



SUMMARY: A detective "hot" on the trail of his suspects sets out to make the big bust, but instead finds himself exposed to a strange radiation which starts to change body structure into that of a female.

PROBABLE CAUSALITY, Part I

By Valerie Hope

"Seventeenth Squad, Narcotics. Reines here, go."

"Reines, this is Lieutenant Coffey in Fraud. Can you come up here a second?" the tinny voice on the other end of the line said. I sighed and put down my full cup of coffee. It was sure to be stone cold by the time I got back from those bean-counters.

"I'll be right there, Lieutenant."

I hung up the phone, notified the civilian aide and stomped up the stairs into the computer-screen lit bowels of the fraud division. These were the guys who tracked credit cards and insurance scams. Not real cops, not like me in Narcotics. Sure, I was a little old for the hardcore undercover stuff, but I'd done it back in the day. And more bullets had flown in my fifteen-year career than these geeks had even seen on a firing range. Maybe they called me up to see how a real cop worked.

But I doubted it.

The Lieutenant was behind a guy at a computer - big surprise - and there was another pencil-neck Fraud cop standing next to them, in an ill-fitting suit with shoes that really could have used a sign.

"You wanted to see me, Lou?" I asked the Lieutenant.

"Yeah, Reines, I want you to meet Brett Blesinger, one of our detectives."

The dork next to him stuck out his hand and I shook it reluctantly. I'd heard of this guy. Top of his class, was a real straight arrow. Made detective out of plainclothes when he was twenty-nine years old, which was relatively unheard of unless someone was really good or really lucky. He cracked a big case - major trafficking operation, I think it was - off some anonymous tips and trace evidence. Everybody said that he was so smart he'd be running the whole department before he was done.

And then in his first week as a third-grade detective with Homicide, he got into a back-and-forth shooting match with some gang-bangers who weren't too excited about being arrested for multiple homicides. His partner got plugged - a real messy shoot. Everybody said that Blesinger froze - he panicked and didn't cover his partner's back. Word was, in a jam, Wonder-Boy Blesinger turned into a great big soup sandwich and he couldn't be counted on to pull his own weight. The department, deprived of their wunderkind, stuck him off in Fraud and tried to forget about him, let him track down his bad guys from behind a desk.

"Brett, this is Detective Cristoph Reennes, from Narcotics," the Lieutenant told him.

I'm sure this kid saw anything in the world but a six-time decorated detective with a list of arrests which would cover his desk. He saw a balding, overweight Cajun coon-ass from the bayou, with a chintzy little cop moustache and a big shiny bald spot on the back of his head, a belly that hid his belt buckle and a cheap suit with a coffee-stained tie. I knew well enough that the people around the squad thought of me as a dinosaur, well past my prime and just making the young, bright-eyed cops' jobs harder. Not good enough to get a command, too proud to retire even though he had no business on the job anymore. But I had more contacts - reliable contacts, too - than the rest of the squad combined and nobody could touch me when it came to arrests. Dinosaur or not, I was still respected for the most part. And no matter how they chuckled behind my back, whenever somebody found themselves behind the eight-ball it was usually old Coon-Ass Reennes they came to for help. I didn't mind the snickering. I knew what I was worth.

"Detective, this is Alex Wylie," the Lieutenant said, gesturing to the guy seated at the computer, "up from Division. He's one of their resident hackers, knows a whole hell of a lot more about this computer shit than any of us do."

"Alex," I said, extending a hand. He shook it vigorously, like most of the overeager young kids who worked in the system and were way the hell too excited to be doing 'real cop work.' His buck-teeth and frazzled brown hair made him look like a school kid, and one destined to get beat up for his lunch money to boot. Sure, he seemed to be a nice enough kid, but this job could eat nice people for a light snack. I had my doubts.

"What you got, Lou?" I pressed, anxious to get back to my cases.

"Where do you stand on the Tenth Street seizure?" he asked me.

The Tenth Street seizure was a fluke that could turn into a career bust. I was lucky enough to catch it, and I do mean lucky. It was on the extreme edge of our precinct. If our radio car hadn't smelled the ether coming out of the house and gotten enough probable cause from a foot search, there was a car from the Eighty-First only one block over. The house was a lab, stuffed full of enough chemicals to blow the neighborhood to Pluto if somebody lit a cigarette on the property and somewhere in the vicinity of twenty-three hundred kilos of heroin. This was a keystone operation, one that probably took in raw heroin from the smugglers from Indonesia and processed it for the streets. If we could pop the guys who ran that house, then we could flip them for the highest of the high. It was one of those things the whole 'War on Drugs' was designed around. We could catch the people who were actually paying to have this shit brought into our country.

But there was nobody. By the time backup arrived and our uniforms went in, there was nobody there. We seized everything and I was busy going through all the crime scene data to try and find who the people in that house were. If they weren't halfway to Ethiopia by now.

"I'm still waiting on my fingerprints from AFIS," I told the Lieutenant. "Most of the lab-rats wore rubber gloves when they worked, but we have some latents on the glassware. Maybe we'll get a hit on somebody we can reach."

"We might have another angle," the Lieutenant said. "Alex?"

"Me and Detective Blensinger ran across this while we were looking for shops producing fake IDs. Identity theft, that kind of thing," Wylie told me. "The high-end shops, I'm talking about, not just the ones that get kids into bars for a couple beers."

"Right," I grunted, already missing my coffee downstairs. It was too early for kids.

"We're talking visas, passports, real Witness Relocation kind of stuff," Blensinger added for emphasis. I tried not to look too impatient.

"Anyway, most of that stuff starts with fake birth certificates, so we keep tabs on the Vital Statistics Bureau downtown," Alex continued. "And we have some interesting hits on people who've requested birth certificates lately."

"Whaddaya mean, 'interesting?'" I pressed.

"We started checking people who'd requested birth certificates from Vital Statistics for the last six weeks," Blensinger explained, loosening his tie. "Checking them against visa requests and passport requests."

"To see if somebody was passing these things to get out of the country," I surmised.

"Right," Blensinger told me. "But the computer was too powerful."

"What?" I asked.

"I was cross-checking these birth certificates against all the records we had, Detective," Alex told me. "And we had a request for seven birth certificates in the last three days that came up as matches against names that had death certificates issued about twenty to twenty-five years ago."

"Birth certificates for dead people?" I asked. I could feel my eyebrows climbing.

"Dead infants, to be exact," Alex said. "Babies that died shortly after death."

"Now comes the really interesting part," Blensinger told me.

"Get this, detective," Alex said, really excited now. "These birth certificates were pulled between 9 April and 12 April. Figure, what - three days to make a new original from the old one, with updated statistics. Another week or so to request drivers' license and Social Security number. That puts us at ten days."

"What're you getting at, Alex?" I asked, rubbing my chin.

"We checked with the hospitals that issued the original birth certificates," Blensinger said. "We found out for every single one of those seven birth certificates, the death certificate had been contested and found to be in error."

"In error? So either these kids miraculously came back from the dead, or there are a bunch of people walking around using their names," I said. "How come the hospitals didn't catch this?"

Alex shrugged. "Erroneous birth certificates are common," he explained. "Sometimes a John Smith that died last year can fuck up a John Smith trying to get a new drivers' license yesterday. The hospitals just ask for proof of ID - a drivers' license and Social Security card, which we're assuming our perps have by now - and then amend all their paperwork. And this

happened to seven babies in seven different hospitals, so it's not like they thought they had some huge epidemic of bad death certs."

"Pretty good job, y'all catching that," I said. "Where do I fit in?"

"Don't your forensics point to at least seven people involved in the Tenth Street operation?" the Lieutenant asked. "It's your case, Cristoph. You can run it however you want - just keep me informed. These guys here will give you anything you need."

"Good," I said. "First stop is Vital Statistics. These guys had to have somebody on the inside."

"There's something else, Detective," Alex said.

"Go ahead," I told him.

"What are the descriptions you have out for these seven perps?" Blensinger asked.

"White or Asian males, about twenty-five to thirty-five, mostly. I don't have the details on me, they're downstairs."

"You might want to check on that," Blensinger said, passing me a sheaf of papers. "All those fake birth certificates? They were all for baby girls."

* * *

I took off my glasses and rubbed my eyes. It didn't make any sense. My seven perps were all males, no doubt about it. The two positive IDs we had were for Averil "Sumo" Starnes, a fat tub of lard with a list of priors as long as my arm, and Jefferson Sancrist, a small-time street hustler who made his way up from block dealer into the distribution end of the drug trade. I'd busted Jeff a few times myself for selling pot, back when I was still in uniform. We were guessing at the other five, but we were pretty sure they were all associates of Sumo Starnes. That meant they could be any five of about a thousand small-time hustlers, pimps or junkies.

But Blensinger's birth certificates were all female. Christine Anne Dudley, Dorothy Lynn Carter, Taniqua Sharone Stokes, Suzanne Leigh Zimmerman, Felicia Susan Armstrong, Julia Christina Torelli and Kelly LeAnn Prescott were the ones that Blensinger was sure were being used to get people out of the country. And there was no way an overstuffed four-hundred-pounder like Sumo Starnes was going to pass as a woman at Customs. As much as I wanted a break in this case, there was nothing else for me to think but that we were chasing a dead end.

My phone rang and I snatched it up angrily, my frustration evident. Seven people didn't just up and disappear like a fart in the wind. They had to go somewhere.

"Reinnes," I barked into the receiver.

"Cristoph, it's Brett," Blensinger told me. "Listen, there's more on those birth certificates. Alex just dug it up."

"Tell me that one of these women is four hundred fifteen pounds and has a moustache," I said sarcastically.

"Nope, but every single one of those names we gave you has been legally changed," Blensinger said. "Every single one."

"Really," I said, intrigued. "That is interesting."

"And get this. They were all processed through one judge."

"Don't keep me in suspense, Brett," I said, my pen already poised to write.

"The Honorable Thomas T. Bunting," Blensinger told me.

My jaw dropped. Tom Bunting - "Playboy" Bunting in the papers - was one of the most notorious womanizers and party-boys in the local paper. It was said around the precincts that he was a shady player, but too smart for anyone to catch him at it.

"Think it might be time to pay ol' "Playboy" a visit?" I asked.

"I'll meet you in the parking lot," Blensinger told me.

* * *

It was the typical judge's chambers, all polished wood and indecipherable books on the shelves. It reeked of education and power. I hated the place. All those books holding all that shit that had no bearing whatsoever on what actually happened out on the streets they were supposed to keep orderly. The 9mm Glock nestled coldly in my left armpit was the only law out there that mattered sometimes. And people like Playboy Bunting needed to have a better understanding of that.

He was every inch the patrician noble, tanned and fit and silver-haired. A chalk-white smile that came a little too easily and shifty brown eyes that never stayed too long in any one place.

"I don't see the relevance," he told me flatly. "I process thousands of name changes, Detective. There is very little investigation into the reasoning behind these changes. Marriages, divorces, it could be anything."

"The relevance, Your Honor, is that we suspect these seven used fake birth certificates and now are using new identities to flee the country," Blensinger said. He was a whole lot calmer than I was. I was seriously considering a little jail time for feeding this rich prick the first three knuckles on my right hand.

"I'll release the records, of course, Detective," Bunting said with an easy smile. "But I assure you, there's very little information to be gotten from the petitions. I doubt you could even lift a viable fingerprint."

"Leave that to us," I grumbled.

Bunting picked up his phone and mumbled to one of his legion of secretaries. The fact that all of those secretaries were young, female, stacked and of no discernable clerical talent had not escaped me on my way in. "Playboy," indeed.

We walked out with a couple dozen files and a dead end. Nothing. No evidence that these female names had been changed to male, or any petition to change sex or anything like that. The next step was to go back to the whiteboard in my office, where what we had of the case was set up. It was as disheartening as the visit to Judge Bunting. A bunch of things that my gut said were connected, but showed no connection at all.

"Anything new from the guy you've been sitting on over at Vital Statistics?" I ventured to Blensinger, my nose half-buried in yet another cup of coffee.

"Nothing," Blensinger replied. "Either he knows we're on to him, or he's not the guy we're looking for. Even though all the birth certificates were processed through his office, that's no indication that he's our guy, I guess."

"It was a long shot," I said, trying to reassure him. The kid wasn't a bad cop.

"Maybe it's just a dead end from the start," Blensinger said, not comforted at all. "I mean, there's no way that Sumo Starnes could use a woman's passport. With the 9/11 Security lately, that would never get by."

"Unless he's not the one trying to hide his identity," I said, tapping my chin.

"Talk to me, Cristoph," Blensinger said, sitting forward.

"We bust Tenth Street and seize twenty-three hundred keys of uncut heroin," I said, thinking out loud. "That's costing somebody a whole hell of a lot of money somewhere. These people are going to be pissed off, don't you think?"

"I would be," Brett said.

"It stands to reason that these pissed off people are going to want their money back or to take it out of somebody's ass," I went on. "Now, I'm Sumo Starnes. I can hide out, keep my head down. But I can't protect myself, because I have a family."

"So if you get your family out of the country, you're safe to hide out and try to negotiate," Brett finished for me.

"Bingo," I said.

"Customs doesn't have any of these people leaving the country," Brett said, holding up the birth certificates.

"It takes time to get all the papers together, especially if you're doing them legit," I told him. "Once I have the birth certificate, I can apply for the Social and the drivers' license and the passport, but they take time to process."

"Even longer with the name changes," Brett said. "You have to start all over."

"Right," I said. "So these people haven't just not left the country, they're probably still local, waiting on their paperwork to arrive."

"You're a genius," Blensinger said. "All we have to do is get with the Social Security office and Motor Vehicles and get them to cough up an address on one of these names."

"And we can ride right up to their front door. We bust them on falsified documentation, threaten to keep them public and in the country, and flip 'em for the location of the dealers," I said.

Blensinger was already out the door. "I'm already calling."

* * *

"I don't get it," Alex Wylie told me from the back seat. "This is a hospital."

"It's pretty smart, actually," I said. "Check 'em in as a Jane Doe until their papers arrive and they can get the hell out of the country. Real low-profile."

The little medical plaza was like about seven hundred others in the metropolitan area, two or three doctors out screwing sick people out of what little money they had left, or one of those Godawful HMO factories where they spent about two seconds looking you over and then prescribed Prozac for your hemorrhoids.

Blensinger hung up his mobile phone. "The place is legitimate," he told us. "Dr. Darick Seales is a board-certified reconstructive surgeon."

"Doesn't surprise me a bit," I said. "Maybe a new nose while you're waiting on your fake IDs."

"Uniforms also report that a couple of weeks ago they stopped and questioned six beauticians coming out the place at two in the morning," Blensinger reported.

"New hair color, that sort of shit," I said. "I'm willing to bet that Audrey Starnes is in there with her daughter, bags packed and waiting for the mailman."

"How long 'til the warrant's clear?" Wylie asked.

I shrugged. "The dispatcher should have called us by now," I said, digging in my pocket for the radio. "I'll see what the hell the hold-up is."

"I think I know," Wylie said. He pointed out the front of the car.

Two dark-suited men were moving towards us, dangling FBI credentials from their upraised hands.

* * *

"What the hell do you mean, 'NASA'?" I asked again.

"I mean NASA," the agent shot back flatly. "The National Aeronautics and Space Administration. You know, the moon landing people. You've probably seen pictures."

"Smart ass," I shot back. "What I want to know is why the hell NASA is using the Feds to keep us away from our suspects in there?"

"You don't know that they're in there," the other Agent, the oriental one, said. I'd taken to referring to them as Tweedledee and Tweedledum. If it pissed them off, they gave no sign.

"Well, we're never gonna know if we don't go in there, are we?" Blensinger said hotly. I hid a grin. The kid may crack under pressure, but he had some balls.

"Then I guess you're going to have to die wondering," Tweedledee told him. "'Cause neither one of you is going in there."

