“And if no one does, then we never bug you about it again,” Jaci said. “And we do your truck checks for a month when you come back to work.”

“Now you're talking,” I said.

“So you'll do it?” Staci said, excited.

“I don't... I mean... Sure. Why the hell not?” I said, sounding defeated but oddly excited at the prospect. “Just as long as y'all promise not to make me look like a whore.”

“Oh, we probably will,” Staci said. “But that can be fun as hell. And besides, me and Jaci will look like whores too, right there with you.”

“Amen,” Jaci said.

“Okay, okay, you win,” I said, laughing. “Your place, Friday at seven. But there is one more thing.”

“Dammit, Niki, you *said*...” Jaci started.

“I'm not backing out, I promise,” I said, holding up my hands to forestall her rant. “It's just that – this is embarrassing – my friend Selina told me that when I dance I look like I'm having a seizure. I never danced before I – *before*. I really don't want to look like a spaz when we go out, so can one of y'all help me learn how?”

“You wanna learn how to dance?” Staci asked, dumbfounded.

“Sorry,” Jaci said. “The old you – Nick, I mean, the guy we knew – he would've died before he asked anybody for help.”

“Yeah, well, he *did* die. In a chemical explosion on East Lawrence Avenue,” I told them. “I'm his twin sister, Niki, and I don't have the faintest clue how to dance, and I ask for help all the fucking time.”

Jaci gave me a little hug. “You're in luck,” she told me. “I'm pretty sure I can teach you some things. Does it surprise you that I used to be a cheerleader?”

“I need to call David,” I told her. “I just won another bet.”

\* \* \*

“Dancing, huh?” Katy said at physical therapy the next day, looking at the DVDs I'd bought last night on my way home from the party. Jaci had taught me – and a drunken Staci as well, which meant there was a *lot* of giggling and snickering – a few moves. The girl could *move*, I'd give her that, explosive and physical and oh, so sexy the way she just surrendered her body to the music. She favored heavy dance beats. I tried my best, but I still felt like a fool when I tried. Jaci had finally given up around midnight, with Staci passed out on my couch in my apartment, but I'd stayed up for another three hours, practicing and trying new things, watching the DVDs that Jaci had recommended and wishing I didn't feel so ridiculous shaking my ass and windmilling my arms around. I had it in my head that dancing was this graceful, swan-like affair, and that just wasn't me.

So I'd taken the problem to the experts. Katy was a hard sell about changing her plan for my recovery, but I put it to her anyway. Something in my head had me thinking that this was *important* to my transition, learning to dance. Girls danced all the time, and they did it well. I needed the same if I was going to make this girl thing real.

“I think it's a great idea,” Katy said after a few minutes' thought. “Great cardio, strength and coordination building – it's got it all. I would've suggested it earlier, but I didn't think you'd go for it.”

“Cool,” I said happily. “Can we start today?”

“Why the rush?”

I blushed a little. “I’m going out on Friday. Dancing, with the girls. I don’t want to look like an idiot out there,” I explained.

Katy smiled at me. “Can I come, too?” she asked. “I like to dance.”

“Sure, I don’t see why not. Word of warning, though, about going out with paramedics. Sometimes – well, most of the time – we talk shop. It’s kinda nasty, hope you have a strong stomach.”

“I think I’ll survive it,” she laughed. “Okay, Dancing 101 it is, girl. Go get yourself changed and we’ll get started.”

I trotted off to the locker room, amazed at how easy asking girls out had gotten since I’d become one myself. This one just asked *me* out. I needed to write a dating book and go on the circuit: *Date Supermodels By Misplacing Your Cock*.

\* \* \*

It was while I was dancing that *it* happened. We were doing modern dance that day, sandwiched in between tap and jazz and hip-hop. When Katy said I was going to dance, she meant I was going to *dance*. I’d even taken a couple ballroom classes. They were putting me on crazy high doses of glucosamine and chondroitin to increase my flexibility, and Selina had told me that she’d always been very flexible, since birth, anyway. I could now do the splits in all three directions and pull my ankles up behind my head without discomfort.

I was doing a very high kick when I felt a cross between a pop and a tear, and I didn’t need to see the slowly spreading flower of blood in the crotch of my pink sweats to know what had happened.

“Are you okay?” Katy asked, a little panicked.

“Yeah,” I said with a small, sad smile. “It’s official.”

“Official?” Katy asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “As in *officially* a girl, now. The skin that was covering my – *opening* – just ruptured.”

“Did it hurt?”

“A little,” I said. “But it was kind of a good hurt, if that makes any sense.”

Katy nodded. “Do I need to call Dr. Richards? That looks like an awful lot of blood.”

I shrugged. “I suppose someone should let him know, but it’s not an emergency,” I told her. “It’s so much blood because I’ve had three periods while I was still all closed up. It’s all been, y’know, backing up inside me.”

“Guess you’re gonna have to learn to use a tampon,” Katy commented.

“That’s nothing,” I said, disheartened. “I’m more nervous about what’s gonna happen tomorrow.”

“What's gonna happen tomorrow?” Katy asked me.

“My first pelvic exam,” I groaned. “Let me go get cleaned up and change, and then we can pick up where we left off.”

“You want to keep dancing?” Katy asked in mild disbelief.

“Hell, yeah,” I said, feigning enthusiasm. I really only wanted to keep dancing to keep myself from curling up in a ball in the locker room and crying uncontrollably. “I want to learn that cool move from that Rihanna video. You promised you were gonna teach it to me.”

“Sure,” Katy said, looking at me in a whole new light. “I didn't know you liked to dance this much, actually. I'm a little surprised.”

“Actually, I didn't think I'd like it this much either,” I said. “I'm surprised, too.”

“Well, I approve wholeheartedly of your choice,” Katy said. “It's a great workout for you. I'd be thrilled if you did this for an hour every day.”

“I'll think about it.”

“I know a way you can take it to the next level, too, if you're interested,” she said, blushing a little the way she did when she had something unusual to suggest.

“I'm already one step ahead of you,” I told her, laughing. “I bought a stripper pole online and installed it in my bedroom three days ago. I'm getting pretty good on it, too, the DVD they sent with it was pretty good. Haven't you noticed how much more upper body strength I'm getting?”

Katy just laughed and hugged me gently. “Go get cleaned up, you amazing bitch,” she told me, patting my shoulder. “Rihanna's waiting.”

\* \* \*

*You amazing bitch*, Katy had called me. I had to admit, I wasn't so sure how much I liked the word *bitch* as it applied to me, since it never had before, and I certainly didn't feel amazing as I lay there in Dr. Richard's exam room, my gown pushed up to my belly and both my legs up in stirrups, my naked ass hanging helplessly over empty space. I'd never noticed just how fucking *cold* it was in that place before I'd had to face it naked from the waist down and suspended in a medieval torture device. Dr. Callander, a heavy-set grey-haired hickory stump of a woman with Coke-bottle glasses and the sweetest little-girl voice I'd ever heard, was my gynecologist for the day. She had been briefed on my condition and was really taking the bedside manner over the top with me, when what I wanted more than anything was to have it over with so I could put my damned pants back on. Still, the hand-holding and detailed explanations of every move she made were sweet and well-intentioned, so it was easy to keep my temper in check, no matter how frustrated and helpless I felt.

Nothing I'd experienced so far had quite prepared me for the sensation of something inside me. First a gloved finger, which I could *sense* more than feel, until it started to squirm around inside my brand-new vagina. Then the speculum, well-lubricated and warmed inside the doctor's palm, which actually felt kind of good for a second until it opened, and then the stretching went from pleasure to pain in a flash, and made me hiss in discomfort. Dr. Callander patted my hand in sympathy, but didn't go any faster, naturally.

A seemingly unending time later, the doctor withdrew the speculum and started putting away samples and equipment briskly. "That takes care of that, young lady," she told me. "Everything looks lovely and pink and healthy. There was some minor irritation from all that blood being trapped there, but it's already clearing up. If there's any redness or swelling, let me know, and I can prescribe you an ointment for any itching."

"Haven't noticed any," I told her, just glad to have table back under my ass again.

"Should have pap smear results in two days," she said. "But I really don't expect anything to show up."

"Anything else I need to know?" I said, now released from the stirrups and sitting up, just happy to be free and *out* of that thing.

"Just that everything's new down there," she told me. "You're going to have some weird sensations, stuff you're not used to, that kind of thing. You may be very dry or very wet down there until you establish some kind of equilibrium. Be patient."

"I will. And I'll call you if anything weird happens," I told her.

"Or even if something happens that you just don't understand or know what it is," she told me. "This is all terribly new to you, I know, but I've been a doctor for thirty-five years and a woman for fifty-six."

"Fifty-six my ass," I told her. "You can't be a day over forty."

"You still bullshit like a man," she snorted.

"Oh, I'm a girl," I quipped back. "I'm gonna go out in the hall and talk nasty about you to all my friends. That's what I'm supposed to do, right?"

She grinned and handed me a plastic bag.

"What's this?" I asked.

"You had some adhesions in the vaginal opening," she told me. "I expected them, the thing just opened up. But we have to keep any more from forming. So you're going to sleep with this in every night for a while."

I pulled out a box containing a white plastic cylinder with a rounded end and a tube of K-Y Jelly. "You're giving me a vibrator?" I asked.

"No," she said. "You can buy your *own* one of those. This is a dilator. They're given to sex reassignment patients to keep the new opening from closing back up post-operatively. Fill it with warm water, lubricate it, put it in and then put a pair of panties on over it. I want you to do this for at least two weeks to make sure you're not going to close back up on us."

I sighed and dropped it back in the bag. "This just keeps getting better," I sighed. "You're *literally* telling me to go fuck myself."

"Doctor's orders," she chuckled.

\* \* \*

Friday finally rolled around. I finished my dance lesson – that's what I was calling physical therapy now – that morning and saw Dr. Richards and Ken Forbes after lunch for check-ins. By four o'clock I was cut loose, so I ran home and took a shower, grabbed a sandwich at a deli by my apartment and put my wet laundry from this morning into the dryer. I had to admit, if the Department of Defense insisted that I live in a cookie-cutter yuppie farm apartment building, then the washer/dryer they'd gotten for me almost made up for the lack of any charm, character or individuality. It had been an easy sell, too – all I had to do was paint a picture of poor, helpless little girl me, alone and undefended at some skeezy laundromat, late at night with no big, strong *man* to take care of me. They'd been delivered the next day.

Funny how manipulation was starting to come more easily, too. Was *that* genetic? I hated to sound sexist, but in my experience every woman I'd ever known could do it as naturally as breathing, so maybe it was a biological imperative.

I slid into my pretty white satin corset with the red rose appliqué on it, then slid my college sweatshirt over that and a pair of cut-off jeans that came down to mid-thigh and were covered with paint splatters. I wormed my toes into my flip-flops and was out the door, grabbing my little purse which I'd *finally* stopped leaving in every office, restaurant, bathroom and waiting room I'd entered since I'd gotten it. I didn't mind losing my wallet, the thing that had held my life since the age of twelve, in favor of a gigantic bag that slung over my shoulder. It was just the amount of shit that could accumulate in that bag that was starting to annoy me. I cleaned the thing out weekly and there was no end of gum wrappers, little post-it notes with unrecognizable phone numbers or errands from ages ago, wadded up Kleenex and any other manner of detritus I could imagine. I couldn't wait until my next period so I could stuff the thing with tampons. Imagine what I could clean out of there *then*.

Katy was waiting outside in her car, honking the horn. I trotted out and piled into her convertible Beetle, a powder-blue Turbo with a white top, which was down even though the day looked like it was threatening rain.

“You look like shit,” she told me as I was fastening my seatbelt.

“Thanks, you're such a charmer,” I shot back.

“No, really. *That's* what you're wearing?”

“It's all I have. Besides, Jaci and Staci said they were gonna dress me tonight, anyway. All I had to do was show up. This is a bet, here, Katy, I'm not gonna make it easy on them,” I said. “Honor's at stake.”

“Oh, *honor*,” Katy said. “In that case, do you want to roll around in the mud and grass for a little while before we leave?”

“The thought crossed my mind,” I told her back. “C'mon, we're gonna be late.”

The drive over was quick – Staci didn't live very far away from my apartment. We came in to a bedlam of loud music and a whirring, whining blender. Jaci and Staci were starting early, mixing margaritas and going through Staci's closet looking for potential party-wear for me.

I introduced Katy and we got situated with drinks. They were suitably congratulatory – although they were a little uncomfortable – when I broke the news about my new, fully functional feminine plumbing. We chatted and drank for a while, just enough to get lubricated, before Jaci sat me down in a chair in front of a mirrored dressing table in Staci's room. Staci's

seven-year-old son, Michael, was chased out of the room before we got started, relegated to his own room and his Legos while the girls played.

“You are so fucking pretty!” Jaci exclaimed, running her fingers through my short blonde hair. “This is going to be a lot of fun.”

“I hope so,” I said honestly. I was more than a little nervous, what with the potential size of my chest on the line.

“You know who you look like,” Staci commented from the doorway, slugging her margarita. “You look just like the Wiener Girl.”

I laughed. “Who?”

“From that show. *Chuck*. The girl who plays his girlfriend, she works at a hot dog place. The Wiener Girl,” she explained.

“Oh my God, you do!” Jaci exclaimed.

“Great,” I grumped. “My claim to fame is looking like the Wiener Girl.”

“Shut up, she's hot,” Jaci said. “Now, let's get started.”

“I'm kinda nervous about this,” I told her honestly. “Not about the clothes and stuff, I mean. I mean going out. I'm not really sure how to talk to anybody, much less a guy, as a girl. I'm afraid I'll put them off if I act like myself.”

“Maybe if y'all were dating for a while, but not in a club,” Katy said. “They'll be too busy looking at your body. It's a different world, the club scene. You don't have to try that hard. The guys do most of the work.”

“If you're nervous, just let them do the talking,” Jaci said. “Trust me, I'm a pro at this. Just remember Jaci's Two Rules. First, laugh at anything you even *think* might be a joke.” She filled one of her hands with a sticky hair gel and started running her coated fingers through my hair.

“Sounds easy enough,” I said.

“And second, act like you don't have a brain in your head,” she told me.

“I don't want to come across as an airhead,” I said, wary.

“That's absolutely what you want,” Staci said. “In the club scene, remember? If you're talking about dating somebody, then yeah. All the old sayings, 'be yourself,' that kind of stuff. We're not talking about dating, we're talking about *hooking up*. And for hooking up, the dumber you act the better your chances.”

“Wow,” I said. “Brave new world I'm in.”

“Think you can handle it?” Katy asked.

“I dunno,” I said. “I don't think I would know the first thing about acting dumb.”

“It's easy. Giggle a lot and don't pay too much attention to anything,” Staci told me. “If you're uncomfortable, smile real big and change the subject.”

“If you let a sentence go by without using the word 'like,' you sound too smart,” Katy added. “And play with your hair a lot.”

“Restrict your topics of conversation to clothes, makeup and fucking,” Jaci added. “It's really easy. Truth be told, acting that way is kind of a relief. At work, you know, you got to be on top of everything all the time, completely together and in control. It's nice to go out and just be a giant bimbo and not worry about nothing except how you look.”

“I never thought of it that way,” I said. “Like some kind of mental vacation.”

“Exactly,” Jaci confirmed.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Yeah,” Jaci said. “Sit the fuck still. I'm about to make you look real, *real* slutty.”

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Six**

**by Valerie Hope**

AFTER THREE HOURS OF PULLING, poking and prodding, Jaci, Staci and Katy let me take a look at myself in the mirror. My hair had been spiked up, going from the flyaway tousle that I'd grown accustomed to into a sleek, polished mane of spikes with teased bangs. My makeup was extreme – black eye shadow and thick black eyeliner all the way around my eyes, thick coats of mascara on curled lashes, and bubblegum pink glossy lipstick. They'd glued a line of rhinestones along my upper eyelashes which sparkled when I blinked. Staci had doused me in a very musky-smelling and cloying perfume as well.

“Wow,” I said. “You did make me look like a hooker. But at least you made me look like a really expensive hooker.”

Jaci laughed. “Wait'll you see what we picked out for you to wear, baby girl.”

“Now I'm scared,” I said.

“Don't be,” Katy shot back, grinning widely. “We're all gonna look like really expensive hookers. We're all gonna look hot as shit tonight.”

“Beating the guys off with a stick,” Staci commented.

“I'm not beating the guys off, period,” I complained. “They can do that all by themselves.” Snorting, half-drunken laughter answered me.

“Now, go do something interesting,” Jaci said, shooing me. “The rest of us bitches gotta start getting ready, and you're hogging all the good light.”

I sat out front in the living room, watching some nameless reality show on cable and sipping my way through a third margarita while the other girls did their hair and makeup. I was determined to take it easy with the drinking – my back was still sore and my navel still hurt from the last time I had a little too much. Still, I was definitely buzzing hard and was starting to actually look forward to going out dancing. Not so much the bet – I wasn't too hot on the idea of getting hit on by random guys at the clubs – but going out with my friends and hanging out, getting to know them a little better. I wished I'd remembered to invite Selina, but she'd told me a while ago that clubbing wasn't really her thing. Still, I considered her a very good friend and I wished she was here.

After another hour or two, the girls were ready. They looked amazing – a little porno slutty with heavy eyeliner and glossy lips, but knowing that was the actual goal made it okay, somehow. They stood me up and moved me back into the bedroom to get me dressed.

“Okay, bitch, strip down,” Jaci commanded. I distractedly wondered who was going to drive us, since everybody in the house was starting to get good and lubricated on tequila. I'd found out from the beginning that if I thought too long or too hard or, actually, at all about what they were asking me to do, I'd get anxious or chicken out. So I just started peeling out of my clothes on command, thinking amusedly about how I would make someone a great wife with a willingness to strip out of my clothes on command without thinking.

They outfitted me in a eensy-weensy black pleated skirt with zipper detail which barely covered my ass. I wore fishnet tights underneath, which didn't give me much of a sense of being covered. My belly was bare, showing off my dumbbell piercing, as well, and my normal corset was replaced by a corselette which stopped just above the hem of the silver sequined halter top they had me in. They had me pad the cups of the black lace corselette out to something resembling a chest with silicone falsies. For jewelry, they had me in a silver arm bracelet across my left biceps, silver rings on both thumbs and a gigantic Lucite heart ring on my right index finger that weighed down my hand. They put black lace forearm warmers on both my forearms in lieu of bracelets and silver hoop earrings so big that they tickled the tops of my shoulders. Of the outfit, I loved the earrings. The gigantic hoops with the short hair had even me thinking that I looked devilishly sexy. I vogued in the mirror a little once I had the clothes on, striking poses in the Staci's full-length in her bedroom.

“Damn,” I commented, looking at the bleach-blonde stunner with the overly-made-up bedroom eyes staring back at me from the mirror.

“You look good, baby,” Jaci said, giving me a tight hug. “Hell, if you strike out with the guys tonight, I'll fucking take you home.”

I looked her dead in the eyes. “Don't joke about that,” I told her softly.

“I didn't mean to...” she began.

I held up a hand to forestall her. “You didn't hurt my feelings. I just don't have much of a sense of humor about that particular thing,” I said. “I've had a thing for you since you first signed on to Medic 21 as a student. Now I can't do anything about it, so I don't even want to tease myself by flirting with you.”

She looked at me a long time without saying anything, an island of silence in the bedlam of women dressing and laughing all around us.

“Why didn't you say anything?” she asked in a half-whisper.

“We work together,” I told her. “It wouldn't have been appropriate, and as a woman in EMS the last thing you needed was a senior medic hitting on you.”

“But David hit on me all the time,” she protested.

“I'm not David,” I said.

She looked at me again, searching my eyes for something. She must have found it. “We're not through talking about this,” she said.

“I think we are,” I told her. “Like I said, there's nothing I can do about how I feel about you, so I'd rather not even think about it.”

“Can't do anything about it?” she said, quirking her eyebrows and biting her bottom lip, giving me a breathtakingly sexy once-over-lightly. “Who says?”

She left me standing there speechless, fish-mouthing with my glossy bubblegum-pink lips. She smiled over her shoulder at me as she walked to the far side of the room to get dressed. I had to admit – I took a very long look at her as she slid out of her blue jeans and tossed her t-shirt into a pile in the corner.

Yeah, I'd changed from a man into a girl, and everything about my life was feminine now, but some male feelings hadn't changed at all. They'd just been waiting for the right moment to reassert themselves.

\* \* \*

“Remember, dumb and cute tonight,” Staci reminded me as the doorman motioned us forward to the head of the line. “Not a brain in your pretty little head. All you are tonight is a choice piece of ass.”

“Is it weird that turns me on a little?” I asked.

“Just a little?” Staci asked, grinning lopsidedly. “It makes me soak through a pair of panties just thinking about it. So, no. Not weird at all.”

That brought me up a little short. The one thing I had in common with all these girls was that I prided myself on the sharpness of my mind and the quality of my education. I'd sacrificed, trained and honed my mind and skills tirelessly, worked my ass off to get where I was. The same with all the women I was out with. But all of us – myself included, which distressed me a little – were perfectly willing and more than a little excited about the prospect of dressing up like tarts, wearing too much makeup, and parading ourselves around as brainless little sex objects for the pleasure of the men in the crowd. What was worse, I felt certain I was beginning to like it, as much as Jaci, Staci and Katy.

Rather than dwell on this, I made my way to the bar, digging in my little sequined clutch purse for my money and my ID. I had a new drivers' license, since I'd colored my hair and gotten the basics like opaque eyebrows taken care of. The picture wasn't too bad. At least it didn't look like my old one, where it wouldn't have been at all out of place for me to be holding up a sign saying “Moreland County Department of Corrections” underneath my face. I was actually a little proud of it – I'd really done a good job on my makeup that day, and I'd done it all myself instead of getting any help. I couldn't believe the people at the DMV had asked me if I wanted time to fix my hair and face before they took the picture. In my male life, they'd just pointed at the blue tape line on the floor and told me to take off my baseball cap.

The bartender ran his eyes up and down the length of my body and gave me a suggestive smile. I had to yell – which made me sound even hoarser – to be heard over the thumping beats coming off the dance floor, and ordered a Stolichnaya and cranberry juice. He nodded and fixed the drink, his back to me. He passed it back on a cocktail napkin with a telephone number scrawled on it in Sharpie. I paid him and left, abashed and uncertain.

I joined the others at the table they'd staked out.

“Holy shit, already?” Jaci gushed, looking at the napkin. “We haven't even scoped the place out yet and you're already up to a B-cup!”

I slugged the drink. It was mixed strong – he must've liked me to put that much vodka in. Or, I suddenly realized, he was trying to get me drunk. “I'm not trying to welch or anything, but I don't think this one should count. I mean, I didn't even get to talk to him or use any of the stuff y'all taught me. If we're gonna do this, I think I should have to walk the walk.”

Staci nodded. “I think she's right.”

To my credit, I didn't jump when Staci said “she.” I was still having a hard time with the feminine pronouns in reference to myself.

“Okay, okay,” Jaci said, relenting. “It didn't count. Besides, bartenders are fucking easy. She should have a challenge.”

I sipped a little more, wrapping my pink-glossed lips around the little straw in such a way to get some raised-eyebrow attention from two guys at an adjacent table. I tried to live up to what the girls had taught me, and offered them a shy smile in return.

“Nice,” Katy commented.

“Okay, so what next?” I asked.

“Well, I like to scope the place out a little,” Jaci said. “Just sit here a while and see who's here. I usually find somebody I know, but I don't go to this club a lot. Usually I mark out three or four guys I think I might like to talk to.”

“Okay, that's gonna be hard,” I said. “I'm not real attracted to guys. Maybe that will change, but mostly I don't think about that kind of stuff. Tell you what. Why don't you girls pick out a few for me? I trust y'all's judgement.”

“Oooh! Fun!” Katy said, clapping her hands a little.

“Let's start slow so I don't lose track. Why don't each of you pick one out for me and I'll go try to get a number?” I offered.

Staci hugged me. “You are so fucking cool to be so on board with this. I thought you might be all resistant and sulky about doing this. We did kinda push you into it, after all.”

I grinned. It made my nose wrinkle, and Jaci had told me it was adorable. Somehow knowing that, oddly, made me want to do it more. I really didn't like my smile very much, though, and was starting to look at the possibility of veneers to reshape and whiten my beaten-down teeth. “I've gotta get serious about this girl stuff eventually,” I told her. “Might as well get down to it sooner rather than later. Besides, when it's y'all with me, you make it fun. I'm actually having a pretty good time. I'm nervous, for damn sure, but still enjoying myself.”

“That's really nice to hear,” Katy said. “You're usually all business. I like you when you loosen up.”

Jaci patted my arm. “Okay, I've got one. See the guy over there, with the blond hair and the goatee, with the cool tattoos? He's cute as hell and he's here alone.”

“How can you tell that?” I asked.

“Watch him,” Staci said. “See how much he's looking around? He's trolling. And he's been flirting with the waitress out in the open. If he was with somebody, he'd be a little more secretive about it.”

She's right, I mused. Girls seem to pay attention to a lot more than guys. And they pay attention to different things.

“Okay, so how do I get close? Just walk up and say hi?” I asked.

“That's coming on way too strong,” Katy told me. “You're sorta thinking like a guy still. No, you've got to be a little more devious about it. First thing is to figure out a way to get him to notice you, then smile and be open so he comes over.”

“How the hell do I do that?” I asked. It sounded complicated as hell.

“Easy,” Jaci said, grabbing my hand. “Let's go dance. Somewhere where he can see you real good. That'll get his attention.”

“He's gonna come over, if you do what we tell you, and we can't be standing around helping you if he talks to you,” Staci said. “You remember everything we told you to do?”

“Cute, sexy and dumb. Short attention span, laugh at his jokes, don't talk about anything serious, play with my hair, make eye contact,” I rattled off. “Touch him early on but then back off. Sit close but not too close. Let him take charge.”

Katy goggled. “How did you remember all that?” she asked.

“Could Some Damn Student Learn Now He's Enrolled in This Community College,” I quoted. “Cute, Sexy, Dumb, Short attention span, Laugh, Nothing serious, Hair, Eye contact, Touch early, sit Close, him in Charge. Easy.”

They all died laughing, and Staci hugged me again. “You are such a paramedic nerd,” she accused.

“Hey, that's how I leared cardiology,” I said defensively.

“That's how we all learned cardiology,” Jaci giggled. She pulled me by the hand. “That doesn't mean that's how we have to learn everything. C'mon, bitch. Let's go dance.”

\* \* \*

I'd watched videos and had coaches and practiced for hours in the safety of the hospital or my apartment. I'd even twirled topless around a stripper pole just to see what it felt like. But out in public, surrounded by people and wearing a skirt that barely covered my ass cheeks, when I got to the dance floor I just froze. I just knew I wouldn't remember anything I'd learned. I'd be spotted for a man immediately and chased out by a mob wielding torches and pitchforks. I'd be laughed at and ridiculed, have rotten vegetables thrown at me. I'd look stupid.

“What's wrong?” Katy asked when she saw the look on my face.

“I can't,” I whispered, just audible above the booming music.

“You can't?”

“I just can't,” I repeated, eyes wide and unblinking.

She took my hand. “Too much pressure?”

“I dunno,” I said, staring at the pulsating, gyrating dance floor like it was a coiled snake ready to strike me. “I just... I thought about it and...”

She smiled and kissed my cheek. “Do we need another drink or something?”

“I'm not sure,” I said, shellshocked.

She looked me in the eyes, stepping into my field of vision to blot out the mesmerizing dance floor. “Niki, look at me. I've seen you dance a million times. You're really good. You look fantastic. You're one of the prettiest girls in here.”

“Pretty?” I asked, sounding about two inches high.

“Okay, more than pretty. You're gorgeous. You're going to look great out there and no one's gonna know. I promise. No one's going to suspect a thing.”

“How can you be sure?”

“Because I've seen every file, every picture, every step you've gone through since your accident, and even with all that I look at the person standing right here in front of me and I still couldn't swear that you hadn't been born a girl.”

“That's sweet,” I said.

“Not sweet. True,” she told me. “Look, Niki, you can be as much of a girl as you want to be. But you'll never be comfortable in this skin you have until you stop thinking of yourself as a guy. You're not a guy anymore, understand me? You're not. No one would ever think you were, not for a hot second. You've got to get that kind of thinking out of your head or you're never gonna have a life worth living.”

“So how do I do that?” I asked.

“Start small,” she told me. “Get the fuck out there and dance.”

\* \* \*

I had to admit, it worked as well as if Jaci had scripted it. I staked out a place near the edge of the floor but with maximum visibility and started moving to the music. Once I got over the initial discomfort of actually dancing where other human beings could see me, I got lost in the music and the movement and started not to care if anyone was even in the room, much less looking at me.

And looking at me there was in spades. Apparently, whatever dancing I had learned came across as smolderingly sexy. I touched myself a lot while I danced, I'd noticed, and maybe it looked enough like masturbation, but every eye in the house was glued to me while I moved. That, and I preferred the high-energy, quick movements – cheerleader dancing, Katy called it – which drew the eye naturally. Anyway, the blond man nearer the bar definitely gave me a good, long look as I danced. I caught his eye and I gave him a shy but inviting smile and turned to face him, as if I were dancing just for him. His eyes devoured me – a weird feeling for me, to be sure. Jaci watched him, too, not overtly, and tapped me on the arm and whispered “Go back to the table” when she'd gotten whatever mysterious social cues she was using to gauge the situation.

I left the floor, sweaty and a little out-of-breath, and went back to the table. I flagged a waitress for another drink and sat there, catching my breath for a while. I lost track of my intended and scanned the room for him. I found him, sitting at my table, across from me, exuding a cloud of confidence and Drakkar Noir.

“Hi,” he said in a smooth bass, “I’m Andy.”

I smiled at him again and extended a slim-fingered hand. I’d put on glittery polish in a pink to match my lips and it sparkled in the harsh dance-floor lighting. “Niki,” I said, trying to sound vapid.

“I saw you dancing out there,” he said. “You’re really good.”

I think I might have blushed under the nine coats of makeup I was wearing. “Thanks,” I said, remembering to play with my hair. “Wanna come out there and dance with me?”

He looked me up and down like I was something tasty to eat. “Actually, I’d rather be sitting right here, talking to you,” he said. “What do you do, Niki?”

I resuscitate dead people in the field with more skill, knowledge and technology used under extreme stress than a macho dumbfuck like you could possibly comprehend, the male part of my brain screamed at him. But I heard myself giggle – scary how good I was getting at that giggle – and do the wrinkle-nosed grin and say, “I’m a secretary at a law firm. What do you do?”

“I’m in investments at Bank of America,” he bragged, sitting back. I wasn’t sure if that was supposed to impress me or not, but I figured I might as well take the bait.

“That, um, sounds complicated,” I lied.

“It’s not that bad. You just have to speak the language,” he told me.

“Like how?” I asked. Let him be in control. The male part of me was fighting that, wanting to take the conversation over and steer it away from what I was sure was going to be a frightfully boring explanation of investments that was either a) made up or b) half-assed. Wouldn’t want to overtax my pretty little girl brain, now, would we? But I kept the grin.

He droned on and on and I only half-listened, trying to keep eye contact. It was hard because he kept looking anywhere but my eyes. I teased him a little, giving him glimpses and suggestions but never actually showing him anything. I licked my lips a lot and sucked on my straw to keep him on edge, which worked amazingly well.

Then I realized. He wasn’t in control of the situation. He did whatever I wanted him to do, whenever I wanted him to do it and he didn’t question anything. This guy was one hundred percent, no reservations my property. I couldn’t believe how thoroughly I owned him. I decided to take it for a spin, just to see what it could do.

I gave him a wide-eyed, innocent stare. “So, um... d’you know anything about cars?” I asked, picking a topic at random. It could just as easily have been nanotechnology or deep-sea drilling, I really didn’t care about the answer. I just wanted to see if he would make a fool of himself trying to impress me.

“A little,” he said, a touch uncomfortable but only for an instant. “Why?”

I twirled a spike of my hair around one finger. “My car has been making a really funny noise,” I told him. “Kind of clunk-clunk-clunk whenever I start it up and then, like, whirrrr when it speeds up. It stops when I stop the car.”

I'd given him a textbook example of losing a wheel bearing, something that plagued ambulances. You got to know that sound intimately, particularly among the fleet we ran.

He nodded gravely, ever the soul of knowledge and wisdom. He even stroked his chin a little. I fought the urge to giggle again. “Sounds like your flywheel,” he told me after a moment's thought. “You probably better take it in.”

“My flywheel?” I asked.

“Yeah,” he said. “I had an Audi a couple years ago, was always having problems with the flywheel. It sounded like what you said. I sold it, finally, got a BMW instead and I've never had any problems with it.”

Points for squeezing in what kind of car you drive, I had to grant him.

“So, what else do you do besides dance and look sexy?” he asked me.

“I want to go to school,” I told him. “Maybe law school, maybe communications, y'know, like broadcast journalism or something,” I told him, trying to remember what all the sorority girls majored in when I was in school. “But that's still a ways off, y'know, 'till I can get some money together.”

“I hear you,” he commiserated. Like an investment banker with a Beemer knew the first thing about being broke and saving for school. “But I meant, like, what do you do for fun?”

“Oh,” I said, sounding incredibly dimwitted. The guy was eating it up. “Well, I like to go out and have fun, mostly, but I'm also into rock climbing and waterskiing and I'm gonna learn how to ride a motorcycle next month. My girlfriends - “ I waved at Jaci and Staci to punctuate, and they waved back “- bought me one of those classes, y'know, where they teach you to ride. For my birthday, two weeks ago.”

“Oh, happy birthday two weeks ago, then,” he said. “That sounds like fun.”

“Yeah, I'm real excited,” I told him. “But I dunno, can you picture me as some hardcore biker chick or something?” I spread my arms wide and let him make the mental picture he'd be masturbating to for the next six weeks.

“Yeah, I see what you mean,” he said after digesting that particular bit of fantasy fuel and storing it away for future use.

“What about you?” I asked, turning it back around on him, giving him back the conversational control. “What do you do for fun?”

“I like to travel,” he said. “I want to go all the way around the world someday. I'm looking at buying a sailboat, maybe next year.”

“Oh, wow,” I cooed. “I've always wanted to go out on a sailboat.”

He jumped at the bait. “Really? 'Cause I've got a buddy that owns one, he lets me take it out whenever I want. We could go sailing together sometime.”

I gave him a wide-eyed gasp. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” he said. “Listen, let me give you my number...”

And just like that, Niki Lightman was a B-cup.

\* \* \*

The bar closed at two and they chased us out. I'd had most of my drinks bought for me, as the girls had said, and I was flying quite high by the time we were set to head back to Staci's place. We called a cab and piled into it, a giggling knot of sexy women in club clothes, which made the cabbie a very happy man.

Jaci plopped into my lap, her tight buns flattening against my thighs in a way that would have had me stiffening rapidly if I still had my old equipment. As it was, I felt myself starting to get heavy and damp between my legs and a persistent, squirming hole seemed to be opening up in my middle. A hole that very demandingly, very insistently pushed to be filled. I liked it and feared it at the same time, and I tried to force myself to think about other things. Unfortunately, Jaci was making it very hard, making little adjustments to her position that sent shivering little thrills of friction up my soft skin. The hand she'd snaked behind me was gently massaging the back of my neck with her fingernails, giving me goosebumps and sending divine waves of alternating warmth and shivers all through me. I felt my nipples stiffen to fiery points in the padded cups of my corset.

“So, bitch, what's the final tally?” Katy said, snorting drunkenly.

I reached into my purse and dug out a business card. “Well, there's Andy, the one Jaci picked out for me. God, what a poser. I was really glad when he left.”

“But a number is a number is a number,” Staci said. “That's a B-cup.”

I pulled out a folded cocktail napkin. “David. Staci's guy, the Latino.”

“The one with the nice butt?” Katy asked.

“I guess you could call it nice,” I said. “I'm not quite where I notice shit like that just yet. He was actually really nice, though. Really respectful. I almost thought he wasn't going to give me digits, but he rallied at the end, once I figured that the dumb and cute thing wasn't doing it for him. We talked a little politics and he was all about me.”

“Way to read the room,” Jaci said. “You're up to a C-cup.”

The next business card followed. “Ah, the lovely and talented Rick, which Katy was kind enough to point out. Your kind of guy, Katy, by the way, personal trainer and big into shit like rock climbing and base jumping. Walking Mountain Dew commercial. And way too into himself.”

“But those are digits,” Katy said, laughing. “Little Miss D-cup.”

“Yeah, yeah,” I said. “But I'm not gonna be a D-cup, I'm sorry to say.”

“Oh, hell no, you're not backing out now,” Staci blurted. “I mean it, Niki, you gotta trust me, you're gonna look so good if you take our advice. I'm not fucking around, a girl with your shape has to have a chest to set it off...”

I held up a placating hand. “Look, I said I wasn't gonna be a D-cup, and I meant it.” I pulled out the final number – Kevin, the guy I'd met all by myself. “I'm gonna be a double-D cup.”

“Oh my GAWD!” Jaci squealed, bouncing up and down in a way that made me completely lose my train of thought. “When did you meet him? Who was he?”

“Y'all were dancing,” I told them. “I'd finished with the last guy so y'all just kinda went about your own business, and I was at the bar getting a drink and he just put it on his tab. He was real tall, his name was Kevin. He owns an independent record label downtown, signs local artists. He was really interesting. He knew bands that I didn't think anybody'd ever heard of.”

“That guy with the longish hair you were talking to?” Katy asked, wide-eyed and laughing with delight. “The grunge-look guy?”

“Yeah, him,” I said. “We talked for a while, and he invited me to go with him to hear some indie bands play at the Boom Boom Room next weekend. And then I got his number.”

“That's awesome!” Staci laughed. “I'm so proud of you!”

“Well, then, you're gonna fucking love this, then,” I told them, the booze and the camaraderie fueling my resolve. I took a deep breath. “'Cause I'm gonna call him.”

“Seriously?” Jaci asked, gasping.

I blushed beet red. “Yeah, seriously,” I told him. “If anything, I get to go hear some shit-hot indie rock and get some free drinks. But he's really interesting and knows a lot about music, we like a lot of the same things, and... and...”

“And what?” Staci pressed.

“And I'm not sure. I mean I'm really not sure, but... I think I might think he's really cute,” I confessed. “I think... I think I might actually like him.”

“You do?” Jaci pressed.

“It was really weird,” I said. “Matter of fact, it kinda freaked me the fuck out. But when we were talking I kept getting distracted by how his shoulder-muscles moved underneath his shirt when he shifted around. And his breath actually smelled really good, too, which was weird. I normally don't think about shit like that at all. And then when I touched him, y'know, like you told me to, I put my hand on his arm and kinda left it there even though you told me I should back off. And after a minute, he put his hand on top of mine, and I got goosebumps,” I said. “And... well, I got wet. Really wet.”

“You do like him!” Staci gasped.

“I might,” I said. “I'm not sure. I'm really fucking confused, okay?”

“Are you all right?” Katy asked, ever the caretaker.

“Sure,” I said lightly. “I just need to go home and think this through for a while.”

“Oh, damn, that reminds me,” Staci said. “How the hell are all of you gonna get home? You bitches are drunk. You can't drive.”

I saw Jaci get that weird intense look she got when she was thinking – I'd seen it when she did dosage calculations in her head on the ambulance. “Well, once we drop you off at your place, I'm just a little ways north of you,” she said.

“And I'm way the hell south,” Katy said.

“And I came with Katy,” I told them.

“No problem,” Jaci said briskly. “Katy can keep the cab. Niki can stay at my place tonight, we can walk to my apartment and tomorrow I'll take her home and pick Katy up and bring her back to her car.”

“That's a lot of driving for you,” Staci protested.

“I don't care,” she said, but the pressure of her hand on the back of my neck said otherwise. She did care, and this was important to her.

“Sounds good to me,” I told her. “I could probably use a walk.”

