

SUMMARY: An ambulance medic who is studying to be an RN, suddenly finds that his body is changing into that of a sexy nurse, and, in his new form he is finding some of the fireman very sexy.

the *Clothes* make the *Man*

story and illustrations
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Part One

LULLS IN THE ACTION CAME so rarely to the crews on Medic 22, the ambulance which served the south portion of the county, that Pete Harrison could only study with half his concentration, unable to shut off the portion of his mind which waited expectantly for the other shoe to drop. Although not the busiest ambulance in the county by any stretch, Medic 22 was that perfect mix of dense urban population, nursing homes and assisted living centers and high-speed freeways that made for a constant stream of 911 calls throughout an average 24-hour shift. Through some miracle of happenstance, Pete and his duty-partner for the shift both managed to eat a sit-down dinner at one of the local diners and watch most of *CSI* before having to run a shortness-of-breath call in one of the low-income housing projects which ran to the county hospital, then come back and sit down long enough for Pete to get deeply into his studies for an hour.



Not that Pete particularly *wanted* to be back in school, but six months on light duty pushing papers in the administration office after a debilitating back injury and the subsequent rehab convinced him that he needed a fallback plan for his career somewhere beyond his paramedic's license and a future of backboarding fat people in the rain for the next fifteen years. He'd never finished his four-year degree and had flopped from dead-end job to dead-end job for about six years before getting an Associate's degree in emergency medical service from his community college and

joining the County EMS system the same year he graduated. Now a nine-year veteran of the streets, he hit the books anew in the quest for his RN, slogging through nursing school (which proved to be most discriminatory towards paramedics, who actually possessed an extra year of school and several skills which the average nurse did not know and practiced medicine without a doctor's supervision) at what seemed like a snail's pace, rehearsing skills which he had mastered in his job several times over and used on every shift he worked. The 24-on, 48-off nature of his job left him plenty of time to study and still allowed him plenty of time to pursue his hobbies, so he rarely studied at work. But as his course of study drew to a close, Pete acutely felt the crunch of finals and found his nose in a medical textbook more often than not, with his finals and his board certification exam looming.

Lost in a detailed study of the kidneys, he jumped a bit as the metallic rumble of the garage door in the outer bay snapped him from his musings roughly. August was brush fire season, and Medic 22 shared a station with the fire department's Engine 4 who spent most of their time dousing cigarette fires in highway medians. They still first-responded to most of the ambulance's medical calls, however, and Pete sympathized very little with the dark circles under the firefighters' eyes and their stumbling walks. They would sleep through the Christmas season while the EMS crews would run the explosion of respiratory complaints which came hand-in-hand with the change in the weather, and the same with the rash of deaths which inevitably coincided with the spring. EMS worked much harder, as a general rule, than the fire service and there were many instances – some in the county where Pete worked, as a matter of fact – where a profound and lingering resentment had built between the services. But the boys on Engine 4 and the medic crews here got along very well. The maturity gap between the forty-something medics and the twenty-something firefighters sometimes led to a clash of cultures, and Pete honestly got sick of the ballbusting which hallmarked every fire service he'd ever come in contact with, but by and large he felt that Engine 4 worked hard, cared about their jobs and shared the load admirably with the ambulance.

The door from the noisy vehicle bay opened into the station's day room and four sweaty, tired-looking firefighters dragged in, offering tired smiles to Pete as they entered and walked into the open kitchen, raiding the fridge for Gatorade and cold water.

“What'd y'all get?” Pete rumbled in his gravelly baritone, marking his place in the book with a finger. Studying was over for the night, he knew – with the firefighters home, the television and conversations would be back on and the laughing, talking, belching and other constant noise would prevent any further reading.

“Trash fire got out of control in those woods behind Palmer Elementary,” Lieutenant Dan Kellerman said, rubbing eyes still reddened from the smoke. “Wasn't nothing.”

Pete's latent paternal instinct kicked in despite his better judgment. “You guys okay? Hot out there.”

Keith McCallum, the sandy-haired driver for the crew, gave him an impish smile and intoned, “Yes, Mom” in a high, whiny voice. The other crewmembers laughed derisively.

“Seriously,” Pete grumbled. “If you'd seen as many dumb fuckers fall out on a fire line as I have, you'd worry too. I'm too goddamned old to train up your fucking replacements.”

The shortest of the fire crew, a rosy-muscled dark-haired plug of a boy named John Hanks, shot him the bird spiritedly. “As if anybody but us would even have your old ass,” he rejoined.

“How's the studying going?” asked the tall, gawky engineer, Bobby Resnick, scrubbing fingers through his sweat-damp reddish hair. He seemed to be the only firefighter on the shift who got the slightest bit uncomfortable with the constant back-and-forth insults and frequently changed the subject when he felt the jibes got a bit too personal for his tastes.

“Shit, you know how it is,” Pete said, shrugging. “Most of it is review – shit, I know more about reading EKGs in the field than the idiot who wrote this fucking book, seems like – but it's still a lot of information to cover.”

“Think you're gonna be ready in time?” Bobby asked. “Your finals are – what, next week?”

“Week after,” Pete told him. “I'll be ready. I'm not gonna sweat it.”

“You're gonna scare the shit out of some patients,” Kellerman interjected. “They're gonna be there expecting some cute little thing to come in and take their temperature and in walks you.”

“There's gonna be more heart attacks on your floor than in the rest of the goddamn hospital combined,” John added.

“Just like any woman out there who thinks firefighters are sexy is gonna get the shock of their life when they see your disgusting unwashed ass and tiny little cock,” Pete riposted.

“I’ll still fuck her with it,” Hanks replied. “Least I can get a woman to want to see me naked.”

“If you could get a woman who isn’t inflatable I’d be impressed,” Pete said, laughing. “You’re like that nerdy kid who swears he has a hot girlfriend who lives in Canada. You talk about all this pussy you get but you never get any phone calls and you show up to work smelling like Jergen’s hand lotion every shift.”

“You should see the fucking blisters on his right hand,” McCallum said.

“Speed over finesse,” Hanks bragged.

“Speaking of your nurse test, we got you something to bring you luck,” Lt. Kellerman said, pulling a box from behind his back which he’d retrieved from the dormitory. “Just a little something from your boys here at Engine 4.”

He handed over a plain cardboard box – obviously from an online order – with the phrase “Dear Fuckhead, Good luck as a nurse! Love, Engine 4” scrawled on it in black Sharpie.



Consciously forcing himself to ignore the juvenile snickering from the crew, Pete opened the box and withdrew a white spandex “naughty nurse” uniform complete with wimple hat, garter belt, white stocking and a red bra and panty set.

“You’re gonna be so cute,” Kellerman laughed as Pete held the skimpy outfit against his chest and laughed.

“You know how I can get y’all back,” Pete teased. “Walk into y’all’s dorm actually wearing this damn thing.”

“Good thing everybody here knows

fucking CPR,” Hanks shot in. “But I don’t know that even y’all can fix blindness.”

“Or PTSD,” Kellerman added. “I’d be curled up in a ball sucking my thumb for months after that.”

Pete stuffed his ‘uniform’ back into the box and flipped the firefighters off jovially. “Y’all are sweet,” he told them. “But I’m pretty sure you fucked up on the sizes.”

“We bought it for an actual girl,” Bobby said. “Y’know, in case you ever meet one.”

“Nice,” Pete said.

“You can put it in your closet with all your other pretty dresses,” Keith remarked.

“That reminds me, you borrowed my pink prom dress and never gave it back,” Pete shot.

“You owned up to having a pink prom dress pretty quick, there, Pete,” Kellerman laughed. “Did we accidentally stumble across a deep dark secret, there?”

“The clothes make the man, Danny,” Pete said with a smile.

“Well, they certainly made *you*,” Kellerman replied, pushing open the door to the showers.

* * *

“Medic 22, Dispatch, Medic 22, Dispatch – respond to a Traumatic Injury at 2307 Fertile Crescent Loop, 2307 Fertile Crescent Loop. 27-year-old male, self-inflicted gunshot wound. PD advises scene is secure and is safe to enter.”

The blaring of the alert pager snapped Pete and his partner *du jour*, Al Nellis, from their sleep and sent them fumbling for boots and duty belts in the semidarkness lit only by the red overhead lights which came on with every received call. Pete managed a grumbled “Medic 22, call received” into his radio and wormed his toes into his open boots, not even bothering to lace them up as he shoved his shirt-tail into his pants on the way to the ambulance. Al twisted the key and brought the unit to rumbling life, the big Cummins diesel filling the quiet bay with noise and noxious smoke. They located the call on the map and slapped the toggles which illuminated the red-and-blue strobes and left the station in a blare of sirens. If the ambulance dispatched to a gunshot wound, then that meant the patient still lived – one of the rare dramatic “every second counts” calls that got the blood flowing and made the job tolerable.

Al threaded the unit through the crowd of strobing black-and-white police vehicles which neatly blocked any and all ambulance access to the scene. One officer struggled to calm a hysterically shrieking and crying woman in the front yard, but Al and Pete ignored her as they high-stepped into the residence, bags of medical gear slapping against their backs and thighs.

A large-boned and overweight black man lay sprawled on the floor in a small pool of bright red arterial blood. Al rolled him out of the blood and began to cut the clothes from him with a pair of trauma shears while Pete located the stippled entrance wound on his neck below his jaw and the much larger, ragged edged exit wound near his right deltoid. Through some miracle, the bullet – which looked like a .38 at least, possibly bigger but not big enough to be a .45, had missed his trachea and the patient maintained an airway of his own, but his breathing rasped slowly through clenched teeth and his pulse was thready and rapid. Pete slapped an end-tidal CO₂ sensor onto the patient's nose and mouth to look for Cheyne-Stokes respirations – a pattern of breathing which indicated injury to the brain stem and could give him valuable insight into just what the bullet damaged. Using that sensor, however, was an intentional breach of protocol which raised Al's eyebrow in question. The first and foremost problem consisted of getting the bleeding stopped, which Pete did quickly in a frenzy of gauze and compression bandage. Although the blood looked arterial, the gushing spray which would have denoted carotid artery injury wasn't present. It was hard to get a compression bandage on in such a way that wouldn't constrict the patient's neck. Pete had to settle for threading the bandage beneath the patient's arms and then placing a

cervical collar to add additional pressure. Pete began to move the backboard into position to receive the patient when he bent in the middle, clutching his lower abdomen in shock and pain.

“Shit! Ouch!” he complained, a little breathless.

“What's wrong?” Al asked him.

“Gut cramp,” Pete said, moving the backboard. “It's nothing.”

They logrolled the overweight patient onto the board and secured him in place, then added high-flow oxygen through a non-rebreather mask to help offset any compensated shock the patient might be experiencing. They secured his head in place – the chance of spinal injury given the mechanism was very high – and moved him onto the stretcher. The cramps – which felt like someone tightening a tourniquet across his lower abdomen – struck Pete again and he gasped.

“You better tell me now, partner,” Al cautioned him as they fastened the backboard onto the stretcher.

“Finish the call,” Pete said. “We'll deal with me later.”

They loaded the patient into the ambulance and Pete fell into the frantic but comfortable rhythm of the Code 3 (lights and sirens) return to the hospital – placement of a 4-lead EKG to monitor heart rate, getting a large-bore IV started in the patient's arm and starting a bolus of normal saline for blood pressure support. He called in the report to the local trauma center on his radio and barely finished before Al pulled into their bay, shutting off the lights and sirens.



They hustled the patient down the hallway in a frenzy of shouted information and nurse's reports, getting the patient moved over to the hospital bed and all the pertinent information relayed to the ER staff in spite of the high-adrenaline nature of the call. The patient had begun to show premature ventricular beats on the EKG monitor, heralding the beginning of the end, and the ER doctors slid the curtain closed in front of the medics' noses and went to work as they walked slowly out to the ambulance to begin the lengthy process of cleaning the blood and discarded wrappers from needles, gauze, IV supplies and EKG electrodes from the floor around where the stretcher rested.

"Not too shabby," Al commented as they began to spray down and scrub the congealing blood from their stretcher. Pete smiled. As burned out and tired as he was after nine years of emergency medical service, the pride of delivering a patient to the ER with respirations and a pulse despite all circumstances to the contrary shone from him, a high unlike any drug.

"Yeah, not bad. What was our scene time?" he asked.

Al consulted their clipboard. "Nine minutes," he said proudly, beating the "Platinum Ten" by one whole minute and putting their response to the emergency near-perfection. "You'd think we've done this before."

“A time or two,” Pete commented, scrubbing a particularly obstinate piece of clot from the stretcher rail with a paper towel.

“Wanna tell me what all the moaning and groaning was about in there?” Al asked.

“Got me,” Pete replied. “Gut cramps. Felt like I was being cut in half for a second there, but they seem to have gone away. Haven't felt them in a while. Must've been something I ate.”

“Need to go have a Code Brown?” Al asked, using the parlance for a lengthy bowel movement which took an emergency vehicle out of service for a while.

“Nah, I don't think so,” Pete said, climbing into the ambulance to pick up trash.

“You let me know if they come back,” Al said. “I don't mind having patients tonight, unless they turn out to be you.”



Pete pursed his lips. Only the young, green medics tried to play through the pain and John Wayne their way through sickness or adversity. The seasoned professionals knew that they became liabilities in a big hurry if they left themselves untreated and attempted to do their jobs with injury or illness. Besides, their next patient could be an elderly person or someone with a compromised immune system who could die from whatever minor stomach bug Pete had picked up over the course of his job. Still, the

symptoms hadn't recurred since they'd loaded the patient in the ambulance for the wild lights-and-sirens ride to the hospital, and the adrenaline dump from the high-acuity call slowly eroded from him, leaving the wrung-out feeling which accompanied the lowered heart rate and blood pressure. He transitioned from fight-or-flight to rest-and-digest smoothly, taking lots of deep breaths, relieved that calls like that still got his juices flowing – he wasn't a total burnout yet.

He rose from aching knees, looking down at the freshly scrubbed floor and walls of his ambulance, no trace of blood or gore remaining from the nasty call they'd run. He hopped down and gave a fond thought to the cold bottles of water and soft drinks in the ER breakroom fridge – and even the occasional ice cream sandwich, if the gods were feeling generous that night – and took two steps towards the back of the ER when the queen mother of all abdominal cramps hit him, bending him double and driving the breath from his lungs in a rush. He couldn't groan or even swear, only clench his teeth and try not to sink back to his abused knees.

Al was at his side in an instant. “They're back,” he said simply.

“Jesus,” Pete panted. “I gotta get to a bathroom.”

He staggered through the ER doors and into the EMS room immediately to the side of the entrance, pushing into the cramped bathroom and locking the door behind him. He dimly heard the sound of Al calling the ambulance out of service momentarily, delayed at the ER “for paperwork.” Bless him – if he'd been in a more playful mood, he would have broadcast via dispatch to the whole system that he was out of service so his partner could take a dump.

Catching his breath momentarily, Pete loosened his laden duty belt with all his tools and radio and fumbled awkwardly with the hook closure of his pants with one hand, the other steadying him against the wall. Dropping his pants and pulling up his shirt tail, he stopped momentarily and gawked at what appeared to be the source of the cramps – nestled into the folds beneath his formidable pot belly, digging cruelly into his flesh, was a pair of pink satin panties trimmed in black lace. He could feel the thong back nestled uncomfortably into the crack of his ass and his penis and scrotum crushed roughly against his body now, sorting the sensations through the haze of pain he felt.

“What the fuck?” he mused.

Mystified, Pete slipped his boots and duty belt off and slipped the painfully tight panties down his hairy legs and held them up before his eyes. There

was no reasonable explanation that he could find – the firefighters couldn't have stolen his Jockeys and replaced them with a little pink thong while he slept, and he certainly hadn't accidentally slipped into a pair of panties this morning and then have such an event slip his mind entirely. And why had he just suddenly felt the pain? He couldn't remember changing underwear or anything of the sort. How could he have gone to sleep in the station dormitory in a pair of tightie-whities with failing elastic and woken up barely an hour and a half later in a pair of satin panties with no knowledge?



It *had* to be an elaborate practical joke. Kellerman and his boys must have done it, maybe even Al was in on it with his access to their sedatives. Maybe they drugged him somehow. But the little tag on the thong carried a Tommy Hilfiger label. Way too pricey and altogether too fashionable for the average firefighter to spend money on for a joke, and Pete doubted that anyone would willingly volunteer a wife or girlfriend's old underwear for the exercise either. Besides, they looked brand new. And even the firefighters weren't dumb enough to buy a pair in a woman's small size and hope to get them over Pete's butt. He didn't know how anyone had even gotten the underwear onto him in the first place, since he'd almost had to cut the scrap of fabric in half with his trauma shears in order to remove them. *No, if this is a practical joke, Pete thought, it's absolutely epic. Kellerman has outdone himself.* He wadded the panties up and stuffed them into the bellows pocket on the right leg of his uniform pants and tried to get used to the feeling of polyester against his bare balls with no degree of success.

He flushed the toilet and washed his hands to give the proper audio and walked out into the break room with every expectation of seeing Al pointing a camera and laughing at the elaborate joke they'd played. But he met only a look of genuine concern and a partner who handed him a bottle of water with a sympathetic expression.

"You okay, there, Petey?" he asked.

Pete cleared his throat awkwardly. "Uh, yeah. No worries. Just the trots, that's all."

"Didn't look like any trots I've ever seen," Al mentioned. "You want to go talk to one of the docs?"

"And cool my heels in Quick Care for three hours waiting on an abdominal CT which isn't gonna show anything? I'll pass, thanks," Pete said. "No, I just need some Gatorade and probably some Imodium to cork me up. I'm fine, partner, really. No reason to worry."

"You're sure."

"I wouldn't bullshit you about something like this," Pete said honestly. "Just the runs."

Al gave him one last searching look before shrugging and leading their way back outside to the waiting ambulance. Pete piled into the passenger seat and began typing his report on the portable computer while Al called their unit back into service and took them back to the station and, hopefully, a little bit more sleep before shift change.

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Sleep came fitfully at best as Pete laid down, his report finished and filed and the truck restocked with supplied. He tossed and turned, unable to tune out the snores and farts of the firefighters in the adjoining dorm or the myriad little knocks and clicks and other noises of the station. Finally he dug into the bellows pocket of his uniform pants and withdrew the pair of pink satin Hilfiger panties, looking at them in the darkness, turning them over and over in his hands and wondering just how in the hell they'd wound up on his body. Thinking about it in detail, Pete had ruled out the possibility that the firefighters could have even been capable of such a stunt even with Al's assistance. If he'd been drugged, then he would be feeling side effects and after-effects of the medication and would have a sore spot on an arm or leg to indicate an injection site. Plus, if he'd been out hard enough for a group of men to strip him and change his underwear, then he most likely

wouldn't have woken up so easily to the tones from the alert pager so much later. And it couldn't have been anything they carried on the ambulance – Al liked a good joke as much as anyone but he had a wife and three kids and would never have placed his medical license in jeopardy by filching sedatives from supply. The DEA had every EMS crew sign them in and out and count them whenever they changed possession. The count wouldn't have come up right if he'd used any of their controlled substances. Maybe something expired? Not possible either – the district commanders took possession of all their expired narcotics and sedatives and delivered them back to the DEA for disposal. Pete had heard of some medics taking the good stuff out of the controlled substance vials and refilling them with saline, but Al wasn't that dumb. Pete had known the man for six years, worked with him. Al cared about his patients and would never have another medic inject them with saline instead of medications that could actually help them so he could feed a habit. It just didn't make any sense at all, how Pete could have wound up in a pair of panties unknowingly in the middle of a shift. He spent the rest of the night racking his brain for how it might actually have happened. Dim shafts of sunlight limned the outside edges of the thick wool blankets tacked up over the windows by the time Pete stuffed the scanty underwear back into a pocket and pushed his legs over the edge of the bed and stuffed his feet into his boots.