"What the hell is so important in there, that it takes the FBI and NASA to safeguard it in a little bitty clinic like that?" I asked.

"Don't you think that if you were authorized to know that, I'd've told you already?" the Fed shot back. "Do yourselves a favor, Detectives. Get the hell out of here."

"I'm not letting that suspect get away," I said flatly. "You can either tie this up, with my lieutenant and your Agent in Charge going round and round and round, and we'll all be up to

our eyeballs in paperwork by the end of the day. Or, you can act like a cop and start helping out. There's no reason we can't both make our arrests today."

"We're not out for an arrest," Tweedledum said, and his partner shot him a hate look.

"So you're sitting on somebody," I gathered.

"That's none of your goddamn business, Detective," Tweedledee told me.

"You can cuss at your little government field-hands, but watch it with me," I warned him.

"He's like a bulldog," Blensinger said. "Just tell him what's going on, or you're never going to get rid of him."

"I think we got off on the wrong foot, here," I said. "We're all supposed to be cops here. I'm Cristoph Reines, this is Brett Blensinger and this is Alex Wylie. Believe it or not, we're actually on the same side."

"We have reason to believe that there are people in there who are awaiting receipt of falsified travel documents in order to skip the country," Blensinger said. "If we can catch them, we have a shot at breaking open the biggest heroin-smuggling operation in the South."

The first agent, Tweedledum, sighed heavily. He finally stuck out his hand begrudgingly. "I'm Special Agent Staley Townes, FBI. This is Kim Lee S'sa-Jen from NASA's Project Security wing."

"One of our Project Supervisors has gone missing," S'sa-Jen told us. "Dr. Lindell Harcott. He's been gone without a trace for at least six days."

"What makes you think he's here?" Wylie asked.

"You have to understand, Detectives, that what we're about to tell you cannot - and I mean *cannot* - circulate. If it gets back to us, we will deny all knowledge," Agent Townes told us. "And you wouldn't like the consequences. Your career would be the first thing we ruined, and we wouldn't stop there."

"We get it, already," I said impatiently. "Now, what's this Harcott done?"

"He was studying something that came back from one of the Shuttle missions," S'sa-Jen told us. "It was a fragment of some kind of meteor. Its core emanated some kind of radiation that we'd never seen before. Dr. Harcott was in charge of studying the effects of that radiation on humans."

"Did he find anything?" Wylie asked.

"We don't know," Townes told us. "He grabbed the meteor and took off a week ago."

"And you think he's here," I said, jerking a thumb at the clinic.

"Possibly," Townes went on. "He's known Dr. Seales since junior high. They did a great deal of work together two years ago on implanted, time release cancer drugs. We figured the same as you did - if Harcott is skipping out, maybe he wanted a little reconstructive surgery to make him harder to recognize before he bailed."

"There's more," S'sa-Jen said. "We also have reason to believe that Dr. Harcott had a drug problem."

My eyebrows shot up. "Oh, really?"

"We found some cocaine when we searched his house," Townes said, obviously not happy at having had that information spilled. "We don't know that he has a problem, really, but."

"Sure. High-powered science geek like that probably takes a little go-powder on the side to keep him sharp during those late nights," I said. "And maybe he starts owing a little money or something. He grabs up some space rock and offers to sell it."

"And who do we know that sells cocaine and might be in that clinic?" Blensinger asked.

I grinned. "Fuck the search warrant," I said, clapping Townes on the shoulder. "I'm just gonna go in there to see how much some liposuction costs."

"And I could use a tummy tuck," Blensinger said, stepping in behind me.

Wylie looked at the agents with a crooked grin. "And I've always wanted to find out more about a nose job, how 'bout y'all?"

* * *

The clinic's front door was unlocked, which was more than enough to make me pull my piece. We didn't dare call for backup, since we were going in without a warrant and without the Lieutenant's okay. The Feds fell into step behind up in standard formation. Ordinarily I didn't hold too high an opinion of the Fucking Bunch of Idiots, but training was training. I wasn't about to say 'no' to two more guns. Sumo had quite the reputation.

Blensinger took the door to the exam rooms and stood down and to the side while we covered it with our other guns. He counted off three on his fingers and pulled the door aside.

I'd never seen such a shocked-looking nurse in my life. She dropped her pill tray and damned if a wet spot didn't appear on her scrubs. Wylie had her grabbed up and out of the way in record time, before she could even make a peep. We moved back into the complex a little, quietly, covering the rooms. The administration wing of the clinic was largely empty, even of the receptionist. We immediately turned a one-eighty and made our way to the surgery wing.

We pushed through the swinging doors and into the heavy smell of antiseptic and that unidentifiable 'hospital' smell. Wrinkling our noses, we carried on, waiting until we had the sure sound of male voices talking in our ears. I stopped the other officers with an upraised hand, wanting to listen a little before we came and spoiled the party in earnest.

"I know it will work. We tested it," a tense, anxious tenor was saying.

"But you can't guarantee it," said a mildly accented baritone.

"Not on humans," the tenor responded. "Only on chimps. But the DNA is similar."

"DNA my ass," the baritone shot back.

"Look, it should be a great deal for you," another, raspy basso said. "You have a way to get rid of your enemies without a trace. Maybe even make a little money doing it. That should be more than enough to pay back what we owe you."

"You see, that's not for you to decide," the baritone said amusedly. "You don't just run up a fifteen-grand tab like yours and expect me to just forget about it because of some fancy rock."

"Fancy rock? Do you have any idea what that 'fancy rock' means to."

"Shut up," the baritone interrupted. "It ain't no fifteen grand. It ain't the money you two fuckers owe me for all the soda you put up your damn noses. If I say it's a fancy rock, it's a fancy rock. I want my fucking money, get me?"

I nodded to the other officers. If that wasn't probable cause for an arrest, nothing was. We pushed through the door, weapons pointed and cocked.

"Well, well, if it ain't my old buddy Sumo Starnes," I said, recognizing the fat face that went along with the baritone. He was in one of his custom-tailored suits which draped his 400-pound girth and he was carrying a small aluminum canister in his pudgy hands.

"Been looking for ya, Sumo," Blensinger told him.

"Dr. Harcott, Dr. Seales," Townes said to the tenor and the bass, two skinny, unshaven men who looked like they'd not seen a bed in several months.

S'sa-Jen turned to Starnes. "That is the property of the United States Government and is extremely dangerous," he told Sumo. "Put it down, put it down *now*."

About that time, two more men in expensive suits, one a swarthy-looking man with bleached-blond hair and the other a vicious-looking little midget of a man with the most pitiful excuse for a beard I'd ever seen came in through another door. I recognized them immediately as Jefferson Sancrist, one of Sumo's dealing buddies, and Adley Fawkes, Sumo's favorite chemist, both prime suspects in the Tenth Street set-up. I turned my gun on them, stopping them cold and smelling a career bust, one that could get me Detective Sergeant for sure and one that would get Blensinger out of Fraud and probably get Wylie his gold shield.

"Stop right there," I told them, holding up my badge. "Averil Starnes, Jefferson Sancrist, Adley Fawkes, you're under arrest. Wylie, make sure you frisk these assholes."

"Dr. Lindell Harcott, Dr. Darick Seales, you're under arrest," Agent Townes said at the same time, also flashing credentials.

We popped our cuffs loose and advanced on the men.

"I want a lawyer," Sancrist told me.

"Good, I'll get you one, you sack of shit," I said back. I grabbed his arm and shoved him back towards Wylie. I wanted to be the one to put the cuffs on Starnes myself. If they even fit around his tubby wrists.

"You ain't got nothing on me, Reannes," Sumo growled at me.

"Oh, no, Sumo, no slick lawyer's gonna get you to skate this time," I told him. "I got your ass, I got you good this time. You're going away for a long time."

"It ain't gonna happen, you Creole fuck," Sumo shot back.

"Just keep telling yourself that, lard ass," I said, grabbing his arm to turn him around. I was already savoring the sound the cuffs were going to make clicking shut.

"No, you fool, you could kill us!" Harcott screamed from behind me.

Sumo opened the canister. Yellow light flashed.

I felt hot and dizzy. Suddenly it wasn't so easy to stand up anymore.

* * *

I was still shaky and sweating when I finally plopped behind the wheel of the car. Sumo was passed out in the back seat, cuffed and Mirandized, with Sancrist and Fawkes. Carrying his limp, unconscious ass down the stairs and into the car would have been a workout for a bodybuilder. I wasn't feeling that good to start with. Even Wylie, usually the portrait of health, was looking pretty rough.

"We have to get ourselves checked out by a doctor," S'sa-Jen was saying. "Now."

"What the hell did that rock do to us?" Blensinger demanded.

"I'm telling you, we don't know," Townes said back. "We just know it's a kind of radiation, one we haven't seen before."

"Bullshit," I snapped. "I heard your two perps tell Sumo that they'd tested it on chimps. If you tested it on chimps, you have to have some idea of what the hell it does."

"Well?" Wylie said.

"We're not sure how it will affect humans," S'sa-Jen told me. "We're just not."

"But?" Blensinger said.

"But," S'sa-Jen went on. "The radiation causes rapid cell regeneration, but it mutates the chromosomes. The chimpanzees were exposed to only tenth-of-a-second bursts. We've been exposed for at least three, maybe even four seconds. There's no way to tell what's going to happen from an exposure that long."

"Waitaminnit. You said mutation?" I asked. "So we're all gonna start growing third arms out our chests, that kind of thing?"

"Nothing like that," S'sa-Jen said. "It broke down some of the chimpanzee's chromosomes. In the tests we ran, the skin we exposed became. different somehow."

"Different how?" Townes asked, suddenly interested. Apparently he'd re-thought his stand on 'need to know' information.

"Hairless, for one. Softer and more elastic. And we think - we *think*, I said, we don't know for sure - we're pretty sure that the chimps were able to take in nourishment through the mutated skin somehow."

"You mean, like, eat?" Blensinger asked.

"No, not eat," S'sa-Jen told him. "They still ate normally and their digestive systems still broke down and utilized the food. It's more like - well, the best I can explain it is this. You can eat a normal meal and not get everything your body needs to keep it healthy. Some people take vitamins. You don't have to take vitamins, but they help your body function better, right? And if you go without them, you get diseases from vitamin deficiency."

"So, this skin on the chimps, it took in some kind of vitamin?" Wylie asked.

"We think so," S'sa-Jen said. "But the exposed skin, it was just a square-inch patch. We weren't sure what kind of 'vitamin' it was supposed to take in, or for what reason."

"So we could get away with just having to rub a carrot on our chests every day, then," I cracked. The other officers looked at me with narrowed eyes.

"Excuse me for having a sense of humor," I mumbled.

"We have to see a doctor," S'sa-Jen reiterated.

"Look, you've said that like, fourteen times already," Blensinger told him. "These chimps, they didn't die from this rock. Why do we have to see a doctor so bad?"

"The length of the exposure! The uncertainty of its reactions on human DNA!" S'sa-Jen explained, a little too agitated to be telling the truth.

"What the hell aren't you telling us, man?" Blensinger asked. "What the hell else did this do to the chimps?"

S'sa-Jen sighed. "We need to see a doctor."

"Spill it," I told him roughly.

"The radiation, it's possible from one experiment that it can cause brain damage," S'sa-Jen nearly whispered. "The chimps in that group experienced a lot of adverse side effects, like easy distraction, lowered attention span, that sort of thing."

"And is that all?" I pressed, using my best interview-room force-the-confession voice.

"No," S'sa-Jen said. "It altered the DNA in other ways, too."

"How?" Wylie and Townes said at the same time and in the same tone.

"We're not certain," Kim Lee said. "We're pretty sure it destroyed the Y chromosome."

"And what the hell does that mean, 'destroyed the Y chromosome?'" I nearly shouted.

"We have to see a doctor," Blensinger told me in the same haunted voice as S'sa-Jen's.

* * *

It was a miracle, really, that me and Townes got us into the city at all without wrapping our cars around a telephone pole someplace. If his vision was anywhere near as blurry as mine was, and if he was sweating and shaking anywhere near as bad as me, it was a miracle that he even kept the car on the road. I almost puked at least six times before the city limits. I finally had to exercise the better part of valor and pull off to the side of the street.

"I can't make it," I told Blensinger and Wylie in a husky, raspy voice. I could hardly breathe, it felt like. The sweat was dripping off of me.

"I'll call the Boss," Wylie said, fumbling for his radio.

"No. Wait," Blensinger said, pointing. "Look. Cops."

I rolled down the window and waved at the passing radio car. It flashed the wig-wags twice and pulled over. I breathed a sigh of relief as the two uniform officers got out and walked our way.

"Thank God," I breathed. "Am I ever happy to see y'all."

Unconsciousness came as I was still wondering why the uniform felt the need to use a stun-gun on me.

* * *

Pinpricks of light stabbed through my eyelids. I groaned and tried to turn away, and I think I vomited. I couldn't be sure. I couldn't feel things properly. I turned my head to the side and tried to turn my eyes away from the light, but I couldn't. The lights followed my movements. I gritted my teeth and growled deep in my throat, but it didn't sound menacing. It sounded weak, somehow - soft and yielding instead of defiant. My arms and legs wouldn't obey me.

"Relax, Reines. You're restrained to a table. That's why you can't move," a voice told me soothingly but from a distance. A familiar voice.

"Huh? Lieutenant?" I mumbled. I forced my eyes open, and the light stabbed at my brain through the unlidged holes. I groaned but persevered until Lieutenant Coffey - the Fraud boss, who'd opened up the whole approach to Starnes through the fake identification - resolved in my vision, like a camera focusing.

"Just relax," the Lieutenant said.

"Where the hell are we?" I managed through a mouth thick with sickness and sleep.

"Safe," the Lieutenant told me. "Relax, I said."

"Where's Blensinger?"

"He's safe. You're all safe," he said, turning away. I heard a door shut behind him. I took deep breaths and tried not to think very much about how weird the Lou was acting. He'd looked at me like he hated me.

I looked at the ceiling, blinking in the glare of the fluorescent lights, counting tiles and hoping that I could keep from thinking about what was happening. I realized that I wasn't in a hospital - there was a dank and dirty quality to my surroundings, like I was being kept in a basement rather than a medical facility. The Lieutenant should have put me in a hospital first thing. I tried to think about why he wouldn't have done what he was supposed to. I hardly even knew the man, really - I worked directly under Lieutenant Talbot in Narcotics. All the scuttlebutt I'd heard from the precinct was that Lieutenant Coffey was an okay boss, strict but forgiving, and the only evidence anyone had of wrongdoing on his part was that he got his taxes done for free by the accountants in the bureau and that he drove a flashy Lexus which he probably couldn't afford on his pay, but rumor had it that he'd been left a little money by a dead relative, which explained it enough for me.

But he had me tied up in a basement, exposed to that radiation which was doing God-knows-what to my insides, maybe even with brain damage, and he was looking at me like I was something he stepped in. Maybe it was what the radiation had done to me, made me hard to look at. Blensinger had told me what the Y chromosome was. Maybe I was losing all my sex characteristics. Maybe I was some hairless neuter now. I could have told, if I could have looked down.

Maybe Coffey didn't have the beef with me, maybe it had been Blensinger all along that he wanted locked in the basement. Or Wylie, although I couldn't imagine why anybody would

want to hurt that kid. Blensinger had pulled a long stint as an embarrassment to the Fraud division, maybe Coffey wanted him out of the way.

I followed that angle as I wormed my fingers around, trying to worry at the restraints around my wrists. They were that soft web material, like seatbelts in a car. I managed to worm my wrists around until I felt a buckle and some Velcro. I started concentrating on getting my right shackle loosened. What the hell else was I going to do while I thought?

So maybe Coffey didn't like Blensinger. Needed him out of the way. Why? The easiest answer was because Blensinger wasn't an embarrassment to the division. I'd been working with him - and even if he did freeze under pressure, he was an excellent detective with top-flight instincts and insight. Being a cop wasn't about being in gunfights. I knew a lot of people that went to pieces in gunfights. And Brett Blensinger was an extremely good cop.