We said good night at the car, hugs and cheek-kisses all around, and Jaci and I waited at the sidewalk as Katy drove away in the cab and Staci got herself inside safely. Then Jaci slipped off her heels – so did I – and we started a quick walk up the street into a residential neighborhood. Initially, I'd wondered why she was walking so quickly, since she'd put so much thought into making sure it was just the two of us left at the end of the night. Then I remembered, that alone on a street, in slutty club clothes at three in the morning wasn't safe for two women on foot. It was the one part of femininity that I actively hated, the lack of safety. Never before in my life had I had to consider that I couldn't do something or be somewhere because it wasn't safe for me, that I could be murdered or raped just on some man's whim, just because he happened to see me alone someplace.

We made quick work of the eight blocks between Jaci's duplex and Staci's house. Jaci lived in a nice neighborhood, one of the older ones in the city, with towering live oaks that stretched above the streets. Her locale was mostly older, retired couples and young couples with kids.

We talked about light stuff – Kevin, mostly – as we walked, and I found myself idly wondering when Jaci was gonna get to the point. She obviously wanted something from me, but I wasn't sure what, and in my drunkenness I wasn't really able to figure out what. My mind was stuffed full of cotton wool.

“So, what'd you want to talk to me about?” I finally asked straight out. “You went to a lot of trouble to get the two of us together.”

She laughed, a little nervously. “Okay,” she said, finally. “You know my reputation, like at work, right?”

I shrugged. “I've heard some stuff, but I never really paid it any mind. You know how medics gossip. I like you, so I didn't really listen.”

She grinned. “You wouldn't. But, anyway, a lot of it is true. I'm kind of a wild girl. I party a lot, and I do a lot of the things people say I do.”

“So what?”

“So, as much as I party, I've kinda... experimented. Enough to know that I like all kinds of stuff from all kinds of people. And, then when you told me that you liked me, tonight, well...”

“Well what?” I asked.

“So, you're sleeping here tonight,” she said.

“And?”

“I was wondering if you wanted to do any of that sleeping in my bed. With me.”

The words stunned silence seemed to fall a little short. I felt like she'd hit me between the eyes with a Louisville Slugger. I stammered something unintelligible.

“Here,” she offered. “Maybe this might help you make up your mind.”

She didn't just move, she flowed across the intervening space and before my eyes could even focus her warm, soft body was pressed against mine. Her hands found teasing, comfortable places in the small of my back and behind my left ear, and her warm, softer-than-soft lips pressed up against mine, stealing my breath and every coherent thought in my head. There was nothing hesitant about it, it insisted, and I found myself powerless against it as my lips parted to accept her flickering tongue. She'd been drinking and smoking, and the tastes mingled with the perfumed heaviness of her lipstick mixed with mine in some divine ambrosia flavor that I sucked at hungrily. Our tongues slithered and teased, dancing with one another. She bit my bottom lip and I moaned, down deep in my throat, feeling myself slide farther and farther into her embrace.

I lost track of how long we kissed. It could have been seconds or years. But, finally, we parted breathlessly.

“What were we talking about?” I asked dazedly, leaning against her shoulder.

“We were talking about whether or not you wanted to come into my room, take off all your clothes and get in my bed with me,” she said, nuzzling my ear deliciously. “And you were about to say yes.”

“Was I?”

“Oh, yeah,” she said. “You absolutely were.”

She took both my hands in both of hers and led me through her front door. I followed her in a hazy, sexual trance. A part of my mind was screaming, Remember what Selina told you! She said once you start, you might not be able to stop, like it was for her! But no matter how hard or how loudly it protested, my body was on autopilot and my mind couldn't move past the sparkling blue-green eyes that twinkled as they swallowed me up.

I didn't even notice the front room of her house. As the door shut behind us, we were in one another's arms again and kissing as if we'd never stopped. My hands began to explore her soft body, finding the places that made her moan and sigh and cataloging them for future use. I dimly remembered how to please a woman, from a previous life several eternities ago, but it was difficult to focus on any one thing from the incredible sensations her own hands were evoking in my body, which had against my will transformed into one giant erogenous zone. Her hands were equal parts massage, caress and tease and I felt as though every nerve ending in my skin was standing at rapt attention, waiting for more of her unbelievable touch.

“I've wanted this all night,” she whispered in my ear between gentle nibbles. “You're so beautiful, Niki. All I could think about was how much I wanted to kiss you.”

I could only sigh. I couldn't think of anything to say that wouldn't sound cheesy or foolish, so I answered her with the most passionate kiss I could muster. Her hands kneaded my shoulders almost painfully to let me know she liked it. I was making out in a doorway with perhaps the most responsive lover I'd ever known, and she was systematically setting me on fire inside. Caresses turned to clutches turned to fumbling with zippers and snaps and closures. It wouldn't be long before I was tearing her clothes off, with the rising cascade of passion and unadulterated want swelling inside my chest, but Jaci took my hands in hers, kissing the tips of my fingers.

“Slow down, baby,” she breathed, panting a little. “We have all night.”

“Sorry,” I said. “This is a little more intense than I expected.”

“That's how it is for us girls,” she told me.

I giggled – the adorable giggle they'd taught me that was now a part of me forever. She smiled expectantly, eyebrows raised.

“It's just funny,” I breathed, caressing her cheek and her soft hair, threading it through my slender fingers.

“What is?”

“That after all the millions of dollars of lab work, clinical stuff, psych evaluations, all the high-powered high-paid doctors and therapists, all of it,” I said, “This is what it took, 'cause for the first time since this happened I really want to be a girl.”

She kissed me. “C'mon, then,” she told me, drawing me towards the bedroom. “Let's go be girls.”

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Seven**

**by Valerie Hope**

I'D HAD THINGS INSIDE MY new vagina before: the speculum at the gynecologist's office, the dilator they'd made me sleep with for the days following my "grand opening." All of them had just felt strange, like dull invaders that gave me no feelings whatsoever except for a distant sense of discomfort and unease. But when Jaci laid me back on her bed, kissing my neck and ear, and her warm, soft hand snaked down my belly and under my short skirt, pushing aside the filmy Lycra of my sodden panties and one slender, oh-so-gentle finger probed and prodded its way between the heavy, musky dampness of my outer lips, flicking across the nub of my clitoris and pushing into me, there was nothing strange about what I felt. I bit my bottom lip and moaned for all I was worth, my fingers tangling painfully in Jaci's soft hair and my eyes squeezed shut.

"Oh, Jesus," I gasped. "Fucking wow."

"You like?" Jaci teased.

I grabbed her wrist and pushed more of her finger into me. "Don't stop."

"Mmmm. Horny girl," Jaci mused, kissing the top of my left breast.

"Your horny girl," I corrected.

She smiled, a lazy sexy smile that was dark and glowing at the same time. "My girl," she whispered. "I really like that."

She teased me, making me so wet that I knew I must be soaking through the sheets, murmuring "My girl" in breathy whispers against my hypersensitive flesh.

I took as much as I could, riding the giant crests and swells of my new, untested female passion, before I couldn't resist the urge to "return favors." I pulled her across to straddle me and struggled a little with the clasp of her bra, giggling at my nervousness, until I freed her bouncing breasts and took the swollen nipples into my mouth, one at a time, laving them gently with my tongue-stud and making her gasp and squeal. My free hand found her damp crotch and I began caressing her in tight, slow circles with my fingers through her panties.

I stayed that way for a long time, her across me while I teased her nipples and stroked her clitoris through her panties, just listening to the delightful little sounds she made when I hit the right spots and letting myself become mesmerized by the lovely rhythm of her breathing. Then she began to push against my hand harder and add her own rhythm by sliding her hips back and forth. Her breathing became panting, punctuated with little rising yelps and squeals until she screwed her eyes shut tight and threw her head back with a high-pitched wail as she

bucked against my hand and pressed her nipple deep into my mouth. She had one or two more little aftershock orgasms after the first one and sagged against me, sweaty and glowing and smiling at me for all she was worth.

“Damn,” she breathed huskily. “I was hoping to do you first.”

“No big,” I said back, brushing the damp hair from her face. I'd never really let myself notice just how beautiful she was before now, and I stared at her face as if trying to memorize every line, every curve, every little subtle interplay of light and shadow, down to her smallest freckle. I couldn't look at her enough.

“No big? Please,” she laughed.

“Really,” I said. “It's my first time, and my first girl orgasm. I used to be scared as hell about it. Y'know, swearing it was never gonna happen. But now I want it to last.”

“I didn't even think about that,” she said. “I've never been with a virgin before.”

I chuckled. “And I've never been a virgin twice before.”

I loved the feeling of just laying there with her against me, our breasts squashed together and breathing in time. I felt like I could stay that way for hours, even as excited as I was.

“I really wanna get you naked and take care of that virgin problem,” she told me.

I slid out from under her. “Sign me up.”

\* \* \*

I thought one finger was incredible. But it was a candle next a bonfire compared to two. And three was comparing them to the sun. But the tongue – that was the supernova, and when she did both the tongue and the fingers...

She'd played me like a piano, taking me right up to the edge and then backing me down, then up again, then down again for what seemed like hours. I clawed at her, growled at her, begged her, tried to push myself against her chin, but she never let me go over the edge until the very end. I felt as though I was being filled inside, like every nerve ending in my body was wicking pure pleasure into my skin and organs, and electricity was shooting up and down my body in unbelievable ecstatic waves. And, just when I knew she would back off again, she pressed, and the fullness inside me built and built and built until I was sure I'd split down the middle and erupt with it, and then it happened.

The world greyed out, and I floated in a seething, boiling lava lake of pure sensation. I screamed – I dimly heard myself do it – and bucked like I was having a seizure, my muscles clamped down on Jaci hard enough to make her grunt, and I just jerked and spasmed until every drop of the pure ecstasy running through my body leached out into the air around me, suffusing it with a musky, satisfied glow. I sagged, boneless, against the mattress and fought for breath.

“Oh,” was all I could manage between gasping breaths. “Oh.”

“Now you're a girl,” Jaci told me, smiling.

“I... I...” I attempted.

“Shh,” she said, laying a finger across my lips. I tried to suck it but she took it away. “Listen, baby, I need to tell you something. Something... well, it's hard for me to say.”

“I'm listening,” I whispered, stroking her damp hair.

“When you were... I mean, before.”

“When I was a man,” I supplied.

“Yeah,” she said. “I liked you. A lot. I mean, you told me why you didn't, and it was hard with David around, being David, but I always wanted you to ask me out. You said you had a crush on me, well, yeah. I had a crush on you too. A major one. So when I heard what happened, I cried for like, two days.”

“Oh, baby,” I said. “I didn't know that.”

“Nobody knew that. I never told you... I just figured you weren't into me.”

“Funny how things work out.”

“But when the doctors said you needed to see your old friends, that you were coming back to work, I figured I'd be your friend. Y'know, if I couldn't... if we couldn't...”

“I'm really glad you did.”

“But here's the thing,” she said, lowering her eyes. “I got to know you. Really got to know you, and that crush I had... it changed. It turned into something else.”

“What do you mean?” I asked her.

“I mean that you're the coolest, most amazing person I've ever met in my life,” she said in a rush, as if trying to beat whatever was telling her not to talk. “And I think I'm in love with you.”

She finally met my eyes. Hers were glistening with unshed tears.

“But, Jaci... How?”

“I don't know how. I don't care how. I just know I do.”

I couldn't make words come out of my mouth – there was so much I wanted to say, it was like the English language was crowding the exit in its rush to express my feelings and got stuck in the doorway.

“I don't know what to... Jaci, baby...”

She sniffled, fearing what was going to come out of my mouth next. I feared what was going to come out next. So, like with any stressful situation, I did what a good paramedic did. I took a second and thought. Luckily, the right words came to me.

“I can't tell you that I love you too,” I whispered. “We barely know each other, baby, and for me love takes a little while.”

“I understand.”

I lifted her chin with one finger. “But I really want to love you. A lot. And I'll be with you until that happens, if you want me to.”

She cried and laughed simultaneously with relief, joy and pain written large across her sweet face. "I want that a lot," she said. "More than I can say."

"So, then, I guess that makes us..."

"...girlfriends," she finished for me. "I don't have any problem with that."

I kissed her fingers. "I don't, either. I figured I was gonna wind up a lesbian, anyway. No matter what hormones I have, I just don't see guys the same way I do girls... oh, shit," I said.

"What?" Jaci asked, suddenly concerned.

"Kevin," I said. "That guy I met. I was gonna go out with him."

Jaci laughed loud, releasing some of her pent-up stress. "So go out with him. Have a blast. Make out with him in the back of the car, fuck him 'till he can't walk. Hell, bring him over here and I'll watch you fuck him," she said. "Fuck anybody or anything you like, baby. But I only want you to love me."

"You're certainly open-minded about this," I commented.

"My girlfriend used to be a guy I liked," she explained. "This is new territory. I'm sure we'll end up monogamous at some point. But you have way too much exploring to do, baby. And I want to do some of it with you."

"Well, we definitely have time," I told her. "My average for dating tends to be around one year. I've always been a serial monogamist."

"I'm shooting for forever, but I can start with one year," she told me.

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure, anything," Jaci said, tracing little circles on my belly with her fingernail. It tickled and I squirmed, which made her smile.

"Would you mind – I mean, I know how you feel, this is just a thing I have. But would you mind not saying those three words until I return the feeling? I've had some really bad relationships where one person felt more than the other, and it all started to trace back to who said those words first."

"I guess so," she said. "But I don't say it to just anybody."

"I didn't think you did," I told her. "Honest. I just... I don't want you to be saying it all the time when I can't say it back just yet. I'd feel bad about that."

"Okay," she said. "But I'm going to think it every day."

"I can live with that," I said. "I just don't want either of us getting hurt. Plus, we work together, and that can get complicated if we're not careful. You know all the horndogs that work for our service. It's gonna be bad enough when I go back on the truck, being the medic who used to be a guy. Besides, I like my privacy. I don't want those idiots jerking off fantasizing about the two of us together. I want you all to myself, and the less they know about what goes on between us, the better."

"I definitely agree," she said. "So for now, it's between us."

“I like that,” I said.

I gave her a searching look as she sat up and stretched. Idly, I wondered aloud, “How big are yours, anyway?”

“My tits? I wear a 34B. Yours are gonna be way bigger than mine,” she said, and then gave me a smoky look that made me wet all over again. “I can't fucking wait.”

\* \* \*

We made love again, slowly, pleasuring one another in the sixty-nine position until we'd both had two or three orgasms. My mind still wanted the refractory period I used to have when I was male, but my body didn't need it anymore. As soon as I'd had an orgasm, I was ready to go again, but my brain kept trying to make me quit. I mentioned it to Jaci as we were raiding her fridge.

“I figure that's easy enough to solve,” she told me, teasing a strawberry across my lips. The taste of the fruit and her juices on my chin mingling was divine.

“How do you reckon?” I asked.

“If I don't give you a choice,” she said. “Besides, I've wanted to do this all night anyway.”

“Do what?”

“Well, we've done slow and passionate,” she said. “We've made love, and it was beautiful. Like music, really, and I could live a thousand years doing nothing but that with you. But I also want to give you a good, hard fuck, too. If you're game, that is. We've really enjoyed the slow and tender. Now I want to see if we both enjoy nasty.”

“I think I can do nasty,” I said. “Maybe if you walk me through it.”

“Well, there's nothing nastier to me than talking dirty,” she confessed.

“I'm not very good at it,” I replied.

“I don't care,” she said. “You can say whatever you want, just as long as you use the dumb and cute voice you were using in the club.”

I laughed in shock and disbelief. “That turned you on?”

“Like you wouldn't believe.”

I twirled a lock of my disheveled hair around one finger and bit my lip. “So, like, um... where do ya wanna, like, do this 'n' stuff?” I cooed.

Turns out, it was right there on the kitchen floor.

And also turns out, I did like it nasty.

\* \* \*

We lay there in a tangled heap of sweat and girl-cum, breathless and thoroughly satisfied. I rested my head on her naked hip and traced designs on her hip with one finger while she stroked my hair. The debris of our – well, there was no other word for it but fucking – lay on the floor and counters all around. The empty canister of whipped cream that she'd made me lick off of her breasts and pussy, the strawberries she'd poked inside me and sucked out, coated

with my salty musk, the dishtowel she'd used to tie my hands behind me, even the pleasant but persistent ache in my crotch where she'd finally gotten four fingers in after making me beg like a little girl for it.

It was definitely a night for discoveries, about Jaci and about myself. Like finding out it turned her on when I talked like an airhead. And there was apparently no upper limit – the thicker I laid it on, the more impassioned she became. Or discovering that I got really turned on by being spanked – I'd have the bruises to show for it tomorrow – and also by having my hair pulled. Or that Jaci really liked having her nipples pinched hard enough to hurt, but only if she was really turned on. And if anything about tonight was sure to hammer nails into the coffin of my departed masculinity, it would be the intense reaction I had to Jaci's using a little bit of hand lotion on one finger and slipping it into my ass. Apparently, I'd been extremely wrong about anal sex of any sort when I was male.

I was sore, though, from her fingers – but it was a good sore. She'd used her fingers hooked upwards, towards the end, to stimulate the g-spot on the anterior wall of my vagina. Whatever it was, it worked, a little too well. I found out, to my embarrassment, that when I had my g-spot stimulated like that, that when I came I squirted. At first I thought I'd peed and was totally abashed. But once Jaci giggled and explained what had happened – not to mention licking a sizeable quantity of the juice off my inner thigh – and pointed out that I'd hit the far wall, we both were struck by just how sexy and nasty that was and just tackled each other. I spent about twenty minutes trying to get Jaci to do it, but she hadn't managed near the amount or distance that I did. I envisioned a very fun competition in the near future.

“Wow,” Jaci breathed, taking a drag off the cigarette she'd fished from her purse. “You are a fucking freak, did you know that? I had no idea you were such a dirty little ho.”

That brought a flood back. She'd growled it in my ear while she pulled my head back by the hair and shoved her fingers into me while I was bent over the kitchen table, squealing. She'd called me a slut, and a nasty little dyke, and a bitch and a skank and a whore. She'd made me say those things back to her – I'm a nasty little slut, I'm a dirty whore. She accused me of sucking strange cock through glory holes and selling my pussy for money and licking cum off the floors of porn theaters. And it drove me wild. The more she'd said, the harder I thrust myself back on her fingers. It got to the point where I was begging her, in my best bubblehead cheerleader voice, to call me a whore and a cum-dumpster. She obliged willingly, feeding her own desires by doing it. Maybe we were working out some long-dormant childhood trauma issues on one another, but at the moment I really didn't care. All I knew was that I liked it.

“I didn't know it either,” I said, taking the cigarette from between her fingers and taking a drag before handing it back. “You bring out the slut in me.”

“You're turning me on again,” she told me.

“Sorry,” I said. “Unless you want to go again.”

“I'd love to,” she said. “But I'm beat. I don't think I can move.”

“Me neither,” I confessed.

The microwave clock said five a.m. and I stifled a yawn. “It's almost coffee time,” I told her. “I have to get back to the hospital for my consult at eight.”

“How can you do that?” she asked me. “Keep going like that?”

“You'll learn,” I told her honestly. “You're a good medic, Jaci, you'll find ways to stay sharp and keep going when you're exhausted.”

“I hope so,” she said. “Cause I could sleep for a month right now.”

“I'll carry you to bed,” I told her. “But can I borrow your car? I need to get to the hospital and then pick everybody up and get them back to their vehicles from last night. And that gives me the excuse to come back here and see you again.”

She smiled dreamily and kissed my forehead. “I'd like that.”

“I'll take you to lunch. It'll be our first official dyke date,” I teased.

“Okay,” she said. “And then afterwards, I'm taking you out. For a manicure.”

“A manicure?”

“Can't help it. Girls with long nails seriously turn me on,” she said sheepishly. “And you're getting 'em 'cause as soon as they're dry you're bringing me to your place and shoving 'em as far up me as they'll go.”

\* \* \*

“Good morning,” I half-sang to Shon as I walked in Dr. Richard's office at five 'till eight. I couldn't keep the just-got-fucked lilt out of my voice.

“You're in a good mood,” she accused.

“I had a totally great night last night,” I said. “Some of the girls I, um, work with took me out. We had a total blast.”

“Where'd you go?”

“A club called Parallax, downtown,” I said. “Very cool place. Next time we go I'll call you, if you're, like, into that kind of thing.”

She smiled at me. “You sound different.”

“I do?” It hit me. I was still talking like the airhead cheerleader. I couldn't seem to stop – just knowing how much it pleased and excited my new girlfriend made me want to do it all the time. I just laughed.

“I guess I do. Like I said, I had a great night. I think I'm, like, finally figuring out how much fun it can be to be a girl,” I told her.

“I'm really happy for you, baby,” she said.

Dr. Richards had stood in the doorway long enough to catch the tail-end of the conversation, so I repeated the details again. He gave me a companionable pat on the shoulder which I turned into a fond hug. It took him aback.

“Relax, doc,” I told him fondly. “I'm a girl now. Girls hug, right?”

He got me some coffee – and became my new personal hero in the process – and sat me down at my accustomed seat across his desk. I demurely crossed my legs at the knee, even though I

was wearing jeans. We chatted about nothing for about ten minutes until we were joined by another doctor, a tall sandy-haired man with a goatee and striking green eyes. He struck me as the sort of man Staci would be attracted to.

“Niki, I'm Doctor Childress,” he said. “I'm your plastic surgeon. Colonel Richards called me in to consult from Mercy General.”

“Nice to meet you,” I told him. “Mercy's a great hospital. Top-notch ER.”

“We like to think so,” he chuckled. “Now, I've been brought up to speed on your remarkable transformation, and I have to say, if they hadn't told me I never would have known. Aside from the body, too – your mannerisms, the way you walk, everything.”

“Thanks,” I said, blushing adorably. “It's been a lot of work.”

“So now it's down to the finishing touches,” he said. “Apparently, your breasts didn't develop the way they thought. I can see that. And you've decided to go ahead with implants? Have you given any thought to size?”

I took a deep breath. “I gotta admit, doc, I, um, was all about little ones right at first. Y'know, like, fighting the transformation. But I talked it over with my girlfriends and they brought me around. They think I should, like, go up to a double-D cup, and I agree.”

He nodded. “That's a little full, but with your height I think they'd be proportional,” he said. “About a 36, I'd say. You're going to be quite full-chested, though, and as slender as you are, they may look bigger than they actually are. I'd suggest maybe a full C-cup, actually.”

A bet was a bet. “Actually, doc, we even went so far as to try on bras and stuff 'em with socks to see how they looked,” I told him. “And I really like the way the double-D's looked on me.”

Richards was dumbfounded, staring at me with his mouth open. Not only was I opting for bigger breasts, I was fighting for them. I'd come a very long way from the irradiated hairless stick that had been brought to him in a hazmat blanket.

“Well, I did. Like 'em, I mean,” I said to him.

Dr. Childress shut the door and asked me to disrobe. I slid out of the loose shirt I was wearing – not because I was trying to dress like a boy, but because I needed to do laundry and only had ten minutes to shower and change since Jaci's and my goodbye kiss had run long. He poked and prodded and traced the contours of my nonesuch breasts, taking measurements from the nipple to my armpit and other landmarks, making notes in a little spiral pad. I hoped neither of them noticed the faint bite mark Jaci had left on my right one.

Dr. Childress opened a sample case he'd brought with him and started talking about saline versus silicone and the number of cc's he was going to have to use. He drew out a bra from the case and had me slip it on, then placed the sample implants into the cups. I turned and let him make more notes and more measurements as I tried to imagine the worn, threadbare black bra stuffed with my own flesh instead of bags of salt water.

“You don't have a lot of natural tissue there,” he said, “so I'd really suggest silicone implants. They look and feel more natural, and the silicone implants don't have a seam which can show on the breast. Recent studies have shown that silicone implants are very safe.”

"I've read the research," I told him. "Homework. If I'm gonna get it done to me, then, like, I wanna know about it."

"Good for you," he said. "Well, if you're set on this size, Niki, I don't see any reason why we can't schedule the procedure for the beginning of next week. I don't see any reason to wait."

"Neither do I," I told him, slipping out of the bra and handing it back to him. I didn't feel the slightest bit uncomfortable standing there in front of them barebreasted, and it gave me a little more chance to try to imagine myself with a giant pair of funbags to show off. I couldn't wait to find out what Jaci intended to do with them.

"Okay, then. How's Tuesday at six a.m.?" he asked.

"Tuesday is great," I said. He left as quickly as he'd come, in a wash of goodbyes and congratulations, already looking at his pager.

"I'm proud of you, Niki," Dr. Richards said. "You're really trying hard. I have to admit I had my doubts as to whether or not you'd ever make the adjustment to your new life."

"Having friends – girls – helped a lot," I told him. "Before, I felt like I didn't fit in either world, y'know? Now I feel like I belong again. I missed that."

"I can understand that," he said.

"And I took what you said to heart," I went on. "It's not in me to do anything half-assed. I didn't ask to be a girl, but now that I am one, I want to be the best girl I can manage. Sure, like, a part of me is always gonna be male inside. I get that. But the rest – I have control of that. That's something I can change if I want."

"So what made the difference?"

"Wanting to change it," I told him. "And finding something to want to change it for. I don't want to be Little Miss Stuck-in-the-Middle any more. I want to be one or the other. And after last night, and some of the stuff I learned about myself, I finally quit feeling like I'm a guy in a girl suit and everybody's gonna find out and laugh at me. I think I might even be able to get good at being a girl."

He got the stone-faced look he got when he was trying to master his emotions. "I've always thought you could. You tend to excel at whatever you put your mind to."

"Which reminds me, I meant to ask you a question," I said.

"Go ahead."

"I've got jeans and sneakers and t-shirts and that's about it," I said. "Is there any money in the budget for me to go out and get some girl clothes?"

He laughed. "Even if I have to pay for them myself."

\* \* \*

I finished up with the doctors, getting more blood drawn and labs collected. My cells were still changing, but according to the latest estimate I was ninety-three and a half percent female. And with the stubborn refusal of my testes to change, I would only ever be ninety-nine point eight percent woman, but I was trying to put that out of my mind. Girl clothes, piercings

and a boob job I could manage. A baby, not so much. Not right now, at least, I shocked myself by thinking.

Wanting to surprise Jaci, I swung through Macy's before I started the taxi service to get everybody back with their cars from last night. I pulled a hundred bucks from my ATM – amazing how much money accumulated in my checking account without having to pay any bills for three months and having workers' comp paying my checks. Even at sixty percent salary, I had a nice chunk of change built up. I browsed as quickly as I could – difficult, now, because I kept trying to picture myself in what I was seeing on the mannequins and the racks. Amused, I remembered a conversation I'd had with David Cupertino a few months back, on a crazy busy shift. We talked about how women go shopping and men go purchasing. Men hit the stores with a definite idea of what they wanted, probably two or three different styles or manufacturers in mind, and we went in to get it and left when we had it. We'd been right. I made a mental note to come back to the store when I had a little time – and maybe some tits to fill out some of the blouses – and try some things on, just browse around to see what struck my fancy. Maybe Jaci would like to come with, even though she didn't really strike me as the shop 'till you drop sort. Maybe Selina, if Jaci begged off.

I finally toggled myself out in a flirty little white sun-dress with little yellow flowers all over it and some white strappy sandals with a two-inch heel. I bought some more of the gigantic hoop earrings – just because I loved the way they looked. I dug in my purse and took a few minutes to finger-comb my tousled hair and put on a light dusting of makeup, line my eyes and throw on some mascara. Pink gloss did for my lips – it was Staci's, borrowed from last night, and had glitter in it, but I didn't mind. I planned to have most of it end up on Jaci anyway. I cranked her little red Yaris and threw it in gear, shoving my wraparound sunglasses on my nose and pulling into traffic to go and pick up Katy. The drive only took about twenty minutes.

“You look great,” she squealed before she was even in the car all the way. “I never thought I'd live to see you in a skirt again.”

“Well, last night was a real epiphany for me,” I said, toying with my hair. “For one thing, I didn't expect to have so much fun. And for another thing, I think if I give it some effort and keep y'all bitches close to me for a while, I think I can actually wind up being good at being a girl.”

“You've got me for as long as you need me. Longer,” she said, buckling in. “Niki, I stopped thinking about you as a patient a long time ago. You're not a patient to me. You're a friend. A good friend, I hope.”

“I'd really like that,” I said. “I have to, like, warn you, though. I've never really had a lot of friends before. I'm not real good at it yet. You're gonna have to have a lot of patience with me. I was a real loner before my accident.”

“I'll help,” she said. “So, did you and Jaci finally hook up last night, or what?”

I coughed and almost put the car in the ditch. “You knew?” I managed around a very uncooperative tongue.

“Honey, we all knew,” she said. “Once Staci confirmed that she was into girls, and knowing what I know about you, I figured it was just a matter of time. Not that I don't hope you find the fun in being around guys, but the two of you are really cute together, and she really likes you. All night long, it was 'Niki this' or 'Niki that' from her. She's got it bad for you, girl.”

“Yeah, well – I got it pretty bad for her, too,” I confessed. “We're together, now. Girlfriends. God, it's so nice to tell somebody. I've been wanting to shout it from the rooftops all day.”

“I'm really happy for both of you,” Katy said. “Jaci's a very sweet girl.”

I bit my bottom lip. “She wasn't that sweet last night,” I muttered.

“Okay, so here's your next girl lesson,” Katy said, smiling and bouncing up and down in her seat. “Dish. I want details.”

\* \* \*

I gave Katy a lot of details – by guy standards – but she wanted more. I'd always heard that girls were every bit as nasty as guys were when it came to locker room talk, but I had no idea. Besides, talking about it turned me on, too, which made me go into a lot more detail so I could relive the night. As I talked, I rediscovered feelings I didn't remember having, and soon the talk turned organically from gory sexual details to a deep search of just what that wild, amazing girl was making me feel.

I finally dropped Katy off in front of Staci's house. Staci wasn't there – she had to pick up her son about this time, I remembered – so I just hugged my physical therapist and bid her goodbye at the curb in front of her car. Guy instincts still prevailed, though – I sat idling the motor until I was sure that she was buckled in and her car started and she'd pulled away.

I fought the urge to floor the accelerator to get back to Jaci. She was filling my thoughts after talking to Katy, and I just couldn't wait to see her again. To touch her and taste her.

If this is what Selina was talking about when she said 'sex-crazed,' I don't know that it's such a bad thing, I thought to myself. Jaci's stereo was tuned to the 'Eighties station and I was singing along with “Material Girl” at the top of my lungs like an idiot. All the damage to my throat hadn't done any favors to my singing voice. I'd sounded like a stepped-on frog before the accident. Now I sounded like a stepped-on frog being ground into a gravel driveway. But I didn't care. I was so happy I had to do something, and singing in the car was probably the least foolish of my available options.

I pulled up to her house to find her sitting on her porch in a plastic patio chair, her knees drawn up to her chest. She was sipping coffee from a huge mug and smoking a cigarette. Her face lit up when she saw me and she waved, smiling happily as I put her car in park and shut off the engine.

“Oh, wow, Niki! You look great,” she gushed upon seeing my new outfit.

“I wanted to look good for you,” I told her. “I've never worn a dress before.”

“What do you think?” she asked.

“Like wearing a bathrobe in public,” I told her honestly. “I kinda like it, though.”

“You should wear one all the time,” she told me. “You have incredible legs.”

I blushed. “Thanks. Gonna take a little time for me to get used to driving in heels, too. I think that takes a little skill.”

She laughed. "It does. You ready to go eat and then get our nails done?"

"Um, I guess so," I said. "Do I need to wash my hands or anything like that?"

"You can, but you don't have to," she told me. "They do pretty much everything for you. You just sit there and let yourself be pampered. It's awesome. But you don't sound too enthused."

I grinned shyly, coloring even more. "I was kind of hoping, well... like, before we eat lunch I was kinda hoping I could eat you."

She gave me a playful shove. "Easy, girl. We got nothing but time."

"I just can't quit thinking about last night," I said.

"Me neither," she said. "But I really want to do this for you, and we can't live on pussy alone. We have to pace ourselves."

"Pace ourselves?" I asked.

"Niki, I've been in relationships where we just fucked around the clock, twenty-four and seven. Once the sex lost its pizzazz, the relationship burned out," she told me. "I don't want that to happen with you, okay? I want to be with you for a very long time. So if that means take it slow when all I want is to do you right here on the front lawn for all the neighbors to see, then I'm gonna take it slow."

I pouted. "But I don't wanna take it slow."

"I know, me neither," she said. "But baby, I want to do this right. I've fucked up enough good things in my life to know what not to do."

"I guess you're right," I said. "If we're not gonna get naked, can I at least kiss you?"

"You better," she told me, sliding close. "As often as you can."

I melted into her arms. It was just like last night – time ceased to have any coherent meaning and I felt like I was floating after we parted, short of breath and a little dizzy but so perfectly content that I honestly believed I could stay there forever and never eat or sleep again, just stand close to her and listen to her breathing.

"I love the way you kiss," I told her.

She nuzzled my neck, her long eyelashes tickling me. "I was just thinking the same thing," she told me. "Nobody's ever kissed me the way you do. Every time you do it, I want to tell you that thing you asked me not to say."

"Well, that's my version of what not to do," I said. "Please, baby, just give me time. I don't want to mess this up either."

She took my hand in hers. "If we keep talking like this, then we are gonna wind up naked. And I'm fucking hungry. So let's go. You can be my chauffeur, practice driving in heels."

I nodded, still trying to process all the feelings and confusion that were sweeping through me like a hurricane. I was still lost in thought by the time I got the car in gear and pulled back onto the road, my fingers still interlaced with hers.

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Eight**

**by Valerie Hope**

I'D NEVER BEEN SURE WHY having a French name was supposed to make a place seem high-class. It certainly didn't work here at Nail L'Expression, shoehorned between an insurance agent and a low-rent Thai place in a strip mall. The walls were covered with glossy posters of hands with long, extravagantly painted nails and the little worktables were filled with silent Vietnamese women in surgical masks. A television atop a cabinet in the corner played The View with the sound turned down.

I stared uncomprehendingly at the “menu” on the wall by the register. I had no idea what two-thirds of the items even were, much less what I wanted. I turned to Jaci with wide, dumbstruck eyes.

“You're gonna have to pick for me,” I told her.

She laughed. “No problem,” she said. She turned to one of the nail techs. “This is my best friend Niki. She wants a full set, solar, and a French pedicure.

“It's what I'm getting,” she told me. “Except I'm getting my eyebrows waxed too. I'm getting a little bushy.”

The silent, smiling tech led me to a tall chair, like a shoeshine chair, with a basin at the foot. I grabbed a copy of one of the nail magazines in the little waiting area and this month's Glamour to read while I was waiting. I climbed up into the chair while the tech filled the basin with warm water and took off my shoes.

I leafed idly through the nail magazine, staggered by the sheer amount of things women could buy for every conceivable part of their anatomy, ranging from a couple dollars to hundreds, if not thousands. Just the fingernails alone had a dizzying array of hardeners, protein infusions, cuticle treatments, growth accelerators and thickeners. Plus, there were trimmers, polishes, glosses, buffing blocks, files... the mind truly boggled. With the panoply of products available, all telling the customers that they had problems which only their product could fix, and the high-gloss polished glamour of the advertising, the average woman didn't stand a chance. Hell, even someone who knew what was going on like myself was susceptible – I found myself lusting heavily after some of the nail lengtheners and a scandalously overpriced sea kelp protein pack, if there was even the hint that they could give me nails like the ones in the pictures.

The tech trimmed my toenails and washed my feet thoroughly and then began massaging my calves and ankles with a sweet-smelling lotion. I sagged in my corset, head lolling a little as I almost fell asleep. It felt divine and oh-so-decadent. She tapped me lightly on one knee when

she was done – I think I'd nodded off – and stuffed a weird spongy thing which separated my toes. In less time than I thought would be possible, she painted my toenails with a polish that nearly matched my flesh tone and then a strip of pure white, just at the tips. She sprayed the nails with drying agent and then coated each nail with a generous application of clear gloss. Then the drying agent, then another coat of gloss. It would've taken me hours to do what she did in a few minutes. I took a second to admire her work and tipped her five dollars. I wasn't sure what the going rate was, but she seemed very pleased with the money. Helping me stand – not easy when I had to keep the toenails dry and navigate around the draining basin of warm sudsy water – she led me to one of the nail stations.

I had my back to the rest of the room – including where Jaci was settling down to her own pedicure. The tech began by trimming my nails and pushing back the cuticles with a toothpick, then washing them. Then she stuck on some white plastic nail extension which were easily three inches long, real dragon-lady nails. I giggled at the sight of them, making silly 'cat-scratch' motions and hissing. The tech ignored me and handed me a little mechanical pencil.

She gestured towards my nails. “How long you want?” she said in heavily accented English.

I looked around the room, at the glossy posters of the long-nailed hands holding flowers and wine glasses and crystal balls. I'd always thought the super-long, painted fingernails were sexy when I was a male. I guess I still harbored a fetish, because the mark I made on my nails would leave me with an inch-and-a-half long nail, easily as long as the nails on the poster. I knew I'd probably have to hack them off to work on an ambulance, but for the few weeks I still had left, it might be a lot of fun for me to wear them that long. I was going to have to retrain myself to do everything, and I seriously doubted I'd be able to type again no matter how much I practiced, but right then I didn't really care.

“So long?” she asked, eyebrow raised. Apparently they were a little longer than she was used to women asking for. I nodded, smiling, and she trimmed them down. Then she laid out a bewildering array of powders and pots and started layering white acrylic on the tips with a long-handled paintbrush.

I paged through Glamour while she worked, picking up several new ways to do my eyes and lips and some tips to speed things up with my makeup in the morning, and some really cute things I could do with my hair which could break up the status quo. There were even a couple cute ones that could give me some variety at work.

She finally finished by buffing my nails shiny with some kind of cream. I asked for her to glue on some rhinestones, something fancy and sparkly, and she made a narrow band between the pink and the white part of the nails on both ring fingers and put single stones in the center of the white nail. I worried, for a minute, about one of the stones possibly coming loose inside Jaci's pussy, later on tonight. Although looking for it might also be a lot of fun. But the nail tech covered the stones with several coats of clear lacquer to secure them in place.

She led me, tottering in the weird toe-separator sponge, to a drying table where I put my hands under ultraviolet light and fans to dry the polish and the acrylic. I was reading the rest of the Glamour magazine when Jaci came in, her browline red and irritated, and stuck her hands underneath the lights across from me.

“Hey, did you enjoy yourself?” she asked.

“I did,” I said, a little surprised. “It was decadent.”

“Gotta love being pampered,” Jaci said. “I come here every two weeks, rain or shine, no matter what. Just to get waited on. And I love the results, too.”

“Yeah, I like that part,” I said. “I may have to budget for this.”

“You better,” she warned. “‘Cause girls with long nails turn me on.”

“You mentioned that,” I giggled. “So, do these qualify?”

I pulled out my hands and Jaci gasped. “Oh my Gawd!” she squealed. “Those look amazing! I love the rhinestones! But they're so long, girl, how you gonna manage with those claws?”

“I had to learn to walk again, I figure I can learn to make do with these,” I said. “I mean, I know I'll have to trim them down to work on the ambulance, but I still have a couple weeks and I thought it might be fun.”

“I fucking love it, baby,” she told me.

“Good,” I said in a lower tone, “‘cause they're gonna be sunk to the knuckles in you before the sun goes down.”

She licked her lips and gave me a smoky look that made my panties damp.

“I just didn't expect them to look so elegant,” I went on. “They make my fingers look so long. I feel like I should be drinking from a champagne flute and smoking really long, skinny cigarettes or something.”

“There's a liquor store just down the sidewalk,” Jaci said. “We can have a bottle of Korbel and a pack of Virginia Slims in hand before we get back to the car.”

“Girl like me, with nails like this, she only drinks Dom Perignon,” I said. “Or hey – what about a big fat cigar?”