His feet slid around in his boots wildly and his pants slid down his legs as he stood. He grabbed them by the beltloops and pulled them up in a panic, clapping from the tiny EMS dormitory into the restroom in boots suddenly several sizes too large. The sleeves of his shirt drooped down past his elbows, as well, making him look for all the world like a small child playing dress-up in his father's EMS uniform.

Pete clicked on the light in the restroom and took a look at himself in the mirror questioningly. His clothes – formerly well-fitting to his six-foot-one, two-hundred-sixty pound frame – now hung on him like drapes. No way could anyone have replaced them – Pete had been awake and wearing them the entire night. With a start, Pete suddenly realized that it wasn't his clothing that had been replaced with ill-fitting replicas. The uniform shirt remained the same adult male XL it had always been, the pants the selfsame 42x32 with the XL belt and the same men's size 11½ boots. Somehow it was Pete who had shrunk. He gathered up the loose hang of his oversized clothing and looked at himself in shocked puzzlement. On tiptoes he couldn't have topped five foot six now, and he stepped onto the beaten-up bathroom scale and watched the dial spin behind the cracked acrylic before coming to rest on 130 pounds.

“This is impossible,” Pete whispered. “I'm dreaming, that's what it is.”

He pinched himself roughly and muttered a curse.

“How can this be happening? People don't just shrink, do they?”

In a panic, Pete dug through his locker and pulled out several medical texts, sitting on the floor of the locker room and thumbing through glossaries and indices looking for any kind of medical condition which had symptoms of memory loss, precipitous weight loss and loss of height and bone mass. Unsurprisingly, he found nothing. Checking the watch which now hung precariously from his much less bulky wrist, he saw that dispatch would be dropping alert tones to all the on-duty crews in the county in five minutes to wake them up and ready them for shift change. Somehow, Pete had to get dressed. He had to be present for shift change to give his pass-on report, no way he could just hide in the bathroom and wait for everyone to leave the station for breakfast or a call before creeping out to his car in his oversized uniform. He had to figure something out.

Pushing himself up from the cold tile floor and attempting to shake the pins and needles from his numb legs, Pete looked around at the veritable ocean of fabric piled around him and wondered what to do. First thing that occurred to him was to stop walking around bare-dicked in the station in case someone walked in. But his Jockey shorts had somehow vanished. He only had the one option.

It didn't even faze him when he picked up the thong panties and stepped into the legs. He pulled them up with a little foot-to-foot shimmy and found that they fit him quite well now. He looked into the mirror and even went as far as to reach in and readjust his cock and balls a bit to make the front lie a bit smoother and prettier. Strangely enough, the sight brought a little bit of a smile to his face.

I really need to shave my legs, though, he thought and then gasped at the realization.

“What in the fuck is happening to me?” he asked his reflection in the mirror *sotto voce*. His reflection offered no answer.

Sighing and fighting back what felt disturbingly like tears, Pete pulled up his pants over the panties and stuffed the tail of the cavernously oversized undershirt into the waist. Somehow, the pants seemed to fit now. He opened the waist and looked at the tag in shock. No more comfortable and familiar 42x32. Now they read simply “Size 5.” A women's size.

He had checked the tag the instant he'd taken them off. It had been 42x32. He remembered it clearly. The clothes had changed somehow, without his even noticing.

"Magic isn't real," he reminded himself weakly. "This can't be happening."

The shirt remained its old XL size, so Pete tucked in a good half a mile of shirt-tail into the waistband and hoped no one noticed how low the short sleeves hung on his arms. Hell, that was the smallest of what he hoped no one noticed. He fully expected to walk out into the dayroom in a moment and be the source of no end of feeble jokes from the firefighters and possibly even his partner.

Taking a deep breath to steel himself, Pete opened the door and stepped out.

"Heard y'all got a gory gunshot wound last night," Lt. Kellerman said amiably, sipping coffee and sitting on the arm of the dilapidated sofa.

"Yeah, ran it with Engine 11," Pete said, waiting for the bomb to drop. "Nasty stuff."

Kellerman chuckled. "Never a dull moment," he commented, then stood stiffly, knuckling his back. "You want breakfast?"

The smell of bacon and eggs wafted in from the kitchen, dawning slowly on Pete's numb haze. His stomach growled but he didn't dare. Not in the state he was in.

"No thanks," Pete said.

"Oh, yeah, that's right," Kellerman said. "Al told me you got a case of the runs last night."

He went wordlessly into the kitchen and Pete goggled. The whole time, staring at him in his ill-fitting clothes, and Kellerman didn't even notice. Like nothing out of the ordinary stood across from him whatsoever. Pushing himself, Pete went into the kitchen and got himself a glass of water.

"Morning, sunshine," John Hanks said, stirring scrambled eggs in a skillet on the stove.

"You look like shit," Keith added. "Rough night?"

"Yeah, kinda tossed and turned," Pete said.

“You could've come in and spooned with me, sweetie,” Keith said.

“Yeah, but then you'd never call me,” Pete said back weakly.

“Won't be long before you can go home and sleep it off,” Al said, filling a coffee mug from the machine. “Christ knows I am, and I didn't have to stay up an extra hour writing a report.”

“No such luck,” Pete said. “I have a nursing clinical at the PICU from nine o'clock to three. After that I can go home and sleep. Don't intend to let the door hit me in the ass on my way out this morning.”

“Don't blame you,” Kellerman said amiably. “Good thing you ain't married.”

“Why's that?”

“Cause you ain't got to deal with no fucking honey-do list the minute you hit the goddamned door like I do,” he said. “No matter how hard we ran the day before, she don't even let me put my shit down before she's on me with 'the gutters need to be cleaned' or 'my car needs the oil changed' or something like that.”

“Yeah, that seems a good trade for no pussy at all,” Pete commented. “Good thing I'm not married.”

“Don't knock it,” Kellerman said.

Shift change came and went without incident – to Pete's astonishment. The whole morning, no one registered the fact that Pete's shirt came down to his knees and bloused out of his waistband so much that he looked like a Smurf mushroom, and that the bottoms of his breast pockets were level with his belt. Or that he'd stuffed two more pairs of socks on and still threatened to walk out of his boots with every other step. Or that he was a mere fraction of his former size.

He signed over the narcotics and gave the pass-on report in a haze, mentioning that the truck was due for an oil change soon and that the brakes seemed to be going a little soft, that the local stroke center's CT scanner was down for the morning for routine maintenance and all possible stroke cases needed to be diverted to the stroke center in the neighboring county for evaluation. The oncoming crew – a sweet and round woman named Kelly Clark whose blonde hair now showed more grey than not and a thin, tall and quiet man named David Remington with a deep 'Barry White' bass voice whose principal topic of conversation was his newborn son these days – paid his changes no heed whatsoever, nodding at all the

right places during pass-on and accepting keys, narcotics, radios and alert pagers from the offgoing personnel.

As they walked out to the truck to remove their bunker gear and safety vests, Pete sidled alongside Kelly. He'd known her since paramedic school and had been one of the first ones she'd called when she got divorced. He considered her a close friend – as close as co-workers could be – and a rumor had even circulated around the system at one time that the two of them were sleeping together.

“Hey, Kel,” Pete began, uncertain how to proceed.

“Hey, sweetie,” she replied, giving him a sidelong hug. “Hey, are you losing weight?”

Pete tried not to laugh hysterically. “A little bit,” he said. *Nearly a hundred and forty pounds, and between the hours of three a.m. and seven a.m., actually. Along with about eight inches in height. Thanks for asking.*

“Hey, Kel, do you... um, do you notice anything... *different* about me?” he asked.

She stopped and looked him over head-to-toe. “New hair?” she asked sincerely.

“Seriously?” Pete asked. “You don't notice anything?”

She shrugged. “I said you've lost weight, what do you want from me?”

Pete let out a breath he hadn't realized he was holding. “Nothing. Everything's good.”

“You *have* done something with your hair, though,” Kelly said. “It looks different.”

He touched his thinning hair in shock. “It does?”

“Yeah,” Kelly replied. “I like it. It looks cute.”

Cute? Pete thought in shock. *You think my hair looks cute?*

“Um... thanks,” Pete said.

“We should hang out soon,” Kelly said. “I never get to see you any more.”

Pete thought back to the hedonistic beer blasts of their younger days and smiled fondly. “Yeah, we should,” he said. “Give me a call sometime, we’ll work something out.”

She gave him a smile over her shoulder as she climbed into the back of the ambulance to check the equipment. He stood there, just staring into space, wondering just what in all hell was happening.

* * *

At least I still have this, Pete thought as he gazed enraptured at the firm, round perfection of Maggie Delaney's ass in her peach-colored scrubs as she bent over to retrieve a suction kit from the bottom shelf of supply. The clinical rotation – required coursework to follow working nurses around in hospitals and get a 'feel' for the job – struck Pete as a waste of time, being firmly of the school that the best training came from being in the thick of it and learning as he went. But the nursing examination board did not see it the same way, and so Pete stood in his comfortable shoes in a pair of teal scrubs, watching nurses putter around the pediatric ICU and explain their jobs *ad nauseam* while the students took notes and tried to appear interested. Like most healthcare workers, Pete developed an allergy to pediatric cases early on and never cared much for the specialty, so his primary goal with this pediatric rotation consisted of getting it over with and getting as far from sick babies as he could.

He'd only just had time to shower and change into scrubs before turning around immediately and returning to the same hospital where he'd dropped the gunshot victim the night before. The man died on the operating table around the time Pete locked himself in the bathroom, struggling to deal with his changing size and the state of his clothing. Pete's callus, grown from long years of fighting against people's determination to die with questionable success, protected him from any sense of failure resulting from the man's death under a comfortable cloud of *easy come, easy go, you did everything you could*. Still, the events of last night took a formidable toll on him – the late night, high-adrenaline call and the subsequent inexplicable changes in his body and his clothing – and kept him stumbling and bumping into furniture throughout the rotation.

The only high point showed up in the form of Maggie Delaney, a tight-bodied young redhead with a hair-trigger smile and infectious belly laugh coupled with a slamming Playmate of the Month body and a sense of humor and potty-mouth that belonged in a firehouse much more than on the average ICU or surgical floor. Pete spent many happy hours in clinical rotations trying to imagine what she looked like beneath her baggy scrubs, but she adopted him as a father figure early on and contented herself with

minor teasing and flirting. Pete enjoyed the flirtation, to be sure, but determined to keep it light as well – she was half his age, after all – and did treasure the lingering looks at her backside and having a 'buddy' with the looks and body of a Bond girl.

“You look like hell,” she told him as they walked together towards the room of a two-month old with cystic fibrosis who needed constant suction of his airway to keep him breathing.

“You say the sweetest things,” Pete replied. “I had a rough night.”

“Incredibly exciting and fabulous ambulance things?” she asked brightly.

“Sure, whatever,” Pete grunted. “Blood and gore and no sleep. The usual.”

“I hope I never get as burned out as you,” she told him. “Blood and gore? Really?”

Even the supervisor nurse for the rotation listened now, everyone intent on the more dramatic face of medicine which, deep down, every one of them daydreamt about when they signed up. The hour-long dramas on TNT overlooked the mind-numbing boredom and endless paperwork which constituted the majority of healthcare and left everyone who knew the real story aching to hear of the really juicy stuff.

“Yeah,” Pete said softly. “Guy tried to kill himself last night, shot himself through the neck with a .38. Shattered the fourth and fifth cervical vertebrae, lacerated his thyroid and tore his jugular all to shit.”

“No shit? Wow,” Maggie said.

“We plugged him up and ran him in. He died on the table about two, three hours later. Can't believe he missed the brainstem in all of that. You could've driven a truck through that cavitation.”

Maggie's eyes sparkled a little bit at the thought of all that splatter-movie injury and being the lantern-jawed saver of lives; she actually showed some genuine attraction to him at that point and her nipples tented the front of her scrubs almost imperceptibly. “That sounds cool as nuts,” she commented.

“If you're into standing in humid ambulance bays breathing diesel fumes and scrubbing blood out of the back of a unit until four a.m., then yeah,” Pete said with a casual shrug. “It rocks.”

“God, you're a crusty old fucker,” she laughed. “That must have been cool.”

“I guess so,” Pete said with a shrug.

“Anything else cool?” she asked.

“Nope. County taxi service.”

“Taking Grandma to the ER all day?” she asked.

“You know it,” Pete said. “Stamping out pain and suffering wherever I go.”

“You should do something fun,” she said. “I worry about you, you know.”

“Aw, shucks, missy. You're gonna make me blush.”

“I *do*,” she protested. “What do you do, when you're not working?”

“Stay home,” I said. “Maybe go to the movies. Study.”

“And eat microwave dinners for one? Jesus, dude, that's *sad*. You need to get out.”

“Are you asking me on a date?” Pete said flirtatiously.

She blushed and looked demurely at the floor. “No, don't get the wrong idea,” she said softly.

He laughed to show no hard feelings and to cover a little bit of hurt. “I didn't. It was a joke, kid. Guys like me don't date girls like you, I get that. You wouldn't be into a balding, pudgy old burnout like me anyway. I'm not your type.”

“That's just it. You're *seriously* not my type.”

“That's what I just said.” I chuckled. “Is this the part where you make some joke about my receding hairline or my pot belly? Or just about my age?”

“No, it's the part where I make some joke about you having a penis,” she said quietly.

“Beg pardon?” Pete spluttered.

“Yeah, I'm not so into the whole dick thing,” Maggie confessed. “I'm only telling you because I don't want you feeling like nobody's interested.”

Believe me, Pete, if I was into that sort of thing, I would *totally* be interested.”

Pete sighed. “That was actually really sweet of you,” he said. “And I never would've guessed.”

“I don't exactly make it public,” she told him. “Nobody's business but mine, y'know?”

“Your secret is safe with me,” Pete told her. “Still, thanks for telling me.”

“You seem really cool,” she told him. “I always looked for you in our study group, y'know.”

“I study better on my own, actually,” Pete said. “It wasn't personal.”

“So, feel like coming out sometime?” she asked him. “As friends? Beats sitting at home alone.”

“Sure, why the hell not?” Pete said, setting up the suction catheter and laying the kit beside the small, pale infant in the bed. The on-duty nurse shouldered her way in front of him to take over for the procedure – Pete had performed thousands of suction procedures in the field, but the school's insurance wouldn't cover his doing it in the hospital as a student, so he had to stand to one side and let someone else do it while he watched.

“Give me digits and I'll call you,” she told him amiably.

“Do you two want to pay attention?” the supervisor nurse asked irritably.

“You need to pad under his shoulders to get the airway open manually first,” Pete shot back, equally as irritated. Getting corrected was one thing, but getting it from a girl fifteen years his junior and with her copping an attitude at the same time proved too much. The nurse jumped, looked down at what she was doing, and blushed scarlet.

Maggie hid her smile behind a fake cough and punched Pete companionably in the shoulder.

“Glad you enjoyed that,” Pete whispered.

“Girlfriend, you have no idea,” she replied.

Pete turned back to the procedure and paid a bit more attention by way of apology to the thoroughly chastised on-duty nurse. Several minutes

elapsed of watching the thick, sticky secretions from the baby's lungs run up the suction line and into the canister before it hit him what Maggie had said: *girlfriend*.

Pete wasn't sure which bothered him more – the fact that she'd said it, or the fact that it hadn't fazed him one bit.

NOTHING HAD FULLY PREPARED PETE Harrison for the shock of being called 'girlfriend,' much less the fact that no strong reaction arose in him by way of response. In fact, it felt *good*. He liked the feeling of belonging and an unfamiliar warm feeling which he could only identify as *sisterhood* surging in his chest at the mention of the word. The pressing business of his nursing clinical demanded his focus elsewhere, however, and Pete stumbled numbly through the remaining three hours, managing to both accomplish the tasks set before him and neatly avoid any further contact with the stunning Maggie Delaney at the same time. He didn't hang around in the cafeteria with the other nursing students this rotation as he normally did, choosing instead to gather his books and hustle to his car to fight the early afternoon traffic back to his austere apartment.

He pushed open the door and sagged against the doorframe, breathing a little hard. The stress and anxiety of the last days took its toll all at once, and Pete only managed to get the door shut behind him, kick off his shoes and pour himself a generous measure of scotch in a plastic fast-food tumbler before sinking bonelessly into his battered recliner.

“What the hell is *happening?*” he mused to the empty air, tipping a large amount of liquor down his mouth and barely tasting it. The familiar blast furnace began in his belly and he felt himself relax infinitesimally.

He looked down at the bag he'd dropped beside his recliner upon entry. His rumpled uniform from the night before peeked out of the flap and he reached down listlessly to draw it into his lap. The first item he noticed, nestled between the folds of navy blue and dingy white, caught the light slanting between his cheap blinds in a vivid slash of pink. He held the scanty panties – pink satin trimmed in black lace, the scandalous kind of women's underwear worn to entice and to attract – up to see them better, examining the designer label and the tiny size, the cut and color of the fabric, even the strange but telltale feminine smell exuding from them.

“Okay, Pete, settle down and *think,*” he bade himself, slugging a bit more scotch to fortify himself. He'd conducted similar conversations with himself on the ambulance during rough calls – Pete believed firmly that no problem couldn't be made easier by the judicious application of a quiet moment to

think it through. Unwavering belief in that philosophy had saved many lives.

“There's no way – *no fucking way* – that anyone could have slipped these on me while I slept and I wouldn't have noticed,” he said. “And there's no way someone could have replaced my pants while I was sitting there wide awake. And there's no reasonable explanation for how I lost weight *and* height in the space of a few hours and had no other symptoms or aftereffects.”

Another belt of scotch. “And nothing in my life should have ever made me feel comfortable, much less *blasé*, about being called 'girlfriend.' No reasonable explanations. So that only leaves *unreasonable* explanations.”

He sighed. “Like magic,” he muttered.

Pete Harrison believed in what he could see and touch and affect. He'd read and been to the movies like everyone else, he knew what the common definitions of magic entailed. Pete had also, once upon a time, dated a Wiccan girl who attempted to expand his horizons and ultimately dumped him over his jaded, narrow-minded scoffing. Nothing in the meandering explanations of magic she offered him could have explained what was happening. These events denoted a *new* kind of magic, something outside any conventional or recognizable definition Pete knew of the word, something no one who talked about such things could describe.

So where – and more importantly, *why* – had it come from? Who would want to do something like this to him? And what, precisely, was *this*? Those questions couldn't be effectively answered with the information that Pete possessed.