Which made the easiest explanation about why Coffey needed Blensinger out of the way was because Blensinger and maybe Wylie had found something that could lead to him. Coffey would be a great front man for an organization, after all - what better person to set up a fraudulent enterprise than a Fraud detective? - and maybe somebody had gotten him to play ball. Maybe that Judge Tom "Playboy" Bunting. That fucker had set off my instincts from Minute One and he seemed real smug and self-satisfied that we weren't going to find anything. Easy to feel that way if he knew that Coffey was covering everything up at the command level. So if me, Blensinger and Wylie were onto something, it would make sense that Coffey needed us all locked in a basement to die from radiation poisoning. It explained a lot - the uniform cop with the stun gun, the way all our leads died out after we talked to Bunting, everything.

But why would the name changes and birth certificates be connected to "Playboy" and Coffey? What did they possibly stand to gain from running that outfit? Maybe if I could have talked to Blensinger about it, we could have found some leads to go on. But nothing was going to happen if we didn't get the hell out of this basement and go see a doctor pronto. We weren't going to get anything figured out if we died. I put a little more concentration on my right wrist.

What the hell could Coffey be up to, anyway? It's not like he was any kind of high-roller or anything, but then again, with his contacts and his knowledge of fraud and identity theft, he could be a completely different person somewhere else. And no way was he running an operation this big on his own. Was he in it with Sumo Starnes? Was he in it with Blensinger, maybe? The only person he ever really socialized with was Lieutenant Jimmy Greco in Vice, but that was just because the two of them went to the Academy together.

I finally managed to get the Velcro free and start loosening the buckle on my right wrist. It slid out of the restraint and I reached across my body to free my left. My arm was slick with sweat and was spindly as a stick, hardly any muscle mass at all. The radiation! I stared at my skinny hand with its long, tapered fingers above the tiny little wrist. It wasn't possible! The thick, bristly dark hair on my arms all the way down to my knuckles was gone, but that was what radiation was supposed to do, anyway.

Snapping myself out of the panicked reverie I'd settled into, I reached across my body and unbuckled my left wrist, then sat up to free my feet. I got my first look at my body and had to bite my bottom lip to keep from screaming out loud. I looked like one of the pictures from the Holocaust Museum. My ribs poked out like slats in a bed, my chest was as narrow and tiny as a birds' and made my nipples look huge, my muscles were shrunken and tiny, the bones of my

hips and knees protruded and my limbs were skinny and stick-like. All of my body hair was either gone or had become so fine and light as to be undetectable against my skin. The only upshot that I could see was that I didn't seem to be carrying a single ounce of fat anywhere on me. Helluva diet. I bent in the middle - it had been a long time since I'd been able to do that so easily - surprised a little at my own flexibility, and started on the restraints on my ankles. It was then that I got a look between my legs.

I'd been afraid of being a hairless neuter. Little did I know that being a hairless neuter was the *positive* outcome. Between my bony, emaciated thighs, where before had always been a decently respectable six-and-a-half incher nestled in a patch of dark, wiry curls was now a puffy, pink pair of lips surrounded by a fluffy little feather of brown.

I bit my lip harder, to keep my panic under control, and prodded gently at what used to be my manhood. The lips parted a little, revealing soft, slick-looking pink folds between them.

I forced myself to look away. I took a quick second to calm down - I realized I had started hyperventilating - and struggled with the restraints around my tiny little ankles. Panic made my fingers slip and shake, and I fumbled with the Velcro closure and buckle that was holding my right leg in place. The part of me that was a trained soldier and then a trained police officer was telling me to be calm, to take my time, but the part of me that was scared more than I'd ever been was telling me just as loudly to go faster, faster.

I heard the click of a 9mm slide being racked behind me and I turned, jumping and stifling a surprised yelp. Coffey was behind me, in the doorway, holding a Glock dead level at my chest.

"I wouldn't," he said, indicating my restraints.

"What the hell did you do to me?" I demanded, my voice husky and soft and - I noticed now - about an octave and a half higher than usual. I didn't need a mirror to know my Adam's apple was completely gone.

"I didn't do anything," Coffey said. "Sumo Starnes was the one that opened the canister, and exposed you and the others to the radiation."

"Did he know it would turn me into a chick?" I said.

"Hell, Cristoph, we didn't even know. We suspected, and the guy from NASA did too, but now that I've seen it. amazing, I gotta tell you."

"And Sumo?" I asked.

"The prettiest little thing you ever laid eyes on, Detective. Everybody in the room when it happened - you, that little rat bastard Blensinger, Officer Wylie, Sumo Starnes, Adley Fawkes, Jeff Sancrist, the Feds, the doctors - a cuter little bunch of schoolgirls you wouldn't believe."

"We're all.?"

"Chicks," Coffey said. "Girls. Cunts. Bitches. Sluts."

"So why the hell are you keeping me tied to a table, then?" I demanded.

"Because you're still dangerous, little girl. You may have a tasty little pussy now, but you still have the brain and experience of Cristoph Reines. You never should have gotten past Judge

Bunting, Cristoph. You never should have even tried. You and Blensinger almost fucked up three years of work. This was the only way I could think to keep you under control."

"Under control? You'll see how under control I am when I get out of here and tear your ass off and hand it to you, you lying fuck."

"Mmm. I like it when little girls talk dirty like that," Coffey said. "Careful, or you'll get me all turned on."

"So that's it," I said hotly. "That's the plan. Keep me tied up down here and do rapes on me until it ain't no fun anymore, and then get rid of me."

"The idea has promise," Coffey said, "but me and the others have other - more fun - things in mind for all you bitches."

"Do tell," I said, narrowing my eyes.

"Oh, telling wouldn't be nearly as much fun as doing," Coffey said.

I'd been in a war. I'd been in gunfights and fistfights and everything in between.

None of them had ever scared me like the look in Coffey's eyes.

Ω



SUMMARY: A detective "hot" on the trail of his suspects sets out to make the big bust, but instead finds himself exposed to a strange radiation which starts to change body structure into that of a female. part two

PROBABLE CAUSALITY, Part II

By Valerie Hope

I was groggy as hell, with whatever the hell the doctor had shot me up with. Felt like needles sinking into my eyes. My head hurt like it had been caved in with a two-by-four, and I don't think I could have gone two rounds with a newborn baby, I was so weak.

But at least I was finally out of the restraints.

I looked around the room at the collection of stick-thin, emaciated girls laying on dirty mattresses in the big room. They had the faces of some of my friends, some of my enemies and some people I didn't even know. Right next to me was Detective Brett Blensinger, a Fraud badge who'd helped me track down a fugitive drug dealer and somehow got himself and me caught up in some crazy-assed plot by the Lieutenant in charge of the Fraud Division, Paul Coffey. Beside Blensinger, on another mattress, was Averil "Sumo" Starnes, the major mover who we'd been tracking. He wasn't much of a "sumo" anymore, though, probably weighing somewhere in the neighborhood of eighty or ninety pounds of just skin and bone, like the rest of us.

Sumo was snoring loudly next to Dr. Lindell Harcott, a prominent geneticist and some high muck-a-muck scientist over at NASA. It had been his little coke problem that had led him to give the meteor rock that transformed me from a two-hundred-fifty pound man of six foot one to the little stick skeleton of about five foot four and eighty-five pounds soaking wet that I was now. Harcott had a hunted look on his angular - was it becoming feminine now, was that it? - face, as well he should. The whole thing was pretty much his fault.

The next mattress held Sumo's right-hand man, another major weight mover in the recreational substance trade named Jefferson Sancrist. A bigger scumbag would be hard to track down. He had a list of priors with us that took an hour to fax anyplace. Beside him - *her*, I guess it was now, with her little pink pussy lips poking out from the black thatch between the skinny legs, there wasn't much call to use the word 'him' anymore - trying valiantly to overcome fear and get some sleep, was Officer Alex Wylie, a smart, cocky little kid in our department who'd helped with a lot of the legwork in the case.

Against the far wall were Kim Lee S'sa-Jen, the little Chinaman from NASA who'd gotten the fun job of tracking down Harcott. We'd met up only yesterday and decided to quit playing "my agency can beat up your agency" and actually go in and make the bust on these dirtbags together. Beside Kim Lee was Darick Seales, a plastic surgeon who was ostensibly helping Sumo and Sancrist get new faces so they could skip the country.

The last mattress held Special Agent Staley Townes, the Fed in charge of bringing in Dr. Harcott and his magic rock. He and Kim Lee had been partnered up when me, Blensinger and Wylie

blundered into the scene. Hell, I felt a little guilty. Maybe all this could have been avoided if I hadn't rushed them into making the bust inside Darick Seales' office. On the mattress with Townes was the true odd man out, Adley Fawkes. Fawkes was one of Sancrist and Sumo's drug chemists - not a nice person, by any stretch, but still probably the most innocent of the bunch - and he'd only been along because Sancrist had needed a ride out to Seales' clinic. I'd definitely boo-hoo for him later, though. Hang out with pushers and bad things will happen to you. He should have known when he signed on the dotted line what he was getting in for.

"Blensinger," I said in the soft, breathy alto that was my voice now, shaking the not-a-man next to me. Blensinger groaned in a high, lilting soprano and sat up, blinking crusty eyes.

"Cristoph? Is that you?" he asked, looking me up and down in amazement.

"Mama Reennes' only son, even though you couldn't tell by looking," I said.

"Where the hell are we?" Blensinger asked.

"Some kind of basement," I told him. "Brett, it was Lieutenant Coffey. I've seen him, talked to him. He has some kind of plan for us. He was the one behind all the fake IDs and passports, not Sumo."

"Are you sure?" Blensinger asked me.

"I saw him. I talked to him. Judge Bunting was in on it, too. Probably some other people, I don't know. He's holding us prisoner, Brett."

"We have to get out of here," Blensinger said.

"Don't count on it," Harcott told us from his mattress. "We're in no condition to escape."

"Maybe you're not," I accused.

"No, none of us are," Harcott explained. "I studied the radiation we were exposed to, remember? It's mutated the 'Y' chromosomes in our bodies that made us male into the 'X' chromosome that mirrors what all human beings have to have to determine sex. An 'X' and a 'Y' gives you a baby boy, two 'X's gives you a baby girl."

"So we're basically like our own twin sisters would be," Blensinger asked.

"Basically," Harcott explained. "But there were other mutations as well. This radiation, the mutations it causes, they're like nothing we've ever seen before. It's destroying our bodies as we speak. That's why all the weight and mass loss, even from the skeleton. Our bodies are literally eating themselves."

"You mean we're just going to get smaller and smaller until we're gone?" I asked.

"Possibly," Harcott said. "Look at what's happened. You and Sumo were closest to the rock, you got the biggest dosages. You've both lost amazing amounts of weight and height. Sumo is maybe a fifth or sixth of his original mass, and you're maybe a quarter of yours. Me and Dr. Seales were farthest away. We're the closest to our original heights and weights. Proximity to the fragment obviously has something to do with how much of the radiation we received. No doubt, unchecked, we will all wind up like Sumo Starnes if we're not treated in time."

"And you can treat this, stop us from shrinking?" I asked.

"I had it worked out in chimps," Harcott said. "It was in my notes, which were taken from me by our captors. If, as you said, Detective, they have plans for us, then it's possible that they're synthesizing the treatment for us right now."

"So, they give us a shot and it's over?" Blensinger asked.

"No," Harcott said. "The genetic mutations are irreversible. We can only stop the spread and progress. And it's not just one shot. It's a lifetime treatment, like dialysis. We would need it every single day in order to live normal lives."

"Great," I said. "So Coffey has us by the balls."

"Don't use that word," Blensinger said grumpily.

* * *

"Hello, ladies."

I jerked awake. Time had ceased to have any meaning down here. I didn't know whether I'd been down here for days or weeks or hours. Everything had blended together into a dull, aching eternity with no breaks except when I passed out from what seemed like exhaustion.

Coffey was back, with some other men. They seemed huge to me, with my diminished stature. Before Sumo had opened his little can, I could have taken any of them - maybe even all of them - easily. But now they could probably tie me in a pretzel without working up a decent sweat. My only saving grace was that they'd by God know they'd been in a fight.

"We thought you might like something to eat," Coffey went on. "You need to keep up your strength for this afternoon."

"What's happening this afternoon?" Sumo growled from his tiny little tangle of arms and legs on the bed.

"We're going to get you all fixed up, Sumo," Coffey said. "Take care of that sickness that's been gnawing at you all. Make you feel a little better."

Coffey snapped his fingers and the two men came forward. I was too weak to even really move before they'd grabbed me underneath the shoulders and hoisted me to my feet. I struggled - feebly - as they pulled me across the floor and dropped me on my stomach in front of Coffey. One of them rolled me over roughly and the other held my arms. The one who had rolled me over then controlled my feet.

Coffey took a white tube from his inside pocket and tore some paper off of one end. He knelt beside me and held the tube over my belly. A warm, sticky liquid oozed out the open end to splatter on my belly.

I can't describe how it felt. I could sense something - I don't know what - leaching through my skin and making the aches and pains diminish.

The first man let go of my arms.

"Rub it in a little," Coffey said. "It'll help more."

I rubbed the warm, slightly sticky fluid around on my skin as the men dragged Adley Fawkes forward and Coffey drained another tube on him. Apparently the mutations that Harcott and

S'sa-Jen told us about in the chimps was true of us, too - that we could now take in nutrients through our skin.

By the time I had it all rubbed in and was feeling better, the men had finished the last of us and were hauling me back to my feet. They pulled me out the room's only door and down the hall.

"Where are you taking me?" I demanded.

"Outside," Coffey grunted. "There's a van. You're all going back to Seales' clinic, where we can get some work done on you."

"Who are you in this with, Coffey?" I demanded.

"You're not a detective anymore, Detective. The M.E. issued your death certificates yesterday. So stop trying to solve some crime that didn't even happen."

"Maybe I ain't trying to solve no crime," I said. "Maybe I just want to know what the fuck is going on. Maybe I want a piece of the action or something."

"I know you better than that, Cristoph. You never let something go once you got your teeth into it," Coffey chuckled.

"Then you know I ain't ever gonna quit until I nail your ass to the wall," I said.

"Not if I never give you a hammer, you won't," Coffey laughed.

* * *

Seales' clinic was sufficiently far out in the 'burbs that nobody ever really noticed the eight malnourished girls with men's haircuts, wrapped in blankets, ushered into the clinic just after sundown. We were strapped down in the waiting room chairs, gagged and blindfolded. We waited for what seemed like hours. I tried to sleep. I got the feeling that I wouldn't get much rest in the next several days, if Coffey had anything to say about it. But at least they were going to stop the mutation and the shrinking. But keeping us all alive, I was starting to wonder if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

Some formless eternity later, strong hands snapped me out of a light sleep and dragged me to my feet again. I was manhandled up onto a soft mattress and strapped down, then I felt the poke of a needle in the back of my hand, an I.V. I was sure. Then the bed started rolling and I heard soft voices - men's voices - saying soft, incomprehensible things. I never knew when unconsciousness came.

* * *

I woke up feeling like I'd been beaten with a tire iron. Everything hurt. I groaned.

"Good, you're awake," Coffey said as my eyes focused on him, leaning against the wall and puffing idly on an expensive-smelling cigar.

"This is Dr. Lawton," Coffey said, gesturing to a short, balding white man who was sitting at a desk near the foot of my gurney. "I want you to listen to him very carefully and do what he says, or you'll answer to me about it."

"You've undergone several procedures," Dr. Lawton said in a cracking, warbling voice. "Some of them quite invasive. You're going to experience a great deal of soreness and discomfort for a while. You're going to run the risk of infection, so I need you to be very careful about keeping yourself - and especially your incisions - clean. You should be able to eat and drink normally, but I need you to stay off your feet for a few days until your body has time to recover."