“With lots of glossy pink lipstick?” she asked, and I nodded.

“My treat,” she said, grinning and blushing.

\* \* \*

I lay back against the back seat of the car, panting heavily, a thick streamer of fragrant smoke trickling from my thickly pink-glossed lips. I puffed a little more on the Macanudo she'd bought me at the liquor store, still enjoying the little waves of pleasure that were still trickling up my body from my engorged clit. The hem of my dress was pushed up onto my belly and my copious juices were drying on my inner thigh.

Jaci levered herself up from where she'd been laying face-down on the passenger seat, which was leaned back all the way. She propped her chin on both her fists and smiled at me, more of my juices glistening on her chin and lips. She licked them happily.

“God,” she breathed. “I don't know what the hell it is about you. I mean, I've never been that visual a person before. I was one of those girls that would rather read a sexy story than watch a

porno. But with you, it's seeing you that sets me off. You started puffing on that stogie and I just couldn't keep my hands off you.”

I chuckled. “Better look into buying a humididor,” I said, puffing a little more. Life didn't get a lot better than this, six shuddering, squealing orgasms and a top-notch smoke to boot.

“I swear, girl, I don't know what it is. I just can't get enough of looking at you.”

“That's how it was for me. When I was a... before,” I said.

“When you were a guy, you mean,” she said.

“I've gotten to where I don't like to say that any more,” I confessed. “Everybody tells me I should start putting that behind me. I think the best way to do that for me is to just pretend like I was born a girl.”

“I can help you with that,” she told me.

“No, that's my job, baby,” I said, stroking her cheek. “But thanks.”

She kissed my thigh tenderly. “Your nails look amazing. What possessed you to get them done so long?”

“Like I said, I always had kind of a fetish,” I told her. “Looking at all those posters in there, the magazine – I just wanted to look like that. Well, mostly.”

“Mostly?” Jaci asked, quirking her eyebrows.

“Part of the fetish was imagining what those hands would look like wrapped around a cock,” I said. “But I'm in no hurry to do that.”

“You don't know what you're missing,” Jaci told me. “And your hands would look hot around a cock. And watching you smoke that cigar, so would your lips.”

“Oh, hell, no,” I laughed. “Besides, I've heard that having one makes you more of an expert in pleasuring one, but I wouldn't even know the first thing about that.”

“It's fun,” she said. And, in a softer, more subdued voice, she added, “I could teach you how.”

“Are you serious?” I asked.

“Look, I love helping you learn girl stuff,” she told me. “It makes me feel so close to you, I can't even describe it. And when I was in the eighth grade, my best friend Lori Whittaker taught me how on a corn dog. Thinking about doing something like that with you, well...”

“Well, what?”

“I think it would make me really happy. But we won't if you don't want to.”

“Don't,” I said. “Don't start that passive-aggressive stuff. If it makes you happy, it makes you happy, and I want to make you happy.”

“So you're saying?”

“I'll do it. But I hate corn dogs.”

“Dill pickles?”

“Now you're talking,” I said. “I have no idea why stuff like this seems so natural to me. You have some weird kind of control over me, it seems like sometimes.”

“Not so weird,” she said. “Pretty simple, actually.”

“Enlighten me?”

“Think about the other night,” she said.

“It's hard to think about anything else these days,” I commented, and she gave my thigh a gentle nibble that sent lovely little frissions of pleasure around my body.

“You were surprised at what you liked. Me calling you a slut, spanking you, that stuff. When you put it in perspective with this 'control' I have over you, it makes perfect sense. You're a sexual submissive. What they call a bottom.”

“Like, some kind of S&M thing?” I asked.

“Sorta,” she giggled. “You're submissive. That can mean a lot of things.”

“Like what?”

“That's for you to find out. Start small, y'know, little things. Maybe you like being tied up. Maybe instead of getting spanked with a hand, use a hairbrush or a slipper. Go over the knee. Suck your thumb.” I squirmed on the seat with a fresh wave of arousal just thinking about those things.

“How do you know so much about this?” I asked her.

“Because I'm kinky, too,” she said. “Maybe that's why we get along so well. I'm sexually dominant. A top, or a domme. Have been since right after I lost my virginity. I get off on bossing people around.”

“Cool,” I said.

“But you have to push your limits to find out what you like,” she said. “Who knows where it could end. You might end up liking being hung up from the ceiling or total bondage where you can't move. Or maybe serious humiliation, being led around on a leash or fed from a dog bowl or being peed on. Or maybe whips and paddles and riding crops will be your thing. There's no way to tell until you do a little exploring.”

I forced myself to stop thinking about what she was saying, not because it repulsed me – some of it did, right at first, but it was quickly subsumed in the incredible torrent of arousal that her words inspired in me.

“And you get off on making people like me do this stuff?” I asked.

She grinned. “I really, really do.”

I leaned down and kissed her. “Then make me do something. I don't care what. I just want to see what it's like.”

She gave me a narrow-eyed, sexy look. “Seriously?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Okay, then. From now on I want you to talk like a bubblehead again. I want people who talk to you to think you're dumb as a bag of hair.”

I twirled my hair around one finger. “Um, so... like, okay.” I said happily.

“Now, we have to go get pickles so I can teach you how to suck cock,” she told me. “We have to go to the store, and I know for a fact they're on the bottom shelf. You're going to go in there with no panties. I want you bare-pussied under your dress. You're gonna wait until there are a bunch of guys in the aisle, and then I'm gonna give you a signal, and you're going to bend over to get them and flash your cute little beaver to everybody in the grocery store.”

I shuddered. It was something I would never do, but somehow knowing that she wanted me to... I felt my will being completely subsumed into hers, and it was one of the most thrilling and comfortable feelings I'd ever experienced.

“You ready?” she asked me.

“I think I am,” I told her. She reached up and pinched my nipple through my corset, hard enough to hurt me and make me gasp and sparking off a little tiny orgasm.

“You want to repeat that?” she asked.

I blinked, remembering. “Um... I totally am, baby.”

“That's better,” she told me. “Let's go shopping, slut.”

\* \* \*

I didn't know which was harder for me to digest – the fact that I'd allowed myself to be flaunted in public the way Jaci had made me, or the fact that it was probably the single most exciting thing I'd ever done in my entire life. I'd taken my time, too, bending over to get the jar from the bottom shelf. I'd even stayed that way, comparing brands and prices, while an aisle full of men stared longingly at my naked pussy peeking from under the short hem of my sun-dress. Jaci and I had left the store giggling like little girls, falling all over one another in our laughter and excitement, and had made out in the car for about twenty minutes just because words weren't working to express what we were feeling.

“God,” I said, breathless from the laughing and the kiss. “That was amazing. I wanna go to another store, I wanna do it again. Can you believe that?”

“My little girl's an exhibitionist,” Jaci chuckled.

“Make me do something else,” I bade her.

“I will,” she said. “I just want to go home, now. We can play some more once we're there.”

I pouted. “Okay,” I whined.

She kissed me. “I love it when you pout. It makes me want to bite your bottom lip when you do it.”

She put on her seatbelt and drove us home, through the thickening traffic. I gazed quietly out the window, just looking at my hands with the long, painted nails and admiring the length and elegance of them, the strange grace that having long nails gave my hands. We made the drive

home in comfortable silence, holding hands over the gearshift, not even moving until we pulled into her short driveway.

Once inside, Jaci took a quick nap on the couch in front of the television while I made us some lunch. I was no wizard in the kitchen, by any stretch, but I managed to toss together a passable grilled chicken salad with the lackluster contents of Jaci's refrigerator. I woke her up a few hours later, as she asked me to, and we ate lunch, talking of everything and nothing at the same time, downing a couple glasses of wine to get us back in the mood – not that we needed it.

“So, what do you want me to do?” I asked her.

“I dunno,” she told me. “Do you feel like doing anything in particular?”

“I was kinda hoping you'd tell me.”

She sighed. “Everything you do is fucking sexy, Niki,” she told me. “There's too much to pick from. You wear your hair a certain way, it makes me want to jump you. You get a certain look in your eyes, it makes me want to jump you. I don't know where to start.”

“Well, you must have things that you think are sexy,” I said.

“Well, sure. Sure, I do. Come with me.”

She led me back to the bedroom and started digging in a beaten-up footlocker in the back of her closet. It looked to be full of old Hallowe'en costumes. She came out with a plastic bag and handed it to me.

“I bought that for an old boyfriend and never wore it. I think the tags are still on. Put it on and come back in the kitchen when you're ready.”

\* \* \*

I was glad I'd come as far as I did in my journey towards accepting being a girl, because if I was an inch less far along I wouldn't have been able to come out of the bedroom. As it was, I was blushed beet red and staring at the floor in an intense mixture of acute embarrassment and eye-crossing arousal. I stepped around the corner nervously. I wore a tight white blouse which tied under my nonesuch breasts and revealed what tiny amount of cleavage I had while baring my flat belly. Low on my hips rode a micro-mini skirt which hardly covered my ass cheeks in red-and-green plaid. I wore white knee socks and a pair of black spike-heeled pumps I'd scrounged from the footlocker which pinched my toes painfully but technically fit me. I'd even gone wild enough to put my hair up in stubby little pigtails over each ear, tied with little red ribbons, which at first looked silly to me – they were no longer than my little finger – but the longer I considered them, the cuter they seemed. I leaned against the doorframe as sexily as I could and stuck my thumb in my mouth, sucking with my red-lacquered, glossy lips.

Jaci tried to speak but it only came out as a little croak.

“So, um... like, you like me like this?” I cooed, knowing how the bubblehead thing turned her on. I actually saw her nipples get stiff through the thin fabric of her tank top, and her mouth opened in a special way she had that meant she was just about as turned on as she could get.

“Wow,” she breathed.

Into it now, I skipped across the room and parked in her lap, rubbing the back of her neck with one long-nailed hand and kissing behind her ear. “You do like,” I whispered between kisses and nibbles. “You so think I'm, like, the hottest thing, live, ever.”

“I do,” she said breathlessly.

“So, um... so, you gonna, like, teach me to suck cock 'n' stuff, or what?” I purred.

“Yeah,” she said. “Take a seat and get a pickle.”

“In a second,” I told her, then squirmed around lasciviously to lay across both her knees. I handed her a hairbrush I'd found on her dressing table with a wide, wooden handle. “First, um, you gotta, like, take care of business, 'cause I've, like, been a real bad girl.”

I felt the hard points of her nipples pressing against my hip as she took the hairbrush. “How hard do you want it, baby?”

“Hard enough to make me, like, scream, okay?”

Without another word, she wrenched one hand behind my back and brought the hairbrush down across my naked ass with a sharp-sounding whack. I barely had time to get my thumb in my mouth and suck for all I was worth, whimpering with every strike. She was swinging hard, making me jump and bite my thumb, and brought tears to the corners of my long-lashed eyes before she finally laid off. But the experience also brought other feelings. Intense feelings.

“Sorry, baby,” she said. “I think you're gonna have a couple bruises. I got a little carried away.”

I popped my wet thumb from my mouth. “I can't believe it. I actually came while you were doing that. You weren't even, like, touching my clit or nothing.”

“I've heard that can happen,” she told me. “For people who are really submissive. But I am sorry if I hurt you.”

“You didn't,” I told her. “I liked it. I liked it a lot.”

“This relationship gets more interesting by the second,” she said. “Now, get a pickle. I've been waiting to do this all day.”

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We succumbed to the giggles at several points during the exercise – I bit a lot of them, I was hungry and I liked pickles – because I was a complete disaster at pickle-sucking. But we kept at it and I got better, even managing to deep-throat once without spluttering and gagging. I made a mental note to swipe some viscous lidocaine jelly from the intubation roll on the ambulance next time I worked. Swallowing that would numb my gag reflex center for about ten or fifteen minutes and let me jam basically whatever I wanted down my throat without discomfort. The thought gave me more excitement than I anticipated.

We did manage to turn one another on, naturally, during our afternoon of Fun with Pickles. So I wound up in my schoolgirl outfit – it was mine, Jaci gave it to me after finding out how well it fit me and how good I looked – on my knees in front of her, sucking on the gigantic pickle she was holding at the level of her crotch, three of my long-nailed fingers sunk to the knuckles inside her and wiggling back and forth and my thumb massaging her button. She came three times, real screamers, and sagged against the wall, panting, telling me she couldn't take any more.

We made an early evening of it – Jaci had work the next morning and five a.m. came entirely too early, and it was my last day before I went in for my surgery. I spent the evening curled up next to her on the sofa, watching the news and checking tomorrow's weather. We ate supper – microwave dinners, nothing fancy – about seven and just cuddled for the rest of the evening, returning to our comfortable, happy silence from the car. Just being around her had its own feeling, as exciting and pleasurable as the sex or the going out together. She turned in around ten, and I piled in the bed next to her, burying my face in her soft, fragrant hair and scratching the tops of her shoulders and upper back with the tips of my long nails. She wrapped her arms around me and stroked my hair. I was asleep in instants, and didn't wake until the morning. I rolled over, sleepily, to see her watching BBC News with the sound turned down and ironing her uniform for the day. The moment rang with a resounding, wonderful, blissfully happy domesticity that made me almost glow with a safe, comfortable happiness that almost surprised me. She kissed me goodbye on the way out the door, and I rolled over and went back to sleep.

\* \* \*

About nine that morning I called a taxi to take me back to my apartment, figuring that my days of being able to get around with just a bicycle were drawing to a close. I hoped I could find a hybrid or a super-efficient diesel I could run on cooking oil or biodiesel. Knowing my luck, though, Dr. Richards would plop me in something super-girly, a powder blue Beetle with pink fuzzy seat covers. Oddly enough, the thought didn't freak me out as much as I thought it would. Somehow, during my grand gherkin adventure, the revulsion surrounding fellatio had disappeared. The thought of a dick in my mouth didn't bring on the sense of near-panic that it had before. A part of me even anticipated it, in a weird way. Maybe even looked forward to it, if I knew somehow that Jaci was the one who wanted me to do it.

Once home, I stripped out of my dirty clothes, stored my new schoolgirl outfit (minus the shoes, which hadn't fit, but I had a pair of super-high heeled stripper shoes that would look great with it).

I decided, with my boring day to kill and no PT that morning, to climb on my neglected bicycle and pedal around my new neighborhood for a while, just to see what was in my vicinity. I slipped into a white baby tee with a big number “00” on the back, a soft white satin corset with padded cups underneath, and a pair of yellow exercise shorts worn over black spandex bike shorts. Little cotton ankle socks with a yellow Nike swoosh and my Reeboks completed the outfit.

I threaded aimlessly through the neighborhoods surrounding the apartment complex, noticing nothing particularly remarkable. Some late-morning joggers walking dogs, a few nice trees. The only thing of any note was a little shopping center which looked like it had seen better days. The only reason I noticed it was because in addition to the standard strip-mall fare – a yoga studio, a tanning salon, a nail salon, a mailbox-rental place, an insurance agency and a disreputable-looking Mexican restaurant – was a tiny little bookstore. I had no self-control where mom-and-pop bookstores were concerned, so I lashed my bike to one of the uprights under the portico and went inside, greeted by the merry tinkling of a bell over the door.

The place was empty of people and full of the wonderful smells of a bookstore – musty paper and dry ink. A matronly woman slouched behind the register, obviously an aging hippie from

the tie-dye tee shirt and the woven hemp skirt. A greying braid hung to her waist and she favored me with a weary smile.

I browsed slowly, very appreciative of the strange and esoteric titles I was finding. Nothing mainstream, nothing Barnes & Noble about this place. I was particularly enthused by the section labeled plainly, "Human Sexuality." It had the standard-issue stuff: the Kama Sutra, The Joy of Sex, the Kinsey Report, those kinds of things, but there was an entire shelf dedicated to kink that caught my eye immediately. I thumbed through some titles with great interest, The Mistress Handbook, the Training of a Slave, Kinky Love. I selected those three and a copy of the Marquis de Sade's original writings and brought them to the register.

The matronly-looking woman looked at them and raised an eyebrow. "Interesting choices," she said.

I blushed prettily. "I've found out a few new things about myself, and thought I'd better try and get educated."

"Good for you," she told me. "It's always better to know than to just be ashamed and tense all the time. I wish you all the happiness in the world."

"That's so sweet," I told her. "I love your place."

"You do? I just opened. It's a neighborhood establishment, literally. My next-door neighbor owns the yoga studio and the tanning salon, her boyfriend is the insurance agent, and the man from across the street owns the restaurant. They make amazing black bean burritos there, by the way. A woman from three houses down is going to try and open a vintage clothing store here next month."

"Cool," I said. "I'm new to the neighborhood, and looking for hangouts. You're probably gonna be seeing a lot of me. I'm Niki, by the way."

She shook my preferred hand. "Maryanne," she said. "Always love having regulars. And if you're interested, you should check out my friend Susan's yoga studio or her tanning salon. She's running some great specials, trying to get new clients. I think she's offering your first two sessions for free or something ridiculous like that. Oh, and tell your friends about us."

"I will," I said, smiling widely. "I promise."

"Tell Susan at the tanning salon that I sent you, you might get an even better deal," she said, winking.

"Okay, okay. You win," I said. Still laughing, I walked into the store next door, my nose immediately assaulted by the smells of coconut oil and fluorescent ozone. It was a tiny place, only about six beds, but it was clean and well-kept. The woman behind the counter was tall, svelte and extraordinarily brown, and favored me with a glittering smile.

"Hi," she said. "Welcome to Tantastic. Can I help you?"

I was still chuckling a little. "Maryanne sent me from next door," I told her.

"She browbeat you into coming over, you mean" she said. "I'm Susan. Are you just humoring her, or are you actually interested in tanning?"

"I could be," I told her. "I don't know much about it, actually."

“Well, with that hair, you're born for a tan,” she told me. “But as fair as you are, and with those freckles, I wouldn't recommend tanning on a bed. For you, I'd stick with the Mystic Tan – the airbrush tanning, you know it?”

I nodded. “Is it safe?”

“Completely. All you have to do is stand there and boom, you're done.”

“How much does it cost?”

“Well, we have a new customer special,” she told me. “First two visits are free if you buy five visits. After that, if you're interested, then a thirty-minute session on a bed is twelve dollars and a Mystic Tan is twenty, or you can pay forty-five dollars a month and have unlimited bed tanning or six Mystic Tans.”

I laughed aloud. “Can I see if it works, first?” I asked her. “Why don't I buy one visit for twenty dollars, like you said, and if I like it then I'll buy five of them and take the free two visits.”

She slapped the table with the palm of her hand. “Sold American.”

I laid a twenty-dollar bill on the counter and she led me back. I had to buy a bikini since I didn't have one of my own, another sixteen dollars, but it was a simple black thong with side-ties that I didn't mind getting trashed in the booth. It took me longer to spread the protective cream on the palms of my hands and my toe- and fingernails and to tuck my hair under the plastic cap Susan had given me than it did to stand in the shower-stall and have my body blasted by horrendously cold blasts of spray. I yelped and tried not to squirm as the automated nozzles doused my body with several thick, greasy coats of the stuff. I got out and toweled off. Susan told me not to wear any tight clothing so as not to cause streaking, so I pulled my clothes on without my corset underneath. I felt completely exposed and naked, not in a good way. I hated the feeling of not having support under my clothes, not that comfortable hug of tight satin and boning around my middle. Still, I thanked Susan after she told me that I should see results in three or four hours. I hopped on my bike and pedaled home, hungry and ready to be home.

To take my mind of the weirdness of being covered with an oil slick that was slowly soaking into my skin and the odd, unsettling feeling of being without a corset, I decided to practice my paramedic skills, particularly in light of my long acrylic nails. I wanted to see if I could get good enough with the claws to forego the necessity of having to cut them. I'd borrowed a plastic arm and an intubation head from Dr. Richards, and I set them up on my kitchen table and started practicing starting IV's and dropping endotracheal tubes, competing with the stopwatch. I didn't trip over the nails nearly as long as I thought I would – wearing latex gloves seemed to smooth things out, and the nails didn't provide much of an obstacle. I had an IV under four minutes and could intubate in under twenty seconds, which were close to my numbers before I had my accident. So I figured that as long as I didn't break one putting someone on a backboard, I shouldn't have to cut them off in order to go back to work. Sure, the commanders would grumble and bitch about protocol, but protocol said no tattoos showing outside the uniform but I personally knew two commanders on my shift alone who had full-sleeve tattoos that were exposed even in dress uniforms. The same went for tee-shirts with logos on them under the uniform shirt. David frequently wore a shirt which prominently displayed “I Ate the Worm at Carlos & Charlie's” under his uniform, visible to the public through the thin cotton, and commanders hadn't said a word. If they could overlook that, then

they could damn well overlook my rhinestone-studded claws. As long as I made sure it didn't effect my job performance.

I whipped myself up some Tuna Helper, just because I didn't feel like really cooking and didn't feel like going out at night on a bicycle, and ate it with a glass of wine, watching the sun go down through the sliding-glass window overlooking my tiny little apartment balcony. The hours I'd spent in the latex gloves had made my fingers pruny from the sweat, so I checked the clock on my microwave. Seven hours since I'd tanned, and I desperately needed some hand lotion, so I went into my bathroom to see the results.

I'd always thought tan lines on a woman were sexy, but I had no idea. My skin had darkened to a rich, even amber, making my freckles less visible and giving my skin a healthy, beach-bunny glow, made all the more dramatic by its contrast with my white-blonde hair. It made me wish I could afford veneers for my teeth, to set it off even more. The sexy, flirtatious blonde staring back at me from the mirror was not even recognizable as anything that could have once been Nick Lightman, from the tight, muscled curves of her flat belly, set off by sparkling rhinestones in the shape of a Playboy Bunny head from a navel piercing, to the sorority-babe tramp stamp tattoo in the small of the back just above a perky, perfect bubble butt, to the long shapely legs to the long, elegant glamour nails which sparkled with rhinestone accents, the full, kissable lips and the long sweeping eyelashes, the subtle but expert make-up.

I stared in open admiration. I was so fucking hot.

My phone rang, and I pressed it distractedly to my ear, still transfixed by the blonde bombshell staring sexily back at me from the mirror. "Hello?"

"Hey, baby," Jaci's bubbly soprano greeted me. "How are you?"

"I'm good. Just about to go to bed," I told her. "How are you?"

"Tired. We've run all day. Huge accident on the freeway about twenty minutes ago, four units, like eighteen or nineteen patients. We just cleared."

"Wow," I said. "You okay?"

"Yeah. Just beat."

"You be careful out there on the roads," I cautioned. "You come home to me. Whatever else happens, you always come home to me, understand?"

She sniffled. Had I made her cry? I wondered. "There's that thing I'm not supposed to say again," she said in a faraway voice.

"Your surgery's at six tomorrow morning," she told me. "I should be off by seven, if we don't catch a late call. So I should be there by the time you wake up."

"That's good," I said. "I kinda wanted you to be the first to see 'em."

She giggled. "Yeah, me too," she said. "And I want to be the first one to play with 'em, too."

"Goodnight, baby. I'll dream about you."

“I always dream about you,” she said, and then the line went dead. I gazed at my beautiful body and face in the mirror for a little while longer, then crawled into bed with one of my new books and read until sleep claimed me.

\* \* \*

The morning had been uneventful, just endless streams of nurses and doctors asking me the same questions over and over. The nurse missed my IV twice, making me think of asking if there was a paramedic around, but I held off. The best news was that I wouldn't be intubated – they'd be controlling my airway with a laryngeal mask airway, which wasn't as secure as an endotracheal tube but was far less invasive. My abused voice wouldn't get any worse, at least.

They put me under, I barely remembered Dr. Richards' voice as they wheeled me into the OR. I woke up to Jaci's tired but smiling face and her warm hand in mine. I brought it to my dry lips and kissed it tenderly.

“Hi,” I croaked. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too,” she said. “You look great.”

Only then did I notice just how high the covers were mounded under my chin. “Oh, wow,” I breathed. “Is that really my rack?”

“It sure is,” she said. “Can I see 'em?”

I steeled myself for my first view of the implacable reminders of my new womanhood, the ones that would be with me until my dying day. No part of me would ever be considered masculine after this. Jaci grabbed the blanket with a flourish, saying, “Ready?”

Nervously, I nodded...

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Nine**

**by Valerie Hope**

JACI WHISKED BACK THE COVERS and revealed them. They were swollen, red and angry but stood like proud, defiant spheres above my chest, the elongated and swollen nipples pointing directly at the ceiling.

“Holy shit,” Jaci breathed. “Wow.”

“You like?” I asked, touching one gingerly. The flesh was abused and sore, but it still managed to send a little frisson of tingling pleasure up my body. The flesh seemed more sensitive, somehow.

“I love,” she said.

“Do they look 'done?’” I asked. “I mean, like I got a boob job?”

“You did get a boob job,” she told me playfully. “And yeah. They look a little 'done,' but that's just because they're so perky. Gravity-defying, y'know. But the main thing is, I couldn't tell that you didn't have any breasts at all before you started. They look really natural. Do you like 'em?”

“I... I mean... they're fucking huge. I know a bet's a bet and all, and you and Staci and everybody kept telling me they'd look great this size, but fuck! I have giganto stripper tits!”

Jaci gave me a gentler version of her playful shove. “Shut up,” she said. “They fit your body, bitch, that's what we meant. And besides, you can't see the rest of yourself. I mean, yeah. You're gonna be a little top-heavy, but we did tell you to stop at a D-cup. But the proportions are right. You'll be able to tell when you stand up.”

“So you're saying I'll get used to these blimps?” I asked.

“In a month you won't remember not having them,” she said.

“So that only leaves one more thing for me to do,” I told her. “I need to get some veneers, get myself a Marie Osmond smile, and I'll be done.”

“Cool!” she said. “I didn't know you wanted to do that!”

“Yeah,” I said. “But, y'know, one thing at a time. Boobs first.”

“Well, baby, I'm really happy for you,” she told me. “You look incredible.”

“Just take me home, okay?” I said in a little-girl voice. “I just want to curl up in bed next to you and read the paper.”

“I can make you breakfast in bed,” she told me.

“Just as long as I can cuddle up next to you, I don't care if I ever eat again, right now,” I said. “I just need to hold my Jaci for a while.”

She smiled and moaned happily, deep in her throat. “My Jaci. I really like that.”

“Well, you are my girl, aren't you?” I asked.

She kissed me, soft and deep. “Body and soul,” she whispered.

\* \* \*

I was in recovery for around an hour longer, just long enough for a brief bout with nausea and a trip to the bathroom. The “girls” hung high on my chest and messed with my center of gravity, but at least the compression garment – a series of extremely tight elastic bands that held them from below, above and both sides – kept them from any painful jiggling. The incisions were below my breasts, the implants behind the pectoral wall, which meant my nipples were still pristine, just huge – the expansion of the flesh on my chest expanded the areolae to the size of the circumference of a soda can and my nipples, which seemed permanently erect post-operatively, to the size of the mini-marshmallows in a cup of hot chocolate. They were, quite simply stated, perfect. And Jaci was right, they did suit my body. When the doctor had asked me whose breasts I wanted mine to look like, I'd picked Kendra Wilkinson, the jock chick who was one of Hef's girlfriends on *The Girls Next Door*. Well, Dr. Childress had nailed it. With the tan, the giant boobs and the platinum blonde hair, I could easily be one of Hef's girlfriends anyway. The thought appealed, but only because it would put me close enough to eventually nail Bridget. That girl did things to me.

I zipped myself into a soft hoodie and slipped into my sweats and flip-flops and let Jaci wheel me out to her car. She transferred me into the front seat like the professional caregiver she was, and I dozed off as she drove me home from Mercy General, chatting about her day. I came and went during the course of the trip – one stop, at the pharmacy, to fill prescriptions for Zofran to combat my nausea and Vicodin for my pain, which I never intended to take. There was also a high-end ointment to combat stretch marks, since the flesh on my chest was stretched almost cruelly over my new, bountiful tits.

I squirmed on the front seat, wishing for comfort that wasn't there. When Jaci got back into the car with my meds, I struggled to sit up. Nobody' warned me how much more difficult sitting up would be, either. These things were heavy.

“Can you do me a big favor, baby? Can you run out to Frederick's or someplace once the mall opens and buy me two or three new corsets? I don't get along too well without 'em. There's money in my purse.”

“Sure, sweetie,” she told me. “I just want to make sure you're settled in, first.”

She drove in silence for a while, contemplating, before asking me, “Does it hurt much?”

“They don't hurt, really,” I explained. “Okay, lifting my arms hurts a lot, but my breasts don't. They're just really, really tender. Like a really bad sunburn, and a first-day-back-at-the-gym sore underneath. Tomorrow's supposed to be the bad day, Dr. Childress says. Why?”

She smiled. “Just wondering,” she told me, “what it's gonna be like for me when I get mine done next year.”

“You're getting a boob job?” I asked.

“Yep,” she said. “January. We'll be able to share bras.”

I giggled. “Wow,” I said. “Cool. I mean, not like I don't think yours are perfect right now, either. I love your breasts. But I love seeing you happy even more.”

“It's not for anybody else but me, really,” she said. “I got teased a lot about being flat-chested, growing up. It means a lot to me to have a big chest. And seeing yours, and how amazing you look, well, I think I just made up my mind. I've been toying with the idea for years, I just never had the courage to step up until now.”

“Well, I promise I'll take care of you,” I said.

She sat back and smiled at me. “By the way,” she said, holding up my cell phone from my purse. “Kevin called for you.”

Was it my imagination, or did I just feel a little thrill of excitement? “When was this?”

“Looks like yesterday,” flipping open the pink phone to check. “Want to call him back?”

She placed the phone in my outstretched hand. I dialed and waited for an answer, which I never got. I waited for his voice mail.

“Hi, Kevin, it's Niki Lightman,” I said. “Phone tag, you're it. Just returning your call. Hopefully, we'll get this right eventually. Talk to you later.”

I hung up and tried to interpret the measuring look Jaci was giving me.

“What?” I demanded.

“Your voice. You brightened up when you got to talk to him,” she commented.

“I told you, I like him,” I defended. “He's smart, he's funny, he's cute. He's into indie rock, he supports local music... what's not to like?”

“Nothing,” she said. “He sounds great. That's what worries me.”

“I don't get it,” I said.

“I mean, he's great. And you – you could just as easily let him slip right through those manicured fingers of yours because you're freaked out by dating a guy.”

“So? I have to start someplace. Sure, I might fuck it up, I might freak out, but that's what first attempts are all about, aren't they?”

“Yeah, but I don't want your first attempt to go south because you can't handle what you're feeling,” she told me. “That's why I think when you go out with him, you're going to go out with

him under my orders and do what I tell you to do while you're out with him. That way it can go well.”

I had that overwhelming feeling, equal parts fear and intense excitement. I swallowed hard. “Jaci, I don't know if I'm ready for what you'd make me do.”

She gave me a mischeivous smile. “How do you know what I'm gonna make you do, honey?” she asked.

“Because I went through half a jar of pickles practicing,” I said. “Look, baby, you know I love it when you take charge. But that doesn't mean I'm not still processing all this stuff I'm figuring out about myself. And it doesn't mean I'm necessarily okay with some of it. It's a lot. It scared me shitless sometimes.”

She caressed my face. “I know that, baby. I felt the same way when I found out about myself. But I do know that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere as far as being okay with it if I hadn't pushed myself. I had to spend a lot of time outside my comfort zone.

“I've never had anyone trust me the way you trust me before,” she went on. “It's the most amazing thing I've ever experienced. And I take the responsibility seriously. I'm not doing this just to turn you on. I promise you that. I'm doing it to help you adjust to this unbelievable change you've made, and to save you making some of the crazy mistakes I made. I'm trying to help.”

I kissed the palm of her hand. “I know that. Even more, I believe that. But I am afraid that you're going too fast for me. I'm not the same as you.”

“No, you're not,” she said. “You're stronger. Stronger than I ever believed a person could be. I'm in awe of you, Nicolette Lightman, and I can't even imagine where you find the determination just to get out of bed in the mornings.”

I blushed. “I don't have a choice.”

“You don't really have a choice here, either. Eventually, you're gonna have to learn how women and men interact in a social situation, and a sexual situation. If you don't want to do it now, then that's cool. But it sounds to me like you do, and I can help make sure you do it well, and in a way that doesn't turn you off to the whole process or leave any scars.”

“And you don't think I could muddle through all on my own?” I asked.

She smiled. “Of course you could,” she said. “Hell, you probably have an advantage, having done it on the other side of the fence. That's not what I'm saying. I'm saying I can help. Don't you get how much helping you means to me? I can take this huge, crazy negative that happened to you and try and make it a positive.”

“Baby,” I said, “you already have.”

She teared up a little, but kept it under control. “I want to do more,” she said. “I want to make everything okay. I know it's stupid, but I still want it.”

“It's not stupid,” I said. “It's the sweetest thing anybody's ever said to me. But you're smart enough to know that only I can make this okay. It has to be me, Jaci.”

“In the end, I know,” she said. “But for now, I can help. I want to help.”

I smiled at her, as heartfelt a smile as I could ever remember offering anyone. “Then help,” I said. “Tell me what to do on this date.”

\* \* \*

I got a house-call from Dr. Richards that afternoon, where he pronounced the breast augmentation procedure a complete and total success. He showed me how to massage the implants so that the scar tissue – called the capsule – didn't contract around them and cause pain. I had to do it several times a day, to make sure the implants stayed loose inside the capsule. It felt kind of nice, so it wasn't a big deal. I got up – it felt really good to walk around, and let me get a head start on learning my new center of gravity – and helped him stow his medical gear back in the black canvas bag he'd brought.

“Doc, I have something I need to ask you. Who's been paying for all this?”

“All what?”

“All my medical bills. These procedures. I haven't seen a single statement, not a single bill, this whole time. Somebody's gotta be footing the bill.”

He glanced at me from where he was coiling his stethoscope around a blood pressure cuff. “United Imaging is picking up most of the tab,” he said, “but for cosmetic things like your implants, it's coming out of the grant I got. The medical and scientific advancements that are coming out of what happened to you are positively huge. The NIH and Walter Reed essentially wrote me blank checks for research, and there's a generous amount set aside for the thing we think you'd need.”

“That's kinda what I wanted to talk to you about,” I told him. “Um... I hate to even ask, but with the new body, and particularly the new jugs – Doc, I really need some new clothes. A lot of new clothes.”

He chuckled. “I hadn't even considered that,” he told me. “Of course you do. I'll have a prepaid credit card issued in your name as soon as I get back to the office. It should take two or three days to process, but in the meantime keep your receipts for anything you pick up and I'll see to it you're reimbursed.”

“Thanks, Doc. I couldn't begin to tell you how much I'm gonna need.”

“I have a teenage daughter, Niki,” he told me. “I have a pretty good idea how much gets spent on clothes. Look, just get what you need. We'll count costs later, I'm not going to quibble about amounts. I mean, don't go overboard – I'll have questions if you go out and get six Armani suits. But a few expensive things, well... you're a very pretty girl, and a pretty girl should have some nice things in her closet.”

I smiled. “I'd hug you again, but it's still a little painful,” I said. “Thanks, Doc. I really appreciate your understanding. I didn't know you had a daughter.”

He pulled a wrinkled picture of a pretty redheaded girl in a letter jacket out of his wallet. “Hayley,” he told me. “She's sixteen.”

“She's really pretty,” I mentioned.

“That's from her mother, believe me,” he said. “Me, I just live in a constant state of panic and sleep with a gun under my pillow.”

I laughed. "I'd think that any daughter of yours could take care of herself."

"Which reminds me," he said. "As soon as you're healed, I've asked Katy to start you with some rudimentary self-defense training. Not just for the day-to-day stuff, either – you get some pretty rough characters in the back of that ambulance of yours."

"That's a really good idea," I said. "I wish you could offer that to all the female medics in the service."

"Maybe we can," he said. "I just need to make some calls."

"Doc, you're a godsend," I told him. "I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You'd manage," he told me honestly. Did I imagine it, or were his eyes a little wet? "You're a truly remarkable person, no matter your gender."

"Still, I'm still grateful," I told him.

"No need for that," he said, stuffing items back into his bag perhaps a little more quickly than was absolutely necessary. "On my tax return, it says I have one daughter. But in my heart, I consider myself to have two. And if Hayley turns out anything at all like you, I'll be a proud man indeed."

A lump sprang unbidden to my throat. "I... I love you, too," I croaked.

He shook off the emotion with an effort and was instantly back behind that implacable mask of Army detachment. "Well, everything looks good," he told me in a dramatically different tone of voice. "I'll see you again at the end of the week. But if anything changes, call me immediately. Even before you call 911."

"I'm a medic," I told him. "I'd have to be dead before I called 911."

"Then just call me," he said. "As many surgeries as you've had, you're at a high risk of infection. We've come too far together for something as stupid as staph to get you now."

"I agree," I said. "I'm monitoring temp q 6." He relaxed visibly hearing the medical jargon, I could see his shoulders lower. "Temp q 6" only meant I was taking my temperature every six hours, but hearing the trade patois gave him a way to veer away from almost saying he was worried about me.

"Is there anything else?" he asked me, clearing his throat.

"Just one more thing," I said. "I'd appreciate a recommendation of a good dentist. I'll put it under my personal health insurance, since it doesn't pertain to the transformation, but I'm way overdue."

He nodded. "I'll have some names for you by close of business day."

I saw him out, then slumped in a recliner. The surgery and the soreness were taking a bit of a toll on my endurance, I felt completely exhausted. I sat there for about an hour, until I heard Jaci's car pull up outside.

"Hey, you're up!" she exclaimed as she came through the door, laden with shopping bags. "How do you feel?"

“Sore and tired,” I said. “But okay. Dr. Richards came by, said everything checks out. The Girls are healing nicely.”

She held up the bags – the purple glossy plastic of Frederick's of Hollywood, the pink-and-white horizontal stripes of Victoria's Secret, some others I didn't recognize. “I found you some really cute corsets,” she told me. “I have to admit, I went a little nuts. I just couldn't resist. When you're better, you can model them for me.”

I managed a weak smile. “I'd like that,” I said. “But in the meantime, find a plain one for me so I can put it on. Dr. Childress said it would work as well as the compression garment and it would make me feel a lot better having some support.”

“You really feel better wearing one, don'tcha?” she asked.

I nodded. “It's like wearing a hug,” I explained. “It's hard to explain, baby, but somewhere along the way, I got to where I needed them. It's a little disconcerting. I'm gonna have to find some plain ones to wear under my uniform, it's gotten that serious.”

“I think it's cool,” she told me. “I mean, I know girls who still sleep with teddy bears, and some who still carry around yearbook pictures from high school. You get attached to things.”

“What did you get attached to?” I asked.

“A really incredible blonde girl,” she told me. “And a really tacky necklace of bottlecaps that I made in summer camp when I was ten.”

I changed out of the torturous compression garment – the Girls sprang free and bounced painfully on my chest until I could get myself laced into the pale pink satin corset that Jaci pulled out of the Victoria's Secret bag. It was very pretty but had a thankful lack of lace trim. As sensitive as my skin was right now, the slightest itchiness would've driven me crazy.

“Oh my God!” Jaci squealed. “I never even noticed your tan! It looks amazing! Did you lie out while I was at work?”

I grinned. “No, actually, I found a cute little tanning salon a few blocks from my place. This cool lady named Susan runs it. I think I'm gonna get a membership there, I really like the way it looks.”

“Ooh, I want one, too!” she said, bouncing. “I'll go with you. I love tanning.”

“I could be into seeing you with tan lines,” I purred. “Sexy.”

“I'll say,” she replied. “If you weren't recovering from surgery, I'd so be molesting you right now. How is it you just keep managing to look better and better?”

“Dunno,” I said. “I'm not really trying. I'm just trying to have some fun.”

“I know,” she told me. “That's what's so amazing about it. You're sexy without trying to be, and that makes you twice as sexy.”

“I just hope it doesn't make too big a problem at work,” I sighed. “David's hard enough to deal with sometimes. I mean, he's going to spend the whole shift staring at my tits anyway, the last thing I want is him drooling all over me.”