“So whoever it is doing this, they seem to want me more like a girl,” he said aloud, finishing his scotch and contemplating another before setting the empty plastic tumbler on his coffee table. Why someone would want Pete to be more effeminate eluded him, but the evidence at hand overwhelmed any other explanations. “So the question is, who would want me to be a girly boy?”

He racked his brain. Ex-girlfriends, people he'd slighted or hurt in the past, even families of patients who died on Pete's watch who blamed him, no one presented to him as someone angry enough or capable of such a thing. Maybe it wasn't malicious? Maybe someone who believed this helped him somehow?

The scotch and stress claimed him finally, dropping his eyelids across his blurring sight. He snored in his recliner, clutching last night's clothes, and did not wake until the next morning.

* * *

Pete had traded a shift with another medic and worked the next morning. He felt better for having slept fourteen hours and woke in plenty of time for a long soak in the shower and a breakfast of toast and scrambled eggs before he had to put on a fresh uniform and head out to the station. He slipped into a clean undershirt and underwear and then uniform pants. He purposefully refused to look at the sizes, just concentrating on the adequate fit. He loaded his pockets with wallet, keys and phone the same way he always did but paused a moment over the unfamiliar thought that he needed a little more storage, a place to carry a hairbrush and a mirror and some other things. The thought lingered in the back of his mind as he made his halting way to Medic 31, his traded station. Medic 31 necessitated a bit longer drive than usual, so Pete climbed into his weathered and worn Nissan about fifteen minutes earlier than usual and slurped coffee from a thermal mug in the stop-and-go traffic on the freeway.

He pulled in shortly before shift change and received the pass-on from the tired medics going off. His partner for the day, Mike Taylor, waited on the front porch of the station, slurping coffee and smoking a cigarette. He grunted a noncommittal good morning as Pete walked out to the truck to begin the morning equipment check.

The first call dropped about forty-five minutes later, while Pete and Mike went through the reams of pointless emails asking for shift trades and trying to sell used furniture and lawn equipment. The two of them made their way lights-and-sirens to the call – an 85-year-old woman with respiratory difficulty – and got her to the ER without event. After moving her from the stretcher to the bed and giving his report to the nurse, Pete stepped outside to begin the process of restocking and cleaning the ambulance and met Mike on his way in from the designated smoker's Siberia around the corner of the ER from the ambulance bay.

Something strange seized Pete at that moment and he tugged Mike's arm as he passed.

“Hey, Mike, d'you think I could bum one of those smokes from you?” Pete asked, not believing the words coming out of his own mouth.

Mike performed a quick double-take. “I thought you quit, like, five years ago.”

"I did," Pete protested. "It's, uh... it's been a stressful couple of days. Just found myself in the mood for one. D'you mind?"

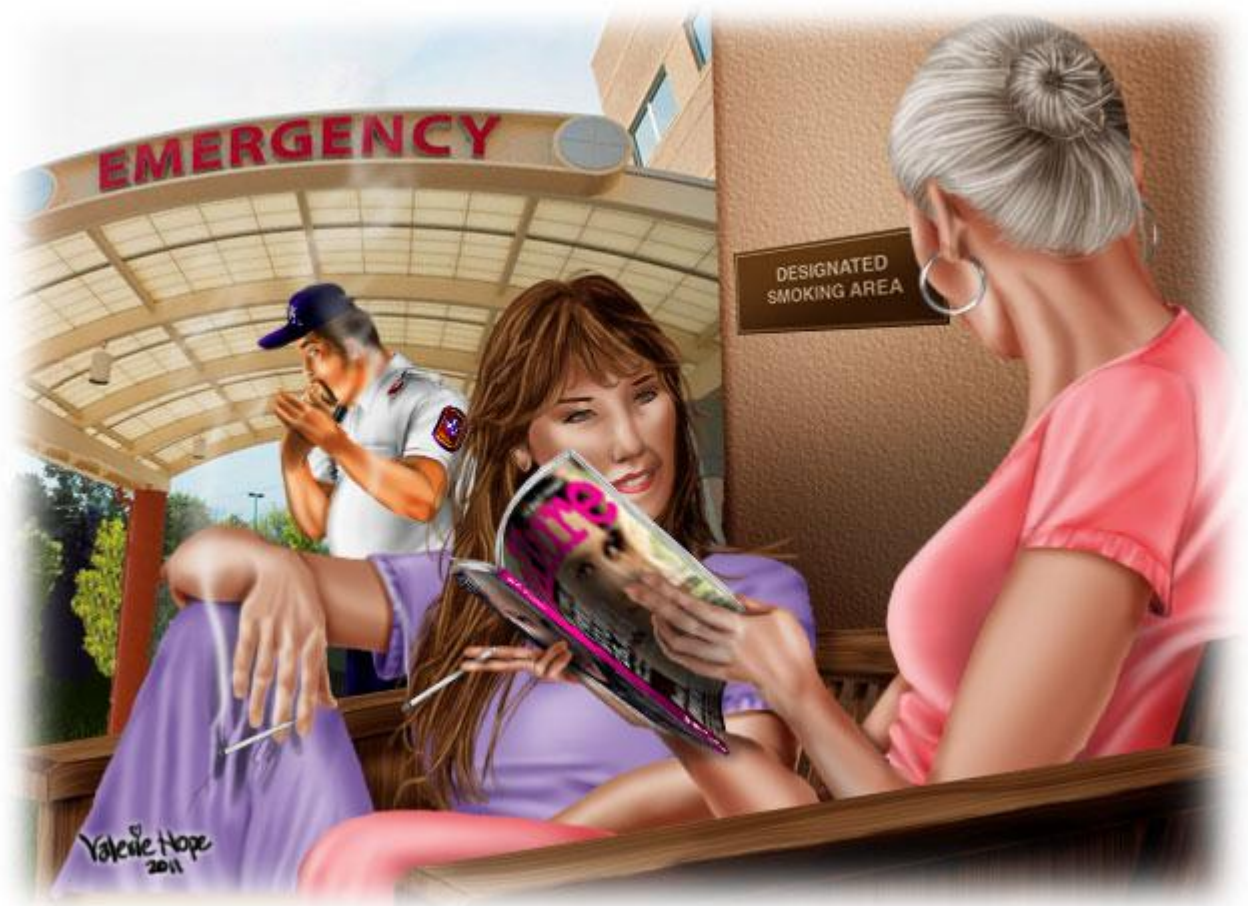
Mike shrugged. "Feel like I'm corrupting you, but sure. Here you go."

He handed over a disposable lighter and a bent Marlboro which Pete straightened with his fingers while crossing the twenty yards or so between the back door of the ER and the smoker's patio. Two nurses

sat on the bench there, smoking and having what seemed a private conversation, so Pete lit up well away from them so not to interrupt.

"...read this thing about braids," one of the nurses, a swan-necked beauty with a orthopaedic rehab tag on her ID, was saying as she pointed to an article in the copy of *Allure* magazine in her hands. "There's some really cute things in here."

"I can't braid for shit," the other nurse commented ruefully.



“Oh, honey, it explains everything you need to know. This magazine is like a 'how-to' for everything. I didn't even know how to do eye makeup before I read some of their articles. It's what my brother's teenage daughter is using to learn.”

“Cool,” the second nurse said, looking more closely. “Let me see.”

Pete gave up after about four puffs from the harsh, throat-scouring cigarette, tossing it in the sand-filled cannister next to the bench while stifling coughs originating from his toenails. Still, something about the two nurses at their leisure, taking a break from promoting health and wellness to sneak outside for something decidedly unhealthy and indulgent, struck Pete as devilishly sexy. The propensity for tobacco use among healthcare workers would surprise most people not in the know – Pete knew several cardiologists and pulmonologists who ducked outside for cigarettes at every opportunity – and always presented a dichotomy which Pete found both amusing and somehow irresistible when done by an attractive woman.

He returned to the ambulance still looking over his shoulder.

“Cute, huh?” Mike asked, nodding knowingly to the sight of the shapely nurses occupying the bench. “I didn't understand why the hell you wanted to throw away five years of sobriety on a whim until I remembered the eye candy over there.”

Pete tried to overlook the slight towards his character with good grace. “You got me,” he muttered.

Mike continued his cleaning, taking his time going back into service after the call – the mark of an experienced field medic. *The next call always drops*, the fundamental rule of emergency service taught new medics. *Don't be in a big rush to meet it*. Exhaustion and burnout awaited the medic who didn't take his time and pace himself, forcing good people into early retirement and desk jobs. Anyone in the job for over three years knew to sleep, eat, pee and poop when the chance presented itself and not give into the temptation to jump immediately back into service after every call.

“So how did it go? Did you talk to them?” Mike asked.

“No such luck,” Pete replied. “They were kinda absorbed in their own stuff over there.”

“Oh, well. Better luck next time,” Mike said. “So, you want to go get something for lunch?”

“I usually just hit a grocery store,” Pete explained. “Get food for the whole shift. Lots cheaper.”

“Sounds good to me,” Mike said. He shut the back doors of the ambulance with an air of finality and climbed back into the driver's seat so Pete could finish his report. Pete banged away on the laptop computer in the front seat as Mike threaded through traffic towards the only supermarket in their service district. They secured the unit with the engine running – the air-conditioner in the patient compartment had to run in order to keep their medications within the acceptable temperature range – and went inside. They split up to shop, red baskets dangling from their hands.

Ordinarily, Pete bee-lined for the frozen dinners and loaded up on the high-sodium, low-fuss meals which fueled his existence. But something just seemed to draw him elsewhere today, towards the deli case and the produce aisle. He looked down at the contents of his basket and jumped in shock. Bottled vitamin water and diet soda, prepackaged salad and carrot sticks, an apple and an orange. Almost as if someone else shopped for him – nothing in the basket remotely resembled anything he would have voluntarily bought for himself. The sickeningly healthy assortment of food *appealed*, though. Like he *should* eat like this, and even like *heal/ways* ate like this. The fact that it didn't bother him bothered him more than anything. The strange, unsettled feeling stayed with him all the way to checkout.

He waited a few minutes before his turn came and he emptied his basket on the conveyor belt, trying not to look at his purchases. The cashier gave him the usual cheerful spiel as he began running Pete's new diet across the scanner, saying “Did you find everything you need? Any ice, or stamps?”

Pete sighed, deciding that giving in to the wave propelling him towards god-knew-what appeared preferable to fighting it and losing every step of the way. *Oh, what the fuck*, he thought resignedly.

“Just this,” he said, flipping an *Allure* magazine from the rack near the register on top of his food.

* * *

Pete breathed a profound sigh of relief at his coincidental choice of trading stations and shifts with his friend. Medic 31 was a stand-alone EMS station, not shared with a fire crew. Even though Mike apparently continued the tradition of not noticing the feminizing changes affecting Pete, Pete doubted he could have sat in the dayroom thumbing

through *Allure* magazine and not draw some derisive comments. Pete's commitment to not fighting the changes held tentatively at best and he struggled with feelings of panic and uncertainty upon the discoveries that he found the salad he ate delicious and the articles in the magazine deeply absorbing and interesting. Tired of the conflicting feelings rushing through him, he dropped the magazine into his bag and stood from the recliner.

"I'm gonna try to get a nap in," he told Mike.

"Good luck," Mike said, not looking away from the game of FreeCell he played on the station computer. Pete gathered up his pharmacology book – the perfect cure for insomnia – and flopped onto his bed in the small room, his former energy from the full night's sleep sapped in a haze of anxiety.

His eyelids drooped without the help of the pharmacology textbook and he rolled onto his side to doze in earnest. Something poked cruelly into his leg, something in the bellows pocket of his uniform pants that he could have sworn wasn't there before.



Pete swung his legs over the edge of the bed – still taken aback by feeling his feet dangle several inches from the floor due to his decreased height – and dug in his pocket. His fingers closed around and withdrew a long sharp-cornered rectangle and a smaller, rigid cylinder. Pete snapped on the bedside lamp and waited for his eyes to adjust to the light. He held a pack of long cigarettes – Virginia Slims Luxury Lights 120's, the long and skinny 'girly' smokes made specifically to appear elegant and sexy – and a pink disposable lighter. But even that revelation paled beside the long, square-cut acrylic nails, polished bright in a white-tipped French manicure, which tipped his fingers and overhung the tips by a good three-quarters of an inch.

“Jesus,” he breathed. “Hooker nails? Really?”

Something occurred to Pete in that moment. *The nurse at the ER, he thought. She had a long French manicure and I remember thinking they looked sexy. Same with the cigarettes. Amanda Lewis used to smoke these, back when I dated her in college, and I thought they made her look like a*

movie star. They always turned me on. I guess if I think it's sexy – or thought it was sexy, maybe – then I wind up with it somehow? How in the hell is this happening?

“I hope I can still start an IV with these things,” he said, somehow certain that if he attempted to cut them off they'd grow right back within the hour. He'd seen medics and nurses and techs with long nails that didn't slow them down one bit, and his fingers seemed preternaturally graceful and elegant as he turned the cigarette pack over in his hands.

A quiet knock came at the door. The thought of having to interact with another human being twisted Pete's guts with worry, so he dove into a truly childish but still effective ploy, stuffing the cigarettes back into his pocket and laying down quickly and pretending to be asleep.

“Pete?” Mike's voice came quietly through the door. “Pete?”

Pete pretended to ignore him, even adding a light *faux* snore for effect.

Mike knocked again, a bit more insistent. “Amber?”

“Yeah?” Pete answered immediately.

What the fuck? I just answered to Amber? My name isn't Amber, it's... it's...

Hasn't it always been Amber? I'm pretty sure I had another name, once, but...

“Amber, there's a call for you,” Mike said. “District Command.”

“I'll be right there,” he croaked, stuffing feet into boots suddenly not so terribly oversized as before.

He stumbled out of bed and into the cramped EMS office, picking up the handset laying beside the phone. He pressed it to his ear and mumbled a muffled “H'lo?”

“Hey, it's Kenny,” the shift commander said over the line. “Listen, HR is pestering us about insurance again. I have to re-file everybody's health plan and I need your full name, date of birth and social. You okay with doing this over the phone?”

“Sure, whatever,” he replied.

“Okay, let me grab a pen. Okay, shoot. Full name.”

Peter Ellis Harrison. "Amber Elizabeth McRory. M-C-R-O-R-Y."

"Got it. Birthdate?"

April 11th, 1968. Three months before the moon landing. "January 23rd, 1986."

Jesus, I'm only twenty-five?

"Great. Social?"

"442-89-7321," he replied. *At least that hasn't changed.*

"Okay. I have you down for the \$1000 deductible and the \$25 copay," he said. "Plus vision and dental. Is that still what you want."

Amber sighed. "Better sign me up for the free health screenings," he said without thinking. "I'm way overdue for a mammogram."

"Sure, no problem," Kenny said brightly, not even pausing at the request. "Says here, that's an additional \$11 out of your check on the first of every month, is that okay by you?"

"Sure," Amber replied. "Is that it?"

"Yep," Kenny replied. "Thanks, Amber. HR will send you a letter this week. Still at the same address?"

"Yeah," he replied.

"Have a safe shift," Kenny said. The phone went dead.

Amber sank into the office chair and buried his face in his long-nailed hands. Tears burned behind his eyelids, tears of fear and frustration and impotence which Amber fought as hard as he was able. It wouldn't do to break down in tears on the job, even though a very persistent voice in the back of his head insisted that crying was just something that *happened* and was nothing to feel shame towards.

"No, dammit," he muttered in something approaching desperate rage. "No, that's *not* okay."

"Did you say something?" Mike called from the dayroom.

"No," Amber said with an air of finality. "No problem."

He considered retreating back into the bedroom and burying himself under the covers – maybe even giving in to the tears threatening to burst from him – but the option escaped from him as the alert pager blared to life, shattering the tense silence.

“Medic 31, Dispatch, Medic 31, Dispatch. Respond to a rollover MVC, the 12,000 block of North IH-35 northbound proper, on the median. Adult male, pinned in. Move your traffic to tach channel South Med 2, responding with Engine 8 and Rescue 3.”

Amber keyed up his radio. “31 received.”

They hightailed it to the truck and left the station sirens wailing. A rollover MVC – motor vehicle collision – with a patient still pinned inside required a focused and coordinated effort on the part of all rescuers, made much more dangerous by the traffic whizzing by and the danger of cutting the car apart with pneumatic tools. The sooner the medic unit arrived on scene, the better the outcome for the patient in almost every case. Amber twisted the dial on the radio to change their channel from Primary to South Med 2 so they could hear the traffic between the rescuers already there.

“...one patient, unconscious, still in the driver's seat,” a voice said in mid-sentence as the radio readjusted. “The door is open but he's in between the roof and the dashboard. Glass everywhere. Bring us two rams and two air bags.”

The pneumatic rams and air bags would force the roof and dashboard apart, Amber knew, and allow the patient to be extricated from the wreck. The firefighters would hold the patient's spine stable while they moved him, but the fact that he wouldn't respond boded ill. Head injuries made for dicey medical transports.

They arrived at the huge scene moments later, shrugging into reflective safety vests and grabbing bags and a backboard on their way. One of the faceless police officers which crawled all over the scene approached them alongside a fire lieutenant whom Amber didn't know.

“Witnesses say he hit the center divider at about 70 and flipped over,” the officer said.

“Responsive only to pain. Looks like he wasn't restrained,” the lieutenant added.

“How long?” Mike asked.

“About six minutes,” the lieutenant said. “We have the rams placed, we just have to fire them up. Problem is, he's going to drop the minute that pressure comes off. We need to rig a spider harness so we can lower him down and not lose control of the spine on the way down.”

“Better get in there and start a line, then,” Mike said. “He's gonna need a bolus once that pressure comes off.”

“Somebody here want to talk to me?” Amber said aloud, annoyed. “I'm only the attending medic.”

“Hm? Oh, sorry,” the lieutenant said. “Just stand back, okay, we'll handle the rough stuff.”

Why, you condescending little shit, Amber thought acidly. Instead of venting his spleen on the hapless firefighter the way he so richly deserved, Amber just shouldered past him and wormed his way into the wreck, wriggling past the shattered passenger's side door and onto the roof of the car beside the patient who dangled limply from between the dashboard and the crushed roof of the car. A firefighter contorted his body next to them, holding the patient's spine in neutral position.

“Gimme an 18-gauge,” Amber barked over her shoulder. When the large-bore IV start kit didn't appear in his gloved hand, tented at the fingertips by his new long nails, in seconds, he snapped his fingers impatiently.

Someone shoved a rolled-up start kit into his palm in a tight-packed 'burrito' – IV catheters and a saline lock rolled up in a rubber tourniquet – and he tore the wrappers open with his teeth, moving quickly to puncture the vein and secure it with tape. The flushed IV line didn't require the impatient snapping of fingers this time, and Amber smiled grimly. If they wanted to act like Amber had never run a goddamn rollover pin-in before, fine, but they better not let their shitty attitude adversely affect patient care. He hooked up the IV line and started the fluid running.

Amber checked the patient's feet and saw the faint blue tinge around the ankles, showing constricted circulation somewhere above the patient's lower extremities. “Set me up an amp of bicarb,” he snapped and didn't have to wait long at all for the thick pre-filled syringe to be handed in. Amber pushed the buffering medication into the IV hurriedly, building up a 'safety net' in the patient's blood to offset the inevitable acidity which would come when all the toxins and microclots building above the area of constriction released into systemic circulation.