"Recover from what?" I asked, my throat raw and hoarse from an intubation.

Dr. Lawton looked a little sheepish as he pulled down the sheet covering me from the neck down, exposing two very swollen, very red and very huge breasts atop my narrow ribcage. They had the unmistakable, spherical look of 'done' tits, perfectly round and with no sag whatsoever. The pink nipples atop them looked positively huge. Some weird kind of tight arrangement of straps crisscrossed above them and below them.

"I need you to leave the compression garment on for several weeks," Lawton told me. "Your breasts are going to be very swollen and painful for a while, and it will probably hurt to lift your arms. Try not to lift anything heavy or do anything very strenuous. You'll need to massage them regularly. You see, your body has formed scar tissue around the implants called a 'capsule.' If you don't massage them daily, the capsule will get hard and shrink, causing a condition called 'capsular contracture.' It's very painful and could require further surgery to correct, and neither of us wants that."

"You bastard," I hissed at Coffey.

"Get off it. I gave you a gorgeous rack. You would have killed to get your hands on 'em before, Cristoph, and now you can feel 'em up whenever the hell you want. Hell, even the doctor says do it at least once a day."

"The implant in the left breast should deliver the required medication to treat your, um, condition for the rest of your life," Lawton said. "As for the right breast, well, we need to test that now and make sure it's working properly."

"Make sure what is working."

I trailed off. Coffey had a remote control gizmo in his hand and he pointed it at me, and all of a sudden my entire brain just trailed off in a haze of the most exquisite pleasure I'd ever felt. My eyes rolled back in my head and I moaned. It was the first time I'd ever felt my brand-new untested pussy get wet before. Ordinarily, I don't think I would have liked it very much. Right then, I really didn't care whether the damned thing flooded the room and made for a slip hazard.

"The endorphin response seems to be working quite well, Lieutenant Coffey," Dr. Lawton said.

I tried to keep a dopey grin off my face and keep my mind on business. "He's gonna kill you, y'know, Lawton," I said. "Now that you're done. He can't just leave you out in the world knowing what you know about him."

Lawton chuckled, a high-pitched and kinda hysterical affair, a crazy-man's laugh. "Kill me? Really, Detective. Who do you think came up with the idea of using Dr. Harcott's research and my own ideas in breast implants? Once he told me his ideas for you, I couldn't possibly let such an opportunity pass me by."

"You sick, perverted Josef Mengele motherfucker," I spat.

"Temper, temper," Lawton said. "Now, Lieutenant, we really must see to the others and get these lovely young women sedated for transport. I wouldn't want them to pop their stitches or anything on the trip home."

"Anything else, Doc?" Coffey said, nodding towards me.

"No, she should just keep very clean and be careful of her incisions. The fat and collagen injections should be healed by now, and the eye work and rhinoplasty shouldn't be much of a problem so long as her bandages remain clean."

"Fat and collagen?" I asked. "Rhinoplasty?"

"For that hourglass figure," Coffey said with a smile. "Can't have tits that big and not have the ass to match, Detective. And all of you could stand new noses, lips and eyes."

"Call me if there are any complications," Lawton told me. "And I'm very interested in the progress, how things come along."

"Rot in hell, you pervert," I hissed.

"I'll see you in a month or so, to help with the last of the cosmetic surgeries." He patted my wrist. "This is very exciting."

"I'm going to kill you," I promised him.

He only smiled as he left.

* * *

The woozy-juice wore off some indeterminate time later. We were all in beds in what looked like some kind of mansion. I was in a room with Wylie and Blensinger. I could see a bathroom off to one side and a big window looking out over some oak trees.

"They moved us again," I said. I don't know when I stopped being shocked at the dusky mezzo soprano voice that was coming out of my mouth. We were all wrapped in bandages and gauze and looked like a couple of mummies. Blensinger and Wylie had red, swollen jugs sticking out that were easily as big as mine.

"How the hell are we going to get out of this one?" Wylie asked, now a bubbly soprano with one of those 'perky' voices I thought reserved for personal trainers and professional cheerleaders.

"I don't know. I don't know why Coffey is doing this," I said. "I just can't figure it out. He doesn't stand to gain anything from this."

"Maybe he does, maybe he doesn't," Blensinger said. "If I could only get to a computer, I could check him out. Find out what he's up to, where his money is, who else he could be, all of that stuff."

"Fat chance of them giving us an AOL account," Wylie grumped.

"Any chance of pulling it off the old fashioned way?" I asked.

"Not from here," Blensinger said. "Wherever the hell *here* is."

"Well we can't just sit here and do nothing," I said.

"Don't you think we'll figure it out eventually?" Blensinger asked.

"Yeah," I replied. "And that's exactly what I'm afraid of."

* * *

We languished a little bit, taking a little bit of food and exercise as we could - our whole bodies hurt from the surgery - and trying to find out more about our situation. Wylie, Blensinger and I were kept separate - possibly because we'd been cops - from Sumo and Harcott and the others, for the most part. We all met in the front room every couple of days, to be lectured by Coffey or some of his goons or this or that doctor brought in to supervise our progress.

The flexibility of my new body was amazing. Even sore and in bandages, I had no problems touching my forehead to my knees at will. The minor work the therapists had me do with weights showed me that I had hardly half of my original brute strength.

Of us all, I think Wylie and Blensinger and me were probably the best-adjusted. Sumo and Sancrist were complete shells, having long since given up over their lot in life and resigned to whatever came next. Seales and Fawkes and Harcott were more interested in what the radiation had done to us, and the medical effects, and how we were receiving drugs and impulses through the gimmicks in our breast implants. Townes and S'sa-Jen were trying to work things out on their own, I could tell, but we didn't get much contact.

Our only 'break' in the case came from our physical therapists and the other technicians who came in to help us in our recovery. Having the bandages changed and help bathing and going to the bathroom with our new equipment was welcome, but there was a definite advantage to having something else to think about while undergoing the wonder of my first leg and bikini wax, or having my breasts massaged or fitted for a bra. We were poked and prodded and measured and weighed, our skin moisturized and our incisions checked, and the nutrient goo rubbed into our bellies or our shoulders to be taken in through our skin. We had meals and walks and training videos about how to deal with hygiene and menstruation (which wasn't the shock I thought it would be - amazing how actually *having* a pussy between my legs completely changed my mind about how unappealing a period was). We put on weight and increased strength. And throughout the whole thing we pressed our people for more information.

The technicians were working with a home health care company called HomeCare International, a well-respected and prestigious firm who'd actually provided the hospice care for Wylie's aunt who died three years back from ovarian cancer. The therapists made mention that they'd been told all of us were employees of a company called Radical Solutions, Inc. That company had been part of an investigation that Blensinger had run earlier this year - he recognized it the instant the nurse mentioned it. There was some suspicion that it had been a holding company used in a large-scale money-laundering operation to funnel illegal gambling proceeds into the stock market and convert them into laundered cash. The Board of Directors for Radical Solutions had never been tracked down in the course of the investigation, Blensinger remembered. They'd tried to chase ghosts for a couple of months and then diverted manpower away from the investigation for other things.

"That makes sense," I told Blensinger. "The manpower diversion would have been Coffey's doing, to get the detectives away from the investigation. And he could very easily have fed everybody false information to keep you from tracking down this Board of Directors that he's probably on."

"Now that you mention it, most of the tips came from Coffey's old informants and anonymous contacts," Blensinger concluded. "He might have been working it from the inside, keeping it hidden."

"But what the hell did Radical Solutions do?" I asked.

"It was a holding company," Blensinger explained. "Just a legal place to park money for a little while. Radical Solutions was getting huge influxes of cash from illegal gambling, numbers, God knows what else. They used that cash to buy stocks in other companies. So Radical Solutions owns pieces of about three or four hundred other, legitimate businesses who have no idea they're getting fed off illegal money."

"If those companies post a profit, then the shareholders get a piece of it," Wylie explained. "If you're smart, you can invest in companies with a quick turnaround and get money back almost immediately. And it's squeaky clean, Cristoph. The original dirty money probably went to pay some guy's salary who's a deacon in his church and has three kids on the honor roll."

"So you get back as much as you put in?" I asked.

"Not all at once," Blensinger told me. "But if you keep the principal - the original amount you invested - in the market, it can pay off indefinitely."

"And then you can get the principal back by dumping the stocks, if you want to get out," Wylie said. "By the time you get that money back, it's been around the world seven times and in more hands than anybody could count. It's a real slick laundry they're running."

"Organized Crime Division got the bulk of the money going into Radical Solutions from the illegal operations," Blensinger told me. "But by then they'd already dumped nearly half a billion into the market. And there's nothing illegal about playing the stock market. There's a ton of cash out there, where nobody can touch it. And in the meantime, Coffey - if he's actually a part of this Radical Solutions company - owns pieces of God knows how many businesses and manufacturers all over the world. That's probably how he got these tits made for us, with the remote control gizmos and the drug dosages. He's probably invested in biotechnology up to his eyeballs."

"And nobody can shut this Radical Solutions place down," I said.

"We tried, Cristoph," Wylie said. "But they weren't doing anything wrong."

"But they have to go broke eventually, right?" I asked.

"If they have good investors, they won't. They can just sell some stocks to buy others indefinitely. And besides, the principal hasn't been touched. They might never run out of money," Blensinger told me.

"Look, we need to know what the hell this Radical Solutions company is up to," I told them. "Maybe we can find out what they're planning to do with us once these stitches come out."

Wylie chuckled. "I don't think the nurses are going to go for that," he said ruefully.

"Waitaminnit," Blensinger said. "The reason we couldn't nail Radical Solutions is because they kept their noses clean, right? Paid their taxes, all that crap."

"Right," Wylie said.

"So they have to follow acceptable reporting practices, right, to stay ahead of the SEC. They have to keep running like they're a legitimate, respectable business or the goombas are going to lose a whole lot of dirty money and people are going to start winding up face down in rivers."

"That's usually the way that works," I confirmed.

Blensinger laughed. "We have some pretty nice nurses, don't y'all think?" he asked.

"What's that got to do with anything?" I shot back, not following.

"I don't think asking for some newspapers and magazines would be unreasonable. Y'know, just to pass the time. *Cosmo* and *Vogue* and *Elle*, all kinds of girly shit. And maybe, if we ask nice, something like *Forbes* and the *Wall Street Journal*."

I grinned, finally following his thinking. "No. I don't think that's unreasonable at all."

"So that takes care of my end, and probably Wylie's too," Blensinger said. "What about you?"

"You said that this river of dirty money was what got Radical Solutions off the ground, right? They couldn't have gotten their fingers in so many pies unless they'd had the - what'd'ya call it, the *principal* - to invest in all these stocks in the first place."

"Right," Wylie told me.

"So nobody knows more about dirty money and places to hide it than Sumo Starnes and Jeff Sancrist," I said. "And I just happen to know where those two bitches live."

* * *

"Piss off, you fuck cop," Sumo spat at me through her bandages, managing to make a distasteful sneer even through the gauze wrapping. "I ain't talking to you."

"Have you gotten a good look at yourself lately, Sumo? At those big monster tits sticking out of your chest? Maybe the little honey pot between your legs? Coffey did that to you. He did it to all of us," I explained.

"Yeah, so?" Jeff Sancrist shot back.

"I'm talking to two guys who had seventeen people shot because they lost forty grand in coke money. And you mean to tell me you don't want to fuck up the guy who stole your dicks?" I asked.

Sancrist's eyes narrowed a little. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about getting Coffey, and Playboy Bunting, and whoever the hell else out there did this to us and nailing their asses to the wall, that's what I'm talking about," I said, sitting back. Funny how I still leaned in like I was in the interrogation room, even though I barely topped five foot four and weighed a hundred and eight pounds, most of it big swollen red tits. At least we had hospital gowns to walk around in now. It was hard to act intimidating with your tits and pussy hanging out. It kinda spoiled the look.

"Can you reach somebody that can hurt these people?" Sumo asked.

"Leave that to me," I told them. "I need to know everything y'all know about who put illegal gambling money into a holding company called Radical Solutions."

Sancrist looked at Sumo. "Think he's bullshitting us?"

Sumo shook her head. "He got tits the same as us, man."

Jeff Sancrist sat forward. "Okay, you remember that big assed turf-war between the Colombians and the Chinese about two years back?"

"Yeah, it was standing room only at the morgues for about a month."

"Yeah, it was bloody," Sumo said. "It wasn't about territory like you cops thought, though. It was about distribution. Even though most of the shooting was downtown, the real war was down on the docks. Chinese said that they could get the smack in cheaper, the Colombians disagreed, then the shooting started."

"And the Colombians, their aim ain't too good," Sancrist added. "Lotsa people get shot whether they're involved or not. Back in the day, you walked up behind somebody with a gun, pushed the muzzle in the back of their neck and squeezed one off. Now you got these asshole punk kids with MAC-11's spraying down the whole block."

"Yeah, those were the days," I said sarcastically. "What about the docks?"

"The Colombians were just getting their feet planted good here in the city," Sumo told me. "They were killing anybody who got in their way and didn't care about who it pissed off. The Fresetti Family was running the docks at the time, and they were getting real damn scared about getting caught between the Colombians and a buncha pissed-off Chinese. They packed their shit up and split."

"Right. That was when Vincent diLorenzo got whacked," I said.

"Yeah," Sancrist said. "Colombians. But the Fresettis, they managed to get as many of their operations as they could out of the area before it got nasty for them. They liquidated the rest to the Chinese, hoping that if they won out they'd owe the Fresettis a favor, right? So they had this shit-pot full of cash and nowhere safe to put it."

"They'd been funneling a little bit of cash from horse-races and shit into this Radical Solutions company, which was actually legit before the Fresettis bought it out and put their own people in," Sumo said. "They dumped all this cash into the company and the new people they had in charge made them a fucking fortune."

"Who are these new people?" I asked.

"Got no idea," Sumo said. "College boys, that kind of shit."

"Not exactly our social circle, baby," Sancrist added.

"Were they hooked up with the city any way?" I asked.

Sumo looked at Sancrist and then back at me, shrugging in a way to make his enormous tits jiggle and bounce. "I never heard, but it makes sense," he said. "That money went everywhere, homes. Everywhere. I suppose it could have been used to make a couple, y'know, generous campaign contributions along the way, buy themselves some love up at city hall. The Fresettis didn't care what the company did, anyhow - they couldn't understand all that stocks and

bonds bullshit any more than we can. All they cared about was that they had enough money every month to keep them in Cadillacs and shiny suits, and they didn't ask these college boys too many questions otherwise."

"Ever hear of this company being hooked up with anything bad?" I asked.

"They own half of everything, homes," Sumo told me. "Some of it's bound to be bad."

"Make me a list of some of the big bads they got mixed up in," I told them. "I'll meet with you later and see what you got."

"Whatever, man," Sancrist said. "Even if we knew what they were mixed up in, it's not like we're ever gonna be able to use it. That cop is gonna fuck our brains out and then blow 'em out afterwards."

"He didn't go to all this trouble of getting us nurses and giving us tits to just cap us," I said. "Try to be a little more positive."

"Shit, positive my ass," Sumo said. "You know the shit in that can gave us all brain damage, don't you? And I heard the cop running all this shit yesterday, out in the hall. He says he got something 'special' planned for us tomorrow."

"Did he say anything else?" I asked.

"Now that, I wouldn't tell you, cop," Sumo said, smiling. "Because whatever he does to me, he might do to you first. And that means I get to hear you scream."

* * *

Something special planned.

I tried not to think about it, to concentrate on other things, but those words kept running through my mind. I wasn't scared of Coffey. I was scared of being helpless.

I finally shoved the note-pad I was using to take notes on the case under my mattress and tried to sleep. It didn't work. I was still staring out the window when the sun came up. It was almost a relief when two new, burly technicians came into the room hauling equipment. Coffey puffed on a cigar idly while he looked at us. The technicians were setting up a television on a small table where we could watch it from the beds.