Jaci looked a little hurt. “Oh,” she said. “I... I guess I thought...”

“Thought what?” I asked.

“I kinda thought you'd partner with me,” she said.

“Oh, baby,” I said. “I never even... Jaci, I'm so sorry. I just assumed that I was gonna go back to my original shift. Dave's been my partner for so long, I didn't even think about working with anyone else. That was really insensitive of me.”

She shook her head. “No, it wasn't,” she said. “We never really talked about this, it makes sense you didn't think about changing. But if I work B shift and you're still on C shift, then we only get to see each other one day out of every three.”

“Damn,” I said. “Baby, I've just been so focused on going back to work. I didn't even think about what that was gonna mean for us. Look, I'll call Commander Devlin in scheduling next week. I don't know if we can be partners straight away, since you're new to the service, but maybe in a few months.”

“You don't have to do that,” Jaci told me. “Really. If anyone moves, it should be me. You have seniority, after all, and you and Dave work really well together. Everyone says y'all're Teamo Supremo.”

“You know I'd partner with you in a hot second,” I told her.

“I know,” she said. “But y'know, if we worked together and dated, we'd probably get sick of each other real quick. Maybe not partnering up is a good idea.”

“You think so?”

“No,” she said. “But I'm looking for a bright side.”

“How about this,” I offered. “How about we don't worry about this until I get cleared to go back to work. We have a few weeks before I can lift anything over about twenty pounds. They're not gonna let me near a stretcher until I can get a hundred and twenty off the floor with no problems.”

She snorted. “I'm gonna have a hard time not thinking about it.”

“Well, c'mere,” I said, opening my arms. “Maybe I can make you forget your troubles for a little while, at least.”

She snuggled against me on the recliner, careful to not put any pressure on my tender new breasts. We just sat there, watching whatever came on television, and I even dozed off for a few minutes. I stroked her hair and periodically pressed soft kisses into her scalp.

“This feels nice,” I commented.

“Yeah,” she said in a quiet, small voice, as if afraid to disturb the moment.

“I'm sorry I upset you,” I half-whispered.

“Shh,” she bade. “Don't mention it.”

“No,” I said. “I think I have a solution.”

“You do?”

“Maybe,” I said. “I don't want to be away from this, Jaci, not ever. I want to feel like this – right now – as much and as often as I can.”

“Me, too.”

“But I think you might be right about not partnering together,” I went on. “I don't want to take the chance that we'll burn out on one another, and working together day in and day out would make that tough. Plus, there's the temptation to sleep together while we're on shift, and that could be a disaster. The more I think about it, the worse an idea it sounds to me. I'd much rather bump into you at Mercy General ER once or twice a shift and put up with David's lame attempts to sweet-talk me than risk us breaking up 'cause we're smothering each other.”

I felt her nod beneath my chin. “I know. I thought the same thing.”

“But if we can get on the same shift, then we get two days out of every three together,” I continued. “Just us. If you're okay with it, I'd like to stay on C shift with David. He may be a horndog, but he is one of my best friends. And you weren't kidding when you said we work well together. You're new enough to still be shopping for a partner. Once you have one that you click with, baby, you'll understand better how important it is to stick with them.”

“Okay,” she said. “I think we can do that. But that's still a lot of time apart.”

I took a deep breath. I was going somewhere I'd never gone before, not with anybody. “It doesn't have to be,” I told her. “Not – not if we move in together.”

She raised her head to look deeply in my eyes, startlement written plainly on her face. “Seriously?”

I nodded. “I'm not sure what I feel for you, Jaci, but I know it's way bigger than me. All I can think about when I'm apart from you is when I can be with you again. If we lived together – hell, at work we can just tell everybody we're roommates so they won't ask too many questions – then we could be together as long as we weren't working. We could spend as much time as we wanted figuring out what this thing between us is. That is, I mean, if you want to.”

She was crying, sparkling tears gathering in the corners of her eyes. “Of course I want to, you stupid bitch,” she told me. “I've never wanted anything this much.”

I smiled. “Then it's settled,” I said. “That was easier than I thought.”

“I've never done this before,” she told me.

“Me neither,” I confided. “We'll make it up as we go. We're both pretty smart. There's only the one problem. I hate my apartment. It's so cookie-cutter. No character. And your place is cute, but it's way too small. We're gonna have to find a new place.”

“No problem,” she told me. “My cousin is a realtor. He found me the place I'm in now, he can find us a place together in an afternoon. As soon as we both know where we're gonna be working, we can find one that's convenient and one with a little character, like you want.”

I kissed her. “Wow,” I said. “I just got the all-over warm fuzzies. Think we got a shot at domestic bliss?”

“Not the white picket fence as it was explained to me,” she said, “but I’ll definitely take it. This just makes so much sense to me, and it takes all the sting out of you and me not being partners.”

She got up, wiping her eyes unashamedly, and fished her cellphone out of her little Coach purse. She scrolled through her address book and pressed it to her ear. “Hi, Commander Devlin, this is Jaclyn Campbell. I’m on B shift on Medic 21.”

A pause. “I’m really good, thanks. I was wondering if there are any openings for full time on C shift, anywhere in West or South District. I’m looking to make a move in the next couple months.”

Another pause. “No, nothing serious. C shift just fits my schedule a lot better for the foreseeable future. I’ll actually really miss my current partner. Staci is a great medic and a good friend.”

A long pause. “Medic 18? Cool. I’ve heard that place really hops.”

I nodded to affirm whatever the commander was saying on the phone. Medic 18 was one of our busier stations. I hoped Jaci didn’t burn out there.

“Or Medic 16,” she said. One of the slower trucks, and in a much better neighborhood. She wouldn’t get as many of the exciting calls, but there were plenty of gooey, bloody trauma calls on the freeway and enough elderly people in the district to where she’d get some interesting medical calls. Of the two, I hoped she picked Medic 16.

“Hang on a second, Commander,” she said, and placed her hand over the receiver. “I could get a spot on Medic 18 with Alannah Hendricks in three months, or Medic 16 with Kylie Chan in six weeks. What do you think?”

“Take ‘Sixteen, it’s a really good truck,” I said. “Eighteen hops, but it burns you out. Nobody stays at ‘Eighteen longer than a year. And Kylie’s a trip. I worked with her for two weeks once while Dave was on vacation. You’ll like her.”

She uncovered the receiver. “Commander? Go ahead and put me down for the spot on Medic 16. I’ll fax you the paperwork either today or tomorrow. Thanks.”

She flipped her phone shut with a soft smack. “Done, and done,” she said. “Wow, this is really easy. I think it was meant to happen.”

“Don’t tell me you’re into all that destiny and kismet stuff,” I groaned.

“Nothing like that,” she laughed. “It’s just like the world is helping us be together, is all. Just ‘cause you don’t believe in it doesn’t mean I can’t be happy about it, so shut up.”

I yawned. “I think I should probably try and get some sleep,” I said muzzily.

“I should call Staci and let her know I’m transferring,” she said. “But if you want, I’ll come curl up next to you when I’m done.”

“I’d really like that,” I said, standing up with an effort. I made my careful, post-operative way into the bedroom. The painkillers were wearing off, I was starting to hurt, but I hoped I could be in bed and asleep before I got to the point where I needed to take another. I’d seen too

many medics get way too involved with prescription medication to be comfortable around Vicodin.

I never even stirred when she slid into the bed next to me.

\* \* \*

The next day sucked ass. Once, I'd gotten on the wrong side of a steroid freak bodybuilder in the back of the ambulance who blamed me for his headache after a six-day cocaine bender. He hadn't beaten me this badly. The surgery was only on my chest, so I couldn't really figure out why my legs and ass hurt. I spent the day as motionless as I could when I wasn't sleeping. Jaci came in to check on me a couple of times, to bring me meals and to check the states of the little incisions under my massive breasts. Once she stayed long enough to rub my feet which had me asleep in moments. The next day was more of the same, except for the times I forced myself to get up and walk around, wash myself and feed myself. Jaci went to work that day, so I had my place to myself. I missed her, but I was grateful for some quiet in which to suffer in silence – medical personnel made the worst patients imaginable, and I hated the fuss that Jaci tried to make over me. Dr. Richards called me once, saying that he had the prepaid credit card ready for me to pick up when I was ready.

I was already awake when Jaci got home from work. I was up, making pancakes, and pressed a cup of coffee in her hand and a kiss on her lips.

“How was your day, baby?” I asked.

“It was great,” she replied, slurping coffee. “Mmm. That's good. No, we ran about six calls during the day, cleared our last one around ten at night and then went back to the station and slept all night.”

“That's unusual for Medic 21,” she said.

“Oh, that reminds me. Our district changed a week ago. We only run south of MLK now, and the Gables Nursing Home and the Creekside Apartments are now in Medic 23's district. It's really knocked down on call volume.”

“Nobody tells me anything,” I grumped. “So, then, you're up for a big day?”

“Sure I am,” she said. “Rarin' to go. What do you have in mind?”

“Got a new bod and new jugs to go with it,” I said. “So the Powers That Be have decided to pony up for new clothes. I need somebody to go with me to buy 'em.”

“You're shitting me,” she said. “They're going to buy you a whole new wardrobe?”

“Amazing what people will stretch to when they're terrified you're going to sue them for millions and millions of dollars,” I said. “Now sit down. Your breakfast is getting cold.”

She flopped at one of the dining chairs and took a long sniff of the pancakes. It was one of the few things I could cook well. “You're a great wife,” she said.

She dug in, and so did I. The day was just getting started.

\* \* \*

I was feeling better, to be sure, but I still wasn't close to a hundred percent. Jaci volunteered to be chauffeur for the day, but I insisted that we use the credit card that Richards was giving me to go and fill up her car. He'd left the card with Shon at the desk, and she, Jaci and I chatted for about ten minutes. Shon was very appreciative of my new cans. She asked if she could feel them, since she'd never actually felt fake tits before. So I let her feel me up in Dr. Richards' waiting room, giggling and blushing madly.

From there, we browsed through Maryanne's bookstore and got month-to-month memberships to Susan's tanning salon while we waited for the mall to open. Jaci got along famously with both of them, and when we mentioned we'd be looking for a place together soon, Susan was quick to add that there was property for rent in their neighborhood. I took a business card and promised to call her as Jaci dragged me out the door.

We got to the mall a few minutes before the rent-a-cops unlocked the doors. I was wearing a new pink satin corset with black lace trim under a blue-and-white Adidas hoodie, and a matching pink satin and black lace thong under faded denim Daisy Duke short-shorts. White platform flip-flops adorned my feet and I was wearing one of the pairs of giant hoop earrings I'd grown to love, which tickled the tops of my shoulders when I turned my head. A little pink barette with a heart on it held my bangs out of my face.

"Got a plan?" Jaci asked me as we started walking through the largely empty mall.

I unfolded the list I'd made while Jaci was at work. "I'm fixed for corsets, thanks to you," I said, "but I need underwear. Sexy stuff, sure, but some plain stuff for work, too. I would really like a couple pairs of jeans, and maybe a for-real set of PJ's instead of scrubs."

"Easy enough," she said. "What else?"

"I want a swimsuit," I said. "One for the tanning booth that I don't mind getting messed up and one to show off in. Then some dressy stuff. All I have is casual. After that, it's jewelry and shoes and then we're out of here."

"Sounds like a plan, baby," she said. "Are you gonna budget for any fun stuff?"

"Sure," I said. "As long as I don't go overboard, I think Dr. Richards will okay anything I buy. I also have some of my own money, if we find anything that we can't justify but still really want."

"Like a plasma screen TV," Jaci commented, and I gave her some of her own 'playful shove' medicine.

"Where do you want to start?" she asked me.

"I've been having good luck with Macy's so far," I mentioned. "Why not start there and work our way out?"

"That sounds good to me," she said, and linked her arm through mine, leading me across the massive expanse of shiny tiles, past the fountain and into the mall proper.

\* \* \*

We staggered out of the place about six hours later, exhausted and footsore. To save my abused upper body, we'd taken to walking out to the car every two stores to drop off what we'd already bought. I would be forever pulling tags off and putting things away, and we still had a run to Target to make, to buy coat hangers and stuff to hold all the stuff we'd just bought.

Tired as I was, I'd had a really good time, trying things on and modeling them for Jaci. I'd even talked her into picking up a couple things, a little blue cocktail dress that hugged her curves deliciously and a pair of dangly earrings that looked entirely too cute on her to leave in the store.

We hit Target and picked up some household stuff, and then Jaci dragged me to a place called Taboo Lingerie to get what she called 'fun stuff.' This consisted mostly of leather and vinyl stuff and super-high-heeled shoes with platforms. I was now the proud owner of a pair of clear platform heels, now, meaning I could dance on a pole in any club in the city. Oddly enough, the thought of maybe doing an amateur night one night made me a little excited. Jaci was right about my exhibitionism. Of course, I'd probably have to go out of town if I really wanted to do that, since if word got out at work I'd never hear the end of it. Flashes of Liv Tyler and Alicia Silverstone in the Aerosmith Crazy video flashed happily through my head, with Jaci and I re-cast in the roles.

We grabbed a quick bite at Boston Market for the way back to my place and took six trips to get all the shit out of her car. I sighed as I looked at the piles of bags and sacks and boxes stacked on my living room floor, lamenting at how long it would take to put everything away.

I felt Jaci's hungry lips at my neck and her hands on my belly. "Don't pout," she told me. "I can't keep my hands off you when you pout."

I moaned and threaded my fingers in her soft hair. "I just don't want to put all this shit away," I said. "I don't even know where I'm gonna put it all."

"So don't," she said, kissing. "Let's relax a little, first."

I turned my head into her kiss and forgot all about housecleaning.



SUMMARY:

## PREHOSPITAL CARE

### Part Ten

by Valerie Hope

I WOKE UP IN THE MIDDLE of the stack of shopping bags, my panties pushed down around my ankles. Jaci was up, humming softly to herself, warming up our thoroughly cold meatloaf in my microwave. I rolled over, squashing my new tits a little painfully, and propped my chin on my fists, watching her.

“You're certainly in a good mood,” I said.

“Seven orgasms does that to a girl,” she told me, winking. “C'mon and eat, baby, and then I'll help you start putting all this away.”

I stood up with an effort – I was still sore and stiff from my surgery – and put my arms around Jaci. “This is really good,” I said. “Us, together, like this... It's really good.”

“I know,” she said. “Y'know, this is the first time ever that I've enjoyed the being together every bit as much as I've enjoyed the sex. And I've enjoyed the sex more than I can even say.”

I kissed her. “Y'know, all that silly talk about us being meant to be together,” I said. “I'm sorry I blew that off. I think you might be right.”

“I'm glad,” she said. “And it wasn't silly talk.”

“It was romantic,” I told her. “And I'm too used to equating *romantic* with *silly*.”

“That's a very guy way to think about it,” she said.

We sat down to dinner and ate like starving women. Jaci stepped out onto my balcony for a cigarette after we were done just as my phone rang.

“Hey, Niki, it's Kevin,” the voice on the other end answered. “Finally got you.”

“Yeah,” I said. “How are you doing?”

“I'm good, really good. How are you?” he asked.

“Very good,” I told him. “Sorry I've been so hard to get a hold of. I had surgery earlier this week.”

“Surgery? Are you okay?”

“I'm great,” I told him. “I got my boobs done. I'm stiff and sore, but doing well.”

“Wow,” he said. “You certainly are direct.”

I giggled, just like I'd done to attract him in the club. "Yeah, I get that all the time. So, I wanted to tell you. If the offer's still open for that band showcase, I'd really love to go with you."

"That's fantastic," he said brightly. "I was hoping you'd say that. And listen, if you're into it, there's a pre-party for VIPs before the show. I'd love it if you could come to that, too."

"Sure, sounds like fun," I said.

"Cool! It's an 'Eighties party, some of the bands are gonna be there doing covers. Dress in your best Spandex, okay? It's gonna be a lot of fun."

I laughed. "Okay, sure. Listen, can you pick me up? I don't have a car right now. I can meet you someplace."

"No problem. You have my card, it's got my email address on it. Send me the where and the when. Party starts at eight."

"Great. I'm really looking forward to it."

"Cool. Niki – I'm really glad you called."

"Me, too," I said shyly. "See you Saturday."

I closed my phone and smiled. The die was cast, now. I had my first date.

Jaci came in, smelling faintly of smoke. "Who was that?" she asked.

"Kevin," I told her. "We're going out this Saturday."

"Outstanding!" Jaci bubbled.

"Do you know how to do big hair?" I asked her.

\* \* \*

We spent the evening in our underwear putting away all my new clothes. The stack of tissue paper and empty shoeboxes grew steadily and my closet began to bulge with the surplus. I even had to consign some of my old sweats and tee shirts to the Goodwill pile, since there was no room for them anymore and there were several that I didn't like or didn't fit over my new titties. We played techno music over my stereo from Jaci's iPod and danced in my bedroom floor. It was nearly midnight before we climbed into bed and made love. It was the wonderful mix of fucking and lovemaking that we'd discovered, at times tender and sighing and other times wild and a little rough. I'd never experienced anything that satisfied me quite so much. She paid some attention to my new, bountiful bouncing chest, although I could tell that she really wanted to fixate on the new 'additions.' I fell asleep having had a handful of orgasms running the gamut from little baby whimpers all the way to screamers, and a couple of top-notch spankings. I brought Jaci off about eight times, too. We collapsed, exhausted, in a heap of tangled, sweaty legs and arms, completely sated and satisfied.

I woke when the sunlight slanting through my blinds fell across my eyes. My tits were really sore this morning, but nowhere near as bad as they'd been the last two days. I celebrated having the worst of my recovery behind me by flushing the Vicodin down the toilet.

I made coffee and called Staci, asking if she knew of any good vintage clothing stores, explaining about the 'Eighties party. She happily agreed to help me shop and also to show me

how to do my hair, offering old stuff from her own vintage wardrobe for me to wear. I agreed to meet her for lunch Friday morning.

Jaci stumbled in, rubbing her eyes and yawning. She wore only a tight-as-sin yellow tee shirt and panties, and her hair was still tousled from the night before. She looked impossibly sexy. I slithered into her arms and gave her a passionate, snail-tongued kiss. Her breath was foul but I didn't care.

"Want coffee, baby?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said muzzily. "How long have you been up?"

"About an hour," I told her. "Held off taking a shower so I didn't wake you up. Actually, that's a lie. I held off taking a shower so we could take one together."

She giggled. "We should totally put a webcam up in here. We could make a million dollars letting guys jerk off watching us do it in every room of your house."

"I kinda like that idea," I told her.

"What do you have going on today?" she asked.

"I'm spending the day naked with this incredible girl I'm dating," I said proudly.

"Well, you're kinda shot for food around here," she told me. "We have to go to the grocery store, at least."

I sighed. "I guess I'm gonna have to go buy a car, soon," I told her. "My old place, I could shop every day at the little Korean market and I didn't need a car to cart it all home. Dr. Richards didn't exactly think of that when he moved me in here. There's not a grocery store for miles."

"I'll take you, baby, you know I will."

"I know, but eventually I'm gonna need a car. Especially if we're posted at different stations. Logistically, it's impossible. And from some of the horror stories I've heard from Staci and Katy, I'm really dreading shopping for a car as a woman. You know I can't stand being patronized."

"I should come along. I'd love to be there and watch while you tear some smarmy car salesman a new one for showing you the makeup mirror before he shows you the gas mileage."

"Is it really that bad?" I asked.

"Yeah," she chuckled. "But you'll get through it. We all have."

"Rite of passage," she said. "But what works in the club works just as well in a dealership. Act dumb as shit and show off your tits, and then completely shut 'em down when they try to play you. Play it right and they'll *give* you a car."

"Hmm," I said, chewing my bottom lip. "That could actually be *fun*."

"That's what I like about you," Jaci told me. "You can find the fun in anything."

"So, do you want to go pick up some groceries?" I asked her.

"Let's take that shower, and then yeah. Maybe rent a movie?"

“Cool,” I said. “But, when we go – will you please let me wear panties this time? Getting the pickles was fun, but the draft was terrible.”

Jaci choked on her coffee.

\* \* \*

The rest of the afternoon passed quietly. Jaci and I bought some food, enough for a decent at-home dinner of pasta and steamed vegetables and a little bit of junk food for curling up on the couch together to watch *Iron Man* and *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*. I fell asleep with my head in her lap.

I woke up in darkness, my bladder demanding urgent attention. Reluctantly, I extricated myself from Jaci's embrace and padded into my bathroom to relieve myself. I hardly even had to pause to remind myself to do it sitting down any more. I let the heavy dampness go – I actually missed the intense relief that urination provided me when I was male. For a female, it was just a lessening of the fullness in my middle. Hell, everything about the process was different for girls, I'd found, including the fact that when my bladder was full and I sneezed or laughed particularly hard I peed myself a little.

Alone in the bathroom, in the middle of the night, I couldn't really help thinking about all the things that had happened to me in the last few months. From a lonely but driven man, focused on his career and living for his job, to a sexy, young and vivacious blonde bombshell of a girl, about to move in with her girlfriend and try to find a way back into a career she loved, to regain the respect and prestige she'd had before the change, except now that selfsame respect and prestige was that much harder to get simply by virtue of her being a girl. That, and now she was surrounded by co-workers whose relationships with her had changed fundamentally. Acquaintances were now lovers, professional respect had been exchanged for true friendship, and those she'd truly liked before now had no idea what to do with her. Everything – literally *everything* – about my life had changed from the ground up, and somehow I was expected to just roll with the deluge of punches that seemed to fly at me from every direction.

Not for the first time, nor the last, I thought about not going back. I thought about getting an online nursing degree and going to work in a hospital, or just leaving healthcare entirely and finding a job doing something else. It was all I'd ever known, taking care of other people, but there had to be some way for me to make a living doing it that didn't involve an ambulance. Hell, it might actually be *nice*, being around people who weren't bleeding or throwing up.

I shook my head, to clear the thoughts from it. This was just runaway self-pity. I couldn't run from my problems, and leaving the job I loved, the job that challenged me so profoundly, was nothing but naked cowardice. I just hoped that the job I left was the job I'd return to. The people I'd worked with before had known me as a fair-haired, lanky man and they'd been hard enough to deal with. I didn't want to think about the problems I'd face with a face that belonged on the cover of *Vogue* and a body that belonged in the middle of *Playboy*. I had the sinking suspicion that my professional life was about to become more complicated by an order of magnitude.

Disheartened, I crawled back onto the couch and drew Jaci's warm arms around me. Somehow, she made my problems seem a lot less overwhelming, making me feel like I

had something resembling a shot at actually making my life work out. For that alone, I would stay with her. She just made things *okay*. No one else in my life had ever made me feel that way.

Groaning lightly, I realized that my mind was going far too fast for me to return to sleep any time soon. I'd moved from the strange, difficult puzzle that my life had become to trying to untangle the complex, passionate knot of emotions in my heart that represented this wild, exuberant woman who'd barged her way into my life. This woman who made me *want* to dress like a schoolgirl and get spanked. What *did* I feel for her, anyway? She confused me terribly, but it was *nothing* compared to what I felt when she wasn't with me.

If Jaci was destined to turn my life upside down, then she did it to a life that was already turned upside down by a freak accident. *Which means she turned it right side up again*, I thought with a smile. But I was gonna *have* to sort out just what she was making me feel, I couldn't go on feeling this confused and turned around. Nobody could live like that, and eventually I'd have no choice but to seek out some kind of emotional stability.

I lay there in Jaci's arms, tired but comfortable, until the first weak rays of sunlight began to paint shreds of orange and pink across the eastern sky. I got up and took a quick shower, taking special care around my incisions, and made myself a cup of coffee. I took the steaming cup and sat in front of my laptop, bringing it to life and checking my email. The first one I opened guaranteed me a fifty-percent increase in the size and girth of my penis. I had to laugh.

The next was the reply to the certification letter that Dr. Richards had given me, allowing me to return to work with no restrictions in six weeks. The letter from Medical Command was all business, but a block of text in blue at the bottom from Commander Rick Shepherd, a personal note, saying how happy they all were that I was coming back, and a purchase order number for new uniforms.

I shut the computer down with an ear-to-ear smile that I couldn't suppress no matter how I tried. I was *back*. I just had to let the Girls heal and I was back on the truck, back to doing what I knew best. Those six weeks couldn't pass fast enough to suit me.

I slipped into one of my new corsets – a pretty pale yellow with white embroidered roses – and my pink sweats and one of my new tee shirts with a screen-print of lipstick kisses all around it. I took a little time to put on some makeup and pull my hair into a little ponytail at the nape of neck. The corset lifted my new titties shockingly, feeling as though they were under my chin, but made them look sensational overall. A quick look in the mirror confirmed my suspicions – if I were still male, I would so do myself. Damn, I looked cute. I left a post-it note for Jaci, telling her I'd be home for lunch, and took off on my bike.

It was a long, tiring ride – the surgery had taken a lot out of me, and my energy hadn't returned as quickly as I'd been hoping. But I finally pulled into the Toyota dealership near the freeway, ready to sign my life away while at the same time being patronized for my new gender and having my fake tits stared at.

I walked into the showroom and walked right past the Tacomas and Camrys towards my target in the back. A too-slick, polished salesman plotted an intercept course right towards me, catching me (and my breasts, which he couldn't take his eyes off) well before I even got a good look at the car I was considering.

“Hi,” he said in a smooth baritone. “Can I help you find something?”

I sighed. This was going to be a long morning.

\* \* \*

To my surprise, other than having my tits stared at the entire time I was there, it was pretty standard stuff. A lot of time spent trying to convince me that I was taking food from the mouths of the sales staff's starving children, that they were, simply by dint of having made my passing acquaintance, willing to go without a penny's profit on the sale just because I was such a *special* person for coming in. I weathered it as best I could, finally using my good credit and a generous down payment to secure a new Prius in candy-apple red. I loaded my bicycle in the back with the unwanted assistance of the sales staff and drove home.

“I love it!” Jaci exclaimed, walking around it while *ooing* and *aahing*. “It's so *you*, baby, it's perfect! I can't believe you just went out and *did* it!”

“Well, I had it in my head as an unpleasant task that I just wanted to get over with,” I told her. “So I did. I did all my research online, I pretty much knew what I wanted when I walked in.”

I blushed a little. “Truth be told, I probably coulda got a better deal if I'd worn something a little more low-cut,” I went on. “They were pretty fascinated by these things.”

She squeezed me gently, making me shiver. “I know exactly how they feel.”

“You should, you've certainly felt them enough,” I teased. “So, feel like going for a spin?”

“Hell yeah I do,” she said, then flinched when I tossed her the keys. “You mean *me* drive?”

I laughed. “You're not gonna wreck it,” I said. “Go on, live a little. Hell, keep that key. I was gonna give it to you anyway.”

She kissed me soundly. “You're awesome,” she said.

“So, why don't you take me to City Uniforms,” I told her. “I have to go get fitted.”

She winked at me and climbed into the drivers' seat.

\* \* \*

It was getting to be a habit, coming home loaded down with bags. We'd lucked out on a slow day at City Uniforms, the central supplier for official uniforms for the police, sheriff's department, fire department and EMS. They were able to fit me and get my alterations done in a few hours, long enough for Jaci and I to grab a quick lunch at a great little Greek place a few blocks away and then come back and pick up my six day-shirts, six night-shirts, eighter pairs of cargo pants, my Class A dress uniform, two jackets and my Nomex bunker gear. I had to buy myself a new duty belt, since my old one could have wrapped around me twice, and a new pair of boots. I also grabbed a window sticker, displaying my credentials as a licensed paramedic, for the back window of my new car. Dr. Richards had already handled getting my new photo to Medical Command for my duty ID, so once I transferred my cellphone case, pager case, radio holster, fanny pack, Leatherman and flashlight holster from my old duty belt onto my new one – I hoped the skinny new belt would have enough real estate to accommodate all the gear I was required to carry and still be able to bend – I'd be ready to go back to work. It was a little strange, hanging my licenses on my belt, under a name that still didn't feel completely mine. As much as Jaci claimed it was completely me, that it suited me to my toenails, a

beautiful sexy name for a beautiful sexy girl, it still took someone calling me 'Nicolette' two or three times to get my attention, whereas I still responded to 'Nicholas' almost immediately. I was thankful that 'Niki' worked. I'd been 'Nicky' when I was male, often enough, particularly among my family. But in my head, I still spelled it with a c and a y instead of two i's and one k. It was one of the last things standing between me and a clean break with my old life, the one that kept me from growing past the accident I'd had.

I was still thinking about that when I pulled my new car into the parking space outside my apartment. I must have been miles away, because Jaci noticed and offered me a penny for my thoughts.

I caressed her cheek. "Just thinking about all the stuff I have to do," I said.

"Do? Do for what?"

"To finish being a girl," I said.

"Can I help?" she asked me.

I thought for a second, blowing out a long breath. "You probably can," I said at length. "I'm just not sure how."

"Talk to me, baby."

"Well, you know how I like it when you take control?" I asked.

"Mm-hmm."

"So, I'm having some problems accepting some stuff. First and foremost, my name. So I need you to call me 'Nicolette' for a while," I told her. "And baby, I need you to find a way to make me *like* it."

\* \* \*

I'd never been a huge fan of scarves, so I wondered why Jaci had bought several plain silk scarves out of her own pocket while we'd been out on our shopping jaunt. I pulled against the silk securing my wrists and ankles to the frame of my bed, experimentally. I couldn't move at all, and the complete lack of control had made my nipples hard enough to etch glass and was beginning to fill my bedroom with the faint scent of my musky arousal. Another scarf gagged me, turning any noise I made into a muffled moan.

Jaci sat on the bed next to me, rubbing the tips of her nails up and down my naked body, making me squirm and tremble. She lightly kissed my belly and gave my gigantic new tits a firm squeeze that made me shudder all over.

"Sexy girl," she purred, running a soft hand up my trembling inner thigh. "We're gonna have a *lot* of fun tonight."

I moaned through my gag.

"Tonight I'm gonna introduce you to a fun new world," she whispered in my ear, nibbling the lobe and softly *clicking* her teeth against my big silver hoops, the only thing she'd let me keep on. "Up 'till now you've only had a few fingers in that sweet little pussy of yours. You like it, but I'm gonna show you just how good it can be."

She reached behind herself and her hand re-emerged holding a big pink dildo, sculpted to resemble a big, thick-veined cock with a swollen head. She teased it along my nose, my lips, my chin, down my neck and into the soft cleft of my breasts. It was *huge*. It scared me, more than a little. My eyes widened.

“Don't worry, baby,” she said, peppering my neck with little baby kisses. “It's not gonna hurt you. You're gonna love it. I promise. There's nothing like a great big, hard cock stuffed up your tight little pussy. You're gonna know what it feels like to *really* be a woman.”

She wormed the gag out of my mouth and pushed the head of the dildo against my swollen lips. “Suck, baby,” she said, and I opened my mouth without hesitation. She pistoned the big dildo slowly in and out of my mouth, letting the sculpted veins roll gently across my pierced tongue. I moaned, very near to out of my mind with lust and desire, and began to work my tongue around it like I'd learned on the pickle, and began to buck my hips against the air.

“Mmm, horny little slut,” she said in a voice like oiled silk. I almost came when she said it. “Get it nice and wet, baby, nice and wet so it slides right in.”

The horniness completely overrode any fear or apprehension, and I sucked like a wild woman. Jaci's eyes smoldered, loving the sight of me, tied to the bed and sucking cock like a porn starlet.

“You have to say it, bitch,” she said. “You have to ask me to fuck you.”

She popped the wet dildo out of my hungry lips. “Fuck me,” I panted. “Please, baby, please fuck me.”

She let me go on for a little while, begging and pleading, before slowly dragging the tip of the sex toy down my flat belly and into the sopping wet furrow between my legs. She added pressure, parting my lips, pressing the tip of the toy against my wet hole, the entrance to the maddening emptiness inside me, in a sweet mixture of pleasure and pain. The fear, the apprehension, and the excitement mixed together inside me and felt like a drug high, making me tingle and shiver all over. With a slowness bordering on cruelty, she began to inch it inside me. There was hardly any resistance at all, I was so wet. I felt tissues part inside me in the familiar sweet pleasure that Jaci's fingers usually brought about, but then they parted some more, wider, wider, until the stretching was almost painful, and delicious. She pushed and pushed until I felt – I actually *felt* – the firm head come to rest against the hard bud of my cervix.

Jaci's warm tongue flickered across my stiff nipples and I almost came again. She kissed her way down my belly and poised her chin just above my throbbing, aching clit.

“I'll make you a girl,” she growled. “The kind of girl I always wanted to fuck when I was in school. One of those stuck-up sorority bitches, with her designer clothes and her hot little body and her high-dollar manicure, all selfish and stuck on herself and a total fucking slut in the bedroom.”

She began to saw the dildo into me. I squealed and screamed, bucking against my bonds and arched back. She stopped briefly to replace my gag and then went down, telling me what a fuck-for-status, airheaded, self-absorbed little *fashionista* trophy girl she was going to make me into. It drove me wild. I bucked and grunted and groaned, trying to stuff *more* of the dildo inside me, even though it was stretching me painfully, whining and squealing through my

gag. She started with her tongue on my clit and I found myself screaming, my eyes screwed shut and my arms and legs taut against my bonds.

“You like it? You like it?” she asked.

I nodded and squealed, screaming and panting. She brought me right to the edge and then quit, pulling the dildo out of me so suddenly I gasped.

“What's your name?” she asked softly.

I could only pant and sag, desperate for release. She put the dildo back in and revved me up again, only to bring me right to the edge again and then pull it out suddenly, driving me from pleasure to pain so fast that I screamed in frustration.

“You ready to tell me your name, yet, bitch?” Jaci growled.

She did it three more times, bringing me right to the edge of release and then stopping. The third time she asked me for my name, I nodded so hard I almost pulled a muscle in my neck. She pulled the gag from my mouth with one hand.

“Well?” she asked me.

“Nicolette!” I panted. “My name is Nicolette!”

She slid the dildo in, hard, and pumped it like she was driving a nail.

“Are you a little slut, Nicolette?”

“Yes,” I squealed between thrusts, “Nicolette is *such* a little sorority slut!”

“You want to cum?”

“Please,” I screamed. “Please, baby, I *need* it!”

“Then say your fucking name! Say it while you cum!” she demanded.

“My... name... is... Nic-ooooo-leeeeeeeeeeeeette!” I screamed at the top of my lungs as the orgasm split me in half, turning me from human to bucking, growling animal. I heard the wood of my bedframe groaning and creaking as I pulled, my back arching until just my heels and the back of my head touched the mattress. I screamed until I had no breath left in me, then drew a ragged breath and screamed some more, chanting 'Nicolette' over and over in a high, breathless soprano like some kind of carnal mantra. Jaci brought me off again and again, taking advantage of my new capacity for multiple orgasms to keep me bucking and screaming and repeating my name – my wonderful, *beautiful* name – over and over until I couldn't remember ever calling myself anything else.

She lay against me, soft flesh against soft tingling flesh, her nose nuzzling my ear as I gasped for breath.

“My Nicolette,” she whispered. “My beautiful, perfect, wonderful, sexy Nicolette.”

“My Jaclyn” I whispered back. “My precious, exciting Jaclyn.”

“Feel better?” she asked.

“Oh my God,” I breathed. “Baby – that was the most incredible thing I've ever felt before. I had no *idea*.”

“So being Nicolette isn't so bad after all,” she commented.

“I never said it was,” I corrected. “But I'm on my way to actually feeling like Nicolette. And *wanting* to feel like Nicolette.”

“I never want you to be anything else,” she said.

“Were you serious?” I asked her. “About who you want me to be? Y'know, the sorority girl, the trophy girl, all that?”

“They turn me on, sure,” she told me. “But I don't need you to be anything else than exactly what you want to be, baby. Nicolette baby.”

I smiled and snuggled against her. “I can try,” I said. “Not, like, change who I am fundamentally. But I guess I could pay more attention to stuff like clothes and makeup and stuff, be more into my appearance, act a little more like that, if it makes you happy. I want to make you happy.”

“We'll talk about it later,” she said. “Right now, I don't want anything different than it is right now, at this very moment.”

I sighed, completely content. “You remember that thing I asked you not to say, the first night we were together?” I asked her, kissing her sweat-damp hair.

“Of course I do,” she said. “What about it?”

I wormed around to look her in the eyes. “I think I love you,” I told her simply.

She wrapped around me, arms and legs, and squeezed me tight against herself, kissing me hard and passionately, tears leaking from the corners of her eyes.

“God, I've wanted to say this it feels like *forever*,” she said. “I love you. I love you so *fucking* much.”

I kissed her again. “I haven't told anybody that in a long time,” I said honestly. “I was never any good at relationships after that got said. I'm scared as hell, Jaci, I gotta be honest. It was usually a sign that things were gonna end soon.”

“I'm not those other girls,” she said. “I'm not gonna let it end.”

“I love you,” I repeated.

“I love you, too,” she said, “Nicolette.”

I smiled. “Y'know, it wasn't just the sex after all,” I commented. “I *really* like hearing you call me that.”

“Good,” she said, “'cause I don't intend to let anyone else use that name. To the world, you're gonna keep being Niki. You're only gonna be Nicolette to me.”

“Then that seals it,” I said, leaning back. “I officially *love* my name.”

\* \* \*

Kissing Jaci goodbye and sending her off to work was one of the hardest things I'd ever done. I wanted to be no farther than arms' reach from her. But relationships were sacrifice, and I knew it. We'd have to do things we didn't want to do. It would make the times we could be together all the more special and wonderful.

Staci had taken the day off – we had caps on how many vacation and sick hours we could carry in our 'bank' at work, so occasionally we had to burn off a vacation day or lose it, and none of us wanted to work for nothing. I met her at her house, early, taking a few minutes to let her gush over my new car. Selina and Katy were coming over, too, and together we'd set aside the whole day to have a little too much to drink and get my 'Eighties costume together for my date tomorrow night.

All three girls were extremely appreciative of my new car, and positively *amazed* at the look of my new breasts. I caved to pressure and slipped out of my corset and let everyone look and feel. They were still a bit sore – nothing major at all, I was recovering quickly and well – but it was nothing compared to what they'd been just four days ago. I still couldn't lift much, or do anything above my head, and my balance was still just a little tad dodgy. Katy promised to have me back in for some fine-tuning of my walk and my posture to accommodate the new superstructure.

“So, I figured we can go several ways,” Staci told me. “We could do the Jennifer Beals *Flashdance* look pretty easy. We could also go the Debbie Gibson, innocent route. Or there's always the Madonna thing.”

“Are you guys actually not seeing this?” Katy asked, scrunching her fingers in my pale hair. “C'mon, it's so *obvious*. The bod, the hair – how can she not be Kelly Bundy? Get *real*.”

“Oh my God,” Staci said, laughing. “She *is*.”

I groaned. “What a claim to fame.”

“Let's get busy,” Staci said. “We got a lot to do.”

\* \* \*

I refused to just sit back and let myself be taken through the process, so I had them teach me what they wanted and then did it myself. I had *no* idea how long it would take to tease and back-comb my hair, separating out little strips and using root-lift mousse near the scalp, combing the roots up and down quickly until it stood out from my scalp like I'd taken an electric shock. I troweled on the makeup, taking down my salon tan to an alabaster paleness with shockingly red lips and heavy blush and eyeliner. It was incredibly slutty, and I found myself liking it more than I thought I would. Sure, like most boys of the 'Eighties, I'd polished my knob more than once to the image of Christina Applegate as Kelly Bundy, like most of the other boys in my class. But I didn't think that seeing a reasonable facsimile of her staring back at me from the mirror would turn me on as much as it was. I found myself wondering if Jaci ever had a Kelly Bundy *Married... With Children* fetish, and then remembered with a shock that she probably hadn't even been alive when the show first aired. Technically, according to my biological age, neither was I.