“Run it wide,” Amber commanded to the firefighter – the lieutenant from earlier, she noted with bitter satisfaction – and watched him open the IV fully, running the saline fluid into the patient's vasculature as quickly as it would go. Once the patient was out of the vehicle, Amber would start another line and run the fluid twice as fast. Soon it would be a question of trying to keep the blood pressure high enough to push blood and oxygen past the increasing intracranial pressure building up around the patient's brain. This call was going to be touch and go.

“We ready?” the head of the extrication team asked.

“Go,” Amber said, nodding.

With a hiss of air and a rumble of portable compressors, air flowed down the heavy-duty lines and the pneumatic rams pushed in mechanical unison, prying the dashboard down and away from the patient with a shriek of protesting metal. The patient sagged in the spider-harness and the firefighters lowered him gently to the ground beside the twisted wreckage of his car. Amber leapt in front of the firefighters to be first to apply a c-collar and a quick assessment, his trauma shears in hand ready to cut away the patient's clothes.

Amber attempted to bend in the middle to check the stability of the pelvis and found that he couldn't bend. No matter how hard he pressed himself forward, he could only fold at the waist, his shoulder's wouldn't move. And he noticed real difficulty drawing a deep breath, to boot. Red-faced, Amber sank to his knees and assessed the patient from one side while the firefighters rolled him onto a backboard and secured him in place.

Flustered and a little alarmed, Amber stood stiffly and walked very straight-backed alongside the patient to the ambulance where the stretcher – and Mike – waited.

“Somebody... set me up... another... liter bag... inside,” he panted roughly, unable to catch his breath at all. He levered himself up into the patient compartment with an effort and sank gladly onto the bench seat beside the patient, starting the second IV in the patient's other arm after taking a blood pressure.

Mike appeared in the back door, holding a blood-smear'd drivers' license. “His name is David Sanders and he's 34 years old. No medic alert tags or anything, no history.”

“Did they find a cell phone? He's wearing a wedding ring.”

“Still looking, hon.”

“Let's get gone,” Amber said. “Cops can sort it out.”

He performed a quick check of the patient's airway as Mike peeled away from the scene, sirens blaring and air-horn vibrating through the floor of the patient compartment. Getting to the trauma center, some five and a half miles away through some of the busiest freeways and surface streets in the region, would be a trick in and of itself.

Amber attempted to reach across the patient to attach a pulse oximeter to the patient's finger and start cleaning him off enough to affix EKG electrodes and found that strange rigid resistance around his midsection as before. Distractedly he rapped a gloved knuckle against his belly and heard an odd solid *knock* at the contact. Circumstances dictated that he force it from his mind and concentrate on other things, but the morbid *what next?* curiosity persisted throughout the transport and the rest of the call. Much less that Mike – if not a friend, then at least a close buddy for nearly a decade – had called him *hon* in front of witnesses and no one, not even Amber, had reacted to it at all. Or the firefighters on scene and their condescending, patronizing treatment. He fumed all the way to the hospital and muttered below his breath even as he took the patient out of the back.

“I cannot *believe* those fuckers,” he hissed. “Treating me like a fucking green rookie out there.”

“They were just looking out for you,” Mike said.

“Bullshit,” Amber muttered. “And *you*, for that matter. What's the idea of jumping on *my* call?”

“I dunno,” Mike said sheepishly.

“You think I can't handle it or something? Buddy, I've been running wrecks like that – *worse* than that – for years,” Amber protested. “Fucking knuckledragging firefighters are one thing, but no way am I gonna take that kind of shit from my own *partner*.”

“Sorry,” Mike said. “Relax, willya? You don't need to be such a bitch about it.”

Amber drilled into him with his eyes. “Wanna repeat that?”

“Sorry,” Mike repeated. “I didn't mean anything by it.”

“I damn sure hope not,” Amber said, then turned the corner into the trauma room and the waiting stat team and started giving the report as they lifted the backboarded patient from the stretcher to the bed.

* * *

The anger and outrage Amber harbored from the call lasted all the way back to the station and halfway through the report. Finally, the demands of his bladder interrupted his seething and he remembered the strange, stiff feeling which prevented any motion above his waist on his way to the bathroom,

necessitating a quick detour into the dorm. Standing before the full-length mirror in the small room, Amber lifted up his shirt and looked in disbelief at the pink satin corset laced tightly across his midsection, trimmed in black lace to match the sexy panties that appeared on him the night before. The shapewear prevented all but the shallowest of breaths and nipped Amber's waist into a disproportionately small diameter; the rigid boning stopped any bending or twisting from his waist to his shoulder, forcing him into perfect posture with shoulders proudly back and chest forward. Padded cups with nothing to fill them tented the front of his uniform shirt and made Amber feel a little bit sad to see.

“Now I *know* it's magic,” Amber whispered. He distinctly remembered wearing a cotton Fruit of the Loom undershirt this morning.

As disconcerting as it was to find himself in a lace-



trimmed corset without knowing how, a part of his brain reacted to the sexy, glamorous and utterly *feminine* look of the garment and the pleasing curve it added to his figure. Another instance of something he'd always considered sexy in the past coming back to haunt him – a few apartments ago, the former tenant bequeathed him a monthly issue of the Frederick's of Hollywood catalog which Amber enjoyed thoroughly. Particularly the sexy and alluring women in their corsets.

What's gonna be next, anyway? Amber wondered angrily. I think a helluva lot of shit is sexy. And some things that don't even go together. No way can I grow tits like Jenna Jameson and like Emily Deschanel at the same time. Unless somehow I got one of each.

Scared at what he might wake up with, Amber sat on his bed and resigned himself to another sleepless night, opening one of his nursing school texts and clicking on the bedside lamp to study. The thought of the distraction, getting lost in the physiology of the human body, overpowering his current troubles carried demanding appeal. He propped his head against the wall and opened the textbook to the next chapter.

“The Female Reproductive System and Treatment of Obstetrical and Gynecological Pathophysiology.”

Amber tossed the book on the floor. “I can't win.”

The alert pager decided his next move for him, drawing them back into the action with its typical uncaring insistence.

* * *

The clock turned over to midnight by the time Amber and Mike managed to get their obese patient into the bed at the local ER. A grossly overweight, smelly uncontrolled diabetic who refused to eat right or check his blood sugar and had no compunctions whatsoever about calling 911 to perform a task that he could just as easily prevent slumped like a sack of wet millet in the bed as Mike mumbled out a report. Amber pushed the stretcher into the hall and nearly ran down a very cute, round young ER tech pushing a respiratory cart in the other direction.

“Oh, sorry. Didn't see you,” Amber said.

“No problem,” the tech said.

“Haven't seen you around here before,” Amber commented. “Are you new?”

“Yeah, I started last week. My name's Jennifer.”

“Amber,” he replied. “Glad to meet you.”

“You, too. Busy tonight?”

“Yeah, so far,” Amber replied. “Hey, I don't want to keep you. Welcome to the team.”

“Thanks,” she said.

“By the way,” Amber commented as she started her cart back in motion, “I love your hair.” Amber had no idea where that comment originated inside him, but it just seemed like the right thing to say. And Jennifer *did* have pretty hair, shiny and thick brunette, hanging over her shoulders and down her back in a cascade of dense, kinky curls.

“Thanks, that's really sweet,” Jennifer said, smiling over her shoulder. “See you later, okay?”

“In all likelihood,” Amber said with a casual wave.

The stretcher went back together quickly and there was little to clean up – just toweling off the flop-sweat of the last patient and restocking a bag of IV fluid, leaving Amber ample time to hit the breakroom for a well deserved bottle of Diet Coke and a trip to the bathroom. Luckily, all the ER restrooms were one-holer unisex, keeping Amber in blissful ignorance of which one he might unthinkingly choose – gentlemen or ladies – in his haste to relieve himself. As it stood, something felt strangely comforting about standing in front of a toilet, and the sight of a penis, even nestled in a pair of pale pink cotton panties, relieved him greatly. He'd even managed to overlook the restriction of the corset over the last hour or so, having needed to rush out to the ambulance without taking time to remove it. The burgeoning familiarity with all things feminine disturbed him. It hadn't dawned on him how easily he began two difficult IV lines on the rollover wreck with the new, long manicure until that moment.

“Jesus, this is getting out of hand,” he mumbled to himself, knuckling his back through the stiff boning of the corset and scrubbing long-nailed fingers through his hair.

Hair which suddenly seemed much thick and much fuller than before.



Amber drew his hands in front of his face and saw tangled strands of thick, soft curls threaded between his fingers, lightening from his normal grey-streaked russet brown in front of his eyes into a light ash blonde, approaching platinum. Hair just like Jennifer's, Amber noted, only longer and a shade more in line with Amber's particular preferences. It finally stopped several inches below his shoulderblades, thick and curly enough to match the width of his shoulders and soft and springy with natural curl.

“Holy shit,” Amber breathed, staring in the mirror above the sink at the lush, thick blonde curls, finally noticing the startling pale green eyes that now sparkled back at him from a smooth, young face free of any blemish or scar. His brows had arched a bit and his cheekbones elevated, his chin and jaw narrowed enough to shave away all trace of masculinity from his visage but still leave him remotely recognizable as himself.

He touched his face in utter astonishment. “This is unbelievable,” he said. “I’m... *pretty*.”

He was. Not a face that would launch a thousand ships, by any stretch, but more than enough to merit a second or even a third look from any average joe. And from what Amber had learned from *Allure* magazine earlier that

day, a little bit of tweezing on the eyebrows, a little bit of lip plumper and some judicious application of powders and colors here and there and that face might actually achieve something close to stunning. But even with no makeup and the light sheen of tired sweat on his delicate brow, certainly easy on the eye.

Do I actually feel proud of how good I look? Amber thought in shock. The feeling shocked him with its sheer unfamiliarity – Amber began purposefully ignoring any thought of being attractive years ago, being quite simply too tired to go to the effort any more. Pride in appearance fit him about as well as his original uniform had, the first night of the changes, but back it came full force. Amber fought the urge to remain in front of the mirror and primp a little, contenting himself just to fluff up his new blonde mane with his fingers and offer his reflection a coquettish, playful wink before heading back out into the ER and the ambulance bay beyond.

* * *

The night passed uneventfully, only one more call – a minor fender-bender with four refusals of treatment obtained – and four hours' uninterrupted sleep. Amber woke to the alert tones and stepped outside to restock the ambulance and take out the trash. Mike still snored and coughed in his bed. Amber wondered why he felt sprightly and energized while Mike – two years his junior, after all – groaned and grunted in his attempt to rouse himself.

Maybe it's because I'm twenty-five again, Amber mused as he emptied the station trash into the big can outside. The day promised to be a hot one – the thermometer already read 88°F even though the sun barely peeked over the cloudy eastern horizon – and the thought of driving home in his sweaty, rumpled uniforms did not appeal. After the oncoming crew came on and the pass-on got completed, Amber tucked his duty gear into his car and went back inside to select from the small assortment of civilian clothes he'd brought for something to wear home.

Before he could make his way back to clock out and change, the regional captain pulled up in front of the station with Everyone's Favorite Manila Envelope under his arm. The ongoing and offgoing crews congregated around the table in the small kitchen and waited expectantly.

“Paychecks, get 'em while they're hot,” the captain announced as he came through the door from the bay, passing them out. Amber took his and tore the envelope open, unsurprised that the check paid to the order of Amber Elizabeth McRory but a little surprised at the amount, nearly a hundred dollars more than he usually received. He looked over the attached sheet

in curiosity and noticed that he no longer had pay deducted from his check for the county's preventative medicine health screening program and received a refund from the wellness program of nearly fifty dollars.

The wellness program? I signed up for that thing years ago and never paid any attention to it, Amber thought. The wellness program paid a dividend every year – divided between checks or in one lump sum, depending on the employee's preference – for submitting affidavits from doctors and personal trainers and other such sundries stating that the employee got regular checkups and kept in shape. And apparently, Amber no longer qualified for the health screening program and no longer had to pay into the fund, since routine cholesterol and triglyceride checks, prostate exams and echocardiograms and cardiac stress tests no longer made an impact on his health. Twenty-five years old placed Amber well and truly out of the danger zone for heart attack and coronary artery disease like he'd been just a few days before.

Not sure what to do with an extra hundred dollar float, Amber tapped her bottom lip pensively with a long manicured nail before shrugging noncommittally and deciding decisions like this could be better served at home, curled up in a chair around his nursing textbooks, enjoying a day off.

Bidding everyone in the station good-bye – and tacitly forgiving Mike his previous shift's indiscretions with a few casual jokes at his expense – Amber ducked back into the dormitory and opened the locker he commandeered for the shift. It came as no surprise whatsoever that the t-shirt and jeans which he



had tucked into his bag for after work morphed during the night into an one-shoulder loose heather grey blouse and a pair of denim shorts and a lightweight linen sundress in a pink leopard print. Amber gathered his wildly curly locks up and out of his face with a barrette he found tucked in his bag and then held one outfit in either hand, weighing them back and forth as if one were somehow more or less girly than the other. He finally opted for the denim shorts and one-shoulder top, just because they seemed a little bit more familiar than a dress.

He had to wiggle quite a bit to get the very snug shorts over his hips and struggled to close the button fly without breaking a nail. What had originally appeared as a pair of mere denim shorts instead turned out to be

'Daisy Dukes' which molded his backside into a firm, jiggling bubble and would have cut cruelly into his midsection if it had not been protected by the stiff armor of the corset. Amber shrugged into the one-shoulder blouse and tried to acquaint himself with the odd sensation of keeping his shirt on by shifting his arms back and forth. A pair of flip-flops tucked into the side pocket turned hot pink and gained a bit of a platform sole and sequined uppers overnight, but at least they fit.

Amber tucked his boots and discarded uniform – now a women's medium shirt and size 3 trousers, with boots a women's size 6½, Amber noticed – into his bag and attempted to shove his keys and wallet into the skin-tight

pockets of the Daisy Duke shorts with no success and nothing to show for it but a painful scrape on his right hip from his keys.

“So much for avoiding a purse,” he mused to himself as he slung his bag over one shoulder and headed out to the car. Having to slide the seat forward about eight inches so his feet could reach the pedals, he started the engine and jumped a bit at the blast of thumping music – Amber could not begin to explain how he knew the singer was Nicki Minaj – which did *not* match the classic rock station on the radio that Amber distinctly remembered enjoying the previous morning as he pulled into the station.

Still, it was catchy. And Amber got the impression that he might know the words, too, just beneath his conscious recollection. Tapping the steering wheel and humming along, he tore open the cellophane wrapper on the long skinny Virginia Slims cigarettes which appeared magically in his pocket yesterday afternoon and dangled one between his lips, touched the end with a lighter and drove away in a squeal of complaining fan-belt, a cloud of exhaled smoke and thumping bass.

Even with the shallow breaths the corset allowed him, Amber didn't cough once.

WITH THE SHIFT THAT HE traded away, Amber – once Pete – had only a single day off between working shifts on the ambulance to try and cope with the sudden and sweeping changes coming over him. Now possessed of a lithe, supple body weighing in at a mere one hundred twenty pounds – and dwindling, he noticed as he stood on the scale in his austere bathroom, having shed another three pounds without trying – and topping out at around five foot five, a very pretty face with delicate cheekbones and high, arched brows dominated by large, sparkling green eyes and a thick cascade of kinky blonde curls. Even the shock of his new appearance in the mirror stopped bothering him as he grew more and more accustomed to the new him. A part of him still wondered what would be next – the changes came quickly at first but seemed to have leveled off for the moment – but the fear he felt previously had eroded, replaced by a Christmas-morning anticipation and excitement.

The alarm rang in the darkness and Amber stirred, swinging his legs over the side of the twin bed and clicking on his bedside lamp. A few small changes occurred overnight, he noticed – his bedside lamp now shone through a girly and pleasant pink lampshade, and his dog-eared paperback spy novels on the Ikea bookshelf nearby disappeared, replaced with a row of lurid romance novels. Padding across the carpet to the bathroom, he noticed the *Playboy* and *Maxim* magazines stacked haphazardly by the toilet were now *Allure*, *Glamour* and *Cosmopolitan*. Nothing else of serious

note struck him, however, and he hummed a contented little tune – Katy Perry, he thought idly – as he loaded his pink toothbrush with Colgate.

Hummed in a husky, mellifluous soprano.

The changes retained the power to shock, at least.

“Wow,” Amber said in his new, chirpy and inherently cheerful voice. “This is gonna take a little bit of getting used to. Still, it could be worse.”

He broke into a chorus of *California Gurlz* – the words sprang into his head unbidden, even though he'd heard the song maybe once in the past – and smiled brightly at the pleasant timbre and pitch he heard from himself. His new voice did make him sound a bit dim, however, in conjunction with the wide, perpetually-surprised eyes and the thick blonde hair. All the makings of the perfect little ditz.

Playfully, he wound a strand of blonde curls around one finger and bobbed his head from side to side, chirping, “So, um... like, whatever 'n' stuff.” The put-on bimbo act dissolved him in a fit of high-pitched giggles but the potential uses of the act did not escape him. He foresaw his days of buying his own drinks coming to a sudden and irrevocable end.

He spit out the gob of toothpaste into the sink and rinsed his mouth and slipped into a tattered pink bathrobe which had been navy blue and smelled alarmingly like old socks only the night before, hanging from a hook on the back of the bathroom door. Unthinkingly, he slid the sliding glass door overlooking his tiny apartment balcony open and stepped outside to reach for the long, skinny Virginia Slims cigarettes he found magically appeared in his pocket the night before. He inhaled deeply and let the smoke escape pursed lips in a long, billowing plume which disappeared into the murky predawn gloom.

Idle time before work was finite, so Amber gave himself until the end of the cigarette to muse and attempt to mine his way to the bottom of the fantastic changes turning his life inside-out over the last few days. Some form of magic, some inexplicable force determined that Pete Harrison fit the universe better as Amber McRory. That a used-up, burned out paramedic with middle age now years in the rearview mirror belonged on this world as a fresh-faced blonde twenty-something. Strange to think it had all started with a simple pair of panties.

Panties. *The clothes make the man.* This had all started with that silly practical joke, the slutty nurse costume gifted to him by the crew of Engine

4 to tease his course of study. Maybe that nurse's uniform had something to do with it.

Still, Amber mused, it hasn't been bad at all. My knees don't hurt any more, and I'm so much more flexible than I was before. I have all this energy. And I actually like the person I see in the mirror now, and that hasn't been the case for a long time. I only wish I knew what was coming next. The only thing that really bothers me is the uncertainty.

He took another deep drag from the cigarette and tapped his bottom lip. *Or am I just assuming I have no control? I wonder – could I change something that I wanted?*

He tried to think of something innocuous, something simple to start – the first thing that sprang to mind was his car, looking out over the apartment parking lot as he was. His aging Nissan Sentra did not suit a vivacious twenty-something young woman at the beginning of her life and career. No, he definitely needed something better.

Amber closed his eyes and concentrated, but when his eyes opened again the same dingy white Sentra sat in his parking space beneath the sodium light that sat there previously. He sighed with disappointment.

Waitaminnit, he thought suddenly, dragging his cigarette. Everything before has cost me something. Maybe this is a give-and-take kind of thing. Maybe I have to give something up in order to get something.