"Bandages will come off soon, ladies," he commented. "I bet you can't wait to see your beautiful selves in the mirror."

"Get fucked," Wylie said.

"Careful with that offer, gorgeous," Coffey warned. "You might just get it."

"What's all this shit?" I asked, pointing to the mess the technicians were unloading.

"Oh, just a little experiment," Coffey said. "Nothing you should get upset about."

"Everything you do upsets me, asshole," Blensinger spat.

"Sorry to hear that," Coffey said. "The techs have to work on you for a little bit, ladies. Do you want it to go easy or go hard?"

I sighed. As much as I hated the son of a bitch, I laid back without protest. The technicians fitted some strange metal and plastic diaper thing on me with wires that ran to a laptop computer which was also hooked to the television. There was also something that looked like one of those virtual reality masks that the tech guys played with. Supposed to be surround-sound, Technicolor smell-o-vision stuff, the "real" movie experience. I don't know why these masks covered our whole faces, but I was willing to bet it wasn't for a happy reason.

"Just relax," I heard Coffey say, muffled by the earpieces that the techs were fitting in my ears before they put me in the mask. "You're gonna get a lot of this stuff. Don't worry about it, it's not going to hurt you."

I tried to say something back, but the tech stuffed the mask over my face. It was completely dark and there was something like a bit between my teeth. I heard a slight hum and hiss as the diaper and the mask adjusted automatically to fit me a little better. It got a little more comfortable, but there were still things poking and prodding me.

"Have a nice day," Coffey said, chuckling.

At first, the video didn't make any sense at all. All I saw were colors and weird computer tones sounded in my ears. Probably test patterns to get readings off of me or something. Then there was a picture of a young, attractive looking blonde with big blue eyes and a huge smile. The techs had been right. It was like I was sitting in the room with her, the images and sounds were so right on.

I could see her from a bunch of different angles. Then I got an image of her wearing a dumpy, "grandma"-style church-lady dress and for some reason I felt sad. A little uncomfortable, really, just looking at her. The image changed to her in a pair of overalls and her hair in a ponytail, and I felt a little less sad but still a bit disappointed. Then the image changed to her in a short tube dress that clung like a second skin, hot pink and tight enough to show her thong panties and her nipples. Her hair was teased out and glamorous, her makeup heavy and even a little slutty, super-high clear platform shoes with stiletto heels. I felt ecstasy. I'd felt it before - the remote control from the doctor's office, dumping something into my bloodstream from my breast implants and making me feel better than I'd ever felt before. I tried to fight it, but I couldn't. She went through at least twenty different outfits and styles, some which made me sad and despondent, others which made me feel that intense rush of pleasure.

Then it was images of the same girl, but getting laid by a man. The first image was her just laying there, missionary position, not making any noise and just letting the guy "do his business" on her. She looked a little bored. I felt the disappointment and discomfort. The next image was her on top, riding him like a cowgirl, tossing her hair around wildly and screaming for all she was worth. That brought the ecstasy. That went on for a long time. I lost track. I zoned out again, like I had with the clothes. It just kinda blurred things.

Next it was the girl saying the same thing different ways.

With a neutral expression, she looked at me and said, "My name is Tiffany. I am an American citizen, twenty-two years old and unmarried." Disappointment, discomfort and sadness.

Then with a huge, bright smile as she twirled a lock of hair around one finger: "So, I'm, like, Tiffany. Who're you? You're cute, y'know that? I've, like, totally been an American citizen and stuff since I was like, born, y'know, and I'm, like, twenty-two. I'm not, like, seeing anybody seriously right now, not like a husband or a boyfriend or anything, y'know, but OhmyGOD I saw

this totally cute guy yesterday who might, like, be interested and stuff!" That brought the ecstasy.

I knew I was being played somehow, but I kept zoning out and couldn't fight it as well as I wanted to. I saw her doing her taxes. I got disappointed. I saw her dancing in a club and got the pleasure. Her shopping in the grocery store made me sad, her shopping in a trendy little boutique for sexy clothes and lingerie gave me that intense pleasure. Her shooting heroin was the pain, her smoking a cigarette was the pleasure. Seeing her drive a Volvo broke my heart, seeing her drive a BMW gave me pleasure. It all blended and blurred until it made my head swim.

Then it changed a little. She vanished and was replaced by a young, well-muscled naked man with brown hair and an intense look in his eyes. Seeing him clothed gave me disappointment, seeing him naked made me feel pleasure. I fought that one hard, but the video replayed it over and over and over until I began to anticipate seeing him naked so I could feel the pleasure. Pictures of fat guys gave me the disappointment, but well-muscled, handsome men brought the ecstasy.

I began to get really fearful inside when the image of the young man, naked and hard, moved forward, towards me it seemed like in the 3D goggles. I was already feeling intense pleasure from seeing him naked and watching his cock get hard, which had played over and over until the pleasure outweighed any aversion I felt towards it. The 3D image got so close I could imagine that his cock was only inches from my lips. Then something in the mask - the bit that had been between my lips - began to feel different. Smooth and warm and a little slick, blunt-headed and pressing against my lips. Between the physical feeling against my lips and the image I was seeing and hearing, it was like he was putting the head of his cock right against my actual mouth. It was hard to tell myself he wasn't real. The pressure built, and I tried to keep my teeth clenched shut, but it kept going and going until the blunt end was between my lips and teeth, in my mouth and pressing against my tongue. And I only thought I knew what pleasure was. The gizmo in my boob kicked into high gear, and the level of my ecstasy went clear off the charts. Over the course of a few minutes I could tell that the more enthusiastically I sucked, or if I moaned or squealed at all, the man-image would groan in pleasure and the ecstasy would kick up a little more. I actually found myself wanting to make him groan with pleasure, because it made me feel so much better.

Next it was the same thing, but I felt the blunt soft head against a different set of lips, down in my diaper. The same thing happened as before. If I tried to fight it, I didn't get the pleasure, but if I followed the happy example of the girl from earlier in the video, got into it a little bit, made some noise, then it started feeling better still, especially if it gave him enough pleasure to make him moan or gasp or groan from what I was doing. And then there was something else that was happening, too. I could feel something inside me, in my middle somewhere, swelling and filling like a cup about to brim over. When the automatic whatever in the diaper that was pistoning into me, the thing I was *convinced* on some level was this guy's cock, changed from short shallow thrusts into deep, hard ones, the cup did brim over. I think I screamed, I'm not sure. It was a different kind of ecstasy that I was getting from the implant. It was better. It took me a while to realize that I'd just had an orgasm, and I could tell from the first seconds after it happened, I was totally hooked. I honestly didn't know how long I could go before I had to have another one.

Next the blunt, soft head was pressing against my asshole. I'd always had a real problem with that, but the implant pumped up the ecstasy in my head and body until I was grunting and grinding over the cock in my ass like I'd been doing it all my life. I even came again - and I didn't even know I could have an orgasm from getting fucked in the ass. Then there were combinations of two - getting fucked in the ass and the pussy simultaneously, or the pussy and the mouth. By the time everything went black, I was completely exhausted. I fell asleep almost instantly.

* * *

I know I had weary, incoherent breaks where nurses fed me or rubbed the nutrient paste onto my belly. I know I got bathed and got my bandages changed, but mostly it was the video. I couldn't keep an accurate count, but I must have spent at least twenty-four hours straight in that thing, coming over and over again like a cat in heat. It got to where I didn't even see it anymore. I wasn't watching what was happening in the video. I just automatically had a sense of when I should feel the pleasure and when I shouldn't.

I really didn't feel it happening, and I certainly wasn't alarmed. It was just that, over time and in the privacy of the 3D world I was in, it seemed okay to be just as excited and thrilled over the sight of a man's erect cock than I was at seeing a woman's naked body. When the video showed images of the woman and the man together, I wanted to cheer them on, and I wanted to get involved. I was every bit as turned on by women as I had been before. Hell, the way the tape made me feel, I wanted to fuck just about everybody. Stranger still, I liked feeling that way. I really did. I was saddened when the techs came some indeterminate time later and took the masks and diapers off, packed up the stuff and went away. But there was a surprise waiting for me that I didn't mind at all.

The room was completely different. Instead of the nondescript, drab room we'd had before, now the walls were painted a happy yellow and my bed had white satin sheets. There were vases with flowers in them, books in shelves. Things everywhere that - God help me, I don't think I'd ever even *wanted* to say this word, no less mean it - I thought were really, really *cute*. And it made me happy. It gave me the same kind of pleasure inside that the images in the mask had.

We were still bandaged up and exhausted, but we were in one piece. I didn't know what Coffey was aiming at, keeping us blindfolded and jacking us off every two seconds for however long, but if it had been to try and break us, then it hadn't worked. I turned to a very tired and somewhat glassy-eyed Blensinger to tell him the good news.

"Hey, baby!" I spewed. "How ya feelin'?"

I stopped dead. It had just come out that way - it hadn't been what I'd thought inside, or even what I'd meant to say, but those were the lilting words that had come out of my mouth. I could feel myself smiling to go along with them.

I took a breath and went on in a firmer, more controlled tone.

"Blensinger," I said slowly. "Are you all right?"

I got the words out, but saying it that way, in those words and that tone of voice, made me disappointed and sad and more than a little uncomfortable.

It finally sunk in what Coffey had done.

I buried my face in my pillow and cried like an infant.

...continued in part three!

Ω



SUMMARY: A detective "hot" on the trail of his suspects sets out to make the big bust, but instead finds himself exposed to a strange radiation which starts to change body structure into that of a female. part three

PROBABLE CAUSALITY, Part III

By Valerie Hope

The bad guys took my body, but I could still get them back.

Just because I couldn't seem to get a sentence out without resorting to "like" and "y'know" and "OhmyGod" and couldn't express a single thought without adding "and stuff" to the end of it, didn't mean I was any less a cop.

Just because I spent most of my waking hours in a state of nearly-constant horniness, just because I had to sleep with a nine-inch G-spot vibrator under my pillow, just because seeing the sight of Brad Pitt on the television got me as turned on as seeing Catherine Zeta-Jones, it wasn't enough to stop me.

And even though we'd been transmogrified into a bunch of bubble-headed, oversexed, horny little clotheshorses, didn't mean that me, Brett Blensinger and Alex Wylie weren't going to nail the guys who did this to the wall somehow.

I was leafing through my notes on the case, trying not to notice as my handwriting changed from a blocky, angular scratch to a rounded, bubbly 'cute' script with the occasional / dotted with a little heart. Even though it was blatantly apparent now that my bandages were off and I was in red lace thong panties and a 36DD matching bra that I was unmistakably a girl now, I still didn't like admitting it to myself. It was hard enough to get used to hearing the others in my condition refer to me as 'she' and 'her.' At least they still called me Cristoph. But eventually that would have to change. I was sure Lieutenant Coffey, the man who masterminded the whole plot against us, was hard at work arranging for new birth certificates and identification for us all.

Me, Wylie and Blensinger wanted to get what we had straight before the afternoon. Rumor had it among the other 'girls' that we were all due to go under the knife for more 'modifications' from Coffey's pet deranged psycho doctor, Dr. Lawton. We didn't know if he was going to give us nose jobs or long furry squirrel tails. The guy was twisted enough to do anything.

Wylie turned away from the door he'd cracked, his enormous tits swinging in the confines of their black satin underwire bra. Even with the extensive work narrowing his nose and raising his cheeks, widening his eyes and puffing out his lips into a perpetual collagen pout, he still looked like the fresh-faced kid working in the Fraud Division with the loud tie that I'd met for the first time a few weeks ago. And even though he was a five-foot seven Latino-looking bombshell with a body to drool over didn't make him any less effective as a cop.

"So, like, they just took Harcott down the hall in a gurney 'n' stuff," he whispered, lighting a cigarette. "Looks like they're totally starting at the far end this time, y'know?"

Harcott had the room farthest from ours, shared with Darick Seales and Adley Fawkes. All the 'science nerds' in one room, all the drug pushers in another, the two feds in a third and all the cops in a fourth. With any luck, they'd be busy working their way towards us for a little while.

"Good," I perked in the bubbly mezzo I'd had to get used to in the last week. "Okay, so, like, Brett, what did you find out about Radical Solutions?"

"OhmyGod, they're, like, totally into everything," Brett said, looking through his notes that started in black ink and now were in pink and lavender with 'cheerleader' handwriting like mine. "Biotechnology, like we thought. Venture capital, too, so, like, he can fund just about anything, including all this work he's, like, doing on us."

"But, like, is there anything that can tell you, like, why he's doing this?" I asked, trying to find out Coffey's plan for us so that we could try to get a step ahead of him.

"I don't get it, okay?" Blensinger said. "It's not, like, Coffey's hurting for money, y'know? Radical Solutions is totally loaded, he's hooked up."

"But that's, like, not his money," Wylie reminded him. "You totally said it's, like, mob money and stuff. They'd totally whack him if he tried to spend it."

"But figure they're totally keeping him well paid, the mob I mean, if, like, Coffey can fund something like this," Blensinger argued.

"Well paid totally doesn't mean rich," I said. "So maybe, like, Coffey is looking for a big score and stuff."

"Look, Coffey, like, told you and stuff that he'd been working on this for three years, okay?" Blensinger said. "The only assets that Radical Solutions bought - and that's, like, only *if* Coffey and Judge Bunting can totally make decisions like that, y'know? - but the only stuff they bought were, like, Darick Seales' clinic, two biotech companies out in like, fucking Silicon Valley and stuff, three warehouses and, like, an old TV station that they closed down anyway."

"And, like, if Coffey is looking for the big score, it's totally got to be, like, bigger than what he's already doing," Wylie suggested. "I mean, like, he's got to cover his expenses for one thing and then totally get himself and everybody else rich. And I mean, like, richer than the mob already makes them and stuff."

"So what kind of racket would, like, score that big, Cristoph?" Blensinger asked.

"Drugs, of course," I said with a giggle. "But that would totally get him into a war with the Colombians and Jamaicans here, plus, like, who knows what else if he went nationwide and stuff."

"Gambling?" Wylie asked.

"The mob already owns all that, y'know?" Blensinger said.

"So what's, like, the easiest way to get rich? What are, like, the get rich quick industries?" Wylie asked.

"Well, like, there's tobacco, but that's, like, really hard to not get caught and stuff," I said, shrugging.

"Guns," Wylie suggested. "Like, military hardware and stuff."

"Hard to not get caught, like she said," Blensinger put in. "What about legit stuff, y'know? Like, y'know, pharmaceuticals are, like, a multi-billion dollar industry, and he's got all this info from the shit he's done to us. Maybe he's gonna, like, start a drug company."

"Possible," I said. "Like, what else?"

"Well, like, the big money makers in America are, like, tobacco, oil, pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, porno, cars, airplanes."

"Waitaminnit, OhmyGOD," I gasped. "What did you just say?"

"What, like, airplanes?" Blensinger asked.

"No, no, before that," I said, waving my hands frantically.

"She said, like, cars, cosmetics, porno," Wylie put in.

I looked down at my mammoth breasts. "I think I know what Coffey has planned for us."

* * *

"Just relax, my dear, I'm not going to hurt you or scar you," Dr. Lawton said as he put the mask over my face and started adjusting the knobs. "You're already nearly perfect, a complete angel. I just want to put the finishing touches on."

I was woozy and dizzy when he put the headphones on over my ears. The last thing I saw was the scalpel in his hands.

* * *

I woke up rough. I always did from anesthesia. My jaw was clenched to keep from puking and I knew I didn't want to move my head too fast. Then, slowly and trying not to panic, I took stock of my body.

It didn't look like anything much had been done to me. There was some kind of crazy, gluey tape stuff on my eyelids. I hoped they hadn't reshaped my eyes again. As it was it looked like I was always surprised, my eyes were so wide. I also had bandages on my hands and on my feet up to the ankles. My feet also had some kind of weird braces on them. I also noticed that I had gauze on my midsection.