“You look *really* cute,” Staci told me, chuckling. She snapped a picture with her phone. “Now we just need to hit some vintage places, get you some clothes. I think I have enough jewelry

that I kept from back then to cover you for your party. God knows I ain't ever gonna wear it again.”

“What, no love for giant day-glo orange plastic doorknocker earrings?” I asked.

“No love for being reminded I ain't eighteen anymore,” she grunted.

“Girl, you shouldn't even go there,” I told her. “You're fucking *gorgeous*.”

“Stop,” she told me.

“Stop, hell,” I said. “I always thought so, y'know, before my accident. I just couldn't say anything back then, 'cause I was afraid you'd take it like I was hitting on you or something. But now I can. You think just 'cause you had a kid and were married for so long that you're all used up and past it. But I've seen you in your Daisy Dukes and your halter top, baby girl, and you need to get over this whole 'old & crusty' riff you're on. I know a dozen guys who'd shit themselves over a chance to get with you.”

She blushed beet red. “I guess it's just safer to think I'm old and nobody's interested,” she said softly. “Safer than getting back out there.”

I put a hand on hers and squeezed. “Staci, you know I love you. We've known each other forever. You're a great mom and a kickass medic and one of my best friends. I know what a bastard Neil was, and even though you tried to cover it up, everybody at Medic 21 knew he was hitting you, there at the end. But they're not all Neils out there. There's some great ones out there, too.”

“I know,” she said. “But it's scary.”

“If I can face waking up a girl one day,” I told her, “then you can face a date. You're braver than me, anyway.”

“Bullshit,” Staci told me.

“Oh, really?” I replied. “I just had to figure out how to put in a tampon and keep my bra straps from getting twisted around. You had to face going home every night to a guy who was beating on you and figure out how to keep yourself and your son safe and in one piece and get the hell out of there.”

She gave me a kiss on the cheek. “Jaci's a lucky girl,” she told me softly.

“I mean it,” I reiterated.

“I know you do,” she said. “That's why Jaci's so damn lucky.”

“You ready to go help me get my Spandex on?” I asked her, trying to lighten the mood.

She grinned. “You're damned right I am,” she told me. We went back out into the front room to the squealed *oohs* and *aahs* of Katy and Selina, mooning over my gigantic hair and my overdone makeup. It was a little bit scary how much I looked like Kelly Bundy, and everyone assured me I was gonna bring the house down when I hit the door of the party.

We all piled into my new Prius, cranked up the music and headed out to the nearest vintage store, a cute little place called *Nostalgic Notions*. I had no idea how much people were charging these days for other people's old clothes, so I'd stopped quickly at an ATM and

withdrawn a pretty big lump of cash. I'd stuffed it in the little Dooney & Bourke purse that Dr. Richards had bought me way back when and followed the loud, gossiping gaggle of women who were fast becoming my best friends into the store.

As I cracked up laughing at Katy holding up a completely ridiculous white disco dress covered with sequined sunflowers to her body, striking a stupid *Saturday Night Fever* pose with her tongue out and her eyes crossed, I realized that they weren't fast becoming anything. They *were* my best friends. And in ten minutes with them I had more fun and felt more love than in ten years with the friends I'd had when I was male.

I'd started out thinking that being female might have a few perks. Now I was struggling to remember what I'd thought was so fucking great about being male in the first place. I trailed my friends through the racks, pawing through the clothes and holding them up against myself, or them, trying to talk Selina into a cute pair of beaded bell-bottom jeans and trying on 'Forties-style hats with Katy and Staci, blowing vampy kisses to ourselves in the mirror while the sales clerk, a rotund but infectiously smiling Hispanic girl with dimples and pink streaks in her hair, went on and on about how good we looked in this or that item. When we told her we needed full-on 'Eighties glam for a costume party, she lit up and grabbed me by the hand, half-dragging me to another section of the store while my girlfriends followed me, every one clutching an intended purchase. The store had been dead before we came through the door, now it hummed with life and fun.

I was really starting to enjoy being a girl.

To Be Continued....



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Eleven**

**by Valerie Hope**

I WOKE JACI UP FOR work by burying my face between her naked thighs, giving her as many orgasms as I could before she had to get up and take a shower, loving how naughty/romantic it made me feel. I was getting very close to heading back to work myself, and I could feel my excitement to return to the trucks starting to build. To that end, I called David Cupertino once I'd had my coffee and a hot bath and I was sure that he'd gotten his truck checked out and his morning routine finished.

“Hey, Dave, what's up?” I asked as soon as he answered his cell.

“Who's this?” he asked, puzzled.

It struck me that he wouldn't recognize my new, husky soprano. “It's Niki. Niki Lightman. How's it going?” I asked.

“Oh, hey, Nick – I mean, Niki. So far, so good. No calls yet, but the shift is young,” he told me. “What's going on?”

“I'm headed back to work in a week and a half,” I told him.

“Yeah, I saw you on the schedule,” he replied. “You excited?”

“You have no fucking idea,” I said. “I can't wait, dude.”

“Yeah, me, too. I finally got your ass broke in as a partner, I don't have the time or the energy to break in another one,” he chuckled.

“Listen, man, I wanted to know if you were up for a beer or a bite to eat sometime soon,” I said. “I've been out of it a while, I need somebody to catch me up on how things are going in the system. You game?”

He didn't skip a beat, which I was thankful for. A part of me was worried that my lothario partner would've taken this for me asking him out on a date, somehow. “Sure, man – shit. I mean girl. What are you doing tomorrow?”

“I got nothing planned,” I told him.

“Sweet,” he said. “Then it's you, me, a pitcher of Sam Adams and the Florida/LSU game at Hooters. Kickoff is at two.”

“Sounds perfect,” I told him.

“Aw, shit,” he backtracked. “I didn't even think. Hooters. Is that – y'know, is that okay with you and everything?”

I laughed out loud. “Who are you talking to, Dave? We've watched games at Hooters for five years.”

“Yeah, I know, but...”

“But just 'cause I'm a girl now?” I asked, teasingly.

I could hear him blushing. “Something like that,” he said.

“If it helps, Dave, I actually still like girls,” I told him. “So not only is Hooters okay, but I'm still gonna make rude comments just like before.”

“Only difference is that I'm gonna go home and whack off thinking about it,” he said, laughing.

“Then I'll wear a halter top and see if I can get you to rub some blisters, bitch,” I shot back. “I'll see you there tomorrow, like, what... one thirty?”

“Sounds great,” he said. “First round's on me.”

I breathed a long sigh of relief as I flipped shut my pink cellphone. I was afraid David might make things weird or uncomfortable. It was strange – the thought of him not making inappropriate comments about my giant tits worried me more than the thought of him doing it. I really didn't want things to change that much between us. I knew things would be different, but I hoped that David would understand that I was friend enough no matter what was between my legs that he wouldn't have to change anything about himself or our relationship to protect that. I felt like if he didn't make comments about ER nurses' tits and tell dirty jokes and watch Skinemax on the station TV even though we weren't supposed to, I might actually start thinking seriously about another partner. It would just be too weird if he started treating me like I was going to sue him for sexual harassment at every turn.

I'd slept late (for me), which meant eight a.m., and I was ravenously hungry. I dove into the groceries I'd bought with Jaci and made myself a ham and cheese omelet, one of the few things I'd actually learned to cook during my extended bachelorhood. It surprised me a little that Dr. Richards hadn't insisted I learn to cook, but I guessed that cooking wasn't nearly so girly as it used to be. Still, I knew of a couple cooking classes during the week that I might like to attend. Maybe Jaci would want to go with me. It could be fun to learn something like that together, and that girl couldn't boil water.

I ate and watched a little television until ten, when the tanning salon opened. I'd gotten an email telling me it was all right to tan so long as I kept my sutures covered, and I'd gotten very pale in the last couple days since the spray tan wore off. I grabbed my little Crown Royal bag which contained my itty-bitty black bikini and some lotion for my hands, threw on a dirty corset from two nights ago and jumped into a pair of cutoff jean-shorts which really showed off my legs and my platform flip-flops and a green ribbed halter tank with the word “Naughty” picked out in rhinestones across my prodigious rack. The clothes were a little tight to wear home – I didn't want to smear my tan – so I stuffed some yoga pants and a baggy tee shirt into my gym bag without even looking at them and ran downstairs to where I'd chained my bicycle.

A pink envelope was taped to the handlebars, and across it in Jaci's bubble-writing was simply, "Nicolette." I opened it with one of my long nails and pulled out a folded sheet of pink paper that said simply, "Look in your car."

I unlocked the car and saw a gift-wrapped box in the back seat. Smiling and blushing, I opened the paper. Inside was a shoebox full of hairstyling products, the same ones that I'd used the day before to perfect my "Kelly Bundy" look. There was a curling iron, a set of hot rollers, a crimper and a straightener and endless bottles of (quite expensive) shampoo, conditioner, gloss, mousse, gel and styling wax. This would've set Jaci back quite a bit. Another pink envelope was also inside, but it was marked "Don't open until your date."

I tapped the sealed envelope against my bottom lip thoughtfully before stuffing it back inside the box. I was a little afraid, wondering what instructions she would give me for my first real date with a man, but I also knew that Jaci's wicked little ideas usually worked out to be intensely exciting and eminently pleasurable. I decided to prolong the anticipation and wait. Besides, I had surprises of my own for today that I hadn't yet told her about, either.

\* \* \*

I was getting better at the spray-tan process, since it only took me about twenty minutes total instead of the forty-five from my first visit. I dropped by a convenience store on the way back to my car, to pick up a pack of hyper-skinny Capri cigarettes (I usually wound up smoking when I drank, and I planned to have a couple on my date tonight) and a three-pack of Trojans just in case Jaci's sealed instructions had me doing something drastic. I hoped that she exercised a little restraint with me – this was scary territory for me. But I'd promised to do what she said, and I kept reminding myself that everything Jaci'd come up with for me since the beginning had wound up being wonderful. She definitely had this whole girl thing down, and listening to her really seemed to help me over the rough spots. Besides, I was still male enough in my psyche to have that strange need to prove my love to her. If that meant going out on a sexual limb for her, then I was willing to do it to show her how I felt. It still seemed easier than saying it. I wondered if that, like the rest of me, would ever change and finally become female.

I hadn't been ready for the knowing, quirked-eyebrow look I got from the aging but still-attractive shop clerk when she saw the condoms. She gave me a secret little smile, saying have a good time, girl, I hope he rocks your world in just the briefest of glances. It really was a sisterhood out there, I was finding. She didn't look at me like some kind of slut or whore, like I had a scarlet "A" embroidered on my shirt, like a part of me feared she would. She just looked at me like a fellow searcher, trolling the endless sea of selfish asshole men, hoping that if she couldn't find one to satisfy her then she could take some consolation if I could.

I'd discovered, to my chagrin, that women could be extremely cruel and catty bitches, with less conscience than even the roughest man. They were by far the crueller and more vicious of the species. Men tended to confront directly, to air their grievances face-to-face, even if violently. Women recruited allies and ostracized. Of the two, I would far prefer a good fistfight. I sucked at politics, and it seemed a cornerstone of being a girl in girl society. Jaci was trying to give me a crash course, but she'd already said that she thought I was completely hopeless and thought it better that I simply not "play the Game" at all.

But still, women seemed to look out for other women, even ones they didn't know, more than men. There was a mutual support there, perhaps even instinctual, that male society didn't offer. Even if it was fake, from a woman who was an enemy, still the attempt was made.

“Big night planned?” the clerk asked knowingly.

“I'll have to let you know,” I said.

She poked my arm gently. “You can't tell me he doesn't want to.”

That stopped me short. It was my decision. I could decide at any point how I wanted the night to end, and Kevin would have to abide by my decision or face criminal charges. The power of it overwhelmed me for a moment.

I grinned. “I don't know if I want to, yet,” I told her. “But I also don't wanna get caught out, y'know, in case it turns out I do.”

“Smart girl,” she said, handing me my change.

I couldn't keep the smile off my face as I left. This kind of power – this could get addictive.

\* \* \*

I got out of the car at Medic 21's station and, not for the first nor the last time since I'd had it done, spit my now much longer hair out of my mouth. I'd made an eleventh-hour call to Dr. Richards to have about a foot to eighteen inches of length added to my shoulder-length hair and the synthetic proteins which gave it its white-gold color added. I told myself that it was to perfect my “Kelly Bundy” costume for the night, but in fact it was because I thought Jaci would like it. And because a small part of me thought that Kevin might like it, too. I was wearing a short denim skirt and cork-soled sandals with a four-inch wedge and big sunflowers on the yellow straps, a yellow halter that showed off my tan belly and pressed my tits together deliciously, and my trademark gigantic hoop earrings. Medic 21 was just backing in to restock from a call, and I snaked my arms around Jaci's waist as she motioned the truck in backwards to its parking slip in the bay, being careful not to accidentally key up her radio. I kissed her neck softly.

“Hey, what are you doing – oh my Gawd! Look at your hair, baby! It's beautiful!” she gushed, running her fingers through it. “You look gorgeous!”

“Thanks,” I said, blushing. “I hoped you were gonna like it.”

“Like it, hell! I love it! Makes you look like one of Hef's girlfriends,” she purred.

“I gotta go get ready for my date,” I told her, “but I wanted to swing by, y'know, and surprise you with my new hair.”

She kissed me, unashamedly. Any firefighters that happened to be watching from the firehouse windows were probably erupting at that moment in giant fountains of sperm. The thought made me giggle.

I broke, breathless, from the kiss. “You having a good shift, baby?”

“So-so,” she said. “Lotsa bullshit calls so far. District is doing its best to bury us in paperwork, that's all.”

I nuzzled her nose. “Baby, there's lots of trucks in the system. Don't clear a call until you've got your report ready. Don't go back in service. That way you never fall behind like that.”

“I forget how long you've been a medic,” she chuckled. “Maybe it's 'cause you look all of about seventeen years old.”

“Well, I have been at it a while,” I told her. “I might even have a thing or two to teach you, after everything you've been teaching me, y'know.”

“I'm gonna remember that from now on, sweetheart,” she promised me.

“Listen, I don't wanna keep you long. I just wanted to say hi and show off a little. I gotta go home and start getting pretty,” I told her. “Be safe out on the streets tonight, okay? You know how crazy things get around here on Friday nights.”

“Have you opened your envelope yet?” she teased.

“Nope,” I said. “You told me not to until my date. I still have three hours left.”

“Good girl, Nicolette,” she said, goosing my ass and giving me goosebumps.

“I just hope whatever's in there won't get me arrested or something,” I said.

“Only if you do it with somebody who's not eighteen,” she teased back. “Now scoot. I have important ambulance shit to do and you're distracting me with your delicious body.”

I blew her a raspberry. “Deal with it. You did it to me for years.”

“Poor baby,” she retorted. “How can I ever make it up to you?”

“I got some ideas, but mostly they involve an eight-inch strap-on and your old cheerleading uniform.”

Finally, after all the time we'd spent together, I got to leave her blushing and speechless. I kissed her again and left, putting a little extra wiggle in my hips and ass for her enjoyment as she watched me walk away.

I hopped back into my Prius and drove the fifteen minutes through the thickening traffic back to my apartment. I'd already started putting things into boxes for my move in with Jaci, but the nerve center of my bedroom – the dressing table – was still the crazy bedlam that it always was. I took a quick shower and patted myself down, then sprayed my brand-new tan with the setting lotion I'd bought at the salon, to keep it from running or streaking. I dabbed a little bit of Chanel No. 5 behind my ears and between my breasts, then rubbed between my wrists. I loved the clean, sexy, classy smell. Then I wrapped myself in a corset for the time being and started in on my hair. I straightened it a small section at a time, then coated the roots generously with mousse before backcombing it and teasing it out several inches from my head. Then I coated tips liberally with styling wax to make my hair look sleek and shiny like a Pantene commercial. It took the better part of two hours to get it the way I wanted it, working from some old screen captures of Married... with Children I'd downloaded off of the Internet to go by. Then I started the makeup, which was easier than I'd originally thought; it was just matte foundation, heavy black eyeliner and very, very red lipstick. I decided to leave my nails alone, even though Kelly's were usually bright red.

I was still looking to be very late for my date – which Jaci assured me was not only okay, but expected – while I stuffed my voluptuous body into the sausage-sheath purple Spandex dress,

which barely covered my ass and didn't begin to cover my thighs. The long sleeves covered me to the wrists, but there was a gigantic keyhole cutout which bared my shoulderblades in the back. I cinched it tight with a six-inch wide black leather belt with two rows of silver grommets. I was going without a corset, which was strange enough, but also without a bra or panties because it spoiled the line of the skin-tight dress. It felt like when I'd switched from briefs to boxers in college – like everything was just hanging out there for everyone to see. This time around, though, the feeling was exciting. I finished it off with a gigantic pewter cross on a leather thong around my neck, five thick black plastic bracelets around one wrist and a pair of black lace fingerless gloves. I wore knee-high black leather boots with a four-inch spike heel and silver chains. Giant black plastic door-knocker earrings pulled not entirely comfortably from my earlobes.

I checked myself in the mirror and found myself thrilled. I was a dead ringer, except for the tan which I wasn't willing to compromise just for a costume. I positively oozed sex. I stuffed my makeup repair kit, a hairbrush, the condoms and cigarettes I'd bought earlier, then the standard cash and keys and identification into a little black leather clutch purse which matched my boots and belt and shellacked my hair with the better part of a can of AquaNet to hold it in place. Once my hair felt like tacky plaster, I knew I was set for the night. I scampered downstairs as quickly as I could in the restrictive dress and high heels, climbed into my car and started the engine.

I opened the pink envelope and scanned it quickly, eyes widening with excitement and a little bit of distraught panic.

Kevin thinks you're a slutty, dumb party girl. That's the girl he picked up in the bar, and that's the girl you're going to give him, she wrote me. You're either going to laugh at his jokes or not get them. You're going to dance the whole time you're there and try to dance so that every guy in the place is staring at you. When you and Kevin are alone, then you're going to make the first move and kiss him without waiting for him to kiss you first. By the end of the night, no matter what, you're going to get what you came to get from him. Guess what, Nicolette... you swallow. Every last drop, now, or you're going to get a spanking that even you won't enjoy when I get home. Love, Jaci.

I read it again just to make sure. So, not only did I have to throw myself at him, I had to seduce him and then suck his dick? And sell it like it's all my idea, which would certainly have him calling and pressuring me for a second, and possibly third, fourth and fifth, date? For the first time since I'd started my whirlwind relationship with Jaci, I had misgivings. I wasn't even sure I wanted to try heterosexuality – which had so recently been homosexuality to me – yet, and now here I was, about to give head to a relative stranger?

About to give head? I wondered in shock. Apparently, somewhere in this tumult, I had made up my mind to follow Jaci's instructions, or at least try. I wasn't sure how or when it had happened, and that scared me quite a bit.

That, and I was starting to get concerned that I was going to have a wet spot on my dress. This whole thing turned me on more than I could even describe. I was almost quivering. I had to walk carefully to the line in front of the chic-ly dingy and run-down club, to keep my thighs from accidentally touching or rubbing the swelling lips of my pussy. I think I might've had a trembling screamer right there on the sidewalk if I hadn't.

Kevin was waiting for me on the sidewalk outside the club, dressed like Don Johnson from Miami Vice, the pastel blazer with the sleeves pushed up, the print shirt and the white linen pants, wearing loafers with no socks, and Wayfarer sunglasses. He looked great. But he pulled the glasses down his nose and stared at me pop-eyed as I slinked up the sidewalk to thread my arm through his.

“You look amazing,” he said, finally. “I was starting to think you weren't gonna show up.”

I offered him a dazzling smile. “Of course I was,” I said. “And, um, so... here I am. I'm really looking forward to this.”

He put a warm hand over mine, pulling me closer to him. “I'm really glad.”

We chatted about nothing, which made it easy to keep up my airhead act, waiting to get into the club. The costumes ranged from as detailed as mine, although principally along a Madonna genre, to someone in regular clothes just wearing a Swatch or with their hair teased. Most of the guys were just variations on the Miami Vice theme, with the occasional Flock of Seagulls, Tears for Fears and Boy George thrown in for leavening.

“I was really glad when you called,” Kevin told me once we were inside. One of the bands was onstage covering ZZ Top, complete with fake beards. What they lacked in skill they made up for in camp, with the carpeted guitars flipping three hundred sixty degrees in unison. I couldn't help but dance, Jaci's suggestions or no. I grabbed Kevin's hands and dragged him onto the floor. He followed good-naturedly.

We danced our ways through Legs, Sharp Dressed Man and Gimme All Your Lovin' before we breathlessly stopped for a drink. Guys around the room were staring at me in a mixture of hunger and intimidation, eyeing my long muscular legs and my firm, bouncing breasts. I could feel their gazes caressing me, removing my skin-tight clothes mentally and staring at my naked, tanned skin with pure desire and lust. It only served to turn me on more.

I ordered a Cosmopolitan to go with Kevin's beer and lit a skinny cigarette, sitting just long enough for the nicotine rush to stop making me dizzy. I followed Jaci's orders to the letter, laughing at his jokes – which were mercifully un-lame – and pretending not to understand one or two of them. With a round of half-hearted clapping, the first band finished their set and left the stage, making room for a Europop cover band called Juke that Kevin claimed was pretty good.

I sipped my drink and just tried to look sexy – I sure as shit felt sexy, so it wasn't too far of a stretch – when a tall, skinny man with longish black hair and laughing brown eyes walked to our table. A fake beard hung down the front of his green-and-white bowling shirt, and I recognized him as the lead guitarist for the band that had just finished.

“What's up?” he asked Kevin jovially.

“Hey, man,” he said. “Luke, this is Niki. Niki, this is my roommate Luke.”

“Right on,” he said, extending a callused hand.

“Y'all sounded great,” I told him, lying a little. Their drummer had very little in the way of rhythm and their bassist cheesed out on most of the hard riffs.

“Thanks,” he said. “Covers aren't really our thing,” he confessed. “We're really here for the showcase, later on, but a gig's a gig.”

“Money's money, right?” I asked.

“You got it.”

Luke ordered a beer of his own and joined us, sitting as close to me on my left side in the close confines of the booth as Kevin was sitting on my right. I was sandwiched between them, and instead of feeling uncomfortable, I found myself becoming a little intoxicated by the sense of warmth, hunger, even the smell of them. I couldn't keep my nipples from tenting out the front of my stretchy Spandex dress, and both of them noticed. Their eyes seemed to roam across the voluptuous expanse of my bosom even more often than usual. I scooted forward a little on my seat, leaning forward, pretending that I still wore a corset to help my posture, to give them both a much more tempting and revealing view.

We danced more, me with Kevin and me with Luke and me with both of them together, and once or twice in a huge knot of men and women I didn't even know. I posed twice against one of the only decently-lit walls in the dark club for cell-phone pictures, one to send Jaci because she hadn't seen my costume and one for a friendly but geeky guy dressed as George Michael who asked me because he claimed he wanted a picture of the most beautiful woman at the party. When the band launched into a long medley of Duran Duran tunes, I found myself dancing more or less alone, while the boys in the room seemed to spend more time standing back a little and just watching me move.

It was three hours and four Cosmopolitans in that I realized I was having the time of my life. I really wished Jaci was here. After the set break, I excused myself to run to the bathroom, this time not hesitating before I pushed open the overpainted door marked “Women.” I let loose the heavy flow of my urine, dabbing carefully at my very aroused and very sensitive pussy when I was done before rearranging my clothes. I made the requisite stop at the mirror – washing my hands like a good medic – to repair my hair and makeup. As I was capping my hairspray after applying another liberal sticky coat of AquaNet, two other girls came up to check their faces as well, a tall black girl tricked out like Grace Jones and a shorter, rounder Latina dressed very well as Madonna. I pulled out my lip gloss and started applying.

“You look amazing, girl,” Grace Jones told me.

“Thanks,” I said. “Y'all, too. I love your earrings.”

“So, what's the deal with you and the two hotties?” Madonna asked me. “You gonna cut one loose for the rest of us, or what?”

I blushed a little. “Technically, I'm not with either one of them,” I tried to explain.

“Well, they're sure as fuck with you, chica,” Madonna said.

“Wasn't planning on that to happen,” I said.

“Horseshit, baby,” Grace told me. “You come in here looking like that and don't expect more than one guy to hit on you? Nice try.” Her smile took any venom out of the jealousy she might have been feeling.

“I can introduce you, if you want,” I said.

Madonna laughed. “Fuck, no,” she said. “You seen the big fucker out there, dressed like Hulk Hogan? He's my date. He'll tear the shit out of anybody he sees me talking to. I couldn't fuck up either of those pretty faces like that.”

“Shit, I'll do it,” Grace said. “I don't care what my date says.”

“Seriously?” I asked.

“Nah,” she said, laughing. “I was just fucking with you.”

“Standing offer,” I said, capping my lip gloss and finger-fluffing the ends of my luxurious blonde hair, which had ceased being a nuisance long ago as I'd gotten used to the extended length. “Just be warned, though – they both like 'em dumb.”

“Dumb?” Madonna asked.

I twirled a lock of white-blonde hair around one finger and rolled my eyes. “Um, so... like... yeah. Real dumb.”

“Way to play the game, girl,” Grace congratulated me. “Maybe I should try that.”

I brushed on a quick coat of mascara and blew myself a playful kiss in the mirror, dropping my makeup back in my purse as I left the two others primping and preening. I really hadn't let myself think about how competitive things might be between girls before – in my circle of friends, it didn't come up – but my first time out of the gate I nab two guys. I must be as hot as I felt. It put a little extra wiggle in my ass when I walked.

I slid back between Kevin and Luke, letting my long-nailed fingers trail teasingly across the tops of their thighs as I sat and took up my fresh Cosmo. I dug in my purse for another cigarette and both men had struck matches to light it for me before I even had the filter between my glossy lips.

I spent the rest of the time leading up to Luke's band taking the stage playing them, enjoying the shit out of the little game I was concocting. The two men competed for my attention, trying to outdo one another to impress me. I let them, enjoying the attention being lavished on me. Over the course of the drinks they bought me, as well, I got well and truly hammered. I tried to warn myself, as I felt myself slipping over the edge, that I had inhibition issues when I drank too much, but the happy, horny and sexy girl that was in control now just waved those concerns away to nothingness.

“Are you having a good time?” Kevin asked, sliding an arm around me as we watched Luke's band set up for the showcase.

“I'm having an amazing time,” I told him. I dimly remembered Jaci's instructions about what I was to do when I got Kevin alone.

“Good,” he said. “I'm really enjoying it, too.”

“You're sweet,” I told him, snuggling a little closer to him.

“Are you cold?” he asked me.

I pointed to my prominent nipples. “You mean these?” I giggled. “No, I'm not cold at all, baby. I'm just really turned on.”

He skipped a beat. “Beg pardon?”

“You heard me, handsome,” I told him, then leaned in and kissed him.

I'd been very freaked, from the outset, about kissing a man. It was something I'd always done with women, and of all the things that still felt the most homosexual, that kiss topped the list. So it was with no small amount of trepidation that my glossy lips met his, and left as quickly as my breath as his rough, stubbly lips crushed against mine.

His kiss was as different from Jaci's as his body and his manner. It felt completely foreign – almost alien – but every bit as pleasurable. It was the first time I truly felt his superior size and strength as compared to my own, and the component of surrender involved in kissing him was intoxicating. It seemed to even reach a totally different physical place inside of me, like I had two separate kinds of horny, the one that Jaci could touch and the one that Kevin was accessing. He was not gentle – he pulled me closer, his hands kneading my shoulders and upper back roughly. It made me feel so incredibly, irresistibly female.

We broke apart after a long while, a little breathless but very pleased with ourselves.

“I said it before,” he told me raggedly. “You certainly are direct.”

I grinned. “Yeah, well, like... you ain't seen nothing yet.”

“Really?” he asked flirtatiously.

“Really,” I confirmed, sipping my drink. “Wait'll you see what I got planned for later, baby.”

“Can't wait,” he said. The bulge developing in his trousers confirmed it. I marvelled. I did that. Me. I could spend an eternity feeling that powerful.

“Hopefully you won't have to, long,” I said.

\* \* \*

We listened to the bands as much as I could, considering that I couldn't keep myself from dancing, particularly when the all-female Cuban rap group took the stage with their wildly infectious beats. I bumped and ground against Kevin on the dance floor, driving myself right to the edge of what horny I could effectively manage, looped on good booze. Completely out of my mind with lust and my own sexual power, I took him by the hand and sought out a quiet, out-of-the-way place and made out with him for about half an hour. His hands sought out my breasts, kneading them roughly, but I was so far gone that I didn't even mind the lingering post-op soreness at his touch. I ground my sopping wet crotch against the top of his thigh, my hand finding his stiffened cock and rubbing it up and down as he nibbled roughly at my neck. My other hand found his short hair and pulled, making him groan and gasp.

“You're fucking incredible,” he told me.

“Get me out of here,” I rasped in his ear, pausing to bite his earlobe. “Now.”

“My apartment's two blocks away,” he told me, taking my hand. I attacked him once more, leaping into his arms and straddling his torso, bucking myself against him, knocking my purse against the back of his head as I threw my arms around his neck. He broke away almost forcefully – which inflamed me even more – and set me down.

Somewhere in the middle of all of that, Luke had come around the corner, saying, “Kev? There you are. Listen, man, I can’t find my keys... oh. Shit. You’re busy, dude, I can come back...”

“How long have you two, like, been roommates?” I purred breathlessly, trying to pull the hem of my dress down over my thighs to cover my bare, aching pussy.

“About seven years,” Luke said.

“And y’all are, like, good friends?” I asked.

“Yeah, real good,” Kevin said.

“Wanna come home with us and watch?” I asked Luke.

“Are you serious?” Kevin asked me, a little overwhelmed.

“Totally serious,” I said. “Baby, you’ve got me so fucking horny right now, we could totally do it right out there in the middle of the fucking club and I so wouldn’t care. Besides, I’ve always, like, wanted to do it in front of an audience ‘n’ stuff.”

Kevin balked. “I don’t know, Niki.”

I stuck out my bottom lip a little. “Pleeeeeease, Kevin? Baby? It’s totally a fantasy of mine, baby, and I promise I’ll totally make it worth it for you.”

Luke didn’t skip a beat. “I’m okay with it if you are, Kev.”

I stepped into Luke, pressing my breasts against his chest. “I only let guys see me naked after I’ve kissed them,” I said, and slid my arms around his neck and pressed my lips against his. He didn’t hesitate before returning it, as roughly as Kevin had, and I felt Kevin’s hard cock pressing through his pants against my ass as his hands found my swollen tits again. Luke’s hands threaded into my sticky, brittle hair and pulled my head back roughly as he parted my lips and invaded my mouth with his warm tongue. He was a better kisser than Kevin.

“C’mon, sweet boys,” I purred, rubbing the backs of both their necks. “Let’s get the fuck out of here.”

\* \* \*

It took a little while for us to make the two blocks to Kevin’s apartment, since we had to stop every few dozen yards to make out and feel one another up – in an alley, a doorway, the staircase leading up to the apartment. I’d never felt like this before, not even with Jaci. It was like my body had a mind of its own, and I was only along for the ride. I’d long since forgotten that they were men and that I’d never done this before. There was only the demanding, aching emptiness in my midsection and the desperate desire to have it filled.

We were barely inside, the interior of the apartment in pitch darkness, when I pushed Luke roughly against one wall and kissed him hard, forcing my pierced tongue between his lips and running long-nailed hands all over his skinny, firm body. I’d never expected the rough, hairy curves of a male body to affect me this way. Behind me, Kevin snapped on a light, and I turned towards him, mouth open and panting, to continue my savage kiss with him, this time working frantically on the buttons of his shirt. I pushed his jacket off and left it in a heap on the floor and left his shirt in a heap atop it, running my hungry hands across his bare, sweaty, hairless chest. Kevin kept himself in good shape, better than I’d been in when I was still male, and he

had just the hint of washboard abs and nice, firm pectorals. My fingers explored them greedily, massaging.

Still mindful of Jaci's suggestions, I sank to my knees in front of Kevin and started working on his belt, kissing and nibbling the tops of his thighs through his trousers, leaving little smears of lipstick – not that I had much left after the making out, but enough to show on his white pants – to mark my progress.

“We don't have to go this fast,” Kevin breathed.

“Yes we do,” I said, freeing his cock from the confines of his light blue boxers.

It wasn't large, but from below and outside it seemed like a monster. It vaguely occurred to me I'd never actually looked at an erect cock from this angle before, and it was just as ugly and veined as I'd remembered mine being. I'd never liked the way they looked before, but now I didn't care. I did like the way it fit in my hand, though, and the wonderful groans he made when I gave it a few experimental strokes. I didn't have to waste any time getting it hard, either – it had been hard for the better part of an hour, its tip glistening wetly with pre-cum connecting it in little rainbow streamers from the tip to the wet spot in the front of his boxers.

With no finesse, purposefully forgetting all Jaci's patient lessons with the pickle, I hungrily stuffed as much of his length into my wide-open mouth as I could, jamming my head down to try and force it down my throat. With one hand I stroked the length of him still outside my mouth and caressed his balls, and with the other I reached blind behind me to find Luke's leg and explore upwards to his own thickening length. Luke was bigger than his roommate and a little bigger around. It might have been a source of tension between the two, but as the beneficiary, I didn't care if both of them were hung like grains of rice. I'd stopped even thinking of them as human, to be honest. They were just two cocks, two ways to scratch the maddening itch inside me, who happened to be named Luke and Kevin.

Behind me, Luke had released his cock from its cotton prison and I felt his warm, gently throbbing length fill my hand. I started stroking it automatically, not giving it very much attention because of the very warm, very demanding cock filling my mouth. Drool ran over my bottom lip and swung wetly below my chin as I pumped his length with my wet mouth, my groaning and squealing muffled a bit as I stuffed my throat full.

“Jesus, this girl's out of fucking control, man,” Luke breathed to his roommate, above me. “Where the hell did you find her?”

“At some club downtown,” Kevin responded between grunts.

“Shit, I got to get out more,” he said.

Tired of his smarmy comments, I decided to shut Luke up by turning my head and stuffing his length down my throat, pumping wildly as I stroked Kevin with my off hand. I delighted myself to no end for about fifteen minutes by turning my head back and forth at random, sucking first one and then the other in turns. I'd never felt so alive before, so sexy and desirable, not in either lifetime as either gender. I honestly felt that I could never get enough of this, that I could easily quit my fulfilling job as a paramedic gleefully and become a porn star like Selina or a hooker, just waiting for an endless succession of cocks to walk through my door and give me the means to feel this way for the rest of my life.

I would've won money if I'd bet that the self-centered, egocentric Luke would cum much faster than the gentler, more romantic-spirited Kevin. He began to grunt and groan and push himself deeper into my throat, grabbing the back of my head almost painfully. I felt warm jets splash against my tongue and the back of my throat, thick and hot and salty with a musky overtone that might actually be pleasant once I got used to it. A little bit overflowed me and ran onto my bottom lip and my chin, and I lapped it up with my tongue once he'd slid from my mouth with a wet pop.

And just like that, it was official. I'm a cocksucker now, I thought, and the sting once associated with that particular word was completely gone. I'm a cocksucker and I swallow, just like Jaci wanted.

"Yummy," I commented, licking my fingers. I turned to Kevin. "Your turn, baby."

I turned back to Kevin's patiently waiting cock and opened my mouth. I dimly wondered whether either of them would freak out if I tried to kiss them with my mouth full, and suppressed a giggle. Luke would. Kevin probably wouldn't. He might not like it, but he wouldn't try and stop me. I had no illusions about which of them was the better person.

It dawned on me that my attraction to Kevin stemmed from the fact that he reminded me of me, before the accident. Unfortunately, the porno performance I was staging for his benefit was probably going to ensure he didn't call me back – it would've freaked me out if I'd been him – but in another way that didn't bother me at all. I felt a growing urge to just use him for my pleasure and then go home to my sweet, wonderful Jaci and not have anything like a guy fucking that up for me. The thought made me feel wonderfully slutty.

Kevin had just shot his own warm, salty load onto my tongue. He generated a lot of cum, and it had spilled out onto my chin and was soaking into the Spandex of my dress. I scooped up what I could with my fingers and licked them clean. The taste was growing on me.

"C'mon, boys," I said, standing, not releasing either cock from my hand. "We ain't done yet."

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Twelve**

**by Valerie Hope**

THE DIGITAL CLOCK ON THE bedstand read six minutes after four in the morning when I finally got up and smoothed my skintight dress over my tits and hips. Luke snored softly at the foot of the bed, fast asleep – typical – but Kevin was still awake, and looking at me like I'd grown two heads. I suspected that I was far from the woman he thought I was.

I leaned down and kissed him, running a hand softly down his naked belly. “Thanks, Kevin, really,” I whispered. “I had so much fun tonight. That really was a dream come true for me.”

Images of what I must have looked like danced just behind my eyes, me straddling Luke and fucking up and down while Kevin stood at the headboard, receiving the wild ministrations of my wet mouth. Me on all fours, being sawed into like an animal in heat by Kevin while I masturbated myself with one hand and Luke with the other. My three condoms and four others, gummed with semen, filled the wastebasket next to the bed.

“I didn't freak you out too bad, did I?” I asked him. “I should've warned you. When I drink, I get a little, um... carried away.”

He gave me a nervous smile. “It wasn't how I thought tonight was gonna end.”

I kissed him again. “We can try again, if you want. No booze, this time, and just us,” I offered.

He sighed. “I'm not sure I could do that without thinking about tonight.”

“I'm sorry if I fucked it up, then,” I said.

He ran a hand across tired eyes. “You didn't,” he said finally. “Really. You didn't. It's me. I'm just being an idiot.” He levered himself up from the bed and slipped on a pair of jeans atop his laundry hamper.

“Of course we can try again,” he said. “I'd really like that.”

“You are so sweet,” I told him honestly. “Kevin, seriously, baby. We had an awesome time tonight, and I don't regret a thing. But if it was too much for you, then it was too much for you. You're not the first relationship I will have fucked up because I had too much to drink and did something wild.”

He grinned. “You're pretty amazing,” he told me, slipping into a pair of shoes.

“I like to think so,” I told him. “Going someplace?”

“Gonna walk you to your car,” he told me. “Least I can do for one of the most incredible nights of my life.”

“It makes me really, um, happy to hear you enjoyed yourself.”

“Five times,” he said, pointing to the wastebasket full of condoms. “Listen, what if we just started over. I mean, we can't really forget about this – I don't know if I even want to, actually – but we can just go back to the beginning. Not a date, just, y'know, hang out. Go see a concert or something. And no booze.”

I grinned. “I'd like that,” I told him. “You call me when you're ready, okay?”

“Count on it,” he said, standing and handing me my purse.

I smoked another cigarette as we walked, arm-in-arm, the two-and-a-half blocks to where my car was parked on the street. My pussy was aching from its rough use – other than fingers and the occasional dildo, it had been virginal before tonight – and I had some itchy, crusty spots on my skin from the mixture of my dried cum and theirs. We talked about not much, just picking up our conversation where we'd left it off before I got plowed and fucked two guys at the same time.

Oh my God, I thought with rising alarm. I got drunk and fucked two guys at the same time! What the hell did I just do?

He stopped next to my car as I tossed my cigarette and dug for my keys. He reached into his pocket and brought out a small rectangular plastic box.

“This is yours,” he told me shyly. “It's Luke. He, uh... he videotapes his hook-ups. Not for the Internet or anything, though I think he probably would if he knew how. Just to flatter himself, really. But you and me, we both have jobs and stuff like this doesn't need to be floating around out there just to stroke his ego. You should probably take it, and if not then I'll just erase it.”

I smiled at him. “You sure you don't want a copy? You and me had a couple great moments on there,” I said, hiding my shock at being taped without my knowledge. I changed my mind. Luke wasn't just a self-centered jerk. He was a self-centered sleazeball. I was having trouble reconciling Kevin even being friends with him, and Kevin could probably see it on my face.