Not quite ready to give up the obvious thing which connected him to masculinity, Amber instead decided to give up his masculine identity within the language. Strangely enough, the thought of never experiencing description as 'he' and 'him' again carried with it a depth of anxiety which equalled the trepidation associated with losing his cock and balls. All his life, Amber had been a 'him.' The idea of losing that made his very identity feel unstable and built on sand.

But curiosity and the potential for some kind of control over this crazy tailspin of his life won out in the end. Summoning whatever courage remained, Amber released the smoke he'd been holding in his lungs out into the night air, along with any further association with 'he' and 'him.'

Her eyes opened slowly through a thick curtain of eyelashes – they weren't that thick before, she mused – and focused on a dark grey two-door Jeep Liberty with a black plastic hard-shell top and Mardi Gras beads hanging from the rearview mirror. Closer inspection showed the red canvas bag

holding *her* bunker gear and the dark Adidas gym bag holding *her* clothes in the back seat.

It worked, Amber sighed in a mixture of mourning and relief.

She pitched her cigarette over the railing into the bushes below – resolving to find herself an ashtray – and went inside to take her shower before work.

* * *

Medic 22 turned up right where she'd left it, but the heart-sinking feeling of *oh shit, I'm back at work again* which usually heralded her arrival at her home station never suffused her, just a sense of mild optimism and hope. She walked through the front door, noticing for the first time the stumpy, up-and-down stride left over from her larger, heavier male frame. Closing her green eyes, she sacrificed some of the respect she'd earned on her years as a medic among her colleagues in exchange for a more graceful, feminine gait.

Her steps slowed imperceptibly as a graceful, dancer's stride with much swaying of hips and ass took her over, placing one small foot in front of the other in a half-glide, half-catwalk strut just as one of the offgoing crew, a skinny Hispanic with pockmarked cheeks named Julio Reyes, said, "Hey, sexy girl."

The unintentional disrespect brought Amber up a little short, but she accepted it with good grace, having parted with it willingly. A future of being *honey, sugar, baby* and *sweetheart* for the rest of her life seemed a fair enough trade for a sexy walk at this stage.

"Hey," she answered. "What's up?"

"Oh, you know. Saving lives."

"This your new partner?" Amber asked, looking pointedly at the slender, shy-looking brunette standing in a neatly-starched uniform with her hands behind her back.

"Nope," Julio said glibly, "she's yours. Came in early to get a feel for the place."

Amber blinked. The succession of overtime medics and shift floats who partnered with her lately while waiting for a new partner became relegated to very low priority in light of the other changes Amber dealt with over the last few days. She knew she would be getting a new medic, fresh out of school and the county training academy, but she honestly forgot when. Of

all the days for it to happen, though. Still, Amber remembered how nervous she felt her first day with the county, and offered the new girl a heartfelt, genuine smile.

“Hey, I'm Amber,” she said, sticking out a long-nailed hand. “Glad to meet you.”

“Same here,” Jill said quietly.

“You look a little shellshocked,” Amber chuckled. “Don't worry, okay? It's gonna be okay, I promise. I only bite assholes like Julio, there.”

“If only that was true,” Julio joked.

“What's it like, here?” Jill asked gesturing around her at the small station.

“It's a pretty busy truck, actually,” Amber said, “but we have our slow days. Been hopping lately, though. You're gonna get some really good calls. The fire crew is awesome. If I wasn't such a total bitch, you'd probably really like it here.”

Jill laughed. “Okay.”

“We're gonna have a good time,” Amber said. “Just tell me you like Greek food and we'll be BFF's.”

“Never really had it,” Jill confessed, “but I'm definitely willing to try.”

“That's the spirit,” Amber said, taking her hand. “Come with me, sweetie. I'll show you where to bed down and then take you through the truck.”

* * *

Jill turned out to be quite funny and self-effacing, once the numbing shock of her first day on the job wore off. Amber found herself genuinely liking her once the ice broke and they began sharing jokes. Most of the day was spent in map study, just driving aimlessly around their service district pointing out areas of interest ranging everywhere from nursing homes and the locations of 'frequent flyers' to the spots where EMS got free coffee and soft drinks and which restaurants offered a discount. They didn't catch their first call until after lunch – it turned out that Jill *did* like Greek food, after eating at Spiro's, one of Amber's favorite places both before and after her changes – at the north edge of their district with Engine 11. Jill acquitted herself quite well, even though the call did little to excite. Just an exacerbation of congestive heart failure in an elderly nursing home resident fixed with high-flow oxygen and nitroglycerine and very little drama. The

only strange part of the call consisted of the way the firefighters behaved. The jokes were subdued,



their manner somewhat shy and conciliatory, just this side of patronizing, and their gazes wandered unerringly from any view of Jill's posterior to Amber's own *derrière* and back again. There were shared smiles and whispered comments behind the backs of the medics.

Holy shit, Amber thought, they're talking about how bad they want to fuck us. I've been a member of some of those conversations. They're picturing us naked and trying to decide which of us is hotter.

Amber kept the amused smile from her face with an effort, pleased that she looked good enough to excited the firefighters while at the same time completely horrified by the fact that *any* of them wanted to have sex with her. Or, perhaps horrified wasn't entirely the correct word. A strange little worm of anxious curiosity squirmed in her middle for a moment at the thought, finally beaten down by the revulsion Amber knew she *should* be feeling.

She almost regretted the sexy walk, now, for what she gave up to get it. Amber knew, from her other friends in the service, how much harder the females needed to work in order to gain the same amount of respect. The male her took that for granted and never missed it – until it was gone. The thought of being referred to as *honey* and *sweetie* while in downtime bothered her not one bit, but Amber believed there was a time and a place for everything. Emergency calls were *not* that time or that place. Getting second glances walking around the fire station constituted one thing,

getting her ass ogled while trying to manage an emergency something *entirely* different.

“What's on your mind?” Jill asked her, snapping her from the resentful thoughts she harbored.

“Oh, nothing. Just get sick of the fire guys sometimes, checking us out while we're trying to run calls.”

Jill laughed. “Comes with the territory, though, doesn't it? It's been that way everywhere I've ever worked,” she chuckled. “I mean, sure – it gets old, but as long as the knuckleheads do their job, what's the harm, right? It's not like they're gonna stop or anything.

“Besides,” she continued, “I go to the gym three nights a week and bust ass to get myself looking like this. I kinda *want* hot single guys to notice.”

“Yeah, if I'm out,” Amber partially agreed. “Just not when I'm trying to get shit done.”

“Preaching to the choir, sister,” Jill said. “And if one of them fucks up I'll jump all the way up his ass for it. But they seemed to keep their shit together. I'm willing to put up with it if they get the job done.”

“I guess I am, too,” Amber said, never having considered it that way – or *at all*, to be completely honest – before. “I guess it's just been wearing thinner than usual lately.”

“So, if you make a left up here at the light, I'll take us by the Continental – one of the really nice retirement communities – and the rehab hospital. They don't call us often, but they're pretty steady customers. The Continental is a bitch to get into after ten o'clock, I'll show you where the gate...”

The alert pager trilled loudly. “Medic 22, dispatch, Medic 22, dispatch, respond to an unconscious person, at the Target, 2300 W. Main. Adult male, time out 14:21.”

Jill grabbed the map book – she had to navigate the call even when obvious as part of her on-the-job training – while Amber slapped the toggles for the overhead lights and flipped the knob for the siren. Jill lifted the radio handset to her mouth and said, “Medic 22, received and responding.”

“Medic 22, responding at 14:22 to 2300 W. Main, at the Target, in the pharmacy. 62-year-old male, clutched his chest and sank to the ground

before losing consciousness. Positive for cardiac history. Breathing but unresponsive. Responding with Engine 4, move all traffic to South Med 2.”

“Oh, shit, that sounds like the real thing,” Jill said, adjusting the radio to the new channel.

Ostensibly, the ambulance responded with the same urgency to every call, but Amber would be lying if she said they didn't drive just a *little* bit faster, move just *a hair* quicker when they heard it might be a chance to get the elusive Save. The number of times when paramedics actually got the chance to *help* people came few and far between, and those calls made the job worth doing.

Medic 22 beat the fire crew to the call by about twenty or thirty seconds, giving Amber time to jump in the patient compartment and begin tossing their equipment – cardiac monitor, drug box, airway bag – onto the stretcher to move inside. She'd only just opened the cabinet to reach for the monitor when she saw the external door open and green-gloved hands reaching in to remove all her gear.

Amber opened the side door and looked curiously outside, expecting to see Jill outside and gasping a little when the crew of Engine 4 loaded themselves down with EMS gear to walk inside. They even opened the back doors and removed the stretcher, under the smiling face of Jill, who carried only a clipboard in her slim hands. Amber's mind reeled. For years, as a male, she had lumbered up flights of narrow stairs and down the steep sides of drainage ditches, through car debris and into attics and crawlspaces laden with all the EMS gear dangling from her aching shoulders while fire stood with the clipboard. She could not actually remember the last time a firefighter had carried even one of the lightweight trauma bags for her.

For the *male* her, she realized. The her that the firefighters *didn't* ogle and *didn't* joke quietly about fucking.

“I'll get those,” she said to Kellerman, who loaded himself down with their monitor and drug box.

“That's okay, Amber, I got it,” he told her brightly.

Well, I'll be damned, she thought, watching the firefighters carry all her gear into the store for her without the slightest bit of resentment or teasing. She had time to pull on her gloves and adjust her handheld radio to the proper channel and even to touch up



her thick blonde curls a little before reaching the patient, and wouldn't bear away a single bruise on her thigh or back from having to walk clear across a crowded store with the airway kit digging into the small of her back or the medication box thumping roughly against her legs and rump with every step.

A girl could get used to this, she mused happily, swaying along with her new sexy walk behind the burdened fire crew. By the time she reached the patient, Amber's smile reached from ear to ear.

* * *

The call turned out to be anticlimactic – just diabetic complications, fixed with an IV and intravenous dextrose, not the exciting world of emergency cardiac intervention they'd hoped – and so did the one after that and the one after that. They only just cleared their last call about ten minutes prior to shift change, wiping sleep-crust from their eyes and chewing gum to rid themselves of the disgusting morning breath they had no time that morning to brush away. The oncoming crew waited for them in the ambulance bay, taking care of many of the mundane tasks associated with the return of an ambulance to station so that Amber and Jill could go home, such as

restocking the supplies they'd used on the last call and unlocking and counting the narcotics for them so they only needed to sign the log.

Amber finished her hospital report on the laptop computer in the truck and sent it forward, then grabbed her gear bag from the rear compartment and went into the station to remove her bedding from the narrow dorm bed and stow it in her locker. A locker that contained, in addition to the new, feminine clothes from before, a stick of Secret anti-perspirant, two bottles of nail polish, a box of Tampax Pearl tampons and a brown-and-white Coach purse.

Overwhelmed but at the same time excited, Amber took the purse and stepped out onto the small back porch of the station to examine the purse while smoking one of her new, long Virginia Slims cigarettes. She emptied her pockets – a field pharmaceutical reference, a pair of trauma shears, an extra pair of gloves (sized small, now, instead of her old large), two hemostats and a roll of cloth tape and a bundled IV start kit. These she tucked into a convenient Ziploc bag she found inside, next to a hairbrush, two 'emergency' tampons, a black plastic powder compact with a mirror, two tubes of lip gloss, an oversized ladies' wallet, her car keys, cellphone and an extra pack of cigarettes. Even her distressed iPhone now resided in a cute pink-and-white zebra stripe hard case with a rhinestone heart emblazoned on its back face. All the credit cards and identification in the wallet showed Amber Elizabeth McRory now, age twenty-five and sex female. A small bottle of Dolce & Gabbana's "The One" perfume tucked into a side pocket, which Amber held beneath her nose and then sprayed lightly beneath each ear on a giggling whim. The light, summery floral scent delighted her and made her feel undeniably girlish.

She puffed her cigarette contentedly, glad to finally be off the clock. Jill, now in civilian clothes, poked her head through the door to bid her new partner a fond good-bye. Amber stood and wrapped her partner in a tight hug, feeling Jill's firm breasts flatten deliciously against her chest, and pressed a chaste kiss into her cheek. A far cry from the gruff handshakes and abrupt, back-pounding hugs of her male days. If she felt any discomfort displaying such affection, however, it dissolved quickly in the outpouring of return she sensed from Jill.

"I'm really glad to have you as a partner," Amber said happily. "You're really cool. I enjoyed working with you."

"Yeah, everybody at the academy told me you were really sweet," Jill replied. "I had a good time. I'm looking forward to this."

They said I was sweet? Amber wondered. Are people's perceptions of me changing as fast as my body is? I've known a lot of the clinical staff at admin for years, and they respect me and like me, but never in a billion years would any one of them describe me as sweet.

“Hey, before you go, give me your number,” Amber said. “In case we need to get in touch before or after work, y'know, something like that.”

“Sure,” she said, digging for her phone. She gave the number, which Amber promptly called so that Jill would have her number in caller ID. They spent a few silent moments typing with thumbs, assigning names to the contact, and then hugged one another sidelong, cheek-to-cheek, while each took a picture with the onboard cameras on their phones to attach to the ID as well.

“We should totally get together some night, too, go out or something,” Jill said. “I'm new in town for the job and I don't really know anybody.”

“That sounds fun,” Amber said. “I'm finishing up nursing school, so I'm pretty busy lately, but I can make some time to hang out in the next week or so. All work and no play, that kind of shit.”

“Right,” Jill agreed.

“And I want to cook dinner for us one shift, to say thanks for being so cool,” Jill added.

“You don't have to do that,” Amber protested.

“I know I don't,” Jill said. “I want to. I love to cook, anyway. Anything I need to know?”

“I'm a vegetarian,” Amber said. *I am?* she wondered in mild shock. *When the fuck did that happen?*

“But milk and eggs, right?”

“No, not vegan. Just no meat,” Amber confirmed.

“I don't know how you do it,” Jill said. “I couldn't make it without steak.”

Honestly, sweetheart, since this is the first I'm hearing about it, I'm not sure how I do it either, she thought, even though she laughed. “I felt that way too, right at first,” she said. “If you wanted to try, though, I bet you twenty dollars that you wouldn't even want meat after two weeks. After a month, even smelling it made me feel sick. And I felt so much better, baby, after I

flushed all that dead shit out of my system. Like I dropped a hundred pounds. Best decision I ever made, and I've never eaten a corpse since."

Jill wrinkled her nose and gestured idly to the cigarette smoldering between Amber's long-nailed fingers. "You're a real portrait of healthy living," she teased.

Amber snorted. "If I didn't do this, then I'd be perfect and no one could relate to me," she explained.

Jill gave Amber a searching look and seemed to decide something. "I can tell, you and me are gonna be friends," she stated simply.

"I hope so. I really like you," Amber replied.

"Me, too," she said. "I better run, though. Call me about hanging out, okay?"

Amber hugged and kissed her again. "I will, I promise. See you Thursday."

"Bye."

Amber sat back on the edge of the picnic table and took a long, contemplative drag on her cigarette. Never, in all her days as a male, did she ever participate in a conversation like that. Open, noncompetitive, supportive and friendly, affectionate and emotional and revealing. Not even the suggestion of dick-measuring or confrontation that hallmarked conversations between males. Added to that fact that not only did Amber *want* to know how her partner felt, she wanted her partner to know how she felt as well and felt not the merest twinge of shame in it.

I like talking as a woman, she decided with a smile.

She tossed her cigarette butt into a nearby bucket of sand and went back into the dorm to change clothes, thinking, *let's see what else I like doing as a woman*.

* * *

Amber took her time changing from her sweaty uniform into a matching cotton bra-and-panty set (the cups of the bra still sadly empty, even though Amber knew she wasn't prepared for breasts yet), a grey one-shoulder blouse and a khaki 'cargo' style miniskirt which bared her hairless legs (somewhere mid-shift they'd become closely shaved and moisturized and Amber never noticed) and a pair of strappy platform wedges which finally made Amber feel tall again.

Thankfully, the fire crew and ambulance caught a call shortly afterwards and left the station empty, giving Amber a little alone time to teeter around in the skyscraper heels, bumping along and grabbing nearby furniture desperately in her quest to maintain balance. After about five minutes, she mastered the rudiments of walking in heels – smaller steps, swaying hips and placing one foot directly in front of the other – and actually began to enjoy the alluring ass-wiggling stride she adopted in order to walk. The temptation to sacrifice more of her masculinity to whatever force changed her to gain a quick-and-dirty mastery of walking in heels came strong, but Amber fought it down. Certain things about womanhood she intended to learn by herself. This magic transformation denied her a girlhood, and she determined to scrape one out for herself by any means necessary.

She did wish she had a past, however, mulling it over as she slid behind the wheel of her new Jeep and belted herself in, tossing her new Coach purse onto the front seat casually and nestling her cigarettes and lighter in the dashboard cup-holder for easy access. The process of making friends like Jill would, at some point, require a sharing of experiences and Amber doubted her new partner would be so enthusiastic about working with her if Amber mentioned casually, over drinks, that she played defensive end on her high school football team and got her first blowjob from Danielle Colter behind the vo-tech building right after her fifteenth birthday.

Not that Amber particularly desired the total loss of her male past, either. Good memories and happy times stood out to her from the life she led, lives saved and friends made and accomplishments won. She knew, deep down, that the sacrifice of her male past would be required from this force determined to change her in order to have a past of her own that suited and fit the new gender. But there existed several things Amber did not care to lose and the likelihood of being able to act selective about what experiences she could give up and which she could keep seemed low.

Still, she thought as she smoked another cigarette and drove her jeep haltingly through thick morning drive-time traffic towards home, *having pictures and mementos and keepsakes from a past beats anything I could just make up. And I wouldn't have to keep lies straight in my head.*

Amber found herself incapable of making the choice without soulsearching, and stop-and-go traffic did not lend itself to deep reflection. She finally decided to let traffic thin out by pulling into the parking lot of a nearby supermarket, deciding to get some of her weekly shopping done early at the same time. Tucked into the door compartment of her Jeep, she found a canvas re-usable shopping bag – perfectly suited to this new hippie tree-hugger lifestyle she found herself inhabiting – which she slung over her shoulder beneath her purse, pushing her sunglasses up into her curls to

hold her hair away from her face and sashaying into the market on her dizzyingly high heels, stumbling only minimally.

Strangely enough, Amber – with the only history she claimed in a supermarket being one of frozen microwave dinners, beer, chips and prepackaged deli meats – proved to know her way around a produce aisle like a seasoned veteran. Perhaps knowledge of how to select (and hopefully prepare, Amber added silently) fresh fruits and vegetables came packaged with her unwilling conversion to vegetarian. Again it struck her that the 'male her' once found women who kept vegetarian sexy (a byproduct of an old girlfriend who claimed her rejection of dietary meat led to her deep craving for cock meat in the bedroom, a claim Amber proved with great satisfaction over and over) and it found its way into the new her somehow. She hoped some of her earlier male predilections for some of the sick shit he'd seen in pornography and thought *hmm* regarding would not become a part of her. By and large, she trusted the force doing the changing, but there were limits.