Wylie and Blensinger were back from surgery, but still out. They were snoozing comfortably, with tape on their eyelids as well, as well as gauze on their ears and little blue plastic shower caps on. I reached around and couldn't feel anything else, on my back or my ass. I was really sore and still very groggy. I decided to take the time I had and get some more rest.

Morning light was streaming through our window when I woke up next, and I could smell the distinctive sharp smell of Wylie's morning cigarette. He was smoking kinda heavily now, and truth be told me and Blensinger were sneaking them occasionally too. I'd never smoked in my life, but now all of a sudden it just seemed to be a good thing to be doing. It made me feel good. I didn't know whether that was the pleasure stuff manufactured in my tits or my own brain, but I'd lost the ability to distinguish one from the other a long time ago. I didn't even know enough to fight it. Whether the pleasure was generated in my brain or my tits, natural or artificial, if it said smoke cigarettes, then I smoked cigarettes. If it said drink bleach, I drank

bleach. I had all I could do just trying not to go out of my mind and keep focused on this case and my revenge.

The nurse was in there, setting up a full-length mirror. She'd set some boxes on the foot of Wylie's bed, as well, and she was humming happily as she set about her work. As much as I wanted to growl and throw something at her, to yell at her for being so goddamned cheerful, the pleasure forced me to smile brightly - I showed a lot of teeth these days - and issue a perky, chipper 'good morning' which the nurse returned sweetly.

"What's, like, going on?" Blensinger asked.

"Bandages off today, ladies," the nurse half-sang. "You'll be able to get up, take walks, get dressed, everything. You're almost ready to get out and about."

"Bandages off? How long have we, like, been out cold?" I asked, concerned pout forming on my face against my will.

"Only about twelve hours, dear," the nurse replied. "These were very minor surgeries."

"So, we can like, leave and stuff?" Wylie asked.

"I don't know, dear. I think so. I know that the service is going to send some people later today to run some classes for you, but I don't know what for or who's doing it."

"Okay, thanks," I said, trying to keep from sounding suspicious. If I was right about Coffey, then the only way to nail him was going to be contact with the outside world. And to do that, I think we were going to have to work extra hard to be nice, sweet little girls and convince him that Alex Wylie, Brett Blensinger and Cristoph Reennes were well and truly dead and gone.

* * *

Coffey came to watch, puffing on his customary cigar, as the nurses and techs took off the bandages. Dr. Lawton was hovering around as well, anxious to see the fruits of his labors. As usual, Coffey started with me, because he had it in for me for some reason. He seemed to get a great deal of satisfaction from me being the first to do everything.

The nurse held up a mirror to show me the healed incisions beneath my giant breasts. They stood up proudly, with the "too-perfect" spherical look of "done" tits. The tiny white scars were hardly visible. Neither were the tiny little incisions on my hips and back which gave me the perfect, firm little feminine bubble of an ass and the wide, womanly hips that I knew, down deep, would fill out a pair of tight low-rise jeans to mouth-watering perfection. She also showed me, with the mirror, my first look at my puffy-lipped, inviting new pussy. I had one of those that puckered a little, like a kissy-face, with thick pink lips and a sparse thatch of downy, soft-looking pubic hair. The tiny little pink bud of my clitoris peeked gently out of the folds when the nurse parted them with two fingers. The soft-edged pink squiggle of my vaginal opening glistened wetly, the tiny little pucker of my urethra. I took a good look and then had to turn away. It was all a little much right now.

The nurse then removed the bandages from my hands, revealing inch-long square cut nails, buffed and healthy-looking, overhanging the tips of my fingers by at least three-quarters of an inch. I stared at them weirdly, amazed and wondering how I was going to be able to do anything with these claws. Using them to tear out Coffey's throat was the first thing that came to mind, but I kept a lid on it. There would be time for that later.

"Polymer ceramic," Lawton told Coffey in the background. "Bonded to the bones of the fingers. They won't grow, but then again they'll never break or chip either."

"Remarkable," Coffey said. "They look completely natural."

"They're embedded in the cuticle, just like a natural nail," Lawton said. "The people at RegenTech will be thrilled. The substance bonds to bone excellently and easily, and there was no infection in any of the girls. I would call their ceramic a smashing success."

"As would I," Coffey said.

"Don't worry, dear," the nurse said, misinterpreting my puzzled and somewhat disgusted look at my new talons. "They'll look much, much better after a nice manicure and maybe a little polish."

As she said that, she pulled the gauze from my ears and my stomach, revealing freshly two freshly pierced earlobes - two little silvery studs in each - and a little silver hoop threaded through my navel.

"Pretty," the nurse commented.

I grunted and Coffey chuckled. "You're lucky," he told me. "I could have had them put in your tongue and clitoral hood like some of the others, sweetheart."

The nurse ignored the hateful look I shot her boss and used tweezers to removed the gluey gauze from above my eyes. Thick, long, feathery eyelashes uncurled, brushing the tops of my cheeks like butterfly wings as I blinked. I blinked quickly to get used to them, and it looked like I was vamping and batting my lashes at the nurse. She giggled as she sat me further up on the bed so she could work on the gauze around my ankles and feet. I couldn't see any difference in them.

"Okay, sweetie, give those a stand and see how it feels," she instructed me, offering her hands to help me up.

I balanced carefully - still not used to walking around with tits and a huge ass yet, either - and found that it was excruciatingly painful to try and put my heels down. I tottered, using my long-nailed hands to balance on the nurse's shoulders while I stood on tip-toe.

"You'll have to sleep with your ankle braces on for a while, dear," the nurse said, "a few weeks. But in the meantime, if you want to move around, these will help a great deal."

She bent and guided my foot into a clear open-toe sandal, a three-inch clear Lucite platform with a seven-and-a-half inch stiletto heel. She fastened the pink vinyl ankle strap snugly and let me use her shoulders to help balance while I got used to the towering high heels and platforms. My ankles wiggled and bent, but I found if I took small steps and kept my weight distributed more evenly they weren't so bad, and they held my feet at a very comfortable angle. They actually felt more comfortable than standing flat-footed.

"Removal of some of the ankle cartilage, reshaping the heel bone and tightening the Achilles' tendon," Lawton said. "There's no real medical use for the surgery, but I always suspected it would have these effects and I thought it would be a nice touch."

"I agree," Coffey said, smiling evilly. "I admire your initiative. I think there might be a bonus in this for you."

Lawton and Coffey watched amusedly as I took my first tentative steps in the giant platforms. I tottered and waved my arms as I walked back and forth, but eventually I got the hang of it and was able to walk a little straighter and with a touch more confidence. I felt like I was swinging my ass all over the room, but the nurse told me it only equated to a sexy little wiggle and a nice, confident strut. She recommended that I put my feet one in front of the other for balance and also to practice as much as I could.

"Okay, sweetie, last thing," she said, reaching up and pulling the plastic shower-cap off of my head. A huge, soft and fragrant wave of shimmery vanilla blonde cascaded in front of my eyes.

I gawked in the mirror. I had a thick, luxuriant head of silky, shiny bright blonde hair, draping over my narrow shoulders in lustrous waves and hanging easily below my shoulderblades and into my lower back. The scalp looked totally natural. I'd almost been bald before I was exposed to the meteor radiation. No way could I have grown this much hair in just a few days.

"You'd never know it was completely synthetic," Lawton said, admiring his own work out loud. "The company in Boston, the fiber-optic manufacturer, discovered this by accident. It didn't work at all as a fiber-optic line, but it is wonderful for our purposes."

"Excellent," Coffey said, a little breathtaken. "It looks completely natural."

"It feels that way as well. Responds to every hair-care and styling product we tested on it, as well, holds color and curl just like natural hair fiber. Better, in some ways. It can be cleaned normally, as well, since it accumulates natural oils from the sebaceous glands just like natural hair, but it won't require conditioning or moisturization and there's no need for a hot-air dryer. That hair can just be wiped dry, instantly."

"Amazing," Coffey said. I could only stare at the double handful of it that I had, still not completely convinced that these shining, silky tresses were coming out of my head. I gave them an experimental tug, and I didn't feel any pain but my head jerked downwards.

"It's attached directly to the skull," Lawton explained to me. "No follicles, which means no nerves. Those hairs, my dear, will never split or dry out or frizz, they won't break or get dry or damaged. You could dye it a different color every day for a month and you'd never dry it out or damage it. The only thing you can't do is perm it. It would hold a perm for a few days, according to our scientists, but it would quickly relax in to just what you see in the mirror right now."

"Doctor, you've outdone yourself," Coffey told him. "I'm very pleased. Shall we move on to the next patient?"

The nurse patted my shoulder sweetly and left me tottering there, wearing nothing but a paper hospital gown and towering platform heels, holding my shiny blonde hair in my hands with their super-long fingernails and looking like a deer in headlights.

Coffey rummaged in the little box that was at the foot of Alex' bed. He handed me a pair of earrings, giant dangly ones of gold wire shaped into huge stars. I was sure they'd touch my shoulders if I wore them.

"Put them on," Coffey ordered me with just a hint of menace. "Then practice your walking out in the hall. We're having people bring in some things later on, after your classes. You'll need them later."

"I'll, like, totally get you for this," I hissed.

He grinned mirthlessly. "Is that, like, a fact and stuff?" he said in a put-on version of my bubbly, perky speech pattern. "Baby, you need to get it through your head. You fucking belong to me. You're nothing but a stupid little bimbo without me in the picture. The sooner you get that through your pretty little empty head, the better you'll be."

He pulled the Macanudo Robusto cigar from his teeth and stuffed the unlit end into my mouth, which was open to protest.

"Put that in your pipe and smoke it, bitch," he said.

I started to pull the cigar out of my mouth and he raised a finger at me in menace. "I told you to smoke it," he reiterated.

"I don't like cigars," I shot back.

"Tough," he barked. "You know what's going to happen if you don't do what I tell you? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. I'll take your pretty little butt back to the basement, where you first started out. I'll brick in the walls, and you can live in total boredom and never see the sun again. Get it? You don't exist anymore, Reinnés. I have your death certificate, signed by the medical examiner. You have no money, no identity, no family, no nothing. In order to stay alive, to keep your buddies safe, you have to make me want to pay attention to you. And to do that, you're going to have to do what I say."

He held up his lighter and flicked back the lid, striking a flame.

"What's it going to be, Reinnés?"

Sobbing a little, I leaned forward and stuck the end of the cigar into the flame to relight it. I puffed until a cloud of blue smoke was streaming out of my mouth. I tried not to choke on the harsh, acrid smoke.

"Lawton, do me a favor and have someone bring two boxes of the Macanudos to Detective Reinnés' room, would you? She's going to start smoking three of these a day until I tell her to stop. Isn't that right, Detective Reinnés?"

I just tried not to break down, clamping my teeth on the fat cigar and looking at the floor.

"I said, 'isn't that right, Detective Reinnés?'" he said again, more forcefully.

"Yes," I whispered around the cigar.

"Yes, what?" Coffey demanded.

"Yes, sir," I said.

He stepped back. "Much better. Now put on your new earrings and go practice your walking until I'm done with your friends. And don't worry, I'm not a total bastard."

He pulled out the remote control that he'd used to trigger the pleasure/pain response from the gadgets deep in my breast implants. He gave me a little zap of pure pleasure that made me gasp and temporarily forget my tears and humiliation.

"See? You may not like cigars now, but keep puffing on it like you are, and I can make sure that you absolutely love it by the end of the day."

Eyes downcast, and trying to ignore the tingling aftershocks of the pleasure-shot he'd given me, I minced past him and out the door to begin practicing my swaying little catwalk sashay up and down the hall, my new earrings tapping gently against my neck and a thick cloud of cigar smoke trailing behind me.

"What a good girl she's turning out to be," Coffey said smugly behind me. "Now, let's move on to Detective Blensinger."

* * *

As much of a little mutant fucker as he was, Dr. Lawton did nice work. I had to admit that we were traffic-stoppers each and every one of us. Blonde seemed to be the color of choice for hair, which wasn't a big surprise, I mused as I listened to the teacher in our little 'class' and puffed dutifully on another of the fat, stinky cigars that had been delivered to my room. That had been a great bit of acting on my part, I had to admit. I didn't mind cigars, not one bit - I'd been known to partake at the occasional bachelor party or birth of somebody's kid several times, and these Macanudos were some of the best. I just had to make Coffey think he had me. And I think I'd convinced him utterly.

I was definitely the 'blonde bombshell' of the group with my nearly-white hair and hourglass figure. Blensinger was more willowy, with big get-lost-in-'em brown eyes and a sleek, shiny mane of straight, golden blonde hair. Wylie had gone the rest of the way towards the Latina look, with smoky brown eyes, thick brows and a lustrous wavy cascade of rich sable brown. Lawton had even added some pigment to her soft skin to give it a healthy, glowing café-au-lait cast to it, further increasing that south of the border allure.

Sumo Starnes was totally unrecognizable. Formerly a fat, hairy sweaty lump of lard weighing in over four hundred pounds, now he was a nimble little waif with a tight, lithe body and not a spare ounce of fat on her. Only the mammoth 36DD's on her chest and her adorable little teardrop butt were evidence that there was a single fat cell in her body. She idly twirled a lock of curly honey blonde hair around one finger as she listened, the rest of the hair blown out behind her in a wild mane of seemingly unkempt kinky curls that fell halfway down her narrow back. She clicked her new tongue stud idly against straightened, chalk-white teeth as she tried to pay attention.

Puffing on a cigarette beside Sumo was Adley Fawkes, the drug chemist, now a wide-eyed little Lolita with a silky mane of ash blonde and high arched eyebrows. She seemed very entranced with her new mammaries, absentmindedly running a fingernail over the swell behind the medical gown when she thought no one was looking. Her nipples tented through her gown prominently and made my mouth water a little. It was difficult, with my unimpeded (and perhaps even amped-up) male sex drive, to be in a room full of such fantastically gorgeous women. The crotch of my Victoria's Secret thong was undeniably wet and bound to get wetter.

Kim Lee S'sa-Jen had definitely turned into the odd man - or was that odd girl, now? - out, now a smolderingly sexy little golden-skinned Asian flower, with dramatic almond eyes and skin like porcelain. A thick mane of jet black hung to her ass, so dark that the highlights from the fluorescent lights shone nearly blue. Her body was tight and compact, and her tits were by far the smallest in the room at 34 C. I couldn't look at Kim Lee too long, I'd had a thing for Asian

women before I'd changed and it was twice as bad now. I found myself fantasizing eagerly about jumping her bones after lights-out some night, eating her pussy until she screamed in ecstasy.

Darick Seales was our token Irish lass, with pale freckled skin and thick, curly reddish-orange curls. She'd even pulled her voluminous hair into two pigtails above her ears, which hung down in a thick curly mass to the tops of her shoulders. Sparkling green eyes danced around the room as she chewed her gum noisily, blowing bubbles between her thick, soft lips. There was nothing small about her lovely pale D-cups except in relation to the mammoths that resided on everyone else.

Jeff Sancrist and Staley Townes were sitting, looking bored and smoking cigarettes next to Darick, both very much the paragon of the big-titted, healthy surfer beach-bunny type with luscious tanned skin and sun-blond hair, bright peppy smiles and exuding health, energy and sex appeal. There was very little of the way they'd originally looked left in them, the only real way to distinguish them apart being Jeff's blue eyes and Staley's hazel-brown. They, too, had undergone the skin pigmentation process to give them the healthy, perpetual tans except for the tempting triangles of pale flesh on their tits and pubic areas. It only served to make their hair look blonder and their teeth look whiter. They looked like a Baywatch Talent Scout's wet dream come true, and I think they knew that. From all reports, they were pretty far gone under the behavioral conditioning we'd all gone through.