“No, I don't want a copy,” he said, chuckling. “My memory works just fine, thanks. And Luke's really selfish, yeah, but he's also stuck with me through some rough times, like my divorce. You find a friend like that, you kinda have to take them warts and all.”

“I know what you mean,” I said, thinking of Jaci and David and Frank and Staci. I took the Mini DV tape from his hand and slipped it into my purse. “I have friends like that, too. They just don't tape people having sex without telling them. I'm starting to regret tonight.”

“Don't,” he said. “Like you said, it was fun. A lot of fun, and a real Letter to Penthouse for men and probably Luke, too. Stuff like that doesn't happen to guys like me.”

“It should,” I told him. “And now you know that the sex of your life is only three or four Cosmopolitans away, now that you're onto my dirty little secret.”

He laughed. “That can be our code. I say let's get a drink, that means I want to hang out, and if I say let's get some drinks, that means I wanna nail you.”

I kissed him. “You are just unbelievably cute, you know that?”

“I try.”

“No, you don't,” I told him. “That's why you're a better guy than Luke.”

“I did have a lot of fun tonight,” he told me.

“Me, too,” I said, giving him a hug. “And I'm really looking forward to hanging out with you. Soon, I hope.”

“Soon,” he confirmed. I kissed him one last time, passionately, and slipped into my car, belting myself in and driving off into the night, almost certain that he was never going to call me. It bothered me more than I expected.

\* \* \*

I got home and took a long shower, treating my abused body gently, assessing the bruises I got from being grabbed and pulled – not that I'd minded at the time. I washed the sticky mess from my hair and wrapped it in a towel. Jaci had shown me how to do the towel-turban thing that girls seemed to know instinctually, and the length of my hair helped hold it in place, and made myself some coffee before sitting on the balcony in a plastic chair, smoking one last cigarette and watching the sun come up. I kept the over half-pack I had left to give to Jaci, putting it into my junk drawer in the kitchen, then blew my hair dry and put on makeup, just some mineral powder to even out my complexion and some eyeliner and mascara, and some pink gloss. I put on one of the outfits I'd gotten with Jaci, black tights and a short black-and-white plaid schoolgirl skirt with the boots from the night before. I slipped my torso back into the tight comfortable embrace of a black lace corset with a sigh of relief, drawing the laces even tighter than usual to make up for my night of being without. It pushed my tits together tightly and raised them up into extremely tempting cleavage, but I covered the lot with a black ribbed mock turtleneck and a white blazer. I finished with sparkling rhinestone hoop earrings and a white newsboy cap worn with a ghetto tilt. I looked like I'd just stepped out of the pages of Vogue and loved the way I looked. Checking the little ladies' Seiko I'd clipped around my wrist, I went down to my car and drove through the grey colorless morning towards Medic 21's station, which was the only center of activity on the sleepy, motionless street at this hour. Staci was out washing the truck and I could dimly see Jaci in the bay, digging in one of the restock lockers. She walked out onto the apron holding an oxygen bottle under each arm as I walked up, my high heels clacking loudly on the concrete.

“Hey, girl!” Staci called brightly, entirely too chipper for six-thirty in the morning. “You look so cute! What brings you out here so early?”

I kissed her cheek – it felt so natural now, when before I'd always been so self-conscious about kissing in public, particularly co-workers. “I thought I'd swing by and offer to buy my girls some breakfast.”

Staci was in the know, so Jaci and I could kiss each other like we meant it, and we did. I helped her stow the oxygen bottles in the backup rack in a side compartment of the ambulance.

“That is so sweet,” Jaci said. “And Staci's right, I love your outfit.”

“You should, you picked it out,” I replied. “How was your night?”

“Excellent,” Staci said. “We had our last call around eleven o'clock and then slept all night. Really fucked up for a Friday.”

“How was your night?” Jaci asked pointedly.

“Tell you later,” I said softly. Then, loudly, for Staci's benefit, “I had a lot of fun. Kevin was really nice to me, and there were some cool bands. I spent a lot of time wishing y'all were around, and Katy and Selina too. I'm really not used to not having backup in situations like that.”

“Yeah, I like going out in groups, too. But the one-on-one thing forces you to get to know whoever you're out with,” Staci said. “Which reminds me. I took your advice. I have a date tonight.”

I squealed and clapped my hands, still not completely free of the airhead persona I'd adopted last night. “That's fantastic, baby! Who is it? Details!”

She grinned shyly. “I kinda took an inventory of my life, y'know, wondering if maybe I'd accidentally friended somebody that maybe I shouldn't've. It turns out that my babysitter – excuse me, my au pair, he always tells me – has had a thing for me for years. And I never really let myself see it, y'know, I was too focused on other shit. But he's cute, he's really good with my son, he's laid back and easygoing and real gentle... so I called him up, and he's taking me to dinner tonight.”

I hugged her tight. “I am so happy for you,” I said. “You deserve something good in your life, Staci, I'm serious. I hope he's everything you need him to be.”

“He's a little too into college football,” she grumped, “but I can overlook that.”

“You want a secret from somebody who used to be a guy?” I asked her. “Ask him to take you to a game and explain all the rules. He'll be yours forever. And you might just end up liking the sport after all.”

“It'd be a great way to bond with your son, too,” Jaci offered.

Staci grinned consideringly. “That sounds do-able.”

“Trust me, baby,” I told her. “I had a girl do that for me once, with soccer, and she wore me like a fucking ring for six months.”

“Nice,” Staci said.

I helped them out with the remainder of their station duties and hung around, chatting, until their relief showed up. They signed over the truck and the narcotics and passed on the keys and radios gladly, then each of them changed into street clothes – for Staci that meant her uniform pants and a loose long-sleeved thermal undershirt in pale blue with a Calvin Klein logo on the front, and for Jaci it was deliciously tight blue jeans and a burgundy cowl-neck sweater and brown suede ankle boots. We left in my car, to a local Mexican joint that did exceptional breakfast tacos. I ordered my typical extra-spicy migas and was pleased that the jalapeños didn't scorch my new, untested mouth. I did drink a lot of coffee, however, because there was a lingering taste in my mouth from the night before, different from the stale paste of smoking too much and the dry, acidic hangover tang, that even the minty aftertaste of my toothpaste couldn't fully cover. I dimly hoped it was Kevin's semen I was tasting and not

Luke's. Somehow the thought of having let that lowlife touch me, much less do what I'd let him do to me, was forming into a serious regret in my belly.

"So, I'm getting closer to being back to work," I told them. "I was kinda hoping, y'know, we could have one last big Girls' Night Out before I start."

"Out to the clubs again?" Staci asked.

"No," I said. "I mean girls' night. Just us, no guys hitting on us. Maybe a cookout or something."

"That sounds like fun," Jaci said. "Y'know, before it gets too cold. We could use my place, I have a pretty big back yard."

"Excellent," I said. "I couldn't have done this, y'know, without y'all."

"I'm just really glad we got to be such friends," Staci said. "I always liked you, Niki, even when you were still Nick. But you were always so caught up in being super-professional, you never really let anybody but Dave get to know you. I thought you didn't like me, honestly, for a long time, until Dave and Frank said that's just how you were. They told me about some of the things you said about me, how you thought I was a great medic and how impressed you were that I worked full time and raised a son on my own, and about... uh... how you thought I was pretty."

She thumped me gently in the arm. "You know, I really could've stood to hear that back then," she chided.

"Sorry," I said. "Before the accident, I just didn't feel like I could."

"Tell me about it," Jaci grumped. "I got Cupertino sniffing around me day in and day out, when the guy I really wanted to hit on me only ever asked me how school was going."

"There was a while there where I actually thought you might be gay," Staci said.

Jaci and Staci laughed, but it made me contemplative. I'd been so sure that they hadn't wanted any of that kind of attention from me when I was male, so certain that they were career-focused and any flirtation from me would be viewed as an annoyance, that I'd retreated behind a wall of chilly professionalism. A wall that, as I was coming to see, made me even more attractive. How many possible wonderful relationships had I turned my back on, back then, by simply believing that I shouldn't make the effort?

"Hey," Jaci said, squeezing my forearm. "Where'd you go, so far away?"

I snapped out of my reverie. "Just thinking about how it used to be. Some of the mistakes I made." I smiled. "But that's all behind me now, and I have a second chance, and I'm really glad I'm making the choices I'm making."

Staci chose to steer the conversation away from the intense place I was taking it. "So what do y'all got planned for today?" she asked airily.

I took Jaci's hand. "Well, I'm meeting Dave for lunch today," I said. "I haven't been alone with him since this happened, and since we're gonna be partners we need to reconnect. And, I suspect, I need to lay down some ground rules."

“Probably,” Staci giggled.

“And then it's home for a nap, and hopefully the Notre Dame game curled up in Jaci's lap, a quiet dinner at home and then bed.”

Jaci squeezed my hand and laid her cheek on my shoulder. “Sounds awesome, baby,” she murmured.

“You two are so cute together,” Staci commented. “If I swung that way, I'd want some of that. It's so obvious how you feel about each other.”

“I hope that doesn't fuck things up at work,” I said. “You know how some of these guys are.”

“Well, don't worry about Frank Jessup,” Staci said. “One foot out of line with him and I'll slap the shit out of him.”

I laughed. “I'd pay to see that.”

I paid the check – the mom-and-pop joint didn't charge much. We chatted a little, waiting for Jaci to finish a cigarette and then the requisite visit to the bathroom by all of us, reminding me uncomfortably of the difference between the male bladder and the female. That was the only thing I truly missed, the ability to 'hold it' for extended periods without much discomfort. I hoped it didn't affect the job – paramedics could easily hit stretches where access to a bathroom was only a fond fantasy. But it didn't seem to bother Jaci or Staci – or any of the female medics I knew – much at all. I was sure I could adapt.

I took them back to their cars and met Jaci at her house, stopping briefly at a convenience store to pick up tampons at Jaci's request. When I came through the front door she was waiting in the front room with an evil smile on her face, her hair tied up in a white ribbon and a blue-and-gold pawprint painted on her left cheek. She wore her old cheerleading uniform, a tight stiff blue-and-gold shell with a garish “HHS Panthers” embroidered patch displayed across the breasts, an eyebrow-raisingly short blue skirt with gold pleats which bared most of her incredible legs, scrunched-down white socks and white Keds. She had a blue-and-gold shiny foil pompom in each hand.

“Well, it was your idea, baby,” she purred. “I couldn't quit thinking about you last night. When we're done I want you to tell me everything.”

I swallowed hard. “There's a lot of everything to tell,” I said.

“I hope so,” she grinned. “Did you get my envelope?”

I nodded.

She struck a cheerleader pose, one arm up and the other at a right angle to her body, one leg bent to hold her foot alongside the opposite knee, toe pointed down. “Well? What are you waiting for?” she asked.

“I wanna see a routine,” I said huskily.

She giggled in pure delight, then put her hands on her hips, elbows pointed at the exact same angle. “Ready? Okay! Panthers got that spirit, yeah, Panthers got that spirit, yeah...” Her body popped into the bouncy, peppy moves like she'd been practicing. Knowing Jaci, she probably

had. She did a high kick, her left foot above her head, and I discovered that she wore nothing whatsoever under her short pleated skirt.

For the second time in eight hours, I sank to my knees in a flood of hungry desire. This time, however, there was no guilt or misgiving at all.

\* \* \*

“So I guess Selina was right,” I told Jaci's belly, where I was curled up, her warm legs surrounding me in a soft embrace. I traced embarrassed circles around her navel with a long fingernail. “I am out of control. All her problems, they passed to me when I changed. I get horny, I get drunk, or both, and I just can't stop. It's like I want to live out every fucking porno I've ever seen.”

“Both of them at once?” Jaci said softly. “Were you safe?”

I gave her belly a gentle slap. “Of course I was! I'm not stupid, Jaci I just couldn't stop. It scared me, afterwards. But while it was happening, it was like I could never get enough of it. It was just how Selina described it.”

“Are you okay with it?” Jaci asked.

“I was,” I confessed, a little sadly. “Until I found out that Luke was such a jerk and then I realized that I'd scared Kevin off. Then I started to regret the whole thing, but it's hard because every time I think about it I can only remember how turned on I was and how good it all felt. And that makes me want to go out and do it again. And that scares me shitless.”

She brushed the hair out of my face with feather-soft fingers. “Well, baby, if you're okay with it, then it's not a problem, no matter what Selina tells you. Look, I'm not upset about it. Hell, I told you to, even though I thought it was just a game. But if it made you happy, if it gave you a way to feel feminine and sexy and all those things you said, then I don't see the bad. So you're insatiable. So you might be a nymphomaniac, a real one. None of that is bad if it makes you happy.”

“But is it healthy?” I asked. “What could it do to us, if I can't control it?”

“First of all, if I know you can't control it, then I know it's not entirely your fault, so I can't get mad or blame you for it. As to whether or not it's healthy, well, probably not. But sometimes the things that are least good for us turn out to be the things we need the most, the things that make us happiest.”

“You think so?” I asked.

“I know so,” she told me. “Don't get uptight about it, baby. If you worry about it constantly, if you let it eat away at you inside, then it becomes unhealthy. But if you accept it, if you learn to live with it and let it make you happy without guilt or tension, then it's as healthy as anything else.”

“I'm just not sure I like the idea of me as this out-of-control, can't-help-myself slut who fucks anybody that shows an interest,” I said softly.

She wiggled a pompom under my nose, making me laugh. “Hey, I kinda like you as an out-of-control, can't-help-yourself slut,” she teased. “I've never had it so good.”

I waved the pompom from in front of my face. “You know what I mean.”

“Look, Nicolette, I'm telling you. Don't worry about it. It's there, it's a part of you. It's a part of us. The sooner we learn to accept it, to live with it, the better it's gonna be for both of us. It's the same as if one of us had an incurable disease. It just becomes a part of things and you either take it in and accept it or you go crazy trying to fight something that can't be fought. You've already done it once, when you woke up as a girl, remember?”

I sighed. “I know you're right, seriously,” I said. “But it's just not what I wanted.”

“Neither was having a pussy,” Jaci soothed, “but look at how well that's working out for you. You've already amazed the shit out of everybody with what an incredible girl you've become. So now you just take it the rest of the way and be an incredible nympho slut.”

I giggled, burying my face against her belly as it dissolved into helpless laughter. “How the hell do you do that?” I asked her finally, tears in my eyes.

“Do what?”

“Make everything okay like that.”

She blushed and stroked my hair. “I really do that?”

“Every day,” I told her. “Or do you just think me saying 'I couldn't do this without you' is just me blowing smoke?”

“I love you,” she told me in a tone of voice that made me tingle all over.

“I love you, too,” I said.

\* \* \*

I didn't even change clothes, just put the same back on – I liked the look, and the newsboy cap was really cute on me, I thought – but took some time to brush my tangled and sweaty hair and repair my makeup. I did a little more with my eyes, a little thicker liner and some darker shadow, just for a little added drama. Jaci snaked her arms around my waist and kissed the side of my neck, and I really loved looking at the two of us together in the mirror.

“Is it really cheesy that I want to get some pictures of the two of us made?” I asked her, reaching over my shoulder to caress her cheek.

“No, I think it's sweet as hell,” she said. “I'd really like a picture of you to carry around when I can't be with you.”

I turned in her arms to face her, our tits squished together wonderfully. “Have I told you lately how beautiful I think you are?” I asked. “You're so pretty, I just can't get over it. I could spend hours just looking at you.”

“Funny,” she said, coloring slightly, “'cause I think you're the most beautiful girl I've ever met. I feel like a mangy dog next to you half the time.”

“We're gonna have to do something about that, then,” I said, kissing her lightly on her lips and both cheeks between words. “Because I can't have you feeling like that. I couldn't stand that.”

“It'll be better once I can get my boobs done,” she said. “And I could probably stand to dress a little better, maybe spend a little more time on my makeup and hair. Maybe even grow it out some.”

“Baby, if the boob job means that much to you, then go make the appointment,” I said. “I'll pay for it up front and then you can pay me back or something. I mean it. It really bothers me that you don't think you're as beautiful as I think you are, and even more because you said it's 'cause of me.”

She gave me a searching look. “You'd actually do that for me?”

“Of course I would,” I said. “Wouldn't you?”

“Well, sure, but...”

I put a finger across her lips. “No buts. We do whatever it takes, baby, until you feel every bit as gorgeous as I see you, whether you're standing next to me or not. Because you're the most beautiful girl in the world.”

I kissed her again and quickly repaired my lips, fluffing my hair and checking my outfit. “David's gonna shit himself seeing me in a skirt this short.”

“He ain't even gonna notice, he'll be so busy staring at your tits,” Jaci said.

“There's that,” I said. “I'll be back in a couple hours, baby, okay?”

“Can't wait,” she said, nuzzling my nose and letting me go. I felt lonely not being in her arms. I grabbed my purse and headed out to the car, taking it through the rapidly thickening noonday traffic onto the freeway for a short, five-minute hop to the exit where the familiar orange-and-white sign stood over a blessedly empty parking lot. I hated crowded restaurants. As I pulled into an empty space near the front of the place, I noted David's beat-to-shit maroon Dodge Intrepid parked nearby. I fixed my hair in the rearview mirror and sashayed into the restaurant, running an appreciative eye over today's crop of Hooters Girls upon entrance.

“Hey,” an exuberant blonde said to me with a wide smile, “sit anywhere you like.”

I found it a little odd that I was both ogling the waitresses the way I always had but at the same time I was eyeing some of the cuter guys in the place, discovering I was starting to develop a “thing” for wide shoulders – a tall black man near the kitchen drew particular attention – and also wondering idly how I would look in one of the trademark scanty uniforms.

“Thanks, sweetie,” I said back to the waitress, and, eyeing David sitting alone at a table with a good view of the television, made my way across the crowded floor towards him.

His eyes popped and his jaw dropped when he saw me, wearing my little designer outfit, with my chalk-blonde hair brushed over one shoulder and my massive new breasts jiggling deliciously with my every step. I gave him a wide Mary Lou Retton smile – Dr. Richards had me practicing my new, girlier smile in the mirror every morning – as I slinked towards him through the crowd. He gaped at me openly, his forgotten beer paused halfway to his mouth.

“Wow,” he croaked. “You look... wow.”

I slid onto a wooden stool across the table from him. “Thanks,” I giggled.

“I could never tell,” he said. “That you weren't born like that.”

“It's been a lot of hard work,” I told him. “I'm glad it's been paying off.”

“It has,” he breathed. “Wow.”

“You already said that,” I said, giggling harder.

He poured me a beer from the pitcher he'd ordered and slid it across the table to me. I took a sip – beer didn't do as much for me as it had used to, but I still enjoyed it, and I didn't want to get as much as buzzed for fear I'd lose control again and wind up fucking half the restaurant – and put my purse on the tabletop and grabbed one of the wrinkled paper menus.

The waitress, a very shapely and well-endowed young woman with “Ashlee” on her nametag and an infectious smile, trotted to our table with a peppy, self-assured stride. “Hey,” she bubbled. “Oh my Gawd, I love your outfit! That's so cute! Where did you get it?”

I returned her smile. “Found it at Macy's,” I said proudly. “It was on sale.”

“That is so cute,” she said.

“Thanks,” I said. “I like yours, too. I always wondered what I'd look like in one of those cute little uniforms.”

She squeezed my arm. “You totally have the body for it, honey.”

“You're sweet,” I demurred.

“So not,” she said. “I'm totally being honest!”

“Then I may have to get a job application,” I teased.

“I'll get you one,” she told me, winking. “You get a uniform to go with it.”

“How about ten wings, hot, with ranch and celery while you're back there?” I added. “Dave?”

Dave jumped a little, having been totally ignored in mine and Ashlee's interchange. He'd never seen me in full-on girl mode before, and I think he was taken aback by the ease with which I accomplished it. “Oh,” he said. “I, uh... Ten hot. Ranch. No celery. And some fries, too, with jalapeño cheese.”

She wrote it all down on the back of a paper towel and disappeared in the same bouncy, resilient stride into the bedlam of the restaurant. Dave was staring at me in open disbelief.

“What?” I asked, wiping my face. “Why are you staring? Do I have a booger?”

“I keep forgetting it's still you in there,” he said softly.

I put my hand over his. “Dave, only the outside has changed. And the changes I had to make to accept it. Inside, I'm still your partner and I'm still your friend, and I'm counting the fucking minutes 'til I'm back out on the streets with you.”

“I know,” Dave told me, “but it's so much to adjust to.”

“Tell me about it.”

He laughed. “Look, Nick – Niki – you're one of the best friends I've got. You've stuck by me through every bad time, every bad decision, you've always had my back,” he said. “And I don't

want that to go anywhere – believe me – but it's tough to feel that way one second and then the next be wondering what you look like naked.”

“And just because we're friends, Dave, if that's what it takes then come back to my place after dinner and I'll strip off for you,” I said. “But that's not where it's gonna end, and you and I both know it.

“Look, I know how good I look,” I went on. “Every time I pass a mirror I'm reminded what a stone fucking hottie I am. I'd be having the same troubles as you are now if I was with a partner who looked like me. I'll do everything I can – show up to work with my hair pulled back and no makeup, that kind of stuff – but my ass is my ass and my tits are my tits and there's nothing I can do about it.”

“Didja have to get 'em so big?” he asked a little plaintively.

“They looked smaller in the catalog,” I said offhandedly. “Look, Dave, I trust you with life-and-death decisions all the time, I can sure as shit trust you with this. Look all you want. Make rude comments. Hell, you can even hit on me. But that's all, okay? I need you to promise me, that's where it ends.”

He coughed and covered it with a slug of beer. “I don't think I can bring myself to hit on you,” he said. “In my head, you're still Nick.”

“We need to fix that,” I told him. “Nick is gone. I'm his twin sister, and you need to get okay with Nicolette, or this is never gonna work.”

He sighed. “I miss Nick,” he said.

“So do I. But there's enough of him inside me, still, to where I'm a pretty decent substitute. But I am not now, or ever, gonna fuck you. Okay?”

“That isn't a problem,” he told me. “No matter how good you look, I just don't think I could ever do that. Besides, there are plenty of other hot blondes out there. I don't need a Nicolette who's my wet dream. I need a Nicolette who's my best friend.”

“She's already here, buddy,” I told him.

He forced words around a lump in his throat. “I missed you out there.”

My own eyes were wet. “I missed you, too.”

“I promise I won't let anything change,” he said. “I don't want this getting weird.”

“Me, neither,” I said.

“I've never had a female close friend before,” he told me honestly. “Buddies, sure, but never a good friend. Is there anything different?”

I nodded. “I hug, now.”

“I can stand that,” he smiled.

“But nothing else really has to change between us. I mean, I still like football, and bicycling, and bad sci-fi movies and girls and all the shit from before.”

He looked at me sheepishly. “Have you... I mean, have you been with... y'know...”

“A guy?” I asked. “Yeah, I tried it. It was... different. I liked it, but not as much as I like being with girls.”

“Are you with a girl now?” he asked.

I nodded. “You have to promise not to say a word to anyone, Dave. You know how medics gossip, and this is officially none of their fucking business.”

“Promise,” he said.

“I'm moving in with Jaci next month,” I said. “We've been together for about a month now. I actually think I'm in love with her.”

“Really? Little Jaci?” he said. “I never would've suspected. Y'know.”

“Yeah, me neither,” I laughed. “But I'm really glad she turned out to be.”

“You sound really happy about it.”

“I am.”

“I'm really glad you're back, Niki,” he told me. “Really glad.”

“See, now, this is the point where I'd hug you,” I told him.

“Don't hold back on my account.”

I stood and bear-hugged him, loving the feel of his hard chest against my cheek, the strength of his arms and his warmth. It didn't do a thing for me sexually, but it felt safe and good and happy.

We sat back down after a long embrace and sipped our beer.

“So, what now?” Dave asked, feeling a little awkward.

“Feel weird?” I asked.

“That's the first time I ever hugged you, I think,” he said.

“I think you're right,” I told him. “Wish that wasn't true, but now at least we can make up for lost time.”

“I guess I just don't know where to go from here.”

I sat back, crossing my legs at the ankle, and pursed my lips in consideration.

“I have an idea about that,” I told him.

“Well, don't keep me in suspense,” he said.

“Top me off,” I told him, pushing over my nearly-empty beer mug. “Best all-around buddy movie.”

He blew out a long breath. “That covers a lot,” he said, a slow smile spreading across his face at the sound of our old time-passer.

“Okay, then, top five.”

“Gotta go with Lethal Weapon for number one,” David said, refilling his beer.

“Uh-uh. Pass. Bad Boys.”

“You're on crack!” David exclaimed. “C'mon, Niki – seriously? Will Smith and Martin Lawrence in front of Danny Glover and a sane Mel Gibson?”

“It was a better movie!” I shot back, sipping beer.

We were still going strong by the time Ashlee returned with our food – and my job application – and were still arguing like the old friends we were by the time the game kicked off.

My relief – and David's – was palpable.

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## **PREHOSPITAL CARE**

### **Part Thirteen**

**by Valerie Hope**

IT WAS LATE AFTERNOON BY the time I got home. David and I had killed another pitcher of beer – well, David did most of the work, my reduced bladder kept me from knocking 'em back the way I used to – and had laughingly filled out my application, never expecting for a moment that I would get a visit and an on-the-spot interview from the manager at halftime. He stared at my breasts throughout the process, put my application on file, and promised to call me when something opened up. I thought the whole thing hysterical. I left in high spirits, full of chicken wings, beer and a friendship I'd been terrified had been irrevocably lost to me. Having David back, like before, gave me more comfort than I'd originally believed. For the first time since I'd fallen into Jaci's arms, I had the overwhelming comfort of feeling like everything would, in the end, be all right. It was like being able to breathe again, for the first time in I couldn't remember when.

Jaci was curled up on the couch, sipping wine and watching some nameless movie on HBO. She brightened immediately when I walked in, humming happily and unable to resist the urge to dance. I kissed her and tossed my purse on the little table by the door, plopping down next to her and stretching catlike across her lap.

“Did you have fun?” Jaci asked.

“So much,” I gushed. “I think me and Dave are going to be just fine. As close to the way things used to be as we can get them. He stares at my tits a lot, but other than that we're the same old friends we used to be.”

“I'm really glad to hear that,” Jaci said. “Can you believe I was actually a little worried?”

“That me and Dave couldn't work it out?” I asked.

“No, that you and Dave would wind up in bed together,” she corrected. “He is seriously cute. I have to admit, some of the times he used to hit on me, I was tempted. Really tempted.”

I shrugged. “Y'know, I don't think I've ever noticed.”

She nodded. “Of course you wouldn't've. Why would you? You don't look at your best friend that way,” she said. “I didn't say I was worried for a sane reason, just that I was worried.”

“I don't think I could ever fuck him,” I said honestly. “I know him too well. He farts in his sleep and I've developed this thing about guys who are prettier than me.”

“Nobody's prettier than you,” Jaci said.

I blushed. “Well, I still think you are.”

“Talk like that will get you very passionately fucked around here.”

I slithered my arms around her neck, drawing her face towards mine. “What the hell are you waiting for, then?” I purred.

\* \* \*

My start date for resuming my shifts on Medic 21 were still a few weeks away, and my only real commitments consisted of the aikido training Katy was giving me at physical therapy, searching for a new house in the nice, older neighborhoods constituting the midpoint between my old and Jaci's new station and the last of the medical checkup Dr. Richards was demanding. I would always be his patient, he'd made that much perfectly clear. The amount of raw data my body could add to his ongoing research was invaluable, and I was glad to provide it. But at least I wouldn't be anchored to the hospital any more. Once Dr. Richards signed off and gave me a clean bill of health, I would largely be my own person again.

I'd finally gotten in to see a dentist, getting a thorough cleaning and some preliminary measurements for porcelain veneers. They were crazy expensive – nearly fifteen grand for what I wanted – but I decided to hell with it. I was getting really into the whole “being pretty” thing, and a dazzling white Marie Osmond smile was the only thing missing from the overall picture I had in my head. I wrote the ghastly check and waited for a call back from the dentist for my first fitting in a couple of days.

Jaci had booked an appointment with Dr. Childress for a new pair of boobies, too – I was lending her the money, and between the surgery and the new teeth, my once-considerable savings were now completely denuded. With no money to really do anything but sit around the house, I quickly grew bored as hell, doing nothing but reading and compulsively tanning and watching reruns of Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders: Making the Team on cable.

Maybe that's why when Travis Moore, the manager from Hooters, called and offered me a job, I nearly jumped in shock when I heard my mouth say yes. If anything, I'd go through their little orientation and get myself a uniform that I could parade around in for a few days until I resumed my work on the ambulance. And the thought of parading around in my little uniform in front of Jaci, in the privacy of our cramped bedroom, didn't detract either.

I reported for my first shift two days later at nine a.m., still set in my mind as halfway through my morning, wearing a pair of overalls and a see-through lace top. Two other girls, nineteen-year-olds studying sonography at the local community college, were in my matriculating class, near-identical Latina brunettes named Sara and Dawn. They were sweet enough, and I learned more about the 'vapid bubblehead' persona that turned Jaci on so much from them in ten minutes than I'd picked up in weeks from any of my other friends. It struck me that these two girls could be completely adjusted and successful in a matter of weeks if they could only stop text-messaging for five minutes. They had the combined attention span of a third grader and giggled constantly. They would have annoyed me if I hadn't found myself instantly liking them.

We filled out paperwork – I-9's and medical emergency forms, all the typical first-day-on-a-new-job stuff – and were issued a binder with the Hooters dress code and code of conduct. I could scarcely believe all the rules levied on these girls, but it made an odd kind of sense; if left to their own devices, they'd text-message the chain into Chapter Eleven in the space of

days. I signed all the waivers and consent forms, was briefed on the opportunities there, which consisted of calendar shoots and beauty pageants, sure, but also included retirement accounts, health benefits and a scholarship program. The chain didn't objectify these young women nearly as much as I'd thought they would. Several of the programs which I opted out of, right and left, seemed legitimately designed to actually help and educate the employees.

And finally I was issued my official uniforms – three in the customary orange-and-white and two in black, with socks and pantyhose and a brown hip-hugger apron to hold our receipts, emblazoned with the wide-eyed Hooters owl. The whole thing fit in a container not much bigger than a shoebox. I was also given an employee ID, which allowed me to track all my transactions and tips, as well as clocking in and out, while working through a swipe-in, swipe-out system. My name-tag, an orange plastic plaque engraved with Niki in white letters, would be sent along from headquarters in a few weeks, so I was issued a temporary badge which gave my name as “New Girl.” We were given a twenty-minute class over the cash register and another about health codes and clean-up which had me fighting to stay awake but confused the other girls terribly. I guess when your job was to stay on top of machinery that literally sustained life, something as relatively simple as a cash register didn't seem so frightening. We were also assigned mentors to show us the ropes and had a quick meet-and-greet. My tutor was a tall, leggy black girl muscled like a panther and with slightly tilted eyes named Jasmine. We hit it off almost immediately. She attended nursing school during the evenings, so we'd be together during the days.

“I gotta admit something to you,” I told her in the locker room as I was changing into my new uniform for the first time. “I'm not really gonna take this job too seriously. I have a full-time job already.”

“Seriously?” Jasmine asked. “What d'you do, girl?”

“I'm a paramedic,” I told her. “I'm out for a while from an injury. I'm really just doing this to pass the time.”

“Are you gonna quit once you go back to work?” she asked me.

“I dunno,” I said. “Maybe.”

She gave me a searching look. “You should think about staying on, girl,” she said. “Body like yours, you're gonna make a shitload of tips, and you could absolutely make the calendar. This is a pretty cool-ass job. What days do you work?”

“Twenty-four hours on, forty-eight hours off. Every third day, if I don't pull overtime,” I told her.

“Well, shit, baby, there you go,” she told me. “All you gotta do to keep part-time status is work two shifts a week. You can do that on your days off.”

“I could,” I said. “But I'm pretty wiped out after I work, and I just moved in with my girlfriend and I'm hoping to spend a lot of time with her.”

“Girlfriend?” she said, quirking an eyebrow. “You gay?”

I nodded. “Queer as a three-dollar bill, baby,” I told her. “I mean, I date guys every once in a while, and it's fun, but I can only fall in love with other girls.”

“Sweet,” she said. “I always wondered if I was lesbian. I'd like to experiment, y'know, sometime, if I can find a cool enough girl who can keep it light and not get too serious. Y'know,

in case it turns out I'm still straight. And I really want to have a baby some day, and that takes a guy no matter what.”

“There's options,” I said. “You only need sperm, sweetie, not a guy.”

She grinned. “What fun is that?”

I laughed. “I hear you.”

“So tell you what, baby girl,” she told me. “Give it two months. If you don't like it, or if you're too tired and it's too much work, then quit and I won't fuck with you about it at all. But I really think you're gonna like it here.”

I made a face. “I just hope that I don't run into nobody from work while I'm in here,” I confessed. “I'd probably never live that shit down, y'know?”

She grinned. “Ain't nothin' to be ashamed of,” she said.

“I'm not ashamed,” I said, looking down at myself in my scanty little uniform with pride. The little white stretch tank top strained across my breasts, making them look even bigger because Jasmine had tied a knot in the back to pull it even tighter. I'd ordered and been issued an extra-small, since Jasmine had told me to order the super-stretchy uniforms a size too small, if not two sizes. The little orange short-shorts clung to my ass like a second skin and the whole ensemble left very little to the imagination. The white showed off my tan to incredible effect. It was my first real experience with pantyhose, and I liked the cool slick feeling against my legs, the tight hug of the material similar to the embrace of the corset that I, unfortunately, couldn't wear under my uniform. White scrunched-down socks and white tennis shoes completed everything. The extra length of my white-blonde locks had been fun and sexy for the costume party, but I was finding that long hair could be extremely annoying. I had it tied up in two schoolgirl pigtails, one over each ear, and my bangs loose. I looked adorable.

“Then why're you stressing?” Jasmine pressed.

“Most of the guys I work with can be real dicks,” I said. “And they never let anything go. If word gets out that I'm working at Hooters then they're gonna be fucking with me about it forever.”

“Fuck them,” Jasmine said, waving a dismissive hand. “It's your motherfuckin' life, girl, and you can do whatever the fuck you want with it. You wanna work at Hooters, then those motherfuckers can just learn to fucking deal with it, y'know what I'm sayin'?”

I shrugged. “I just don't want a raft of shit for it.”

“Ignore it,” she said. “Hell, half the guys at the tables think we're hookers half the time. You can't go around listening to what those short-dicks say about you, girl, you ain't responsible for changing how they think. Just live your damn life.”

I smiled at her. “That's good advice,” I said.

“Besides, girl, with a body like yours, those dumb motherfuckers are gonna be thinkin' and sayin' all that shit about you anyway. You might as well get paid for it, right? Shit, pack those motherfuckers in here and take all their money, there's your revenge right there.”

I laughed. “I like the way you think, girl.”

“C'mon, cutie,” she told me, tucking in the tag of my tank top. “I'll show you around the kitchen. We open in a little while and you get to be a real live Hooters Girl.”

I got a little thrill at the sound of that. “Can't wait,” I said brightly.

\* \* \*

Jaci had no idea how right she was about how effective playing dumb could be. I tried to be as personable as I could once the lunch crowd started showing up, but I didn't really start getting traction with my customers until I started playing with my hair, smacking my gum and saying “um” a lot. My cheeks ached from the effort of smiling all day, even when I didn't feel like it, but as soon as I slipped into the dumb blonde persona I was working hard to perfect, based on my observations of the women around me and lots of reality television heavily featuring Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders trainees, the Kardashian girls and Holly, Bridget and Kendra from The Girls Next Door, my tips almost tripled.

The strangest thing about it, though, was how comfortable I found it. Maybe it was the dichotomy with the profession that I had used for so long to define myself. There, on the ambulance, I was expected to be completely competent and in control, to have an answer and a response for everything. It relaxed me to act vapid and dumb, to not get jokes or follow conversations, to just stand there and be pretty and sexy and fetch beer and hot wings for people. I played with my hair and giggled, I blew bubbles with my gum and fixed my makeup.

Truth be told, part of the 'dumb blonde' persona involved not being a very good waitress, but the dumber and cuter I acted the less my customers cared. I just refused to let myself care about anything but how cute I looked or how many guys stared at my tits and ass – and what a feeling that was, a power-trip like I'd never had before, not even my wild evening with Kevin and Luke – and nothing else. I fucked up orders, I forgot them, every manner of mistake I could make, and all I had to do was smile, lean forward and take a deep breath and guys still tipped me thirty and forty percent. I signed all my receipts with smiley faces and dotted the i's in my name with little hearts and used a pink pen and wrote like the cheerleaders who'd signed my high-school yearbook, in huge letters shaped like bubbles. It was such a change from a job where the tiniest mistake could mean death, pain or debilitation for my patients.

By the time I swiped my white ID card through the reader on the side of the cash register to clock out, I'd decided that Jasmine was right. I liked being a Hooters Girl, more than I ever dreamed I would. And I wasn't likely to just walk away from it, since I hadn't felt this relaxed and this stress-free in nearly a decade.

I pulled off my uniform in the locker room, enjoying the chatter of the girls at shift change. I'd made some friends – a blonde girl that looked uncannily like me in the face named Aimee and a short, peppy and curvaceous Asian girl with almond eyes, glossy black hair and a mouth that begged to be kissed named Lindsey were on the fast-track to becoming real friends, and a tall redhead with very muscular legs named Amber would have possibly been more than that, if she'd been gay and I wasn't so desperately devoted to Jaci. I slipped into a white satin corset with zip sides and a white linen peasant blouse over a second-skin pair of L.E.I. jeans and my new favorite strappy sandals with the three-inch cork wedge heels. I went to the manager's office for my tips – I made about sixty bucks, which Jasmine had assured me was excellent for a Wednesday with no sports – and took the cute little pink-and-white Adidas gym bag I'd picked up, now stuffed with makeup, shoes, socks, hose and skimpy Hooters uniforms off my shoulder and tossed it into the back seat with my bedding and the big orange bag that

contained my helmet and my Nomex bunker gear for working wrecks and hazardous situations on the ambulance.

I was a little worried, at least over the last couple days, because I was starting to have the strange, squirming wild feeling in my breast that I'd felt before, the one that led to my night with Kevin and Luke and the night I got my tattoo and all my various piercings. A part of me had hoped that it would be satisfied by joining the glamorous ranks of Hooters waitresses, but now that I'd discovered cock, it seemed that wouldn't be enough any more. I'd actually had to take a couple seconds to think before denying one or two propositions from some of the male customers who'd flirted with me while I was waiting tables. I was going to have to figure out something to do about this, and soon. As much as a huge part of me wanted to lose control again, to just give in and indulge in whatever kinky, crazy sexual escapade my little mind could devise. But the logical part of me was certain that it would lead to nothing positive, particularly so close to re-starting my job as a paramedic. What if I wound up on YouTube doing something, or as a walk-on in a Girls Gone Wild video or something equally as irrevocable. I would probably be fired, while the commanders who saw me would not be punished or even reprimanded for having watched these videos on company time.

I knew I had to be careful.

I also knew that if I didn't handle this feeling, it was going to get worse and lead me to do something really crazy. I was still thinking about it extensively by the time I pulled up in the driveway of my apartment.

Jaci was stretched out on my couch when I got in, watching Animal Planet and sipping red wine. She sat up with a bright smile on her face when she saw me.

"Hey, baby, where were you?"

"It's a surprise," I told her. "Wait right there a minute."

Giggling, I scampered into the bathroom and quick-changed into my Hooters uniform, sans shoes or pantyhose or any underwear whatsoever. My hope was that Jaci would have me out of my uniform as quickly as I'd gotten into it.

"I really like surprises," Jaci called in from the front room.

"I know you do," I called back. "And you're really gonna love this one."

"You're killing me, baby," she whined. "What is it?"

I stepped around the corner and hit a runway pose. "I, um, got a temp job."

Her eyes almost popped out of her head. "Oh my God. Are you serious? Are you fucking serious?" she squealed, laughing and clapping her hands.