The canvas bag over her shoulder grew heavier and heavier as it filled with fresh herbs, bags of dried beans, fresh apples and mangoes and bananas, kale and spinach and portobello mushrooms. Each new thing she viewed among the vegetables sparked off another new idea for something to make from it – a true culture shock to Amber, whose previous experience of cooking consisted of boiling water and scrambling the occasional egg. She went with the flow, however, trying not to read too much into the stray thoughts of *I should have waited until Saturday for the farmer's market, this arugula isn't fresh* and the like which popped in and out of her head as she shopped. She even bought tofu, which shocked her no end. As a male, she had shunned and ridiculed tofu and all those who consumed it. Now, she looked forward to the stir-fry she planned, and to grilling it for salads.



It's a brave new world, she thought amusedly.

From the alien landscape of the produce aisle, she ventured into the even more unfamiliar cosmetics section, hoping that the mysterious feminine knowledge and instincts which came along with the hair and shaved legs would somehow inform her of what the hell most of this stuff on the shelves even was, much less what she should purchase. Relief flooded through her when her fingers danced deftly across the racks, selecting this thing and that and dropping them into her bulging sack. Things like emory boards, barettes and hair-bands and the giant bottles of Pantene for Curly Hair shampoo and conditioner, she probably could have sussed out for herself, but her unlearned knowledge helped immeasurably when it came to liquid foundation, eyeliner, moisturizer, makeup remover, eye shadow and mascara and the literally dozens of other things she took. Equally as confusing proved the things she glanced over and did not select, comfortable in the knowledge that she already owned a straightening iron and an eyelash curler. Perhaps the magic only provided her with non-expendable things.

By the time she slid a long baguette wrapped in cellophane from the store bakery into her bag, Amber could no longer bear its on her shoulder and let

it slip down to be carried in both hands. Thankfully her tottering on the high platform wedges seemed to have vanished unless she tried to walk too fast and she managed to keep her balance admirably under her heavy burden all the way to the checkout lanes. The young cashier eyed her appreciatively as he began scanning her items and she returned his attention with a sweet and coquettish smile. For the first time in her entire life, she accepted assistance from one of the bagboys – a very sweet mentally challenged young man with 'Robert' on his nametag who took one look at her and declared very loudly that she was the prettiest girl he'd seen all day – carrying her purchases out to her car. Amber favored Robert with a dry kiss on his cheek for his assistance, which made him blush scarlet and hoot in delight, then climbed into her car to back from her parking spot, light a cigarette and continue her journey home in a haze of girlish delight.

* * *

Amber busied herself around her slowly transforming apartment, putting away her groceries and brewing a pitcher of iced tea. She kept the platform sandals on her feet ostensibly so that she could reach her uppermost cabinet shelves with her diminished height, but actually because she began to feel more and more comfortable and wanted the practice. She opened packages and arranged all her new cosmetics in an empty pink satchel found under her sink, decorated with glittery foil 'kissy lips' and the embroidered words 'sexy' and 'glamorous' and 'hot' interspersed. She kept it open on the countertop for her morning ablutions but could zip it shut and carry it away to the fire station at a moment's notice. A few of the cosmetic purchases. Things like the little shower pouf and the moisturizing body wash, the exfoliant scrub and the ladies' Venus razor went into the wire caddy hanging from the showerhead, and the dizzying assortment of hairspray, mousse, gel, wax and shine enhancers occupied the lowest shelf of the cabinet next to a straightening iron, a set of hot rollers and a high-power hair dryer with a huge diffuser on the end. A small array of daytime and nighttime moisturizers and rejuvenators dwelt next to the sink with her toothbrush and toothpaste and the little whitening trays she newly purchased.

Oddly, Amber found her glasses in their battered case in the cabinet, as well, even though her vision seemed better than before. A little pout twisted her pretty face – she distinctly felt the thought *boys don't make passes* skitter across her brain before disappearing – but she shrugged nonchalantly and dropped them by her bedside table anyway. So her vision stayed a bit poor. Millions of people, young and old, needed vision correction. The connection to her old life actually reassured her somewhat, allaying the fear that the man Pete Harrison, lost amidst the sweeping changes of Amber McRory, still lived and existed within her somewhere.

Here and there, Amber discovered a few more things transformed about her residence – the writing on the whiteboard stuck on the exposed end of her kitchen cabinet enumerated a 'to do' list including things like appointments at a hair salon and a gynecologist beside the reminders for an oil change and to pay the cable bill, in a bubbly, cutesy script. Two little pink dry-erase hearts and a ladybug were doodled in the corners of the board, just to ensure the total lack of masculinity. Her DVDs now included many romantic comedies and 'chick flicks' and lacked explosions and sat alphabetized on the rack instead of strewn haphazardly around the entertainment center. A pink dayplanner rested beside the phone where only a crumpled note-pad resided before. A trashcan dedicated solely to recycling sat next to the kitchen garbage. And every room of the house contained either a cut-glass, ceramic or crystal ashtray now, some with stubbed-out butts of Virginia Slims 120's and small piles of ash in them. The preponderance of cans of Febreze air freshener, Glade plug-ins in several sockets and the windows Amber opened immediately upon returning home explained the lack of stale smoke-smell indoors.

She sat outside on the balcony – now occupied by a small plastic table and two plastic lawn chairs and screened neatly from view by a window-box and several hanging planters full of well-tended greenery – and smoked another cigarette while playing idly with some of her new makeup. A part of her worried that she neared half a pack now – quite an adjustment from being a nonsmoker – and wondered what it might be doing to her health, but the majority of her consciousness told her to relax and not stress about it. Using her previously purchased *Allure* magazine, she walked herself through some of the new summer looks for makeup and even made a feeble attempt at twisting her hair into one of the flirty and glamorous ponytails she found displayed on another page. The sweetly perfumed, slightly sticky feeling of the makeup on her skin made her feel surprisingly pretty, even though the heavy and oily feel of it upon its original application turned her off a bit. She applied and wiped off three tries before settling on a light dusting of bronze powder on her cheeks, a coat of mascara and a thin line of glittery green powder on her eyelids. A coat of wet-looking coral gloss sparkled on her lips, applied with a wand between puffs on her cigarette, leaving a shiny stain on the pristine white filter that sent a little sexual thrill through her every time she noticed it. She enjoyed the morning air and the pleasant breeze outside while she smoothed on a coating of clear sealer gloss over her French manicure to keep it locked in place and looking good, the way *Allure* recommended and finished her cigarette peacefully while it dried.

Lunchtime – and the small salad she prepared herself to go with it – passed uneventfully and Amber found herself growing a little restive. Ordinarily, a slow morning such as this one with no demand on her time

appealed to her, back in her days as a male. She spent mornings like this sleeping and watching television and otherwise striving to do as little as humanly possible. Not the new Amber. A lingering, creeping feeling of boredom squirmed inside her mercilessly. Finally, wondering just what in the hell she *did* as a girl, she dug through her purse again in search of some small clue about just what a twenty-five year-old girl might do for fun on a Tuesday morning.

Some new, small items appeared in her purse while she occupied herself elsewhere. Another shade of lip gloss and a nail file, a travel-pack of Kleenex tissues and... a gym membership card.

She wasted no time in throwing a few items of clothing into her overnight bag and rushing out the door.

* * *

Working out before her transformation consisted mainly of lifting weights. Apparently, the new Amber knew more about her body and how best to keep it in its physical prime and had spent three hours in stretching and cardio before working with a balance ball and some oversized rubber bands for strengthening. And she came away every bit as sore and tired as the 'male her' would have been after groaning and grunting under heavy iron for the same amount of time.

At least the boredom no longer nagged at her. Home welcomed her with no appreciable changes, leaving her untasked with new discoveries and able to take a quick shower, reapply her makeup, cook and eat the tofu stir-fry with water chestnuts, snowpeas, carrots and shiitake mushrooms she planned earlier and even wash her dishes. She ventured into her bedroom then, to search for a pair of pajamas in the unknown contents of her chest-of-drawers, chewing her bottom lip sexily as she pawed through the neatly-folded panties in every cut, color and fabric she could imagine, the woolly socks and knee socks and pantyhose...

Her fingers stopped dead over a pair of pink silk stocking with lace tops, balled neatly on top of a matching pink garter belt and pink thong. Even though she began her search with the distinct intention of finding something comfortable for sleeping, once she spotted the sexy lingerie she knew she must feel the smooth, slick silk on her hairless legs and the sexy tug of the garters. She unbuttoned the blue-striped man's dress shirt (left from her male days and absolutely huge on her) she pulled on after showering and slowly rolled the stockings up her legs with due care for her long manicure, absolutely glorying in the sexy, warm embrace of them against her skin. Her cock stirred and then stiffened to diamond hardness between her

smooth things, throbbing insistently against her as she gently hooked the garters onto the lace-trimmed tops. The elastic pressed insistently against the smooth cheeks of her butt and fronts of her thighs, delicious and scandalous and so utterly *feminine*. At best she could only manage to press her rampant and pulsating cock against her thigh and snuggle it beneath the firmly scrap of pink lace the panties afforded, unable to even give the illusion of a smooth line, and settled the skinny thong between the globes of her pert *derrière*. She slipped her skinny torso – now complete with visible ribs, showing her that she lost yet more weight since she last noticed – into her pink satin corset and laced it up as tightly as she could by herself. Everything she felt – the constrictive crush of the corset, the sexual hug of the silk stockings, the slick perfumed feel of the makeup on her face, the feather-soft tickle of her long curls on her back and shoulders, viewing the world through a rim of exquisitely long, mascara-blackened lashes – served to nearly overwhelm her with pure femininity. She lay facedown on her bed and pressed her cock into the covers. It relieved her little. She attempted to force her mind onto something else, reciting ventilation and compression rates for infant, child and adult CPR. Oddly enough, that only managed to make her hornier. One long-nailed hand down the front of her panties, a few quick strokes, and the pressure would be gone. But she did not want to cum.



She abhorred the thought of feeling the world melt away until only the cock and balls between her legs remained. She found iron-hard certainty inside herself that she never wanted to feel that kind of release again. She slid her glasses onto her nose and opened her most boring nursing textbook – *Ethics in the Scope of Nursing Care* – and lit a cigarette, hoping the study of the mind-numbing topic might force her to forget the feelings and thoughts racing through her brain, or at least put her to sleep. She puffed her cigarette roughly until the

white filter grew uncomfortably warm to the touch, finally even trying to read the ponderous textbook aloud in order to break the maddening desire for release building between her legs and the equally maddening revulsion she felt at the idea of even touching herself.

She stubbed out her cigarette and pushed herself up to her knees in utter frustration. “This is ridiculous,” she said angrily, and her insistent cock thumped against her thigh in response. The tip now peeked out of the leg of her panties and a glistening drop of pre-ejaculate sparkled on its tip. Amber quickly unhooked her garters and rolled down her stockings immediately, knowing that if the sticky fluid dribbling from her cock ruined one stitch of her beautiful lingerie, she would scream and throw a temper tantrum worthy of the most willful three-year-old. Naked, she padded into the kitchen in hopes that the transformation neglected to take away the small but potent supply of aged scotch she kept in the cabinet above her refrigerator.

Even the generous tumbler of burning liquor poured quickly down her throat accomplished little to assuage the maddening urgency building inside her. A frantic feeling rose in her, her mind flittering to anything, even the ridiculous, which could distract her from the *now, now, NOW* demands for release and satisfaction she struggled against. *I don't care what it is. I'll bake fucking cookies or run ten miles, just let something happen to change this.*

Shit, she thought with disdain. *I guess all I can do right now is masturbate.* She slipped out of the oversized blue dress shirt with a sneer of distaste and levered herself up onto the kitchen counter. The cold marble sent a shiver up her spine, making her breath hiss and breaking her concentration long enough for the glass and bottle of 12-year-old single malt scotch sitting next to her left hip to transform into a goblet and bottle of Napa Valley chardonnay without her noticing.

Her cock stood at painfully stiff attention, pointing straight the ceiling bobbing softly in time with her pulse. Amber knew that a single grip and a few insistent tugs would solve her problem, as close to the edge as she sat,

but the very thought of touching the rampant masculine organ between her legs brought up bile and made her right hand clench into a fist, seemingly unwilling of its own accord to touch down there. She blew out a long breath. *This is gonna be tougher than I thought*, she thought to herself. *C'mon, girl*, she thought, *it's just a couple little tugs.*



Girl, she said, trying to force herself to relax. *I just called myself girl. That's the whole problem, isn't it? I walk like a girl, I talk like a girl, I dress like a girl and I'm starting to act like a girl and the whole time there's this... thing between my legs making it all a fucking lie.*

She looked down at the offending organ between her legs. *I wish I didn't even have this damn thing any more.*

Amber gasped. With a pulling sensation more comfortable than she would have guessed, she watched her raging cock begin to shrink and wilt while at the same time never losing the surging pressure of full, demanding erection. Her scrotum flattened and elongated, stretching down between her legs as it bifurcated and the testes inside disappeared with a sucking feeling into her body. With a little exquisite tearing feeling, the scrotum parted in the middle and formed thick, musky labia over a patch of the most impossibly sensitive tissue Amber ever experienced. The tiny bud which

once formed her erect cock slipped between the thickening nether lips and disappeared into the soft, slightly damp nest which formed around it, still feeling as if a giant throbbing erection should be pushing near-painfully away from her body. A downy thatch of sandy blonde, trimmed into a neat little 'landing strip,' formed from the bushy, wiry curls between her legs.

Not that Amber could see any of this, however, as her view down into her transforming crotch disappeared behind the smooth, spherical obstructions growing out of her narrow chest. With her nipples swelling and expanding to proud pink points standing out of round, pink areolae, her pectorals seemed to swell out into perfect, gravity-defying globes which ballooned out to truly mammoth proportions. Curious, Amber ran a soft hand across the upper surface of her left mound and received a trembling frisson of pleasure up and down her body. A heavy dampness formed seemingly out of nowhere between her legs and she bit back a soft moan.

A tiny hiss of pain escaped her lips as a little silver dumbbell stud appeared through the skin above her navel, the final little touch of femininity to complete the picture of Amber McRory.

She stood, looking down at her new, completely female body with utter amazement and adoration. *My God, she thought, I'm perfect. Absolutely beautiful.* She longed for a look at herself but had not, the last time she checked, did not own a full length mirror. Somehow, she sensed that she crossed the line from *pretty to beautiful*, and felt it. Standing with her new, bounteous breasts thrust out proudly, she slipped a cigarette from her pack and shrugged back into the loose – or, not so loose, now, at least across the chest – blue dress shirt to sit outside in the evening air, enjoy a smoke and the rest of her wine, and plan out what she wanted next.

BREASTS, AMBER DECIDED, WERE A real pain in the ass. They jiggled and bounced everywhere, got pinched between things, made it hard to fold one's arms and almost impossible to run, and just generally got in the way and obstructed everything. She looked down at the smashed bowl of Raisin Bran on her kitchen floor, swept from the counter by her new breasts as she turned to pick up the pitcher of orange juice to smash into a huge milk-soaked mess on the linoleum. *A huge pain in the ass,* she repeated to herself, *and I wouldn't trade them for anything.*

Amber stayed up most of the night examining them, playing with them and generally getting acquainted with The Girls (as she'd taken to calling them around three a.m.). A quick search online and some quick calculations with a measuring tape put them at about a 34D, maybe a touch fuller. Examination with a hand mirror and some careful squinting showed a tiny little white scar beneath each globe, letting Amber know that at some point

in her magical life before the transformation she underwent a boob job to get that perfect shape and symmetry, and the gravity-defying pertness that let her look every bit as good without a bra as when she wore one. She encased them in cotton, in satin and in silk, in lace and in vinyl, everything from sports bras to push-ups to strapless, crushed them together in a corset and let them swing free in her nudity. She fell asleep on her couch cradling them and dreamed dreams about them – amorphous, happy blurs upon waking – and woke up with her hands cupping them gently, nipples erect and yearning to be touched.

She meant to play with herself a little, to explore the other new anatomy she developed, but her breasts occupied her concentration so much that she fell asleep before she could truly spend any time on her new, ultra-sensitive pussy and clit. She had the entire day to do just that, however, but first decided to refuel herself with breakfast, a shower and a cigarette. A bit of soreness lingered in her muscles from her previous day's trip to the gym, but her lithe new body stretched out beautifully and returned her to limber and graceful in only a few short minutes. Amber even managed to satisfy her curiosity about whether or not she could do the splits – legs back-to-front *and* out to her sides, it turned out. She could also bend backwards and put the top of her head on the floor from a seated position, too.

She dropped to her hands and knees with a roll of paper towels (made from recycled post-consumer paper, she saw, in keeping with her new tree-hugger sensibilities) and cleaned up the mess, gathering up the shards of broken porcelain and dumping them in her trash. Not really feeling like repeating the process and risking another breast-related disaster, she opted out of Raisin Bran and just made herself a couple pieces of toast, which she nibbled sparingly while sipping orange juice and a cup of hot green tea (it surprised her to find that she no longer owned any coffee or coffee paraphernalia) on her balcony.

Her one-and-only copy of *Allure* sat on the small table where she left it yesterday and she thumbed through it casually while she ate, experiencing for the first time in her life the endless possibilities surrounding the questions of how she should do her hair and makeup today, and what she should wear. A quick glance down at her beautiful, sexual new body peeking out from behind the blue-striped men's dress shirt she wore convinced her to go all out and go out for the day a little bit slutty, something that once appealed to her on a visceral level. As a male, she always admired and lusted a bit for women just this side of trashy; now that the opportunity to be that kind of woman presented itself, Amber decided to jump at the chance and see just what life that way could be like.

She finished her breakfast and wandered into the bathroom, taking a quick shower and attempting to puzzle her way through the confusing assortment of body washes, exfoliants, moisturizers and rehydrators she found dangling in the wire caddy beneath the showerhead. She ran a razor over her legs to keep them smooth and soft and muddled through the myriad creams and lotions she found, eventually managing to emerge dripping onto her fuzzy bathmat with clean, soft hair and skin.

She toweled her hair from sopping to damp, a bit nonplussed at just how long the process took with hair as thick, dense and lush as hers. Curious, she completed the process with the blow dryer and saw with dismay the entire process took the better part of an hour after leaving the shower. The benefits of washing hair the night before and not doing it every time she showered became readily apparent to her. Valuable knowledge to have – not knowing could easily make her late for work or miss a test or a clinical rotation for nursing school.

Tying her hair back in a pink bandanna and lighting a cigarette, she propped open the copy of *Allure* against her hot rollers, open to the page describing makeup techniques they described as 'dramatic' but that Amber knew deep down embodied 'slutty.' Heavy black eyeliner on upper and lower lids, dark 'smoky eye' brown shadow, tweezed eyebrows darkened a little with pencil and frosted pink blush and lipstick.



Amber pushed her hair back over one ear and saw with a start and then a delighted giggle that her ears were pierced – three times in each lobe and once through each cartilage. She managed clumsily, with her long fingernails, to thread studs through two sets of holes and dangle huge, thick silver hoops through the lowermost to nestle in her blonde curls before returning to the business of applying blush to her cheeks.

She finished with a light dusting of sweet-smelling powder to take down the shine on her face and to set her makeup, then glossed her lips to slick, glistening shine and thickened her already dramatic eyelashes with three coats of heavy, black mascara.