Lindell Harcott, the scientist who'd originally studied all the things the meteor had done to us, sat alone, taking notes dutifully from the lecture like the excellent student she'd been her whole life. She idly toyed with a huge golden hoop earring nestled in the thick sable mane she'd been given, tapping her tongue stud against her teeth as she tried to concentrate past the conditioning in order to keep up with the lecture. She was probably the one out of the group that was most gorgeous, since Lindell Harcott had been rather 'pretty' in a feminine way before he'd been transformed. Wylie concurred with me, except that Alex believed that I was the prettiest (which made me blush in a way I didn't think I would, and was more than a little disconcerting) and that Harcott was sort of the Rosalind Russell to my Marilyn Monroe, à la *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. Even distant, detached Blensinger agreed that he'd spent a couple of happy hours trying to decide which of us was more beautiful, me or Harcott. I tried very hard not to care about that. I had a hard time succeeding.

Of the few conversations we'd been able to have, only Wylie, Blensinger, Harcott and I had managed to resist the conditioning with any measure of success. The rest were the total brainless bimbo sluts that Coffey had designed. We hoped that nobody picked up on the knowing looks that we all exchanged. If anyone suspected that we weren't as bimbo as the rest of them, someone might take notice and derail our plan before we were ready to move.

The instructor bid us all good night and packed up her stuff and left. I shook my head a little to clear it, amazed at how incredibly attentive and interested I'd been in what was given to me. Maybe it was a function of the conditioning or maybe even something done to us by Coffey and his remote control. I'd asked questions and actually cared about the answers. And in one afternoon and evening, I'd learned and absorbed more about makeup, hairstyling and clothing that I'd known there was to learn. And it worried and delighted me both to realize that I actually couldn't wait to get back to my room, turn on the curling iron, grab the foundation sponge and try some of this stuff out. If I could get there without falling off the titanic heels I was bound to for the rest of my life.

Coffey came in as we were all standing up to leave. I tried to look meek and downcast. Wylie even went a step farther and held my hand, as if to comfort me. She was a really good cop, and a surprisingly good actress.

"I have a proposition for you ladies," Coffey said. "You should all know by now that your former identities are effectively wiped away. There is no record of you anywhere, which means you won't be able to hold a legal job, own any property, any of that. You should also know by now that I can't simply let you free to roam around, on the off chance that you could convince someone of what happened to you."

"So, like, what then?" Sumo asked.

"I'm offering you an opportunity. I can provide you with an identity and some work. It lets you out of this house - your prison - and gives you back a life. In return, you work for me. You'll be paying me back for all the work I've done on you, and the identities."

"How much does that mean?" Blensinger asked, putting on the bimbo act convincingly.

"These procedures were very expensive," Coffey explained. "I would say that each of you ladies owes me somewhere in the neighborhood of two million dollars."

"Like, apiece?" Kim Lee squeaked in shock. "Where are we, like, gonna get that kind of money and stuff?"

"I would be willing to let you work it off," Coffey said.

"Doing, like, what?" Seales asked him.

"I co-own a company," he said. "That makes movies. We could really use some gorgeous, talented women like you. You'd be making excellent money, and you could all probably live very comfortably while you were paying me back for what I've done for you. I think that would be an excellent bargain, don't you?"

Harcott was the first to ask a probing question, a big gamble for someone who was supposed to be a brainless bimbo.

"What kind of movies? What if we, like, can't act and stuff?"

"I wouldn't worry. We could bring in acting coaches if that really concerned you," Coffey said. "The company I own is interested in doing adult movies."

"You mean, like, pornos and stuff?" Staley Townes asked.

"Porno is such an ugly term," Coffey said. "But yes. Adult entertainment. Think about it, ladies. You already adore sex, right? This would let you have as much as you wanted, plus all the men you were with would be screened for diseases, which is more than any bar or club would guarantee you. You'd get a living allowance, plus your apartments, your cars, your makeup and clothes and jewelry, they would all be free, since the company would buy them."

"That sounds like fun," Seales said to Sancrist.

"There's another thing, as well," Coffey said. "You all know how sick you can become if you don't receive the nutrient paste that we rub into your skin, correct? You can only go about three days without it before you're at a health risk. That nutrient paste occurs naturally in human semen. This job would allow you to receive those nutrients without having to pick up

men in bars or clubs and run the risk of being beaten, robbed, getting a disease, becoming pregnant or any of the other risks."

"And we could, y'know, do that until we paid you back?" I asked.

"Yes, and then you could consider staying on, if you liked. My partners and I would handle all of the business end. All we'd ask is that you let us film while you have the fun and look as good as you would do for free, anyway," Coffey said.

"So, like, how would it work and stuff?" Fawkes asked.

"Well, if you want to do this, tomorrow I'll bring some papers in for everyone. Birth certificates. Then we'll use those and go out, to get Social Security cards and drivers' licenses, everything you'd need. Then, I'll get a friend of mine who's a judge to let you change your names to whatever you want," Coffey said, neatly detailing his whole counterfeit identification operation and also implicating Judge "Playboy" Bunting as well. He probably didn't even have to pay Bunting to get him to go along, just offered to send one or more of us into his chambers after court some day and blow him. The horny old goat would be one of the first I was going to get after I nailed Coffey to the wall.

"And, like, then what?" Sancrist asked.

"After that, I'd get you all a temporary job at a strip club owned by some friends of mine," Coffey said, obviously meaning his mob employers. "You would dance there for a few weeks, maybe a month tops, before one of our 'talent agents' would come in and 'discover' you. That way you girls won't just come out of nowhere and suddenly be big stars. You'll have some history, and that way when they do an *A&E Biography* of you, you won't have to spend a lot of time making stuff up about where you came from."

"That sounds cool," Wylie said.

"Yeah, girl, he's, like, totally smart," Sumo agreed.

"Yeah, baby," Blensinger added in a very convincing and very sexy *Austin Powers* growl. I even managed to look a little more excited, but I had to keep Coffey convinced that I was scared of him. I acted as excited as everyone else when we all agreed to accept Coffey's offer - like we had another choice, really, besides crack whore - and made decent time on my giant platform shoes back to my room, so I could practice my makeup and hair and also talk to Wylie and Blensinger about my plan.

* * *

"I totally remember now," I said, opening my eye wide for the eyelash curler. "From this totally cute Detective in Vice, Tommy Shaw. He told me, two weeks before we, like, busted the house on Tenth Street, that there were, like, a whole bunch of new hookers and stuff working in the warehouse district. Tommy, like, busted eight of them. And they wouldn't, like, give up a pimp."

"Yeah, I totally remember that too," Wylie said, lining his lips with a cherry-red lip-liner pencil and vamping a little in the mirror. Behind her, Blensinger let go with a ton of hairspray over the tightly-wound coil she'd rolled around her curling iron.

"So?" Blensinger asked, picking up her cigarette from the ashtray and taking a drag as she unwound the hair.

"So, do you, like, remember around the same time that all those members of the Lorenzo family, like, came up missing and stuff? Organized Crime Unit was all, like, fucked up looking for them, y'know."

"Oh, yeah," Blensinger told me, giggling. "Blonde moment! I was, like, tracking down fake passports for, like, a week trying to find if they'd left the country 'n' stuff. It was a total drag, we didn't find anything. We just, like, assumed they'd, y'know, gotten whacked 'n' stuff."

"No! We, like, totally found something, baby," Wylie corrected. "We found those eight birth certificates, y'know? The ones that we called Cristoph over 'n' stuff?"

"OhmyGOD! No way!" Blensinger said. "I totally never put that together!"

"I bet if we, like, went back and found out the names of those eight hookers, y'know, we'd totally find that their original names were, like, the ones on those birth certificates you found and that Bunting had totally changed them to something else," I opined.

"Yeah, that's totally got to be it," Wylie echoed. "The Lorenzo family was totally at war with the Fresetti family 'n' stuff, y'know? The Fresettis that, like, totally own Radical Solutions?"

"I so get it now," Blensinger said, winding up another coil of hair on the styling wand. "The Fresettis get Coffey to girl-o-fy those Lorenzo soldiers 'n' stuff, and he totally makes them into hookers with the meteor rock. I find the names they used and he has to, like, totally get me and Alex off the case 'n' stuff so we don't, like, find him out."

"Right," I said. "And Harcott, who's totally got the meteor rock, gets scared and doesn't want to be involved. He, like, tries to sell the rock to Sumo to, like, pay off his debts so he can skip the country 'n' stuff."

"And you're all, like, totally on Sumo's trail, and Coffey's, like, scared that when you find Sumo you're gonna find Harcott and totally get the whole story," Wylie finishes. "And now he's, like, got us all bimbo-ized 'n' stuff, and he thinks he can totally like, make a fortune off us and we'll, y'know, be all like his slaves 'n' stuff."

"Yeah," I agreed. "That's what I got, too."

Blensinger put down her curling iron and started brushing out the curls into a sexy, wavy cascade. "So, like, what's next for us, then, girl?"

I tried to ignore that I was starting to like it when she called me girl. Just like I tried to ignore than I was thinking about Wylie and Blensinger as 'she' and 'her' now. I tried to ignore a lot.

"Well, like, I've totally been thinking." I began, lining my eyes.

* * *

God, I loved makeup. I loved high heels. I loved big hair and big tits and dance music. I was writhing up on the stage, the lights beating down on me, gyrating my hips and playing with my nipples while the bass thump of Prince's "Gett Off" played over the P.A. The dry scratch of dollar bills against my smooth skin, tucked neatly under my g-string, was delicious. It was perfect. I never wanted it to end.

I finished my turn on stage and stepped carefully down the steep steps leading to the stage, careful on my towering platform heels. I pulled the shiny black Lycra 'booty' shorts back on over my thong when I was on the floor, giving them a nice tight tuck into my butt. Then the shiny red satin corset that pushed my tits up into a mouth-watering shelf. I strutted through the club, my little sequined clutch purse stuffed full of twenty-dollar bills in my long-nailed fingers (the shiny new French manicure I had looked *fantastic*), stopping to say 'hi' to some of my regulars. I went to the back bar and ordered a vodka and cranberry juice, lit a long Virginia Slims cigarette while the bartender mixed it and then made my way through the thick crowd, dodging around drunks on their way to tip on stage and girls giving intimate, sensual table dances to the table in the back where we were supposed to meet.

They looked fantastic, as always - Blensinger in a little plaid schoolgirl skirt and a second-skin white t-shirt cropped so high that the bottoms of her luscious boobs were showing. Her hair was in long, lustrous pigtailed over her ears to fall in two shiny, feather-soft plumes over her shoulders. She sucked on a long Virginia Slims as well, sipping a bourbon-and-Coke and playing with one of her huge silver hoop earrings. Her face brightened into the huge, sweet smile that always seemed to greet me.

Wylie was next to her, sipping a strawberry margarita from a schooner. She'd chosen a gauzy, sequined white salsa dress and a seven-row rhinestone choker for tonight and worn her hair up on one side, giving her an incredibly classy, Rita Hayworth kind of look. She, too, brightened and smiled broadly when I approached, sliding over to make room for me at the cramped table.

"Hey, baby girl," Blensinger said to me happily, wrapping me in a tight hug and giving me a little buss on the cheek. Wylie did the same. Somehow, being around strippers all day and night had taken away our reluctance to touch one another. We tipped each other on stage and Blensinger had even gone so far as to suck my nipples when I slipped her a single through the side of her g-string one night. Sure, we all sort of knew that as future porn stars, we'd probably be having sex with one another all the time, but I got the impression - and pretty much returned the emotion, too - that Blensinger might have wanted to pursue that option off the clock a little bit. Maybe tonight, after lights-out. But I didn't want Alex to feel left out, either. Maybe we could explore some of the more interesting permutations of the number three, then. I was certainly interested.

I was still having a little trouble calling them by the names on their new identification. They were processed off of some more birth certificates that Coffey had acquired through his contacts in the Bureau of Vital Statistics. We never paid much attention to what we had, since we were all in the process of legally changing our names for when we became big porn stars. For the time being, my stage name that I danced under was "Lana." I think my real name was Jessica something, and Blensinger's was Connie and Wylie's was Suzanne. We either called each other by our original last names or by our dance names, "Lana," "Rosie" and "Robin." Hell, we knew who we were. I suppose we were all kinda waiting for the chance to name ourselves. We were going to have a big 'new name' party when we all processed our paperwork. We weren't even telling each other.

"Is he, like, coming?" I asked excitedly, pulling on my cigarette.

"Yeah, he totally said he was," Wylie answered. "You know, like, one or more of us is gonna have to fuck him to get this to work."

"Big deal," Blensinger said. "It's not like I don't have to find some, like, loser or another to cum on my fucking tits every three days or I totally, like, starve."

"Yeah, at least we can have it, like, count for something 'n' stuff," I agreed.

We chatted for a little while, drinking and smoking and generally looking fabulous. Wylie minced off at one point to greet a regular customer and give him a lap dance, and I did the same at one point. It was about two, two and a half hours later that our mark finally came in the door.

He was swarthy and handsome, very angular of face and with not a single one of his dark, thick hairs out of place. He wore at least ten grand worth of leather and jewelry. Blensinger bounded to her feet instantly upon seeing him.

"Hey, sweetie!" she cried, kissing him on the cheek and binding him up in a huge, tit-mashing hug. He grinned expectantly and guided him by both hands to our table. I noticed that the guy's eyes never left Blensinger's breasts. This might almost be too easy. I'd heard about this guy, but I reminded myself that I was just a dumb stripper and wasn't supposed to know that Anthony Marcati was a senior lieutenant in the Fresetti family with a list of priors as long as your leg and no convictions. A very connected guy, Tony Marcati. He was one of the V.I.P. owners of the club we were dancing in, a surprisingly high-class establishment called 'Tailfeathers.'

"Tony, baby, these are my friends," Blensinger said happily, plopping down in his leather-clad lap and stroking the back of his neck. She was very careful about pushing one of her soft, firm breasts against his chin while she pointed us out with a long red nail. "That's my girlfriend Lana, and over there is, like, Robin, who you met before."

"How y'all doin'?" Tony asked. I answered by rubbing one of my platform-shod feet along the inside of his calf and giving him a smoldering smile.

"So, y'all are the girls that got hired by Vixen Video," Tony said, scratching his upper lip. "Congratulations. Hey, Andy -" he barked to a passing bartender "- set us up with a little champagne to celebrate, all right?"

"The Dom Perignon?" Andy the bartender asked.

"Do I drink anything else?"

"Oh, wow," I said, wide-eyed. I tried to look awed in the presence of big spenders. It made them want to push a whole lot of money into my underwear.

I decided to press it home. Between Blensinger's unparalleled ass on his lap, Wylie's massaging hand on his shoulder and my foot on the inside of his calf, he probably thought we were his for the taking. But I needed this guy with a dick way too hard to think around. I reached into my purse and pulled out one of the last of Coffey's Macanudos.

"So, if this is, like, a celebration, y'know, d'you mind? I've totally been saving this," I said with my most vapid grin.

"Sure, go ahead," Tony said, a little weirded out by the concept of a woman carrying around a cigar. I clipped the tip and puffed it alight. My eyes never left his, suggesting everything, while I sucked the tip like it was a dick. He swallowed hard and couldn't look away. I was sure

Blensinger was doing her little 'leg squeeze' thing to get him even harder. Men were so easy sometimes. He hadn't sat with us ten minutes and we already owned him.

Now that the hook was baited, it was time to reel him in.

"I'm so tired," Wylie said, stretching in such a way as to make her tits jut and wiggle deliciously. "OhmyGod, I can't wait for tonight to be over."

"You not getting enough sleep or something?" Tony asked.

"Oh, totally," Blensinger said. "We've totally been up at dawn trying to, like, get ready to start filming 'n' stuff. Rehearsals and stuff, and then, like, all these meetings and papers to sign, and then dancing all night."