"Yep," I said proudly. "I just finished my first shift as a real, honest-to-God Hooters Girl. It was a total trip. I filled out the application as a joke, while me and Dave were eating that day. Well, next thing I knew I was having a little interview thing with the manager, and then the next thing he's calling me on my cell. I dunno, babe – I was bored and low on cash, I don't start back on the ambulance for a couple weeks, yet. I originally said yes 'cause I wanted the uniform, y'know, so I could parade around in it in front of you and try and turn you on. But now that I've

actually done it, and gotten to see what it feels like to look that cute and have all those guys flirting and staring at you...”

“You're kidding. You want to try and keep the job?” she gasped, hands tented over her wide-open mouth.

“I know it means less time together,” I said, trying to mollify her, “but I can stay part-time and fit it around my paramedic schedule, it's only six hours a day, two days a week during lunch, and you're usually sleeping anyway. We can use the money, baby, and I love the way it makes me feel, and we'll still have the nights together, and... baby? Are you listening?”

“You look so... fucking... hot in that,” she half-drooled. “C'mere.”

I smiled and jumped into her lap. straddling her, my hands clenching in her hair and my crotch grinding against her thigh as I lowered my mouth onto hers and kissed her as hard and as passionately as I could.

\* \* \*

I sagged against Jaci's chest, panting and soaked with sweat, gasping for breath that wouldn't come through an open mouth. My soft, damp hair floated around our faces like a curtain and I caressed her face with both hands, peppering her eyelids, cheeks, nose and lips with tiny little baby kisses.

“I love you so much, baby,” I whispered. “So much.”

She was breathing as hard as I, and her fingers, pruny from their immersion in my wet crotch for so long, slipped from me and traced a warm, wet line up the small of my back.

“I love you,” she said back breathily. “I've always loved you, from the first moment I saw you.”

I was barely able to talk around the size of the lump in my throat. I'd never been as happy in my entire life – either of my entire lives – as I was that one perfect moment. “Is love always like this for girls?” I asked.

“I wouldn't know,” she said. “I've never been in love before you. I had crushes, I was in lust with people, I even really cared about people, but until I met you I didn't know what love was.”

Tears leaked from my eyes. It felt perfectly normal to be crying. “I wish there was more, y'know, that we could do, some way to get closer,” I said.

“We'll come up with something,” Jaci said.

“Tell me something you've never told anyone else before,” I urged her.

She wrapped her arms around me tight and kissed my neck and collarbone for a moment. “When I was nineteen, I used a fake ID to get an abortion,” she said. “I got pregnant by my boyfriend at the time and when I told him he wouldn't return any of my calls. I broke into my college fund – that's why I wound up going to community college for my paramedic's degree instead of going to a four-year college, I drove three hundred miles and aborted the pregnancy.”

“Oh, baby,” I said, kissing her and stroking her hair. “That must have been so hard for you. I'm so sorry.”

“I still have dreams. I wonder if it was a boy or a girl, and what it looked like.”

“Of course you do,” I said.

“Your turn,” she told me.

“I was engaged,” I told her. “Before I met you, before I even became a medic. She was killed in a car accident. I'd say it was a drunk driver, but she was the drunk driver. I never got to know what it would be like, y'know, to be married or to have kids. After Shannon died, I just kinda quit trying to ever know. Until I met you, of course.”

She kissed me and sniffled loudly. “I'm so sorry.”

I wiped away a tear. “Again,” I said. “Another secret, but this time a happy one.”

She didn't skip a beat. “I want you to be my wife someday.”

My breath stilled in my chest and my heart skipped a beat. I'd never even let myself dream about being a husband, and I'd grown to hate the very word, since it brought back so much pain and grief. But the word wife – I'd never applied it to myself before, and it shocked me and thrilled me and made me feel a way I thought I'd forgotten how to feel.

“Now you,” she said. “I want a silly one.”

I giggled. “This one scared me,” I told her, brushing her hair out her eyes with my long fingernails. “But somewhere, over the last, like, six weeks or so, it dawned on me just how bad I want to be a Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader.”

She laughed and hugged me close. “You'd be an awesome DCC,” she told me. “And you never know, if you start taking dance classes now, you might be ready for training camp in a season or two.”

I got a serious case of the giggles. “Not a fucking chance,” I told her. “I would be in a constant state of arousal around all those girls. I'd soak through the uniform in, like, five seconds.”

“Now you,” I said. “A sweet one.”

“I see you in your little uniform and see how you learned to dance and took self-defense and all the girly stuff they had you doing and I get jealous, 'cause I want to do it too. You're such a good woman, Niki, and the stuff you do is so girly and feminine and fun... and I want to have everything you have.”

I giggled. “I'll totally get you a job application.”

“Now you,” she said. “A serious one.”

I cleared my throat. “Okay, um... you remember what I told you about Selina, about the problem she used to have? Well, I think I have it too. I'm starting to feel like I'm about to lose control again, like before, and I'm both afraid of what's gonna happen and really turned on by it. I just hope I can control it somehow, so I don't get in any trouble or wind up doing something with someone at work or something crazy like that.”

“Oh,” Jaci said. “Wow.”

I shrugged. “We knew this might happen.”

“I guess so,” she said. “But it's still kinda weird hearing you say it like that.”

“Yeah,” I agreed.

“Look, baby, it's a part of you. I'm not afraid of it. We'll figure something out.”

“It's strange,” I said. “On the one hand, I really don't want to be like this. I want to just be your girlfriend and you and me have our life and not have any outside distractions. But on the other hand – I gotta admit – a part of me wants to just lose control and stay that way, go completely crazy and never stop.”

“There's gotta be a way to balance the two,” Jaci said. “Niki, you're the smartest person I've ever met, and the strongest. If anybody can figure it out, it's you.”

“I appreciate that, more than you know,” I told her. “But it still scares me. And turns me on, all at the same time. Being like this – it really conflicts me. I'm not sure how to feel about it.”

“Maybe you and I could figure out a way to do this together,” Jaci offered. “Like, be swingers or something.”

“I dunno. I'm not sure I'm comfortable with the idea of dragging you into this. It's not really something I have total control of. I'm still scared that one day this could seriously ruin my life, or my career, or both. There's still enough male inside me to desperately want to protect you from that.”

“I can look after myself,” Jaci stated.

“I know,” I amended. “But it doesn't change me feeling that way. It's a holdover, from before the accident. I know you can take care of yourself. But it still feels really good when you occasionally let me do it.”

“Sweetie, there's a safe way to do anything. People jump out of planes and work in toxic waste dumps and active volcanoes, and they're alive because they think it through. That's all we have to do, is think it through and take precautions.”

I sighed and slid off her lap to curl up next to her. “I know that,” I said. “But like I said, I can't really control this thing. I don't always have the luxury of thinking it through. I mean, look at the whole Hooters Girl thing. I went completely on pussy control and next thing I know I'm doing it. What happens if somebody from work comes in and sees me? Spreads the word, y'know, 'hey, everybody, go check out the medic who works at Hooters, go stare at her tits and fucking sexually harass her. It could really fuck things up for me, and I did it without even giving it a second thought. Once it hit me that being a Hooters Girl turned me on, I couldn't stop any more.”

Jaci caressed my cheek. “Tell you what,” she said briskly. “I'm going to get up and make myself a sandwich, then I'm gonna call Selina and have her meet me for lunch tomorrow, while you're waiting tables. I'm gonna talk to her about this and let her know what's going on, and I'm gonna get her advice for both of us. She beat this thing once, and I know she can help us figure it out.”

“Do you really think that's a good idea?” I asked. “Y'know, airing out all our personal business like that?”

“I do,” she told me. “She's your friend, she cares about you and she feels responsible for what's happened to you. She wants to help, it'll help her with her guilt and whatever else she may be feeling. And she knows more about this than either of us.”

“Okay,” I said. “Will you come visit me at work when you're done and tell me what you find out?”

“And miss a chance to see you in your uniform again?” Jaci asked, waggling her eyebrows. “Not a fucking chance.”

“You are so bad,” I accused her before falling into her offered kiss.

\* \* \*

“I don't know anything about it, really,” Jaci explained, lighting a cigarette and sipping her wine in the little outdoor café where Selina had agreed to meet her. The gorgeous nurse was dressed to thrill, in a little black halter dress with tiny white polka dots that nipped in at her tiny waist and framed her flawless, enhanced C-cups. She wore a bit too much makeup and designer sunglasses against the late morning glare.

“Can I bum one of those?” she asked, gesturing to Jaci's pack of Marlboro Ultra Lights. When Jaci nodded, she took one and lit it from a book of the bistro's matches she'd taken while waiting for a table, exhaling a thin cloud of billowing bluish smoke above her head.

“The main thing you have to understand is that you're working with two separate things, here,” Selina began. “First of all, there's the pathology itself. It's not a want, Jaci, not for me and not for Niki. It's a need. She feels horniness like you would feel hunger, or thirst, or the urge to pee. If you try to ignore it, then it grows and strengthens until it can no longer be denied. And just like if you ignored your hunger until it got out of control, you'd stuff yourself until you got sick, it's that way for Niki with sex. The longer she denies it, tries to go without it, the crazier she goes when she finally gives into it. That's why she wound up with two guys her first time, and if she doesn't find a way to manage it instead of bottling it up, she'll wind up with six guys, and the whole thing will show up on the Internet.”

“And what's the other thing?” Jaci asked.

“There's the sickness, one, and then there's the why. The reasons she uses to do it. For me, it was to fill the emptiness inside me, trying to find something to fill the hole inside that was left by having no self-esteem and a shitty self-image. But I don't think my reasons are Niki's reasons.”

“What do you think they are?”

“I asked Dr. Kennedy – the staff psychiatrist – the same question, rhetorically. She said she thought it was an attempt on Niki's part to assert control over her life. Think about it – she had her whole life turned on its ear. Everything she'd ever learned about her body, her world, her life and her relationships was made wrong literally overnight. All her training as a male became useless in the space of a few days. So you take someone who's used to being in charge of situations, of knowing what to do, and you put them in a situation where they can't run, where nothing they do changes anything, where they have no influence whatsoever, and they're going to look for what things they can control.”

“Men,” Jaci concluded. “She knows she can turn them on, that she can make them do basically whatever she wants them to do.”

“Right,” Selina confirmed. “Also, she can control how the world perceives her, probably more as a girl than she ever could as a boy. So she uses that, too. She surrenders control to you, sexually, because she trusts you. She uses you, subconsciously, to help her come to terms with the helplessness and victimization she's been feeling since the accident.”

“Am I doing her any good at all?” Jaci asked.

“That's something y'all need to work out between yourselves,” Selina said honestly. “Only the two of you can determine that.”

“Okay,” Jaci said, puffing on her cigarette. “So what do you suggest?”

“Well, there's one thing that's extremely alarming that y'all have to get under control pretty fast,” Selina said. “Niki only lets herself lose control, to surrender to her overdeveloped sex drive and indulge in her pathology when she gets drunk. It won't be long, if it hasn't happened already, that her mind will associate the loss of control with the alcohol, and she'll start believing that she can't lose control without it. And as the drive to express herself sexually more and more often strengthens, she'll start drinking more and more heavily. It won't be long before she has herself a serious substance abuse problem if y'all don't break the cycle soon. You have to get her to lay off the booze when she's out.”

“What if I suggested to her that she have, like, one night a month that's her fuck night?” Jaci asked. “And make her promise no booze. Tell her, y'know, 'this is your night to go out and get laid and fuck around and do whatever you want. I promise not to get upset about anything you do so long as you do it sober.”

Selina shrugged. “I don't know if that would work or not,” she confessed. “Once again, it depends on y'all. And you really should be talking to a therapist about this, Jaci, seriously. I'm just a nurse.”

“A nurse who's beaten this,” Jaci countered.

“And also a nurse who was born a girl,” she shot back. “I already knew what a clitoris did and how it felt, and what it was like to have things inside my vagina. For Niki it's all brand new, and it's blowing her mind. She's experiencing sexual gratification – and sexual urges, too, for that matter – that her mind was never designed to have to deal with. She's as high on it as if you'd given her heroin.”

Jaci blew out a long breath. “I don't know what to do.”

“First of all, you may be onto something with the whole dominatrix thing,” Selina said. “You can impose rules on her, make her do things or not do things. And you need open other avenues for her, like I did.”

“What other avenues?” Jaci asked.

“Look at me,” Selina said, arms wide. “I dress like a fucking hooker when I'm not in scrubs. As slutty as I can and not be naked walking down the street. It helps me, that I make the world look at me like a slut and a whore. I used to love that before my recovery, feeling like that. So I just found another way to let myself have it that didn't involve spreading my legs for strangers.”

“I see what you mean,” Jaci said.

“Look, as her partner, you just have to answer the same two questions over and over again,” Selina said. “And you'll need Niki's help to do it. You have to find out what Niki wants, and why Niki wants it. If you have a long list of those, then you'll be able to figure out what to do pretty easy.”

Jaci stubbed out her cigarette in the little glass ashtray and downed her wine. “I guess I have a lot of thinking to do,” she confessed.

Selina patted her hand. “You do,” she confirmed. “But don't sweat it. Don't stress. Niki's not in any immediate danger. Start at the top – call Dr. Richards and get him to recommend a good therapist, someone you can both talk to, separately and together. It'll help you get perspective.”

“I'll do that. Tomorrow,” Jaci said.

“And in the meantime, help her let the pressure off a little bit at a time so she doesn't get drunk and let it off all at once and put herself at risk,” Selina said. “Don't play at being her dominatrix, be her dominatrix. Make her flash her tits at people driving by while you're in the car. Make her get phone numbers from strangers but don't make her call them back. And while you're doing that, be on the lookout for a kind, discreet guy who can put the dick to her every now and again to take the edge off.”

“Oh, now that sounds easy,” Jaci grumped. “Finding a guy to fuck my girlfriend and not either try and fuck me, too, and to not get weird about it and try to take her away for himself.”

“If you look carefully enough, they're out there,” Selina said. “Believe it or not, I think I might actually know a few likely candidates. Former, um... co-workers of mine that I kept in touch with. Great guys, and pretty much up for anything, as well as being really sexually openminded. A situation like yours would seem completely normal and understandable to them.”

“I'd really appreciate it if you could work out an introduction,” Jaci said.

“You're gonna get through this, sweetheart,” Selina reassured her. “I can see how much she means to you. Y'all're gonna be fine, I can feel it.”

“You're really sweet,” Jaci said.

“And I don't care what hour of the day or night it is, Jaci, if you have a question or a problem or just need someone to talk to, you call me. I want to help Niki through this as much as you do.”

“I know you do,” Jaci said, giving her hand a squeeze.

“Good luck,” she said, standing. Jaci stood at the same time, and gave her a hug and a chaste little air-kiss on each cheek, like they were Europeans or fashion models or something. It made Jaci giggle.

“One more thing I almost forgot,” Selina said over her shoulder. “Niki's not exactly in touch with her feelings yet. She may be telling you things that she needs without even knowing that's what she's doing. You have to really listen to her carefully and think about what she says, even if she's joking.”

“Gimme an example,” Jaci said.

“Oh, think about if there's anything she mentioned more than, say, twice in a short span of time,” Selina said. “She may be asking you to get it for her.”

“Oh,” Jaci said. “Well, one night we were fooling around and she asked to see me in my old cheerleading uniform. After that she's mentioned cheerleaders probably three, maybe four times in the past week.”

“That's exactly what I'm talking about,” Selina said. “She may be asking you, without even realizing it, to help her become a cheerleader somehow. Like most guys, she probably grew up thinking cheerleaders were the paragons of femininity. Maybe she's saying she'll never feel completely like a girl until she gets the chance to cheer.”

“Wow,” Jaci said. “You're good. So how would you deal with that?”

Selina said, “Easy. I'd sign her up for cheer classes and maybe get her an audition for an arena football team or maybe enroll her for the squad for the basketball team at the junior college. Let her do the rest. I bet you she'd work her ass off.”

“I know she would,” Jaci laughed. “I was just gonna sew her a DCC Uniform and then fuck her in it.”

“That might be a lot of fun, but it doesn't help her unless she can be in the kick-line,” Selina said.

“What do you think it means if she keeps talking about Kendra from The Girls Next Door?” Jaci asked.

Selina smiled. “It means you probably better hire a good photographer.”

To Be Continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## PREHOSPITAL CARE

### Part Fourteen

by Valerie Hope

“HEY, BABY,” I SAID AS Jaci walked through the door, fresh from lunch with Selina and tanning. I *loved* her brown. She was so pale most of the time, I worried that she'd burn that gorgeous skin of hers half the time working wrecks on the roadside in the bright sunlight, no sunscreen in sight. But now that she had a nice base tan – which was a big contrast to her milky skin from before – she wasn't in that kind of danger any more. And beside all that, it made her look *incredibly* hot.

“Hey, yourself,” she said, kissing me.

“Didja have a good time?” I asked her. “How's Selina doing?”

“I did,” Jaci replied, “and Selina's doing real well.”

“I should call her,” I said. “I haven't talked to her in a while, and texting just doesn't really count. Maybe she and I could go out or something.”

“You totally should,” Jaci said.

She had a strange, intense look in her eyes, like she was seeing me for the first time. “Are you okay?” I had to ask.

“I dunno,” she answered. “Selina gave me a lot of things to think about.”

“Like what?” I pressed.

“I'll have to get back to you,” Jaci said cryptically. “I *want* to talk to you about some of the stuff she mentioned, but I have to get it all straight in my head, okay? I promise, as soon as I get it figured out a little, we'll talk.”

“Sounds serious,” I said, a little freaked, to be honest.

“It is, kinda,” Jaci quantified. “But then again, it isn't. It's complicated.”

“Can I help?” I offered.

She smiled that sweet I-love-you-Niki smile I'd come to love and treasure so much. “Of course you can,” she told me. “But this time, maybe you *shouldn't*.”

“Okay,” I said, a little deflated. That was the way with us medics – we liked to charge in and save the day, and we got a little bent out of shape when we weren't allowed to.

“Don't pout,” Jaci told me. “You know I have to eat your pussy when you pout.”

“Then I should pout all the fucking time,” I said, sticking out my bottom lip as far as it would go and turning on my very best puppy-dog eyes, which I'd practiced in the mirror once Staci had told me I had the best she'd seen in a while. My little Hooters pigtails, which I hadn't taken out yet, must've made me look all of about twelve years old.

Jaci laughed and kissed me in such a way that my panties started to soak a little. I pulled her closer to me and reached around to start working on the waistband of her second-skin jeans.

She grabbed my wrists gently. “Please, baby, you know if we start then we'll get all sidetracked, and I really do want to think about some of this stuff while it's still fresh in my mind,” she said. “Do you mind waiting 'til later?”

That took me aback. That was the first time Jaci had turned me down for sex. I decided I really didn't like that feeling, and the wild part of me wanted to go into the bedroom and change into the sluttiest, sexiest outfit I could piece together and *make* her fuck me. But I took a deep breath instead.

“No, I don't mind, baby,” I told her. “I mean – I do, 'cause I *really* want to, but I don't, because it's you asking. But you're gonna have to promise to seriously work me over tonight. Your baby don't like going without, you know that, right?”

She nodded. “Yeah, you're pretty fucking insatiable.”

“Less than eight orgasms before lunch 'n' I'm cranky all damn day,” I affirmed.

“I'm gonna go get on the Internet for a little bit,” Jaci told me, “and do a little mental organizing. Why don't you put something on the stove for dinner, and we'll talk while we eat, and afterwards I'll put you on the table and you can be dessert. Sound good?”

I moaned, low in my throat, almost a purr. “Sounds *real* good.”

She smacked my bottom, hard enough to make me jump a little, and doing *nothing* positive for the sodden state of my panties. “Then scoot, sexy. I'll be out in a little while.”

\* \* \*

The next day when Jaci went to work, I spent the morning in the tub, masturbating. The crazy urges were still there, stronger than ever, eating away at my insides. I could feel the wildness inside me, growing and boiling, until it started to scare me a little. I pushed the boundaries as far as I could, digging into my box of sex toys until I had no less than six inches stuffed in every hole in me, and still it felt as though I could never cum enough to offset the driving, urgent need to just go *apeshit* out there. I was honestly afraid to go out of the house, sure that I'd reverse-cowgirl fuck the mailman if I saw that he had anything resembling a cock for me to use.

I arched my back a little, forcing the six-inch dildo in my ass a little further in. It made me hiss with pain a little, but that got quickly drowned beneath the fresh wave of pleasure. I sawed into my pussy a little deeper and harder with the Royal Rabbit that Jaci had gotten me, letting the little teaser brush hard against my clitoris, while I sucked on the mammoth nine-inch lifelike cock in my other hand for all I was worth, my moaning and squealing muffled against the oversized invader. Opening my throat the way Jaci had taught me, I slid it in, fighting my gag reflex, until my swollen lips wrapped around the very base. My head swam a little from lack of

air before I finally pulled it out with a gasping moan. My whole body felt on fire, my nipples poking proud and red from the sudsy surface of the bathwater.

I came several times, but it did *nothing* to ease the wild animal lust burning inside me. Sighing, I pulled the wet toys out of me and dropped them on a folded towel beside the tub, then got up and dried off. The thick towels of Egyptian cotton teased my skin and turned me on all over again.

Putting on the super-cute, super-stretchy Hooters uniform and walking towards my car to go to my shift seemed like a walk to the gallows for me. I was petrified that I was going to wind up doing something that put me in danger – but at the same time, I was positively *aching* for it. I didn't know what to do, and I certainly didn't know how to feel.

Somewhere deep in my mind, I braced myself for the inevitable. It was going to happen again, and it was going to happen *today*.

A part of me was overjoyed.

\* \* \*

I worked the tables well – my orientation with Jasmine was almost over and I could start scheduling my shifts whenever I liked – and hoped my prominent nipples didn't stand out through the super-stretchy material of my white tank top. I'd probably get better tips if they did, actually, but I was still a little embarrassed about how turned on I was at work. I hustled pitchers of beer and platters of wings, flirted with my customers and raked in the tips. I let my tits brush against arms and pressed them into backs as I leaned across to refill beer mugs, I leaned over to give long and tempting looks at my shapely, hard-as-a-rock ass and down into my delicious cleavage, I played with my hair and acted the airhead blonde better than I ever had. I also had to run to the bathroom no less than six times during my shift to change out a maxi-pad sodden and clinging from the wet arousal I'd placed it there to soak up. I was so horny I was actually starting to *shake*. I walked onto the back loading dock in my adorable little uniform and bummed a cigarette from a co-worker, a sexy and perky little tanned redhead named Jessica, taking a light from her and trying to calm myself down as best I could.

“You okay, girl?” Jessica asked, puffing on her own smoke.

“Yeah,” I said. “Stressing.”

“About what?” she asked.

“Y'know, like, life,” I told her, blowing out a lungful of blue-white smoke. “I got a lot of shit going on right now.”

“You should find some weed,” she offered. “Y'know, to help you calm down.”

I giggled. “I would, but weed doesn't calm me down, y'know, I get all paranoid 'n' stuff and it only makes shit worse for me. Thanks, though.”

“Wanna talk about it?” Jessica offered.

I smiled and brushed my hair behind my ear, setting my oversized silver hoop earring swaying against my neck and shoulder. “You're sweet,” I said. “But, like, it's really complicated 'n' shit. I wouldn't wanna, like, burden you or nothin'!”

She snorted. “Girl, if you knew *half* the shit people told me...”

I shrugged. “I guess the short version is, I'm fuckin' lonely as shit,” I said. “No – not lonely. Fuckin' *horny*. I don't want, like, a boyfriend or nothin', I just wanna get my ass laid and then never fuckin' call back, y'know? I just want *dick*.”

Jessica laughed out loud. “Hell, yeah! I *totally* know what you mean, girl!”

“So, like, I'm thinkin' about, y'know, gettin' all slutty lookin' and going out to a club to fuckin' pick up some random guy and take him home and fuck the hell out of him,” I said, “but I'm stressin' 'cause I'm not sure about how that shit will go, y'know? I mean, what if I get, like, some stalker or some fuckin' psycho or something? And what if he doesn't fuck good? Does that mean I have to go do it all again the next night, like that? Shit. And baby, the battery-powered version just ain't cuttin' it.”

“Yeah, totally,” she laughed. “Sometimes a girl just *needs* some live cock.”

“Absolutely,” I said. “So now you know why I'm stressin'!”

She patted my arm and tossed her cigarette butt. “It's cool, sweetie, whatever you decide to do,” she said. “You're a grown woman, you can totally make your own decisions. Whatever you decide will be cool.”

She walked back inside – who knew if she was going to tell everyone in the restaurant how big a slut I was, sometimes girls did that – and left me alone to smoke in peace. Funny how I was actually considering taking the advice of someone at *least* ten years younger than me about life and decision-making. Sure, I looked seventeen, but I was much older and had seen and done much more. And it wasn't my decisions I was questioning. It was my reasons for deciding that concerned me.

I knew from talking with Selina that I should be fighting this, but the hardest part of that – and the part that Selina didn't tell me – was that I didn't *want* to fight it. I wanted to succumb and just be the crazy, out-of-control slut that my insides were driving me to be. In fact, I was starting to become *desperate* for it. A part of me could easily see how this could end, my face and body splashed across porn site after porn site on the Internet, strange cocks shoved in me every which way, half-dead from Hepatitis C and HIV and herpes, my career as a medic in tatters, my relationship with my precious Jaci in ruins. But as big a part of me wanted that so badly I could scream. And all of it served to make my pussy throb and drip with wetness even more.

If I didn't get a cock soon I was going to do something stupid, I realized.

I puffed a few more times on the cigarette Jessica'd given me and tried to think of a plan. My mind wouldn't function past coming up with *get yourself laid* over and over again. My long fingernails toyed with my phone, in the little brown pouch hanging between my legs, wondering if Jaci could call sick and come off the truck, drive clear across town and try to help me. But that wouldn't be fair to her. In desperation, I flipped open the pink-and-white-swirl Nokia and jammed out a text message with my long, porn-star fingernails.

*Hey baby gotta get myself laid tonite cant hold out anymore. Sorry. Will let u kno what happns. Luv u Niki.*

I tapped 'Send' and dropped the phone back into my pouch. At least now I felt like I wasn't cheating on my girlfriend any more. I sighed long and hard, took a considerable final pull on the cigarette and tossed it. I popped an Altoid to get the smoke off my breath, quickly re-coated my lips in pink glitter gloss and stepped inside to get back to work, hoping against hope that I didn't just jump on the next guy I waited on that I thought was cute and rodeo-fuck him right there in the aisle in front of everyone who'd come to Hooters to watch the game.

\* \* \*

I got a text back just as I was clocking out at the end of my shift: *Hey baby do what u got 2 do I understand n I luv u no matter what. Talk l8r. Luv Jaci.*

I sighed in relief and drove myself home. I took an hour to cake on a little too much makeup – heavy eyes and red glossy lips – and did a toned-down version of my Kelly Bundy tease to get lots of volume. I slipped into my sexiest corset – a red number with black lace trim and about a half-size too small, so when I laced it up my tits pressed together hard and looked like they were about to spill over the top and nipped my already slender waist in even more, giving me the most amazing Jayne Mansfield hourglass figure – and then slinked into a little red sheath skirt with spaghetti straps that looked amazing against my tan. I didn't even bother with panties, the way I was feeling now I'd only lose them anyway. I selected an oversized bag, gold lamé with tan leather straps, and stuffed it with a change of clothes, makeup, hairspray, keys and ID, my phone and sunglasses and a pack of skinny Capri cigarettes I'd bought on the way home. I piled into my car, smelling faintly and pleasantly of the pricey Estée Lauder perfume I'd spritzed on my pulse points on my way out the door. I pushed my sunglasses down onto my nose and lit a cigarette as I backed out of the parking slip in front of my apartment and pulled into traffic.

I was running a little early for the party crowd – the sun was just now going down – but I was banking on the fact that I looked hot enough and accessible enough to get guys to talk to me no matter what. It's not like I was out looking for Mr. Right, anyway. I just wanted him warm, willing and free from disease.

I pulled into one of the trendier bars popping up in midtown, an upscale place called Perrino's which was attached to the Omni hotel. I grinned as I pulled in, seeing that there was a big convention of some kind in town and the bar was basically packed. I handed my keys to the valet with a glittering smile and sashayed in, making my best entrance and delighting at the number of heads that turned to watch me walk. I put plenty of sway and wiggle in my walk to keep those eyes tuned to this station, and wasn't disappointed. I'd only just sat down on one of the tall barstools, perching sexily with ankles crossed, when a tall, distinguished looking man with greying hair at his temples and a relaxed smile slid alongside me.

"Hello," he said in a rich bass. "May I buy you a drink?"

*Smooth operator*, I said. I hadn't really considered older men before – hell, I hadn't really considered *men* at all before just a little while ago – but this guy was handsome and smooth and polished and oh, so confident. My body started to respond to him almost immediately.

"Vodka and cranberry juice," I said with a flirtatious smile. "Thank you, um...?" I prompted, gesturing to the empty stool next to me.

"John," he replied, "John Richardson. I haven't seen you around, are you with the convention?"

I seized on a sexy idea and suppressed a giggle. I took the hand he offered, palm down and ladylike – it had taken Dr. Richards and company months to break me of the hard up-and-down pumping handshake of the man I'd used to be. “Not as such,” I told him. “I'm Nicolette.”

“Pretty name for a pretty girl,” he complimented me, and I paid him back with a sexy, girlish blush. “What do you mean, 'not as such'?”

“Well, I'm with the convention to be sure, but I'm not officially *with* the convention,” I told him, taking out a cigarette which he lit for me without missing a beat. This guy had the manners and the slick moves that I'd used to hate before my accident. But now I see why they worked. This guy was turning me the fuck *on*.

“I'm not sure I follow,” he told me.

“Let's just say I'm an independent contractor,” I replied cryptically. “I'm a kind of support staff for the hotel. Hospitality, you could say.”

“I see,” he said, his face clearly showing that he didn't. Then, slowly, I could see the fake idea I'd planted begin to take root and his eyes widened a little.

“You *do* see,” I said with a sexy, knowing smile.

“I wouldn't have guessed in a million years,” he said, chuckling. “You're not exactly what I pictured a... a...”

I patted his wrist. “I prefer call girl,” I whispered to him.

“Very well,” he said. “I would've been here for hours trying to figure out what the politically correct term would work out to.”

“Why don't we skip it entirely, then, and I'll just be Nicolette and you just be John?” I suggested, running the inside of my foot 'accidentally' up his leg a little. “Thanks for the drink, by the way.”

“I can't stand to see a beautiful woman drink alone,” he told me.

“And they say chivaryl is dead,” I teased. “What do you do, John?”

“Nothing so glamorous as you,” he demurred. “I'm a pharmaceutical rep.”

I leaned forward to provide him a delicious and unhindered view of my cleavage. “So you're in town for a convention, you don't know anyone, you wander down to the hotel bar and suddenly, across a room, our eyes meet. Sounds like a Harlequin romance, doesn't it?”

He chuckled, a rich and deep sound. “It does, when you put it like that.”

“Tell you something, John, I've met a lot of men in my life. Some I've liked, some not, some I connected with, some not,” I told him. “But I have *never, ever* met someone who I found quite as attractive as I find you.”

He sipped his drink to cover his shock at my directness. “You're too kind.”

“I'm too honest,” I riposted. “Everyone says so.”

“So, why don't we have a few more drinks, then, get to know one another a little bit, and then you take me back to your room so I can be whoever you want me to be?” I asked him.

“Just business?” he asked.

“Ordinarily, I'd say yes,” I explained. “But I'm not lying about how attractive you are. So let's just say business *and* pleasure for now, okay?”

“Okay,” he said. “I feel like I should tell you, Nicolette – I'm married.”

“Is she here?”

“No,” he said.

“Well, I am,” I said. “And it doesn't bother me if it doesn't bother you.”

\* \* \*

I stretched out like a cat in the sunshine that night, *utterly* satisfied with myself and with the sex. I still had a little bit of cum drying on my smooth chin, which I scratched delicately with my long nails. I just sat in my car, giggling uncontrollably and smoking my skinny, girly cigarettes. The wildness was gone from me – thankfully – but I didn't feel the guilt I had last time.

Reaching into my purse, I grabbed out the thing that gave me the giggles. A wad of cash, loose twenties and fifties. I lifted my hands to the roof of the car and let the money rain down over me while I laughed.

John had been fun, although his interpersonal confidence had *not* carried over into his sexual confidence. He had kind of a small dick, too, which left me a bit unsatisfied, but I did enjoy reading his needs and being the aggressive, dominant female who pushed him down, tied his hands and just *took* him like he was a blushing, fumbling virgin. I rode him hard, leaving him drained and exhausted but only just whetting my prodigious appetite. After I'd fucked him twice, I'd untied him and cuddled for a little bit and he asked me what the tab was. Unaware what the going rate was, I just winged it and named a number. John dug it out of his wallet without batting an eye and passed it to me.

I was a hooker, that fast. And it felt *amazing*. Scandalously naughty, deliciously slutty, the thrill of the illegality of it and the mystique of the woman who had sex for a living, that air of been-everywhere-done-everything that surrounded the professional escort or stripper that only served to make them more worldly and more attractive.

I was on such a high, I returned to the bar and was barely through my second vodka-and-cranberry before another man – this one a little chubby and balding and obviously relying on the Scotch he was sipping for the courage to talk to me – was in my company. So I did what any good hooker would do – I went again.

The second guy, Chris, lacked confidence in the bar but had *no* shortage in the bedroom – he had a cock like a baseball bat, for one thing, and just enough pent-up aggression and frustration inside him that he tore into me and fucked me like a freight train. I could barely walk afterwards, and that was *including* the bit where I couldn't take any more and popped him out of my crotch and into my waiting mouth for the twenty-minute blow job that finished him off.

The third man had been named Eric and was almost completely unremarkable in appearance and demeanor until he took me back to his room. Then the kink came out behind closed doors and he indulged himself with me, spanking my ass a bright cherry red before plunging his very

long but very skinny cock, coated liberally with lubricant, into my tight asshole to assfuck me for all he was worth while I masturbated with one hand and sucked the thumb of the other. He insisted that I call him 'Daddy' and repeatedly tell him what a bad girl I was. He ended by cumming all over my tits while I sucked on a pacifier he'd brought with him in his suitcase. Instead of thinking that he was a sick fuck, though, which might have happened earlier in my life, I found myself taking stock of what I'd felt while living out his fantasy and wondering which things I was going to bring home to Jaci. I found myself wondering how much the average pacifier cost.

Just when I had just begun to feel satisfied enough to be able to go home and sleep this off, my fourth customer of the night came up and bought me a drink. I'd never been with a black man – or woman – before and I had to admit I was more than intrigued, having heard all the myths growing up. His name was Aaron and he was mannerly and gentle and *astoundingly* handsome and I would've given him whatever he wanted for free, but word had gotten around somehow that I was a 'pro' (I still got sexy, excited little shivers when I used those terms to describe myself) and he insisted that a job was a job. I followed him back to his room eagerly. He'd tried to be mannerly and polished even there, but I made it my personal mission in life to bring the animal out of him, teasing and *wanting* openly. He'd torn into me until I thought I'd split in half from the open force of it. His cock hadn't been any bigger than any of the others I'd seen – which I had to admit was a little bit of a disappointment, because I was truly beginning to believe that size *did* matter – but he was able to use it to its best effect. I lost track of how many times I came with him and when he finally began to signal his climax with a rising arpeggio of groans, I flipped around onto my knees and took it on my face like a porno girl, jacking his hot white load onto my lips, cheeks and waiting tongue with glee, swallowing what I could catch and letting the rest coat my face, wrecking my makeup and dripping onto my tits and hands. It was delightful, messy fun and I looked up at him lovingly as I scraped up what I could and licked my fingers clean.

I'd taken a little time to clean myself up and walked back to my car – it was about four in the morning and my pussy was far, *far* too sore and raw to even attempt another go 'round. It surprised me a little that I was disappointed by that – I'd just had four different men in one night, the absolute pinnacle of sluttish abandon in my own mind, and still I wanted *more*. And I was drunk on the power I associated with the absolute certainty that I could have it, any time I wanted. And having over a grand in cash to show for my night's fun was intoxicating on a different level.

Selina had *beaten* this? Why on earth had she even *wanted* to?

I drove home in a happy, satisfied haze. I hadn't even realized that I'd started crying until I pulled into Jaci's driveway with the first little bit of sun pinking the eastern sky.

I tucked the cash away – I didn't even want to look at it, suddenly, even though it would be the first and last months' rent on Jaci's and my new home together – and went inside to clean myself up before Jaci got home. I suddenly couldn't think of anything except not letting her see me like this.

\* \* \*

I decided to let Jaci sleep a bit – she'd gotten killed on Medic 21 last night – before I confessed what I'd done. I took the hottest shower I could stand and brushed my teeth twice before squeezing myself into my black Hooters uniform for the lunch shift. I stumbled through my

afternoon in a haze, not even aware of what tips I was or wasn't making. I was just relieved that I got all my orders correct – I barely listened to the people at the tables telling me what they wanted. I got home just after six o'clock to find Jaci putting her books in boxes for our impending move. She ran a hungry look over my skin-tight uniform gave me a glittering bright smile and stood to kiss me but stopped short when she saw my face.

“What's wrong?” she asked me.

“I'm scared, baby, I'm *really* scared,” I told her. “I lost it last night. *Seriously* lost it, just like Selina said.”

“What did you do?”

“I fucked four different guys,” I confessed.

“At *once*?”

I laughed. “No, one at a time,” I said. “I'd get done with one and go back to the bar and get another one. I thought it would be fun and sexy, y'know, if I told the first guy that I was a call girl. And he bought it. So I just kept doing it.”

Jaci's eyes were wide as saucers. “You turned tricks?” she asked.

I nodded. “Yeah,” I said. “It was so much *fun* when I was doing it, baby, and it made me feel so damn good. And the guys were into it, and I was into them, and everything was just feeling so *fantastic* and *natural* while it was happening, and then when I was too sore to keep going I came home and then I started crying and I barely got it back together in time for work.”

Jaci put her arms around me and held me close and tight. I sagged in her arms, but I didn't cry – I'd finished that last night, apparently. Now I just felt empty.

“God help me, Jaci, I want to do it again,” I whispered.

“I know you do, baby,” Jaci told me. “That's just what Selina said would happen. She said it's nothing you can help. You're always gonna *want* to, honey, always. Selina says you just learn to not do it no matter how bad you want to.”

“I've never wanted like this,” I told her. “It's so powerful. I used to think I had self-control, that I could stop doing anything if I just set my mind to it. But I don't think I could stop doing this.”

Jaci pushed me away a little and gave me a searching look. “Then you be smart about it. You keep it safe. You can do whatever you want that way and not be in a hotel room with somebody you barely know,” she told me.

“I know,” I said. “But it's hard. This comes over me all of a sudden. It's like one minute I'm fine and the next I'm like a bitch in heat. I don't know what to do.”

Jaci pulled me close again. “Baby, I know you don't. We're gonna work it out.”

“We need to do it *soon*,” I said.

“In the meantime, though, Selina made some suggestions. I think we should get going on them, just as soon as we can,” Jaci went on. “I thought it might be safe to wait, but now I'm thinking the sooner the better.”

“What are they?” I asked.

“For one thing, you're not quitting Hooters,” she told me. “You're gonna stay there, and work part-time, and you're gonna try out for their calendar and their beauty pageant and everything they throw at you. We're going out today to find you some competition bikinis.”

I looked at her quizzically, but I felt an unbelievable knot of tension disappear from my chest when she said it. As well as a chilly flush of security, sexuality and purest *love* at the sound of her firmly, strictly just *telling* me what to do.

“Yes, ma'am,” I said teasingly.

She raised an eyebrow. “Yes, *Mistress*,” she said. “If we're gonna do this, then we're gonna do this right. If I need to be in control, then we're both gonna act like it, and that means that I'm Mistress and you're slave, got it?”