The makeup felt much heavier to her than the previous days' attempts due to the increased amount she wore and also from the way it altered how she really looked without it. A completely different girl stared back from the mirror now than she saw prior to her work, this one glamorous and unafraid and comfortable in her own skin, overtly sexual and vivacious and proud to show it. She blew her reflection a playful kiss in parting and went into her bedroom to pick out some clothes for the day.

She confined her bouncing breasts in a white push-up bra which created a delicious valley of tempting cleavage, the white satin and lace trim creating gorgeous contrast with the slight amber tan of her skin. A matching pair of scanty thong panties joined them. For kicks and jollies, as well as increased practice with walking in heels, she slipped into a strappy pair of open-toed 'stripper shoes' found magically appeared in her closet, black stilettos with a 6" heel and a 2½" platform. For the outfit, she chose a simple gray denim miniskirt that barely covered her pantied pussy and displayed her firm ass admirably and a pink checkered 'boyfriend' shirt that she knotted beneath her breasts to better display her cleavage and her taut, smoothly-muscled belly.

Checking her appearance in the mirror, she slung her designer purse over one shoulder and walked out her door, locking it behind her and then heading for her jeep. Pausing only long enough to sync her iPhone with the little FM receiver attached to her stereo, she soon had her MP3's playing through her car speakers, thumping house music that made her positively itch to dance. She reached into her purse for the weatherbeaten pair of sunglasses she'd worn for years, bought for ten dollars at a gas station on a particularly rough shift and never replaced. The glasses she did draw forth from the cluttered depths of her handbag looked too big for her face, large black plastic 'bug-eye' rims and a Coco Chanel logo picked out in rhinestones on the temples.

Oh, God, don't tell me I'm one of those ridiculous fashionistas, she thought ruefully as she slid them onto her slender, aquiline nose. Designer purse, designer sunglasses, designer perfume... I hate those status-conscious bitches. I never found that sexy. Why does it seem to matter now?

It didn't. Amber searched her mind, quizzing herself honestly about what mattered and what did not, and overpriced designer clothing just didn't seem to measure up to what truly concerned her innermost heart. She discovered, to her infinite relief, that she picked up the designer perfume because it smelled pretty and carried the purse and sunglasses because they looked cute. A realization dawned, that in a vinyl garment bag in the closet hung her one and only ludicrously expensive designer purchase, a devilishly sexy and glamorous D'or cocktail dress and a matching set of Miu Miu stiletto heels. The rest of her stuff came from stores varying in price and quality from Charlotte Russe and Wet Seal to Wal-Mart and Goodwill. She liked what looked cute on her, not what the label said.

She threaded her way through traffic the short distance from her apartment to her bank, endorsing her paycheck in the cheerleader 'bubble writing' that composed her script now as she idled in the drive-through. She stuffed it into the pneumatic tube with a deposit slip from her checkbook and her

drivers' license, waiting for the hiss signaling its return, tapping her manicured fingernails against her steering wheel in time to the music. Some hidden instinct forced through her disinterest and relative boredom and made her glance down at the receipt which returned in the tube with her ID and a hundred dollars in cash, raising her eyebrows in shock.

The balances showing in checking and savings easily tripled what normally showed there. Amber almost pushed the 'call' button on the drive-through kiosk or parked and walked inside to tell the bank they made a horrible mistake, but stopped herself. Perhaps the 'new' Amber just knew better how to manage her finances than 'old' Pete Harrison. Maybe she never blew most of her money on things like flat-screen televisions and trips to the coast, never had to pay alimony and child support to a wife divorced nine years ago and a son who barely spoke to her. Maybe she had money from her parents. Perhaps the magic transforming her blessed her with a bit more than just perfect breasts and natural blonde hair.

She drove away still musing, the wondering and curiosity about her own mysterious past gnawing at her. For the first time, she considered the sacrifice of her male past almost worth it, just to *know* who she had been and what she had done. But even with brand-new tits and pussy filling out her underwear and blonde curls floating in the breeze through the open window, all the life and energy and hope surging through her now, she truly did not want the man who had been Pete Harrison to die, forgotten and uncelebrated. No matter how much she loved being female, how wonderful it made her life and her outlook, he had been a *good* man. A *worthy* man. Amber refused to simply let him cease to exist.

There has to be a way to keep what he accomplished, she thought as she drove. To keep the old, male me from just vanishing the same way my cock did. No way could the universe be that unfair. I delivered six babies in the field before all this. About a dozen people are alive because I showed up to save them. I did good things, things people should remember, dammit. Those can't just go away without a trace. I won't let them.

The harsh realization of her powerlessness against the magic dawned heavily on her then. She had been horny to the point of madness last night when her cock shrank and compressed into her new, untried clitoris and her balls swelled into ovaries before retreating into her body. Those essential hallmarks of her manhood left unmourned, lost in a haze of sexual arousal and complete and total wonder. For something so mundane and physical, Amber expected only a small amount of sadness, shock and distress at their passing. Once the newness wore away from her pussy and breasts, she felt sure she would miss her cock every now and again.

The impending arrival of her first menstrual period alone ensured that eventuality. But she doubted the loss of any sleep about it, in the long- or the short-term. Losing her service in the military, the lives she'd saved as a medic, the friends she'd made among the fire and EMS services, even the son she'd made with a woman who no longer loved her – missing those things could not be subsumed in any amount of horniness or expectation.

Or will the magic change those, too? she wondered. *Will the lives I saved as Pete be the lives I still saved as Amber? What about my son? He hates me, but will he still be mine? My life wasn't great, before, but it wasn't a total loss and I certainly didn't hate it. What will become of it if I simply let go of it all?*

Suddenly, it dawned on her. She assumed that her life would be replaced wholesale – one entire life for another. Nothing she experienced to date supported that assumption. Perhaps, if Amber were to sit and take stock of her previous life one facet at a time, she could sacrifice the things that mattered little to her and keep the events and accomplishments she treasured.

She put her foot down in the platform stiletto heels, goosing the powerful V6 engine in her Jeep to hurry home so she could sit down with a notepad and start sorting out which parts of her life she wished to retain and those parts to give wholeheartedly to the magic, to do with what it willed.

* * *

Amber hustled into her apartment as quickly as the skyscraper heels would allow, both from excited anticipation of the work she intended and also because of her first real experience of the diminished capacity of the female bladder. Before, in her male days, Amber could 'tie a knot in it' and hold in her urine for a ridiculously long time – a particularly handy skill to have on an ambulance in the middle of a horrendously busy shift. This attitude prevailed when first she felt the urge in her midsection, the first twinges of demanding pressure. That feeling, from her male days, usually indicated that she had somewhere between one and two hours to find a toilet and relieve herself.

When, ten minutes later, her body cried out *NOW!* in no uncertain terms, Amber reacted to the urgency with no small amount of frustrated disappointment and a little bit of outrage. This would make for some really interesting shifts on the ambulance, she decided sourly.

Trotting inside hurriedly with her cigarette still smoldering from between pink-glossed lips, she only barely managed to get her panties down around

her ankles and her skirt above her waist before the hot, heavy flow poured out of her – not in the familiar concentrated stream, but in a messy, dripping cascade which left everything wet and slick-feeling down below. Added to that, simple placement of the new opening felt to Amber as though she urinated from her butt, now, so far back and underneath her did the flow originate. She still felt the same relief from before, however, and she relaxed visibly as the

pressure inside her eased and then vanished. Amber discovered, to her chagrin, her own cluelessness in the area of knowing exactly *when* she finished, however, not sure if the heavy drips dribbling from her neatly trimmed pubic hair meant more needed to be done or not. So she slipped on her eyeglasses and began openly wondering about where, in her life, she should begin taking stock and which of her experiences to give away to the magic transforming her and which to keep for her own. A notepad, kept in the pharmacology book beside the toilet, went onto one smooth knee and she began to write out her ideas in the rounded, girlish script.



When nothing happened in her 'girl parts' for about five minutes, Amber dropped her cigarette into the ashtray and wiped herself carefully, from back to front the way she seemed to recall hearing from an old girlfriend

during the potty-training of her daughter. She stood – an interesting trick in platform heels – and rearranged her clothing, then moved back out to the front dining table to continue her work.

The most pressing concern centered on her son by the ill-advised and poorly-executed two year marriage to a woman he barely knew, back in 1999. Her son, Jason, bought wholeheartedly into his mother's antipathy for his father and joined her in resenting him, blaming him for every ill befalling either of them and seeking any excuse *not* to spend time with him.

“I'd love it if my son actually liked me,” she said aloud, hoping the magic listened. “But I don't think he could be my son. I can't see any way it could work out, with me a girl, for me to be his parent. But I could be his aunt. Maybe if Lisa could be about a decade younger, and we were sisters instead of exes, and Jason could be her son by a failed marriage to someone who wasn't me... someone she didn't hate and blame for everything...”

Motion caught her eye and she looked up. On the wall beside her phone, a padded board crosshatched with pink ribbon appeared and a snapshot of Jason, cheek-to-cheek with Amber, appeared. They laughed and made silly faces, with a scene from a carnival or an amusement park in the background. On her bookshelf, a frame picture of Jason in a soccer uniform, kneeling on a grass field, appeared. Relief flooded through Amber like a wave, and she laughed and sobbed at the same time, covering her mouth and hoping the tears gathering at the corners of her eyes didn't ruin her makeup. Hope blossomed in her chest. Pete Harrison didn't have to die. The magic would spare him after all.

So you are listening, Amber thought. Let's see what else we can do.

She thought back to her school days. Amber, as a male, attended public school without much distinction and participated on just a few random activities like football, Key Club and one season of track. She paused long enough to dig out a dusty yearbook from a box in her closet and bring it back to the table, now decorated with a spray of daises in a little pink glass vase in her absence. The battered volume with “Vikings Class of '85” on the cover morphed before her eyes as she ran a slim hand across the cover, becoming “Vikings Class of '02” with fewer stains and more gloss remaining. She flipped quickly through to the page with her senior picture. The pimply-faced boy with the spike haircut faded, replaced with a rather glamorous picture of a curly-haired blonde girl with braces and a sweet smile. The caption beside it faded from “Peter Harrison, Football 2,3,4, Track & Field 3, Key Club 3,4” into a much longer “Amber McRory, Debate

2,3,4, Volleyball 1,2,3,4, Soccer 2,3,4, Cheerleading 1,2,3,4, Cheer Captain 4, Homecoming Queen 4, Prom Queen 4. Cutest Smile, Best Personality.”

Wow, Amber thought, smiling. I'm actually one of those girls I used to hate.

More pictures appeared around the apartment. Pictures of herself, more slender and less ripe, shy of the full flower of womanhood that she wore now, clad in a cheerleading uniform atop a human pyramid and posing with pom-poms held high, posing with the mascot on the sideline, gowned in blue satin and waving from atop a homecoming parade float. Posing in a red gown with a handsome young man in a tuxedo in front of a cheesy prom backdrop.

But the magic seemed to run away with her from there. A wooden case appeared on the uppermost shelf of her bookcase, containing two tiaras on satin – one for each of the Miss Teen titles she won. Pictures of herself on the pageant circuit, wearing tailored gowns and swimsuits with sashes across herself, faded into being in frames and on the ribbon frame. *A beauty queen? Me? Really?*

So how would an overachiever like me wind up humping toe pain cases to the ER at four in the morning on an ambulance? Surely I would have gone to college, she thought.

More pictures appeared, and some memorabilia. The pictures displayed Amber, ripening into her early twenties, cavorting with a group of sexy, fresh-faced girls all dressed in skin-tight white tank tops and shiny orange short-shorts, smiling and mugging for the cameras. Without seeing it, Amber knew immediately that her old Hooters uniforms – both the orange-and-white and the all-black – hung in the back of her closet now. She took a job at Hooters her freshman year at State University on her Miss Teen pageant scholarship, to earn the money to pay the rest of her tuition. The job, the Hooters International Pageant, cheerleading and sorority parties dominated her freshman year; her studies suffered greatly and she wound up on academic probation by the end of the spring semester. With low grades and her scholarships in jeopardy, Amber exercised the better part of valor and dropped out of State, opting instead for the paramedic program at the local community college, using the last of her scholarship money and the job at Hooters to pay for it. She took the job with County before the ink on her associate's degree even dried and then worked for a few years before re-entering school to get her bachelor's in nursing from the State University outreach program.

Memories formed from the wispy mists of dim and blurry images in her mind. Growing up in a house with a green door, with a big sister who loved

her and a mother and father consisting only of hazy memories – they perished from her former life in a car accident a month before her twelfth birthday, and perished at the same point in her new life. Only this time, a big sister to lean on and cry with existed and the lingering pain – and the abandonment issues and difficulty with trust that came with it – aching in her heart on a day-to-day basis faded a bit. Amber remembered ballet and gymnastics classes, school plays and soccer games, camping in the mountains during the summertime and selling Girl Scout cookies door-to-door from a squeaky Radio Flyer wagon, holding her mother's hand.

Amber sat back, smiling, and lit a cigarette while she fondly remembered the lives she touched in the back of her ambulance, the babies delivered and the hearts restarted, the mothers and fathers and sons and daughters, brothers and sisters and husbands and wives still around because Amber showed up in her big white truck with the flashing lights.

Everything she wanted to keep still remained to her. A delighted few hours spent going through photographs and mementos now decorating her walls and stuffed into albums and shoeboxes left her suffused with a feeling of wonder and happiness she forgot herself able to feel, smiling ear to ear with her new very straight, very white teeth.

She just began dressing for the gym when her phone rang. She pressed it to her ear to *click* loudly against her earrings. “Hello?” she said in her lyrical soprano.

“Hey, Amber? It's Jill,” her partner's voice said on the other end of the line.

“Oh, hey! What's up, girl?” Amber asked.

“*Nada*,” she replied. “Just sick of unpacking and bored. Wanted to know if you wanted to go do something tonight.”

Amber bit her bottom lip in thought. “I guess I could,” she said. “I have some studying to do, but other than that I'm pretty much free. What d'you have in mind?”

“Don't much care,” Jill told her. “Just as long as it isn't *here*, y'know? I'm sick of looking at boxes.”

“Poor baby,” Amber sympathized. “Sounds like a job for margaritas.”

“You always know the right thing to say,” Jill laughed. “Hey, can I ask you a favor? I need a ride. My car's in the shop right now. I can kick in for gas.”

“No worries, baby, I'll pick you up,” Amber said. “Just text me your address and I'll be by around, like, eight or so. I'm probably gonna eat here, just 'cause I have to study, if that's okay.”

“Yeah, no problem. See you at eight.”

“Cool.”

The connection broke. Amber sighed and levered herself out of the chair at the small dining table, taking a final drag from her cigarette before stubbing it out in the ashtray. She *did* need to study – the magic refused to miraculously impart all the facts she needed to pass her nursing exam – and would need a solid hour and a half to get ready to go out, which left her precious little time to review the material for her final. She ensconced herself on the couch, legs tucked underneath her beneath a woven afghan, a bottle of Diet Pepsi and an ashtray balanced on the arm of her sofa while she lost herself in refreshing the knowledge of foley catheter placement and aseptic procedures for a few hours before leaving for her first night out as a large-breasted, complete woman.

* * *

Amber returned home about one a.m., a little bleary-eyed and sweaty but otherwise vastly entertained and thoroughly satisfied with her first experience in public as a total girl. She'd worn a pair of strappy gladiator sandals with a four-inch spike heel and a curve-hugging 'little black dress,' her newfound favorite style of heavy, slutty makeup and her trademark oversized hoop earrings. She even took the time to thread dumbbell jewelry through the piercings in her cartilage. Jill, too, dressed to impress for the evening in a figure-flattering pink tube-dress with huge red hibiscus flowers printed on it and clunky-heeled white clogs. Amber's little partner looked completely different slutted up for the evening, with heavy makeup and her hair teased out a little, gathered on one side over her ear by a large red silk flower clip. Amber chided herself for not noticing how sexy she was until that moment.

In fact, she chided herself a little for not noticing that she still found most women sexy and attractive. A memory surfaced while nursing her second strawberry margarita, of a very poignant and breathless experimentation in the room of a luxury hotel during the Miss Teen pageant with a lithe and willowy redhead named Heather whom Amber never saw again after the competition. Enough to make Amber wonder on which side of the sexual orientation gap she actually fell. Only a firm and dedicated commitment to not shitting where she ate kept Amber from making a pass at her petite and devilishly hot new partner – but the thought definitely crossed her mind,

more and more often as the empty margarita glasses began their slow accumulation on their table.

Amber talked at length about her new past, grateful to have something she could share in the conversation now. As the drinks flowed, the conversation became more and more inane, finally devolving into a long series of flirtations with boys who came out of the crowd to talk with them and a staggering amount of sweaty, overtly sexual dancing. The manufactured history of ballet, tap and jazz along with years and years of cheerleading allowed Amber the ability to dance like a professional, drawing every eye in the little outdoor cantina to her undulating curves and jiggling breasts. For her part, Amber loved the feeling of the music taking her over and moving her body seemingly of its own accord. Her bones seemed to go slightly liquid in her body as she swayed and undulated like a snake, then popped into dramatic poses with her curly mane sailing behind her like a banner, until her skin glistened with perspiration and her breasts rose and fell with her breathless panting. Amber couldn't remember having as much fun in either of her lives.

They sat for about three hours at the bar, sipping water and sobering up before Amber took Jill home, exchanging fond hugs with one another on her doorstep before parting. Amber wended her way back to the apartment slowly through empty streets and sank onto her bed gratefully, still in her party clothes, only managing to kick off her shoes before drifting into a happy, dreamless sleep.

* * *

The next day passed without event – Amber fielded a phone call from Jill, inquiring about her hangover, and another from Maggie asking if she took notes on the nursing-school lecture involving orthopedic rehabilitation. The rest of the time she spent lounging around her apartment in a pair of pink pajamas printed with red puffy hearts and a white spaghetti-strap camisole that strained to contain her perfect breasts. She fought the urge to play with herself during her very long, steamy shower – such a distraction would surely cost her the day, which she desperately needed to spend buried in her nursing textbooks, with her final looming three days away. Although the lure of being out in public, around people she could talk and dance and flirt with, made serious demands on her attention, Amber realized with relief that spending a quiet day at home, studying and doing small household chores, did not drive her crazy with boredom.

She awoke around four a.m. the next morning on the couch next to an empty pitcher of iced tea and a full ashtray, surrounded by neatly stacked and organized piles of lecture notes and study guides. Her head ached a

little, just from eyestrain and lack of exercise, but her confidence about her exams decreased the baseline stress she carried to a blessedly small amount.

Work loomed – more time spent with Jill, which she enjoyed, but less time to prepare for finals and adjust to the strange new life in which she found herself dropped. Amber showered quickly and raided her closet for the day's uniform, a little disappointed that she must forego the bright colors and soft fabrics of her wardrobe for the drab white and navy blue of her duty uniform. But the County uniform code made no demands on what she wore beneath her uniform, and to that end Amber clad herself in a black satin corset with leopard-skin panels in the front, a black satin thong and black silk stockings attached to the corset's garters.