"And all the moving," I said simply.

"Moving? Y'all moving someplace?" Tony asked.

"Not us," I said. "But, like, Mr. Coffey is up at, like, the crack of dawn every morning, y'know, putting shit in boxes and loading it up into his car and stuff."

"He is?" Tony asked, his eyes narrowing a little suspiciously.

"Totally," Wylie confirmed. "All day. Box after box."

"And he's, like, so moody lately, too. He's all, like, bitching at us all the time, all like, 'don't ask so many questions' and 'stay out of my office' and shit," Blensinger said.

"Like the other day, right?" I piped in. "He was, like, trying to get this totally heavy box into his Suburban, right, and he like drops this metal Thermos thing? And I, like, go to pick it up, y'know, just to help him out 'n' stuff, and he, like, totally grabs it and, like, kinda shoves me away, and he's all, like, 'get your hands off of that, bitch!' and stuff."

"OhmyGod, he, like, said that to you?" Wylie said, like it was the first time she'd ever heard it. Nice touch. It let me reinforce the story.

"Totally," I said. "He, like, shoved me and everything."

"Yeah, he's been a total bastard lately," Blensinger said. "The other day, I, like, just asked him where he was going and he totally bit my head off."

"He sounds like he's under a lot of stress," Tony said, considering hard. That narrow-eyed, thin-lipped look told me that he was going for it.

"It's totally rubbing off on people, too," I went on. "Like, the other day, Judge Bunting came by and I, like, just wanted to know about the name changes? He was, like, getting his passport from Mr. Coffey, and y'know how he's like, always so nice 'n' stuff? And the other day, he was, like, totally cold."

"OhmyGod, I totally agree," Wylie chimed in. "Dr. Lawton was just like that, too, when he came by for his passport. He's usually, like, the sweetest guy in the world and then it was like he couldn't run away fast enough, y'know?"

We chattered on like dumb bimbos, reading infinitely more into how mean these men were being instead of what they were doing, but I knew that Tony Marcati had swallowed the hook all

the way. Now it was just a matter of time, and a little sleight-of-hand. And I knew exactly where to play the trick.

"OhmyGod, Tony, so, like, you're coming to the party, right?" I bubbled, grabbing his arm with both my hands.

"What party is that, sweetheart?" he said, smiling. It was good to see that the smile never totally reached his eyes.

"The Grand Opening party, y'know, for, like, the video company? Everybody's totally gonna be there 'n' stuff. You *have* to come and dance with me, okay?" I said.

"Oh, Tony, totally," Wylie said. "You have to come."

"Sure, I'll come," Tony said. "Just, y'know, call my secretary, okay? Rosie here's got the number and everything."

"Oh that is so totally cool!" Blensinger said happily, hugging him and 'accidentally' feeding him a swollen pink nipple while she did it. Oh, we had him all right.

I winked at Wylie, and she smiled a smile that raised the temperature in the room ten degrees.

* * *

There was some sense of community, I guess, from having lived in the same house together for so long and having been through what we'd been through. So we had gotten together for a 'pajama party' of sorts about a week earlier, sat down and tried to decide what to do about our new names. It seemed like the last piece of the puzzle, the last step we had to take to be completely women. We all decided to take a stage name similar to our original, male names, just to remind us where we came from. And also to be able to cover any mistakes we might make in calling each other by our old names.

So when they parted the curtain on the party and we walked out, the world had already forgotten Averil "Sumo" Starnes, but April Starr was perfectly acceptable. Adley Fawkes would live on, somehow, in the luscious form of Ashleigh Fox, just like Darick Seales would continue in the world in a small way as Darcy Steele. In some cases it was actually a little improvement. The world was cheapened and degraded by having a Jefferson Sancrist in it. But having Jennifer St. Croix might actually make it a little better. The FBI had buried Staley Townes weeks before with military honors. Stacey Towers would live on a while longer, just in a different way. And maybe Kim Lee S'sa-Jen would have made a difference in the world with his knowledge and skill, but that didn't mean that Kymberlee Savage couldn't do the same in her own way.

And of the last of us, the four who'd managed to keep their wits and not succumb to the temptation of losing their minds in the happy fog of shallow, vapid concerns that we'd been led to, there wasn't much mourning either. We hadn't really liked ourselves before this had happened, nor had we particularly liked one another. Now we had a chance to change that, to pursue something that might be much more important than what we pursued before. Happiness, friends, satisfaction and joy instead of success, respect and prestige. And we hadn't given up on what had happened before. We were pretty sure that our fingerprints had not been modified along with the rest of us. We could prove who we once were, and maybe go back to some semblance of our old lives once this case was blown open. Lindell Harcott had been a brilliant scientist. Lindzee Hart could be again. Officer Alex Wylie had

been a promising young cop on a good career track and with the potential to be a first-rate detective. Alexis Wylde had the same prospects. And Brett Blensinger was fighting to prove that he wasn't a failure as a detective or as an officer. Brittany Blessing didn't have to fight that war. She'd already proven what she was worth.

But what about old, tired Cristoph Reennes? He'd pretty much painted himself into a corner. Cristoph Reennes had burned his bridges. Krystal Rains had her whole happy life in front of her, nothing but options.

The party was loud and full of laughter and clinking glasses, techno music and fun. The starlets dotted the crowd, drawing the eye like peacocks among the dark suits and coats of the other men and women, the directors and scriptwriters and administrative staff. You couldn't miss us, the eight girls that had been 'discovered' at the Tailfeathers club out by the airport. Filming on our first feature, "Head for Business," began tomorrow, plus post-production on our "Casting Couch" documentary, where me and the other girls had fucked and sucked and masturbated in a staged "audition" for our parts, and then we'd gone around in a limo "casting" well-hung studs to star opposite us. On the walls were giant black-and-white high glamour publicity shots of us, signed with our new chosen names. I took a moment from my champagne and cigarette and shallow conversation to look at the rounded, perky "Krystal Rains" scrawled over my picture in royal blue, the / dotted with a little heart. That really was who I was now. And, surprisingly, I didn't have much of a problem with it. Sure, I missed being a cop. Very badly sometimes, but that part of my life wasn't closed yet. Hell, if anything, Krystal Rains was going to be the future star of the company's third feature, currently being written, called "NYPD Blow." At least it would be a chance to get back in uniform for a little while. I was actually a little excited to see what kind of an actress Krystal Rains would wind up being. I was looking forward to this new life, my new BMW Z3 roadster and my beach house, having lunch with my best friends Alexis Wylde and Brittany Blessing. Life was offering me more right now than it ever had before. I could almost thank Sumo Starnes - excuse me, April Starr now - for opening the canister in a panic. I could almost thank Lieutenant Coffey for my huge tits and my long silky hair.

Almost.

The wiseguys were all in a knot near the back, talking to one another softly and with their backs to the rest of the crowd. Getting the 'go ahead' nod from Brittany and Alexis, I excused myself from one of the directors and sashayed catwalk-style across the marble floor, effortlessly, in my towering platform heels, my black sequined sausage-sheath dress clinging to my every delicious curve and the track-lights highlighting my pale blonde mane, cigarette trailing a thin blue plume of smoke. I sidled up to Tony Marcati and ran a hungry hand across his well-muscled ass.

"Hey, honey," I purred to him. "Thanks for last night." He was a pretty good lay for such a self-absorbed bastard. I knew he was personally responsible for at least seven murders, and I still intended to see him fry for it, but for now it was enough that he was good enough in the sack to make me cum twelve times in one session.

He looked understandably distracted. "Can you excuse me a minute, sweetheart?"

"Oh. Like, sure," I said, pouting a little. "But, like, remember how you told me to look in Coffey's office for you, baby? Y'know, as a little favor 'n' stuff?"

"Yeah," Marcati said, trying to listen to both me and the other conversation at the same time. "What about it?"

"Well, y'know, I'm not too smart about stuff like you asked me, baby, but I dunno if this is what you mean by 'something suspicious' or not, okay?"

He looked down at the plane ticket receipt that Brittany had bought just three days earlier. In Coffey's name, dated this evening, just after the party.

He kissed my cheek fondly. "This is just what I meant, baby doll."

"Did I do good, baby?" I asked with wide, girlish eyes.

"You did perfect. You're a fucking angel, y'know that?" He passed the ticket to a grey-haired gentleman to his right, one who I wasn't supposed to know was Giancarlo Fresetti, the head of the Fresetti family. He looked at it and passed it to Francis Capliatti, his second-in-command, who then passed it to Julian Scorupco, one of his major hitters. They all looked at me fondly.

"This is the girl you been telling me about, Tony?" Don Fresetti said softly.

"Yeah, Uncle Gee," Tony said, taking my arm and gently ushering me forward a little. "This is Krystal Rains, one of the stars."

"Tony tells me a lot about you," Fresetti told me, bowing slightly over my hand. "Giancarlo Fresetti, my dear. Everybody calls me Uncle Gee."

"Nice to meet you," I said shyly. The man I'd testified against in Superior Court ten years ago didn't even recognize me. It was amazing.

"You've done us a really big favor, my dear," Fresetti continued. "Tell me, is there anything we could do for you or your family to repay this kindness?"

"Oh, wow," I breathed. "Really, Mr. Fresetti."

"Uncle Gee."

"Uncle Gee, I mean, I, like, only meant it as a favor to Tony, y'know? I wasn't really thinking of, y'know, wanting anything for it."

"All the more reason to reward you, sweetheart," Tony said.

"Anything you want, my dear. Money, maybe, or diamonds? A car?" Frank Capliatti suggested. "Just name it."

"Um."

Tony Marcati nudged me, delighted by my modesty in front of the Don. "Go ahead, sweetheart. There's got to be something."

"Okay, like, this is probably stupid, right?" I said.

"Go ahead, my dear," Fresetti prompted.

"Well, it's just, like, me and some of the other girls - Brittany and Lindzee and Alexis, y'know, we were like kinda disappointed 'n' stuff 'cause we weren't allowed to buy any stock or nothing in the company, y'know? It's, like, this business is probably going to do real well, and we're all, like, gonna work real hard, and we all totally wish that we could, y'know, own a piece of it,

right? 'Cause, y'know, our bodies won't, like, last forever. Y'know, we have to retire sometime, and then what?"

"Smart girl," Fresetti commented, smiling. "Hang on to this one, Tony, she's a bright one. I tell you what, Ms. Rains - can I call you Krystal? - tell you what, Krystal, I sit on the board of directors for this company. I can arrange as many shares of preferred stock for you and your friends as you want, and probably make you a deal on share price. It's good, you looking out for your future like that. That's good business."

"Thanks! I totally want to learn the business end of this, too, y'know. I think I'd be totally good at it. I'd like to maybe even, like, run this place someday, once I retire 'n' stuff."

Fresetti smiled even larger and tapped the receipt I'd given Tony. "I'll keep that in mind, my dear. Giancarlo Fresetti, he never forgets a favor."

"Oh, baby, this is so totally cool!" I cooed, pressing my tits against Tony's arm. "Can you, like, excuse me? OhmyGod, I totally can't wait to tell Brittany and Alexis!"

"Yeah, baby, go ahead," he said, kissing my cheek. By the time I'd gone two steps, the wise guys were talking 'business' again. I made my way back through the crowd towards the office. I had to stop and talk with Ashleigh and Darcy for a minute - I did have to work with these girls, after all, and I didn't want them to think I was stuck-up or bitchy. Hell, I was scripted to eat Darcy's pussy tomorrow. That would suck if she didn't like me. But eventually I made it through the crowd of congratulatory hugs and cheek-kisses, back to Lindzee. I hugged her tight and kissed her cheek fondly.

"Did you do it?" I whispered, my smile stapled in place so no one would suspect what we were talking about.

"Yeah," she said, nodding. "Lawton had it. Little hornball was fast asleep once I, like, got through sucking his teensy little pecker for him. I walked right out with it."

"Did it work, what you did 'n' stuff?" I asked.

"I totally think so," Lindzee said. "I, like, x-rayed it for, like, nearly five minutes. The sensors were detecting, like, zero radiation and stuff from the meteor. I think it's, like, totally neutralized. Even if it's not, I totally don't think that it can ever hurt anybody again."

"You're the best, baby girl," I said, squeezing your hand. "Where is it?"

"Just where you said, honey," Lindzee said, looking around to see if we were attracting attention yet. "Right where they can find it."

"Kick ass," I said. My nipples were starting to get hard with excitement.

Alexis sashayed up to us, smiling from ear to ear. "Look, you guys. It's starting."

Coffey was excusing himself and heading quickly to his office. To answer the '911' page he'd just received from Lawton's cell-phone, which was currently in Brittany's purse. And the Fresetti people were heading there right behind him. Frank Capliatti, in particular, had a reputation for making people take a very long time to die. If Coffey couldn't explain the packed suitcase on his desk, with several thousand in cash and his passport in the side (freshly pilfered from his office safe by Alexis, who knew quite a bit about safes and electronic security from her days moonlighting as a bank security guard when she'd been a uniformed officer),

and the neutralized meteor rock that Lindzee had stolen from the sexually sated and now tied and gagged in his office Dr. Lawton, then he was going to spend a long time wishing he'd never crossed us. I just hoped the son of a bitch would actually figure out who fucked him before he wound up at the bottom of the river. Maybe I could work a way to tell him.

* * *

The party had been a smashing success. Darcy, Ashleigh, Jennifer, Kimberlee, April and Stacey had all headed off with men they'd picked up from the crowd, leaving just Alexis, Lindzee, Brittany and I in the little dark office in the back, finishing off the last few bottle of Cristal over cigarettes and cigars, having a little celebration of our own.

I hung up my cute little pink-and-white-swirl cell-phone. "That was Tony," I told the girls. "He said they, like, had to go 'out of town' for a few days, but Don Fresetti had arranged for us to, like, buy as many shares as we want starting when the office opens tomorrow."

"How much?" Alexis asked.

"Seventy-five cents a share," I told him. "He said he totally never forgets a favor."

"So between us, we can totally buy out the company from Radical Solutions first thing in the morning, right?" Lindzee chimed in.

"It's ours, baby!" I toasted, raising my glass.

"Too bad for Uncle Gee, though, y'know?" Brittany said. "He did all this for us, and, like, the first movie we ever make is going right to Lieutenant Kroft in Homicide, right?"

We looked at the monitors behind us - a difficult task, crammed into the security and surveillance office like we were. Brittany played the tape one last time, watching Fresetti, Tony Marcati, Frank Capliatti and Julian Scorupco go into the back office and confront a panicked, wild-eyed Coffey, beat him severely, take him into the alley behind the building and shoot him dead before stuffing him into the trunk of a Cadillac. It was enough to put the Fresettis away for a number of years. A career bust, to say the least. Maybe I could parlay it into something someday, if I ever got my shield back.

"And the rest of it?" I asked while Brittany ejected the tape and slipped it into an envelope before stripping off the latex gloves she'd been wearing. No sense launching an investigation into our whereabouts. There were directions to give any rewards to families of police officers who had been killed in the line of duty. I liked that Karen Cabot was going to get a little help from this. I'd gone to the Academy with Don Cabot and I liked that I could help his family.

"They went through his laptop," Brittany confirmed, and I did a little tit-jiggling 'happy dance' that I'd perfected in the club. I missed dancing there. But it would only be a few months before the place was up at auction. We'd all dance there again someday, when we owned it.

"Cool," I said. "Hope they check his email 'n' stuff." I'd spent half a night in 'Playboy' Bunting's office - I'd only had to suck off two security guards to get in there, I was expecting three or four - typing fake emails to Coffey about the 'plans' to meet in Argentina. Bunting would be at the bottom of the river next to Coffey soon, and Fresetti and the others would be facing capital murder charges for the deaths of a cop and a superior court judge. And all we got out of it was controlling interest in a potential billion-dollar company.

"Not a bad day, y'know?" I said, raising my glass.

Nobody disagreed.

Ω