I swam in an ocean of surging safety and passionate affection. “Yes, Mistress.”

“Better,” she said. “Now, I have more for you to do. It's gonna mean we have less time to spend together, baby, but if it means you get better, then it's what we have to do.”

“What is it, Mistress?” I asked.

“I have an appointment set up for the end of the week, the day after you get your veneers put in,” she said. “It's with a man named Henry Conroy, and he's one of the top glamour photographers in the state. We're gonna get some shots done.”

“Shots, Mistress?”

“Yes. Pictures. Headshots, body shots, those kinds of things,” Jaci said. “You're gonna need them.”

“Need them for what, Mistress?” I asked.

“Well, you need a headshot for your audition next week,” she said. “I have you set to go in and dance for a spot on the Bearkats cheerleaders roster.”

I looked at her in outright shock but could not deny the utter and complete joy that rose in my heart when she mentioned the semi-professional cheerleading and dance squad for the local municipal arena football team. They did halftime shows all over the place, apparently, and their choreographer was world-famous.

“I get to be a cheerleader?” I asked in a very small voice, still not believing. “Like you were?”

“If you work hard and practice, then yes, you get to be a cheerleader,” Jaci said. I could tell she was melting inside, but she kept her Mistress façade intact and stern.

It was all I could do to keep from jumping up and down and clapping my hands. The thought of being a cheerleader, of doing the routines and being out in front of people, wearing the cute little uniform, meant as much to me as being a Hooters Girl, which in turn meant as much to me as being a paramedic. I was starting to wonder how I was going to find the time for all of this, but I didn't care. If I had to stop sleeping, I'd find the time.

“And you'll need the body shots for the other thing I have planned,” Jaci went on. “I'm having them sent to a friend of my ex-boyfriend's, a man named Jason Wright. He's the top scout in the area.”

“Top scout, Mistress? For what?” I asked.

“*Playboy* magazine, baby,” she told me. “We're gonna get you in a centerfold.”

*I only thought I was happy and excited before*, I managed to think before I sat down hard on the floor and fainted, slumping backwards.

\* \* \*

“Are you okay, sweetie?” Jaci was asking just seconds later, cradling my head in her lap and shining a penlight into my eyes. “Did you hit your head?”

“I'm fine, Mistress,” I said. “Just... *overwhelmed*.”

“No more Mistress for now,” she told me. “I need you to call me 'baby' for a while.”

I smiled. “I can do that, baby,” I said.

“You back?” she asked. “Full name? You know where you are? What day it is?” The familiar orientation questions from EMS made me smile.

“Nicolette Julianne Lightman,” I replied, kissing the palm of the hand that was caressing my face. I'm at my girlfriend Jaci's house. And it's the happiest day of my life, which just happens to be a Wednesday morning.”

“The happiest? Really?” she asked teasingly.

“Yeah, the happiest,” I said. “Because my amazing, fantastic girlfriend just forgave me for being a hooker, then pushed me into being a Hooters Girl, a cheerleader and a Playmate of the Month all at once.”

“I'm glad it makes you happy,” she said.

“It makes me *ec-fucking-static*,” I clarified. “Only one thing could make me happier, baby.”

“What's that?”

I threaded my fingers through hers. “Marry me.”

Jaci stared at me wordlessly, tears glistening in the corners of her eyes for a moment. “Are you really asking?” she said very quietly.

“Really really,” I told her. “Be my Mistress. Be my friend. Be my lover, but for all of it, *please* be my wife, baby. Be my wife.”

She leaned forward and kissed me as thoroughly and as passionately as I'd ever been kissed before in my life. “Yes,” she whispered in my ear, and I buried my face in her hair as I hugged her. “Yes yes yes.”

“I love you,” I told her.

From wounded male paramedic straight into full female nymphomaniac in weeks, then from there to sexual submissive, cocksucker, paramedic again, then Hooters Girl, then cheerleader and *Playboy* Playmate and now fiancée in a matter of days.

Things moved fast around the Lightman-Campbell household.

“Penny for your thoughts?” she said to me.

I chuckled. “Just wondering my chances of being Miss September,” I said softly. “That's my birthday month.”

\* \* \*

The last few days of my removal from EMS went by in a happy blur. I used my ill-gotten gains from my night of poor judgment to put a security deposit down on a darling little two-bedroom house with hardwood floors and a fireplace about equidistant from both of our stations, and to buy Jaci a big honking diamond. She wore it proudly, showing it off to everyone she knew and even a bunch of people she didn't.

I got my veneers – finally – and couldn't stop smiling after that. I had a smile like a harbor lighthouse now, a mouth full of chalk-white Marie Osmond teeth that any celebrity would be proud of. And I liked the way they looked so much that I walked around with a permanent, ear-to-ear Mary Lou Retton smile that showed every tooth in my head. Dr. Richards said it was far and away the girliest thing about me now, and Jaci said that a smile like that would make me a shoo-in for the Bearkats cheer squad.

Katy helped me night and day on my audition routine, which was equal parts gymnastics and dance, all set to Britney Spears' “Gimme More.” I also made use of Dr. Richards' hair-and-makeup gurus, who'd come in to teach me, for a quick makeover just before the afternoon sitting for the camera. The digital proofs Henry Conroy showed me didn't even *look* like me – they were of some stratospherically gorgeous blonde who belonged on the cover of *Cosmopolitan* or *Glamour* or *Elle* or *Vogue* or *Allure* – all publications I found myself reading every month now, carrying at least one or two of them around in my purse with me at all times. I did some full-body, in three different outfits and two of the barely-there competition bikinis that Jaci had found for me the night I proposed, and a few nudes. He promised me copies of all of the ones I chose by the next week. I couldn't wait. I'd even talked Jaci into having some done, but she kinda phoned them in, saying she'd sit for the real deal once she had her new tits.

The hair and makeup people also agreed to work on me before my dance audition and then, if I got it, the interview so I'd look as killer-gorgeous as I did right now on the day. Jaci and I walked around everywhere holding hands and sneaking into secluded corners to kiss. We took Staci, Katy, Selina and Shon from the ambulance and Amber, Lindsey, Aimee and Jasmine from Hooters out to dinner and made our big announcement to a happy round of cheers, hugs, happy tears and heartfelt congratulations. We still had a ways to go, of course, but we were initially thinking about a June wedding for next year, and hopefully outdoors at one of the state parks nearby. Katy and Selina both agreed to be bridesmaids. Staci was Jaci's maid of honor, and she intended to ask her sister – who lived in Connecticut with her husband – a friend from college named Karen whom I'd never met, and Frank Jessup to be attendants. I belly-laughed at the thought of sour old Frank Jessup in a bridesmaid dress, and all the EMS people at the table joined in wholeheartedly.

I finally just gave in and admitted I'd started smoking – being around Jaci, who smoked at home, and Staci as well, and tired of sneaking them out of their packs, I just bought myself a carton of the ultra-skinny Virginia Slims Superslims – they were cheaper than the Capris I started on, and easier to find – and started carrying them around in my purse. Jaci gave me a hard plastic case, designed for underwater work, to keep a pack and a lighter, since working as a paramedic could destroy a pack of cigarettes in the time it took to blink. I put the plastic case in the pouch on my belt with my eye protection, my respirator, my nerve agent antidote kit and my laminated card with the Los Angeles Prehospital Stroke Scale printed on one side and my pediatric drug dosages on the other. I added a tin of wintergreen Altoids to go with it, if I needed to get the smell of smoke off of my breath on a pukey patient.

The alarm went off before the sun, but I was already awake. I'd scarcely slept the night before, so high was my excitement. I'd practiced my skills and reread my medical operating guidelines to make sure they were fresh, ironed my uniform and then kissed my fiancée and headed out the door, back to Crowhill station and the familiar smell of diesel fumes and harsh antiseptic. Back to Medic 21, at long last.

Back home.

I hoped it was as glad to see me as I was to see it.

To be continued...



SUMMARY: A paramedic, at the scene of a major accident, is exposed to a strange substance which starts him off on a journey of transformation

## PREHOSPITAL CARE

### Part Fifteen

by Valerie Hope

“DISPATCH, MEDIC 21, RESPOND TO 2344 Holcombe Street, Apartment 133, on a respiratory,” the radio on my shoulder squawked loudly. I grabbed the handset, my long nails clicking against it, and spoke back in my hoarse soprano.

“Medic 21, received,” I replied. “Dave! We're up! Shake it dry and come on!” I knocked loudly on the door of the men's room at the ER where we'd just dropped our last patient.

“Why don't you shake it dry for me?” a muffled voice answered from behind the door, and one of the ER nurses stopped and gave us a raised-eyebrow look.

“I didn't bring my glasses and I don't feel like washing the forceps,” I shot back.

The nurse snorted and gave me a thumbs-up as she went about her way.

I stuffed the clipboard I'd been carrying under my arm and walked peppily out to the unit, idling outside the EMS entrance to the emergency room. I climbed into the drivers' seat – I'd taken the last call, so now I wasn't “up” any more until David finished this one – and buckled in. I had to slide the seat forward until my feet could reach the pedals. I'd been upset about that, right at first – it bothered me that I couldn't just pile in and go like before. But now I did it without thinking, which was more than I could say for Dave. When I piled in after him, I had plenty of leg room. If he climbed behind the wheel after me, he got his knees around his ears and the steering wheel in his crotch. It was pretty funny.

David came trotting out to the unit and jumped in the hot-seat, bringing up the computer and plotting the address sent to us by dispatch. I threw Twenty-One in gear and hit the lights and wailers, pulling out into traffic lit up and loud and making the engine roar in protest.

It was my third shift back, and Dave and I had been getting slammed. I couldn't get enough, though. Even the calls that used to annoy me from before – homeless shelters calling EMS for homeless guys who just needed a blanket and a warm place to sleep, some of our more notable frequent flyers – didn't get to me, I was just so damn *glad* to be *back*.

The sun would be up soon, I noted as we pulled away, and with the sun would be our relief and the end of another shift. Dave and I were taking off on our fifteenth call in twenty-four hours, which was pushing the totals for Busiest Truck in the System. We'd had everything today from an active seizure at seven o'clock this morning to a full code – CPR, defibrillation and heavyweight cardiac drugs and a twisted ankle. David called us in responding as the additional patient information from the 911 call-takers filtered down to us.

“Dispatch, Medic 21, respond to a 78-year-old female, difficulty breathing times two hours, two-day history of bronchitis, cardiac history. Patient is conscious and alert. At 05:23.”

“Little old lady,” Dave said. “Wish you were up, girly girl. Seems you got the magic touch, now.”

He was right. LOL, in cyberspace, meant *Laugh Out Loud*, but in EMS it stood for *Little Old Lady*, a type of call most medics dreaded because little old ladies tended to be *the* grouchiest and bitchiest species on the planet. They complained about everything – the ambulance is too hot if it's not too cold, the roads too bumpy – that we specifically couldn't control. David's answer was to give serious consideration to sedating them.

But now I didn't have to go that route. I could tell them how pretty their hair looked, or ask them where they got their sweater, or any number of girly nonsense questions and have them wrapped around my finger in moments. I could apologize for every ache and pain as if I'd done it personally and they'd pat my hand and say it wasn't my fault. I was the Little Old Lady Whisperer, now.

And I was the Little Old Man Whisperer, too – having a big firm DD-cup rack made most little old men act *very* nice and cooperative towards me. And teenage boys. Only middle-aged women hated me now, but that was because I was young and hot and they were starting to fade a little. But I could still moon over how well they took care of their skin, or how young they looked, and make some inroads there.

It was stupefying how much differently I was treated, for two reasons. First, because I was female: people seemed to be more willing to interact with me and expected compassion and empathy from me where before it had always seemed to come as a surprise.

Second, I was treated differently because I was *hot*. I never carried the airway bag or the cardiac monitor any more, because it was either taken away from me by one of the macho firefighters on scene or because David did it instead of suffering the disapproval of everyone who was thinking *how are you gonna let that pretty little thing carry that great big heavy bag?* I was a little affronted, right at first, but it faded. It wasn't like I was *unable* to carry these things; if these big knuckledraggers wanted to schlep all my shit because they liked my tits and ass, then why not just let them?

I took a quick second to hitch up the cups of my corset – a white cotton number with gentle boning that, unfortunately, had started tending to ride down over the course of the shift – as we turned a corner. I saw David looking at me out of the corner of his eye, watching my bountiful tits jiggle under my white uniform shirt. I knew he wouldn't do anything – and I was trying *very* hard not to tease, but I was new enough to this whole girl business that sometimes I did it accidentally – but I actually kinda liked him looking.

My own diamond – a great big two-karat number in a platinum setting – sparkled brightly in the lights of oncoming cars as we tore through the largely-empty streets towards our call. I thought Jaci must've sold one of her kidneys to get it for me, but she assured me the ring had belonged to her grandmother, who'd be thrilled to see me wearing it. It was difficult to pull on latex gloves over my long, rhinestone-studded fingernails *and* a gigantic rock, but I was damned if I was gonna take *either* thing off for a second if I could help it.

The back of the ambulance – we called it *the box* – seemed a lot bigger now than it had before. My smaller feet and frame made it much easier to move around and navigate the forest

of EKG wires, oxygen tubes, IV sets, blood pressure cuffs and other cables and tubing we routinely attached to our patients for transport and treatment. The overhead rail and the IV hanger – famous head-knockers from my past, I couldn't go a shift without braining myself silly against one or both of them – were no longer a threat to me.

There were *some* downsides, of course. First was having an extra two feet of hair. For one thing, it made wearing my uniform ball cap a chore, having to thread my hair through the gap at the back just to put it on or take it off. Even with the tight French braid or ponytail I kept it in for work, it still wound up in my way more often than not, if it didn't wind up in my mouth or up my nose. Still, I wanted to give myself a chance to get used to it before I decided to go and get it hacked off short. I liked to tell myself that I didn't care one way or the other, that I only wore it long because Jaci thought it was sexy, but I was lying. I loved my long, soft and shockingly blonde Kelly Bundy hair. I played with it constantly, winding it around my fingers and tickling myself across the nose with the ends. I kept it long because I loved the way it made me look, not because it made my job one *whit* easier.

It took me a little while to adjust to things like being alone in the back of the box with big men who made me feel physically insignificant. I found out early that only males cared about going situations like that alone. It was no reflection on me whatsoever to ask for a big burly firefighter or police officer to ride in the back with me and keep an eye on things. Dr. Richards had brought in several experts and had me trained in aikido to the point where I felt as though I could physically defend myself if needs be, but I really preferred to keep it that way.

That, and having to remind myself that I wore small gloves now instead of large. At least I wasn't walking into the Crowhill station men's room without looking. And other than the hair in my mouth and occasionally getting the earpieces of my stethoscope getting hung in my big hoop earrings, the transition back from civilian to medic again went smoother than I could have dreamed.

We pulled into the call as I killed the wailers, leaving the strobes on. I bailed out and grabbed the airway bag and the cardiac monitor from the side compartment, walking around back to where Dave was pulling out the stretcher from its cradle. I dropped our equipment on the cot and grabbed the back end as David slammed the unit door shut. We wheeled it up the uneven sidewalk towards the door without a moment's hesitation. It was nice to be back in the rhythm again, communicating near-telepathically with my partner. We walked into the tidy but run-down residence and I started pressing the patient's husband for medications, drug allergies and medical history while Dave knelt beside the laboriously breathing woman and started trying to assess her.

I took a moment to take it all in, the worried husband and the sick wife, the yipping dog nipping at my ankles and the plastic grocery sack full of medications that somehow I had to get all written down before we left, the pings and beeps of the cardiac monitor and the hiss of the oxygen in the lines and the quiet, reassuring murmurings of my partner.

It was very, very good to be home.

\* \* \*

“You still got it,” Dave said amiably, handing me the unlocked strongbox containing our narcotics for the unit. I verified his counts of morphine, midazolam, Valium and Fentanyl and

signed the log. That log was the proof required of us by the DEA that we weren't pinching the controlled substances for our own personal use.

“Thanks,” I said, leaning heavily against the wall and puffing on my cigarette in the weak morning sunshine. We hadn't slept at all, and I still had a very busy day ahead of me. And I *did* want to get home and nail my fiancée before it got started in full swing.

“Were you worried?” Dave asked.

“Nah,” I said, playing with my hair. “I kept up my skills pretty well while I was off. Things're a little different, now that I'm so little and I got these.” I gestured to my large tits.

“Like what?”

“Like putting somebody on a backboard,” I told him. “Also, I ain't as strong as I used to be, but that can change. Just gotta start lifting weights again.”

“You're working it like you never left,” Dave said. “Just like before. Sharp as shit and completely together.”

I grinned behind a softly roiling cloud of blue smoke. “It's a front. I have *no* fucking idea what I'm doing out there.”

He laughed. “That makes two of us,” he said. “Listen, Niki, I guess I'm trying to say that it's *really* good to have you back. Being out here on the streets with you again, reminded me how much I missed riding with you.”

I squeezed his well-muscled forearm. “I feel the same way,” I told him.

“Wanna make out?” he asked with a lopsided grin.

“Ain't drunk enough,” I giggled.

I tossed my butt and levered myself off the wall with a grunt of effort. “Guess I better clock out,” I said. Frank had showed up to relieve me about five minutes ago, but was still in the bathroom. Staci's car would be pulling in any second.

“Whatcha got goin' on today?” Dave asked.

“Well, I got my second job starting at ten,” I said. “And I got practice tonight.”

“Second job? Practice?” David asked, adorably befuddled.

“Well, you should know what the second job is, Chief. You were right there when I got it,” I told him with a devilish smile.

“I was... you're kidding. You work at Hooters?” he asked, wide-eyed and incredulous. “Seriously?”

I nodded, still giggling. “Hell yeah I do. I originally took the job, y'know, just to get the cute little uniform – which I look incredible in, by the way – to have for, like, Jaci and maybe for Hallowe'en or something. But turns out I really like it, and there are some awesome girls there that I've gotten to be friends with.”

I poked him in the chest with a long-nailed finger. “Listen, I told *you* because I trust you, and also because I can make your life a living hell if you fuck it up,” I warned him sternly. “But you

know how some of these horndogs around here are. Not a fucking *word*, not to anybody, okay? That's the last fucking thing I need."

He put up his hands in supplication. "Okay, okay," he said. "Can I come by, though? To see you in your uniform and hang out?"

"Maybe get me to introduce you to some cute nineteen year-old girls?" I added.

"Well, if you decided to do something like *that*, I don't know that I wouldn't be grateful..."

"Sure, Dave. But just *you*, okay?"

"Deal," he said. "I really missed you, Niki. You're different – a *lot* different, and I don't just mean physically – but inside you're still you."

"I missed you too, cowboy," I told him. Then I gave him a playful but firm shove in the shoulder. "Now shut up, you're gonna make me cry."

"So different," he said. "So what's 'practice'?"

I giggled again. "Well, here's another one you can't tell anybody," he said. "I auditioned last week for a slot in the Bearkats squad, and I got it. Tonight's my first practice."

"Bearkats? You're playing football?" he asked me. "Doing what? Kicker?"

I snorted. "No, idiot," I said, shoving him again. "Cheerleader."

He backed away to slump against the wall, wide-mouthed. "You're a cheerleader. A Hooters Girl *and* a cheerleader."

"Yep," I said smugly. "The times, they are a-changin'!"

"No shit," he said. "Any more surprises?"

I tried to cover the lie as I shook my head. Dave knew me very well, though, and could tell I was holding something back, but he decided not to press me. I was glad he made that choice. I didn't know how he'd react to hearing that his best friend and paramedic partner had pictures into a *Playboy* talent scout and had just finished working out her routine for the amateur pole-dance competition at a strip club south of town on Friday night.

And that the *Playboy* scout had called her back right in the middle of their shift together, asking if they could get together for coffee this week.

There was only so much poor Dave could digest in one sitting.

"So anyway, Dave-o, I have a question for you," I said, pulling the bulky bag of my Nomex bunker gear from the back external compartment of the ambulance. "It's serious, okay?"

He looked at me quizzically. "Sure, Nik."

"*Niki*," I corrected. "Gotta make that break with the old life, remember?"

He nodded. "Right. Niki. What's up?"

"So, I told you that me and Jaci are gonna get hitched," I said.

He chuckled. “Still can't believe that one. Cute little Jaci that I tried to score with for years. I tell you, Niki, the only reason you could swoop in there so fast is because I did all the hard work, wearing her down.”

“Yeah, Casanova, you turned her into a dyke,” I laughed. “But seriously. You obviously don't have any problem with two girls getting married.”

“Love is love, partner,” he told me. “Two girls, two guys – as long as they want to be together, I don't see why the hell they can't get married.”

“I agree,” I said. “That's why I want you to stand with me. On the day. As maid of honor-slash-best man, whatever the fuck we want to call it. I can't imagine anybody else up there with me but you.”

He stopped dead, staring at me. “Really?”

“Of course, Dave. Who the hell else would I ask? You're my best friend.”

It almost looked like he teared up a little, but he covered it well. “You're gonna have the best stag party in the history of the universe,” he bragged.

I laughed. “Just as long as you're there, you're with me and you don't forget the fucking ring,” I said. “So, are you in?”

“Am I in. What the fuck kind of question is that?”

I caught him up in a rib-creaking bear hug, my cheek pressed deeply into his chest. His arms folded around me and squeezed back – more gently, but that was just one of those things he couldn't get over about girls – and patted my shoulder fondly.

“Thanks, Dave,” I said.

“Thanks for asking,” he said. “You're my best friend, too, no matter how big your tits have gotten.”

“Ever had a friend who was a girl before?” I asked him.

“Not 'till now. It's kinda cool, though,” he said.

“Yeah, it really is,” I confirmed.

\* \* \*

Jaci pulled up as Frank, Staci, Dave and I were starting up a bullshit session in the ambulance bay. Medics loved to tell war stories, and I was getting all the gory details from the good calls I'd missed while I was out.

We stayed and hung out, my fiancée and I – God, how I loved the sound of that, I wished we could still call ourselves that after we were married – and just shot the shit with our friends. The perfect, comforting sense of camaraderie that I'd come to associate with being among other medics settled over me like a warm blanket, and I was unable to keep my new, permanent toothy smile off my face as I laughed at Frank's account of a drunk he'd run a month ago.

“...so I tell him, 'Sir, it's either go with me or go with the cops. Which would you rather do?' And he says, 'Don't I need to be sick to go with y'all?' I'm, like, 'Well, no, but it helps.' And he

fucking shoves his finger down his throat and sprays puke all over the side of the ambulance, all over my boots and he almost gets the cop. I thought the dude was gonna go for his Taser, I swear.”

We all laughed – gross didn't affect us anymore, that part of our brains long since burned out and overloaded. And also because we'd all run calls like that.

“So, when are you two gonna finally get hitched?” Frank asked after a pause.

“June, we think,” Jaci said. “We don't have a definite date yet, 'cause we're still trying to find someone who can perform the ceremony. I mean, it won't be legal here, but we don't care. We just want somebody to do it.”

“You'll find someone,” Staci said.

“Well, Niki – I gotta admit, it took some getting used to. I mean, I still expect to see a big lanky blonde boy hoofing in with a bicycle every morning,” Frank said. “You're definitely different. Not just the way you look, neither. Different inside. But I think it suits you.”

“Thanks,” I said. “It feels like it does.”

“You've turned into one helluva girl,” he said, “but you're still Nick enough inside, so it's not like we lost you. You're just a shitload nicer to look at.”

I blushed. “Thanks, Frank.”

He put a timid hand on my shoulder. From this taciturn, reserved man, it was as much if not more than a heartfelt embrace. “It's good to have you back.”

“It's good to be home,” I replied.

He cleared his throat and retreated back behind his gruff façade. “Well. Shit. I gotta go. Calls're gonna start dropping soon and I need to get my breakfast.”

Jaci hugged him side-on, friendly and chaste. “Be safe out there, you big grouch,” she told him.

“Oh, shit, you know me,” he said. Without meeting my eyes, he gave us a half-hearted wave and retreated into the station, his slight limp from a long-ago back injury very pronounced.

“I thought he was gonna cry,” I said, bewildered.

“Are you kidding?” Staci said. “Niki, baby, he *adores* you. Even, y'know... from before. While you were gone, he asked about you and talked about you every single day. I think he thought of you like a son.”

“I learned a lot from him,” I said, “but I didn't know he felt that way.”

“Like Frank would ever say anything,” Staci put in. “But he did. And I think he's okay now, with the idea of having you as a daughter now. I think if you hadn't come back, Frank might've put in his papers.”

“Wow,” I breathed.

“Yeah,” David confirmed. “He always said you reminded him of himself when he first started out in EMS.”

“I had no idea,” I said.

“He actually *did* tear up, you know,” Staci added. “When Jaci asked him to be a part of the wedding. He had to go outside.”

Jaci was getting wet-eyed, and so was I. “That is so sweet,” Jaci breathed.

“Thought you should know,” Staci said with a wistful smile. “He ain't lying, though, Niki. It *is* good to have you back.”

I smiled again. “I can't tell you how good it is to be here,” I said. “There were a couple times I thought it was never gonna happen, y'know?”

“Aw, shit,” Dave said. “You couldn't stop being a medic, no matter how big your damn tits got. It's in your blood, so it don't matter what you pack between your legs.”

“I guess it is,” I said. “I never left here, y'know, in spirit.”

“We would've known if you had,” Staci said. “We laughed about it, y'know, seeing 'Nick's ghost' walking around the station at night. But secretly I think we all believed it.”

Jaci slid an arm around me. “So, what about that breakfast, babe?” she asked.

“Yeah,” I said. “Dave? You in?”

He shook his head no. “Can't do it. I'm meeting somebody.”

“New girlfriend?” I asked.

“Potential girlfriend. We've only been out a couple times,” he said.

“Shit, I'm not the only one who's changed,” I mentioned. “Could this be the end of Love-'Em-and-Leave-'Em Cupertino in my lifetime?”

“Hope she never finds out what a dick you are,” Staci jibed.

“Yeah, me too,” David said. “You remember Kylie, right? The cute little radiology tech from St. Luke's?”

“Pink Scrubs?” I said, using the nickname we'd tagged her with ages ago, in reference to her preferred shade of surgical scrubs she wore on duty. “You're dating Pink Scrubs? You lucky fucker.”

“I know, right?” David said. “I must've asked her out, like, a hundred times and she always negged me.”

“What happened?” Jaci demanded.

“Well, we ran a stroke to St. Luke's the shift after Niki and me met for lunch that day,” he said. “And as we were clearing the call, I started talking to her, y'know, just like normal, but this time when I asked her out at the end of it, she said yes. I dunno what happened. Maybe I just wore her down.”

“Actually, I remember that shift,” Staci said. “We relieved y'all late – you caught a call, like, twenty minutes before shift change. We hung out in the bay while y'all restocked, and all you could talk about was how proud you were of Niki, how good you thought she was doing, how you couldn't wait for her to get back here so you could prove that nothing had changed, how

you felt bad for staying away while she was recovering but now you were gonna be the best partner and friend she could possibly have..."

"You said all *that*?" I marvelled.

"I don't remember it," Dave said, waving it away but betraying himself with a deep scarlet blush. "I might've."

"If you talked half that passionately to Pink Scrubs, then it's no wonder she wanted to go out with you," Staci said. "If any man showed a willingness like that to be that good a friend to a woman, shit... I'd've thrown myself at you."

"Seriously?" Dave said. "Wanna go make out?"

"Not drunk enough," Staci shot back, and I laughed out loud, considering I'd used those exact same words not twenty minutes earlier.

"Well, shit, Niki, you're just a positive for me all the way around," Dave said. "But I guess you're right. I do feel kinda different about Kylie. I *like* her, a lot. I get a bad rap from y'all, seriously – and I do kinda work it, being King Playa, like y'all say I am. But really, the reason I can't make a relationship last is because of this job. Nobody I've met recently has been willing to put up with my schedule for longer than a week or two. But Kylie gets it. I'm not saying – but I'm hoping – that she and I can do the boyfriend-girlfriend thing."

"Wow," Jaci said. "It's like a Sign of the Apocalypse."

"Says the engaged girl who used to brag about how hard she partied," I jabbed.

"She got you there, Jaci," Staci said when Jaci started to protest. "Seriously. You used to have more stories than Dave, here, about all the partying and screwing around you did. Until Niki, here, settled your ass down."

"Really? Y'all thought I was a player?" Jaci said.

"Oh, *hell* yeah," Dave said. "Nobody said shit, though, 'cause you were so sweet on the one hand and 'cause Frank would've killed anybody who said a word on the other."

"Yeah, no lie," I said. "One of the assholes over on Medic 6 said something where Frank could hear it once over at Education for mandatory clinical training. Frank about tore his fucking head off."

"What did the guy say?" Jaci pressed.

"I dunno," I replied. "Frank never told me."

"They were calling you the new Blackjack Slut," Dave said. Medic 21 was called the Blackjack on the streets by some medics, for obvious reasons, the same as Medic 22 was the Double Deuce and Medic 10 the X-Box, for the Roman numeral. "You remember Jenn Holloway, who used to work here? She had a reputation like that and some of those knuckle-draggers used to call her Blackjack On-Her-Back-Jack or the BJ Slut. It stuck. They were trying to tag you the same way until Frank crawled up and made a summer home in their asses."

"I had no idea," Jaci said.

“Yeah, Frank's a real pit bull when it comes to the people he likes,” Dave said. “Problem is, you can never tell if he likes you until he defends you like that.”

“I should thank him or something,” Jaci said.

“That'd only embarrass him,” Staci cautioned. “Just keep doing what you're doing. Shit, inviting him to that barbecue y'all're having when you move into the new place is plenty of thanks for Frank.”

Jaci looked as though she was going to press it farther, so I tugged her by the waist towards the parking lot. “We gotta let Staci get to work, babe,” I said. “Else Frank'll bitch at her for making him do all the work. And I need to get some breakfast, I'm hungry.”

“Okay, okay,” Jaci said, relenting and letting me pull her. “So we'll see y'all on Saturday at the housewarming, right?”

Dave and Staci both nodded agreement as I pulled her around the side of the building and planted a passionate, snail-tongued kiss on her. She sighed and sagged against me a little, breathless.

“You can still make me lightheaded when you kiss me, you know that?” she said, playing with the stray tendrils of hair that had escaped my French braid over the course of the busy shift. “Like the first time.”

“You, too,” I said, patting her delightfully firm bottom. “C'mon, beautiful, take me someplace and feed me.”

“You sound really happy, baby,” she commented as he took my offered hand. I liked the sound our engagement rings made as they clicked together.

“I am,” I said, looking at the dilapidated station. “I'm back where shit makes sense, again.”

\* \* \*

My life couldn't settle into the happy, busy routine I wanted for a few weeks, yet. We moved in together, derailing our lives into a happy bedlam for a few days until we got the boxes unpacked and made our first domestic-bliss runs to Target for things like bookshelves and toilet brushes. I quickly got used to waking up beside her the mornings we were off.

Two weeks after changing to Medic 16 and her new partner, Jaci took some time off and had her surgery, equipping herself with new, DD-cup tits like my own. She recovered like a champ, pushing herself so she could get back on the trucks as best she could. Now there were two of us out on the streets, driving the firefighters wild, and loving every second of it.

I got some numbers from some guys who used to work with Selina, ex-porn studs with very big cocks and very open minds who agreed to 'service' me every couple of weeks, helping me keep the wild urges in check so I could live my day-to-day life. None of them were interested in long-term relationships, they all got on very well with the new, enhanced Jaci and their own girlfriends were as open-minded as they and understood completely about the necessity of dealing with the needs of my sexual dysfunction. Some of them even came over to watch as I took on two or three guys at once, sipping wine and playing with themselves. One of them, a leggy brunette with wild tattoos, offered to join in, but I drew the line there. I may not be able to help myself where cock was concerned, but Jaci was the only girl I wanted to touch. Jaci watched a few times, too, but I think it was a bit much for her. We did tape a couple of my

more ambitious sessions, though, just for our personal fun later, and doing it for the camera was *incredible*. I could easily see why Selina wound up where she did. The thought of performing like that, for all those people, was as strong an elixir as any I'd come across. If not for my friends, there would have been no way at *all* I wouldn't have wound up on an Internet site.

The meeting with Jason Wright was like a surreal dream. He met me for coffee at an adorable little shop in my new neighborhood, sitting there in his scandalously expensive Armani suit as I pedaled up on my bicycle, wearing a short blue sundress and tennis shoes and nothing but a blue satin corset on underneath. He bought me a coffee and lit my cigarette for me, explained to me that Hef had *loved* my photos and wanted me for a Playmate. In the space of dizzy minutes, I had a contact number, an unsigned contract, and an invitation to the Mansion in my hands before I'd even gotten halfway through my smoke. He left quickly – he had another meeting – and I just sat there, stunned and silent, sipping coffee and smoking three more cigarettes before I could even move. I texted Jaci and rode to the tanning salon to be alone in the booth and sort things out in my head. It was more than a little overwhelming for someone who'd been a grown man just short months ago to be looking down the barrel of being Miss July – missed my goal by four months – for the next year.

Hooters stayed as fun and engaging as it was when I started, and I was well on my way to being featured in the calendar, the representatives loved my shots as much as Jason Wright had. They were talking to me about the pageant next year – which might conflict with the wedding, but Jaci said that June wasn't a definite – and I had to be very careful not to mention *Playboy* to them on the off chance they'd see it as a conflict and withdraw their offer. I was also being considered for a feature in the Hooters magazine. Two published pictorials in one year, and I wasn't even a professional model.

Yet, I added to myself, happy and feeling incredibly sexy and attractive.

I'd gotten quite used to throwing on a pair of denim overalls over my Hooters uniform on my days off and driving to the upscale dance studio across town for the four-hour practices. Lisa Cervenka, the choreography, was a former Raiders Girl and took her job *very* seriously. She intended to make the Bearkats Girls the single best semi-pro dance team in the country, and she drove us mercilessly towards that end. She was more than helpful in scheduling, understanding that all her girls had day jobs and mine as a paramedic was extremely important to me. I even had to miss the occasional game for work, since I was twenty-four on and forty-eight off, but I made up for it by helping out with other things, like choreography and bookings. And I *loved* cheering and dancing at the games. I went from a rookie cheerleader to being on the feature dance squad and the kick line in a few short months. The little red spandex uniform and the sparkly mylar pompoms fed into my vision of what a girl was *supposed* to be – admittedly, an impression formed when I was still male – and made me feel very feminine and very *right* about how I ended up in my life. And it was fun, and it got boys to look at me and want me, which fed my sexual addiction no end but did spice up things between Jaci and me and made it all the more important to call up Selina's friends every few weeks to help me let the pressure off.

I flew to Los Angeles early the next year, before springtime, and posed for my *Playboy* spread over the course of four days. In the downtime, I got to be the consummate tourist and get my picture taken in front of the Chinese Theater, on the Walk of Fame and in front of the Hollywood sign, and eating at the Brown Derby. I hung out with Holly, Bridget and Kendra –

they were all really sweet and *impossibly* spoiled, just like they were on television – and lived like royalty for the better part of a week before heading home. They'd decided to make me Miss August, and I billed it under the false name of Tiffany Miller, a name that Jaci and I picked drunkenly out of the phone book one night.

By the time I was ready to be fitted for my white gown, I'd appeared in several publications under Tiffany Miller – twice in the Hooters magazine, damn near spilling out of my teeny-weenie bikini, in their 2009 Calendar – this time I got September, dammit – and well on my way to going to Las Vegas for the pageant. I wouldn't do well, I knew, because I didn't really take it seriously. I had a perfectly wonderful life outside of Hooters, and I didn't need it the way some of the other girls did. I didn't want to waste my time or theirs by trying to stand in the way. But I thought it would be fun nonetheless, so I went ahead and signed up for it.

Life on the ambulance continued at the frenetic pace I'd come to know and adore. Dave and I ran the streets non-stop, doing our best to help, winning some and losing some with equal clinical detachment. He and Kylie Pink Scrubs had been going out exclusively for nearly six months, and she was all he could talk about or think about while we were together. I liked Dave-In-Love. He was a much mellower, much more well-adjusted guy.

In June, like we'd originally planned, Jaci and I laced ourselves in to matching floor-length white gowns with veils, copied from a Vera Wang design we'd seen in *Modern Bride* and had fallen in love with. Frank's sister-in-law was a professional seamstress and put the gowns together for a fraction of what they would've cost otherwise. We were married on a hillside in Warm Springs State Park, just outside an old Spanish mission, by a hippie woman with hair to her waist – an old friend of Jaci's mom's – who happened to be an ordained Episcopal priest. She cried as she gave us our vows. Everyone we knew was there: David, Staci, Frank, Aimee, Lindsey, Jasmine, Katy, Selina, Dr. Richards and Ken Forbes, nurses and orderlies from the military hospital, various medics and command staff from EMS and the manager of Hooters, half the Bearkats cheer team and even some of the players I'd gotten to know. Our wedding was quite the glamorous affair, it turned out. Even Frank seemed to be having a good time, though he spent it muttering and grumbling the way he always did. His wife – who was the source of endless complaints by Frank at work – was a beautiful woman, a former model, who hung on his every word and looked at him as adoringly as he did at her.

We danced and fed each other cake, kissed one another openly, called each other Mrs. Lightman-Campbell – yes, we'd decided to hyphenate, like good progressive dykes – and walked around hand in hand in our designer knock-off wedding gowns with the opera-length white gloves and flowing gossamer veils, accepting good wishes and congratulations from everyone we saw. The temperate, windy afternoon gave way to a gentle, humid night as the lights came up and the band got rocking in the little hospitality building next to the mission we'd rented for the reception.

I was just coming in from outside, where I'd sneaked a quick cigarette, and was going to get myself another glass of champagne with Jaci's hand in mine, when Dr. Richards stepped into my path and gave us both kisses on the cheek and heartfelt congratulations.

“I got you both something off the registry, but I wanted to get you alone to give you your real wedding present,” he said, holding up a Polaroid picture of a chrome cylinder marked with medical tags.

“You didn't have to... what *is* that?” I asked.

“It's for you both,” he told us. “From when you were under my care, Niki. During your change, I managed to extract some of the last viable sperm your body produced. I've tested it exhaustively, there's no genetic defect that I can determine. But, oddly, only the sperm carrying the X chromosome survived, some byproduct of your transformation. I wanted you to know – it's yours. For whatever you want it for.”

I beetled my brow a little. “My sperm?”

Jaci's breath caught in her throat and her hand squeezed mine almost painfully.

“Niki,” she whispered, just audible over the Electric Slide blasting in the background and the roar of laughter as Frank was dragged onto the dance floor by several shapely Bearkats cheerleaders. “Oh, Niki, I can have your baby.”

The thought of it nearly knocked me flat. “A baby?”

She looked deeply into my eyes. “Not *now*, of course, but... Niki, baby, at least we know we *can*, now. I thought we'd have to find someone else, or an anonymous donor, or something... Dr. Richards, I don't know what to say.”

“The accepted convention is something along the lines of *thank you*, if I recall,” he joked. “I'll keep it in cryogenics until you both want it. It can only produce female offspring, but I didn't figure the two of you would care very much.”

Jaci hugged him and kissed him, and I did the same. Jaci whispered something private into his ear, and he kissed her cheek again and nodded.

“You really want a baby?” I asked her as she led me, dewy-eyed, back to the dance floor and threw her arms around me, her heart pounding hard enough for me to feel plainly beneath her giant fake breasts and mine.

“No,” Jaci said. “I want *your* baby. Now, more than ever.”

I took her in my arms – I still led when I danced, strangely enough, even though Katy had trained me to follow as well – and we started swaying to the slow number that the DJ had just put on. “When?” I asked.

“When we feel like it,” she said. “We have time. Plenty of time. Forever, in fact. You're my wife, after all. I have a *wife*.”

“A baby,” I mused. “I never really pictured myself as a father before.”

“You shouldn't,” Jaci – my *wife* Jaci – said, laughing and kissing me.

The End