Something caught her eye, glinting on the top of her bureau nestled among the picture frames showing her cheerleading days and hair accessories. A small silver locket on a herringbone chain. It rattled a bit when she shook it. Amber pried it apart with her long manicured nails and found perhaps the last vestige of her former life – the plastic end-cap from a 3cc syringe. The syringe which contained the

three-hundred milligram dose of amiodarone – a potent cardiac antiarrhythmic – which she pushed in her male days into the vein of the first person she ever saved. Smiling, Amber fastened the tiny clasp behind her neck beneath the soft curtain of her hair and nestled the silver locket in the deep valley of her cleavage, resolving never to remove the jewelry again for as long as she lived.

She slipped into her work clothes and tucked her stockinged feet into a pair of wooly socks to prevent slipping around inside her boots, then gathered up the truly astonishing amount of crap she now required for a 24-hour shift at work: spare uniform, shower kit stuffed to bursting with shampoo, conditioner and body wash, makeup bag, backpack full of textbooks, laptop computer and small cooler of food for the day. It took two trips from the door to the car to get it all loaded. The sun just barely peeked over the eastern treeline by the time she put her Jeep in gear and began her journey to work, cigarette dangling from pink-glossed lips and Pink blaring over her speakers.

Jill pulled up just as Amber unloaded her second trip from the car into the station. They hugged one another and shared a few private jokes about their drunken night out, chatting airily while walking in together. The crew of Engine 4 worked busily, mopping floors and taking out trash. Keith McCallum offered the two girls a beaming smile upon seeing them enter.

“My two favorite medics,” he said brightly. “What's up?”

“Here to live the dream, baby,” Jill answered. He laughed, turning away, and Jill sagged against the wall, fanning herself theatrically and rolling her eyes.

“Oh, my *God*,” she breathed *sotto voce*. “Break me off a piece of that.”

“Keith? Really?” Amber asked, eyebrows raised.

“God, are you blind? Do you see that six-pack?” Jill whispered. “I would use that body like a fucking carnival ride if I got the chance.”

Amber poked her partner in the shoulder playfully. “You can't bottle those feelings up inside, Jill, they'll eat you up inside,” she teased. “You have to try and let it out.”

“Bitch,” Jill giggled. “You can't tell me you wouldn't put your ankles on opposite walls for that.”

Amber chewed her bottom lip. "I dunno," she said. "I guess I never really thought about it much."

"You're better than I am, then," Jill said. "That's *all* I ever think about. C'mon. Let's go check the truck so we can get some breakfast. I've got that first-day-after-the-hangover kind of hungry."

Amber dropped her stuff in the dorm and followed her shapely partner out into the bay, lost deeply in thoughts equal parts disturbing and exciting. She didn't really engage with the joking and teasing around the breakfast table and stayed lost in her own reflections until well after lunch.

* * *

Medic 22 pulled up outside the small but well-kept residence in a sleepy little suburban neighborhood, responding to a chest pain call on a 62-year-old male. Dispatch information described all the textbook symptoms of heart attack, leading the medics and fire crew to believe that this might actually be the "real thing" and grounds to actually practice some medicine on a day where they performed as little more than a glorified taxi service. The Engine 4 crew of Lt. Kellerman, Keith, Bobby and John bailed out of their vehicle in a rush, grabbing all the bags and gear for the 'helpless little girls' in the ambulance and taking it into the house with ingratiating smiles plastered all over their faces.

I used to love doing things for pretty girls, she thought, watching them preen and strut for her benefit. I acted like a blithering idiot, too. She shook her head roughly, trying to clear it from the troubling thoughts plaguing her today.

I've been so caught up in the cosmetic changes that I didn't stop to consider what being a girl might mean for me sexually, she thought. I know I still like girls, but do I like guys, now? Which do I like more? The thought of a guy touching me still freaks me out, but I've been thinking about it all morning long and even though it stresses me out it doesn't disgust me. I can't say it excites me, per se, but it doesn't make my stomach turn. I actually think I might be getting a little bit curious.

She walked into the house, still lost in a fog of thought. *Like what Jill said about Keith. I never looked at him as anything other than, well... than Keith, for Chrissakes. Like I ever spent a single second thinking about his abs or his shoulders...*

His wide, muscular shoulders...

She stopped dead. *Now where the hell did that come from? Am I starting to like guys?*

Bobby shouldered past her, dragging the stretcher behind him. Bobby, the one who always seemed shy and reticent about teasing her. Jill called out from the back room where she treated the patient, asking for an IV saline drip to be set up. Bobby opened the drug box at his feet and started the process of preparing and spiking the IV bag while bent over. Bent over, with his ass showing. His almost perfect, superbly muscled and exquisitely rounded ass. An ass just *made* for squeezing or a nice firm swat. For kneading like bread dough and for grabbing and pulling him in, deeper into her...



She sagged against the wall a bit, a little breathless. *Wow, she thought. I think I just decided that I like guys.* She took another long and informative look at Bobby's superlative backside and refined her decision a bit further.

Actually, she emended, I think I like guys and I'm pretty sure that I want Bobby to fuck my brains out. Or do I want Keith to do it, with his six-pack? Or John, with his pectorals?

I can't believe I can't make up my fucking mind as to which of those hose-jockeys I want to nail me, she thought with dismay. Even more so, I can't believe Jill's in there with a heart attack patient and I'm standing out here daydreaming about John Hanks' pectorals.

She shook her head to clear it further, with limited success, and cornered the patient's wife in order to gather information on the patient's medical history, medications and allergies. She concentrated only with effort – taking down the information and attempting to be reassuring as best she could while all the time thinking, *pectorals and abs and butts and shoulders and eyes and smiles – what else am I gonna wind up daydreaming about today?*

* * *

Amber stifled a soft moan, flopping in her narrow, hard bed from one side to another and burying her face into her pillow. Images flittered across her mind – the firm, naked bits from her previous list, glistening with sweat and flexing strongly against her soft, yielding flesh. But the list now included something different to fantasize about, something that disturbed her deeply while at the same time igniting strange new fires deep inside her belly. Pictures of huge, throbbing cocks covered in glistening moisture and mapped with ropy veins, surrounding her and pulsing in her hands, between her breasts and pressing insistently between her legs, making her grunt and scream. What started as simply warm wetness between her thighs had grown into an insistent urge threatening to overwhelm her. Unwilling to touch herself at work – certain taboos could *not* be challenged, no matter how demanding her body became – she made do with pressing her mound against a hard knot of wadded-up blanket, sending waves of pleasure throughout her body. Nipples hard as glass pressed against the restrictive walls of her corset. Only direct contact with the fiery, aching buds of nipples and clit promised any relief, however, and the pressure only built, her appetite growing by what it fed upon rather than diminishing.

The morning 'wake up' tones came just as the sleepless Amber reached the point where she could stand no more. She rose from her bed near-mad, gathering up her sodden bedding and shoving it into a laundry bag to be taken home to wash the musky sexual scent from it. She ran it out to her car first thing, every pull or tug from her dampened panties against her swollen mound forcing her to bite back mewls and squeals of pleasure. Avoiding the firefighters in the small, cramped station took a bit of effort, but Amber managed. She doubted her ability to keep her clothes on or her hands to herself if presented with any of the objects of her fantasies. Only Lt. Kellerman escaped her desire – his pot-belly and graying walrus mustache did nothing for her, she discovered – but Amber shunned him as

well, afraid that in her ardor she might decide that any hard and willing cock would do.

What truly intoxicated Amber about her arousal centered around her absolute certainty that any of the men in the fire station would fuck her gladly if she asked. Amber hailed from a world where sex required work – dating, saying all the right things, being romantic and thoughtful and spending some indeterminate amount of time with a woman attempting to win her. Sex, now, was a certainty. All that was required of Amber included only saying 'yes.' Nothing from her previous experience prepared her for that kind of sexual power, leading her to avoid the fire crew assiduously and hope none of them saw her. But even though the relatively unaware firefighters noticed nothing out of the ordinary – shifts where the offgoing EMS crew had no contact with them during shift change were not rare – Amber's obvious arousal and the faintly sweet musk of her wet pussy could not escape Jill's notice.

“Somebody had some good dreams last night,” Jill teased softly as they emptied the ambulance trash together, outside in the bay surrounded by the whirring din of the air conditioners and the diesel rumbles of the big engines. Outside, the oncoming firefighters tested their aerial ladder, stretching it up far into the sky and slewing it back and forth, up and down in roars of hydraulic pumps and hisses of hose.

Amber sighed, gnawing her bottom lip. “Jesus, is it *that* obvious?”

“Only if you've been there,” Jill said. “What brought this on? You look ready to jump the next set of bones that talks to you. I've been watching you head the other way whenever any of the fire guys comes anywhere near you.”

“I dunno. I started getting the itch yesterday on that damn STEMI call we had,” she said, using the medical parlance for “ST-segment Elevation Myocardial Infarction” to identify the type of heart attack they ran.

“Yeah, you seemed pretty out of it on that call,” Jill commented.

“Sorry about that,” Amber said. “I tried to make it up to you the rest of the shift.”

“But anyway, you were saying,” Jill said, accepting the apology with a casual wave of her hand.

“It just kept snowballing. By the time we went to bed I was damn near out of my head. I didn't get much sleep last night,” Amber said. “Feel like I'm about to blow up right now.”

“Too bad you weren't home,” Jill said. “So much easier when you can just light a couple candles and rub one out. Just take the edge of so you can go on about your day.”

Amber leaned against the brush-guard of the ambulance and dug in her leg pocket for her cigarettes and lighter. She sighed deeply, trying to ignore the tingling arpeggios of sensation radiating from her nipples begun by her deep breath. “Yeah, that thought crossed my mind several times last night while I pretended to sleep.”

Jill giggled. “I haven't had a case of the hornies like that at work in a long time,” she said. “But y'know something? If it's just us and you need to, y'know... let your fingers do the walking... I'm cool. Just do what you need to do. As long as you're okay with me doing the same.”

“I'm not sure how I feel about that,” Amber said honestly, exhaling a large cloud of bluish-grey smoke above their heads which drifted out of the ambulance bay and into the morning air outside. “I mean, it would've been nice last night to get some sleep, but there's just certain lines I don't know if I can cross, y'know?”

“I get it,” Jill said. “But when the doors close on the dorm at night, it's just us girls in there,” she said. “And we gotta stick together. None of these knuckleheads are gonna have our backs if one of us gets cramps or needs an emergency tampon, or needs to go have a good cry after a bad call. Or needs to ride the two-finger express while she squeals into a pillow so she can sleep. Consider it a standing offer.”

“You're sweet,” Amber said, taking another drag. “I appreciate it.”

“S nothing,” Jill said. “Looks like our relief is here.”

Amber raced through the process of shift change, handing over her radio and keys and signing the narcotic log as fast as she felt she could without appearing frantic. As it stood, Jill watched her rush with an amused smile and a few silent giggles which threatened to start Amber chuckling as well. The amusement didn't stop Amber's mad race for the door the second she clocked out, however.

* * *

She got home in record time, having zigzagged through traffic near-recklessly and pulled into her customary parking place near her apartment in a chirp of abused tires. She tossed her lipstick-stained cigarette into the bushes and nearly dropped her keys in her rush to get through the door. She stripped off her sodden uniform, tossing it towards the hamper, and released herself from the confines of the sexy corset. She took due care – even though the extra time pained her – to roll her sweaty stockings down carefully and put them on her bathroom counter to be washed out by hand, later – and put on another pair. Something about the slick, silken embrace and the way it made her legs feel when she rubbed them together just fueled that internal fire deliciously. A pair of hot pink thigh-highs, lined with sticky bands to make them stay up without garters, took the place of the old ones, and she even wormed her feet into a pair of black spike-heeled pumps to complete the 'porno' look she had in her head before sinking back against her pillows and finally allowing her naked, swollen sexual flesh to be touched. Even though Amber had not really experimented with herself since she first gained her 'girl parts' a few days past, her fingers seemed to know what best to do, teasing nipples into even stiffer points of pure pleasure and tracing gentle circles around her nether lips. She wet a fingertip by sucking on it – an act which brought her more pleasure than she suspected it would, feeling her soft, glossy lips closing around rough flesh – and then touched her clitoris directly. The contact made her jump and gasp, biting her lip and squeezing her eyes shut. She knew she had to have more, immediately.



Time to find out if I'm a moaner or a screamer, she thought ascerbically, worming a finger down below and feeling the tip press against the yielding flesh of her opening. Carefully maneuvering the long fingernail around the sensitive tissue, she pressed – and experienced having something inside her for the very first time.

“Holy shit,” she breathed between clenched teeth. “Oh, my God.”

She lost track of how long she lay there, impaled on her own finger, just submerging her entire consciousness into the sensation of having something *within* her body and the throbbing ripples of pure pleasure the tiny invader elicited. But eventually she began to dry out a bit and Amber retracted the finger with a sigh of disappointment and re-wet the tip with her tongue.

I taste like honey and salt, she noted, sucking her fingertip. *Even a little bit like strawberries.*

The yearning chasm of need opened in her belly now beckoned, and Amber obeyed. Her fingers migrated southward, two destined for her tender, yielding insides and another two dedicated solely to rubbing her

clitoris, to drive herself into a place she'd never been before. A place she longed to discover for herself.

Setting a picture of a very naked and very erect Bobby Resnick firmly in her mind's eye, Amber slipped her fingers into her pussy and started tracing her little circles again, eyes closed and moaning breathily.

AMBER PRIDED HERSELF ON HER adaptability to the sweeping and rapid-fire changes flying at her minute by minute since her fantastic transformation from man to young woman. She never accidentally stepped into the men's room any more, she always remembered to use a straw with her drinks to keep from wrecking her lipstick, she hardly ever forgot to take her purse with her when she left someplace. She learned to move her head in such a way that her hair seldom wound up in her mouth or stuck to her lip gloss these days, she taught herself to French braid so her hair behaved while she worked out and she now knew to avoid the smell of cooking meat to keep her newborn vegetarian sensibilities from making her nauseated.

But nothing prepared her for what she felt right now.

Fantasies of the fire crew, Engine 4, that she worked with on a day-to-day basis, hammered against the insides of her skull – she pictured them naked and sweating, driving themselves into her every hole, worshipping every exposed inch of her skin. Her hands worked between her legs, her arms pushing her breasts together beneath her chin while her left hand tickled and teased her swollen clitoris and her right pushed two fingers in and out of her warm, slick hole. Amber panted and squealed and moaned, thrashing her head and watching the lurid porno movie in her mind, until the feeling inside her grew to a near-explosive pressure, pounding against the inside of her skull and making her body tingle and thrash. Just when she thought she could contain no more, bucking her hips wildly against her hands, the feeling transformed inside her – taking on an acute edge and feeling as though it moved in slow motion; like piled fabric falling from atop a table, falling from the top down and gathering up more of itself as it slid, gathering momentum and speed until the bulk of it fell all at once.

Her back arched until only the top of her head and the cheeks of her ass supported her weight, she bit her bottom lip to the point of pain and her left hand turned into a blur of up-and-down motion. Amber's heels drummed against the mattress and her high voice rose even higher, several octaves in a breathless arpeggio, until...

The world melted away, like when she was male, but instead of her entire consciousness centering around a cock and balls, it expanded to take in

every cell, every atom of her body from the ends of her curly blonde hair to the edges of her toenails. Every smallest part of her thrummed and throbbed with pure ecstasy, a pleasure that she had never known before and would not have estimated that she could contain. She screamed, high and ululating, looking for any way to let out the pleasure, her hips clenching painfully around her hands and her head thrashing back and forth in the lush nest formed by her sweat-dampened hair.

Her breath came only in ragged pants once the surging flood finally abated, leaving her limp and wrung-out. A left-over reflex from being male, keeping her hands moving to milk the last drops of orgasm from a deflating cock, surprised her with an unexpected outcome – quickly and surprisingly, the wave built inside her once more and she barely had time to catch her breath before she came again, clenching tight and arching her back as before, screaming and thrashing.

The two-and-a-row orgasm left Amber breathless, lightheaded and exhausted but she could not help wondering just how *multiple* she actually was – a few more quick flicks with her fingers and a deep push inside herself and she launched into a third. By the time that one – smaller and somehow sweeter than its predecessors – ebbed, her clitoris had become far too sensitive to touch for her to continue. She slipped fingers bathed in slick lubrication, pruny from their immersion in her vagina, out of herself with a wet *pop* and sagged against the bed, unable to do anything more than just lay still and pant for breath.

So that's what a girl orgasm feels like, she thought sarcastically. *Good to know.*

Pleasure on the level she just experienced left her mind reeling a bit, unsure how to process or store what she just went through. The heavy lethargy – familiar from her days as a male – passed within seconds, however, leaving behind a deeply rejuvenated and energized feeling that left Amber feeling bright and beautiful, inside and out.

She sat up on the edge of her bed and jumped a bit at the cold shock of the wet spot she left behind. Amber soaked the sheets admirably when she came, apparently, maybe even squirted a little bit given the size of it and the triangular shape. She scooted over to keep her stockings out of the sticky mess, then perched on the edge of her bed and lit a cigarette, raking her fingers through her sweat-damp hair.

I can't believe I'm ready to go again, she thought to herself in wonder. *This is amazing. I never knew it was like this for a girl. Why aren't they fucking or masturbating every second of every day?*

She blew out a lungful of smoke through swollen lips. *You can't get addicted to that feeling*, she thought ruefully, *no matter how much you want to. You have to be careful around anything that feels that good. There's bound to be a hook. Nothing that feels like that comes for free.*

She thought about it momentarily. If she indulged in that pleasure as much as she wanted to, it would mean either masturbating or having some form of sex four or five times daily. She wouldn't be able to hold a job and would have a reputation as a mindless slut within a week. So she would have to go without, and that meant walking around with the knowledge of the volatile, explosive pleasure she could experience. She would be on the constant lookout for opportunity to experience it. Knowing what she knew now, Amber resigned herself to the fact that she would be a *very* horny girl from now on. And she might take some silly risks in her constant underlying quest to feel the way she just felt.

She puffed her cigarette deeply and lay back against her pillows. A feeling of cold loneliness remained in the absence of that life-affirming ecstasy and Amber longed for someone to be there with her – a pair of arms around her, the quiet and reassuring rhythm of breathing and heartbeat and warmth near enough to wrap herself around, to bury her forehead in the nook of a neck and feel a pulse. To smell something other than her own fading arousal, to whisper something inane and meaningless and hear something in return. Oddly enough, however, she did not immediately fantasize about the muscular, naked men who fueled her earlier orgasmic fire. The softer, warmer fantasies about falling asleep in someone's arms and being held, of tender fingers stroking her hair and tracing idle designs on the bare flesh of her shoulder showed her pictures of her own naked body entwined around Maggie Delaney, the redhaired nursing student in Amber's study group. To smell her sweet, drying sexual sweat and whisper quiet endearments against her neck, to run fingers through her auburn hair and see how softly she could kiss her eyelids.

An overwhelming desire to be with her led Amber to find her phone – in her purse beside the front door – and recline on her couch while she dialed, cigarette dangling from her lips. It rang quietly before a familiar voice answered, “H'lo?”

“Hey, Mags? Amber,” she said, twisting a curled lock of hair around one finger.

“Oh, hey, girl! Were your ears burning?”

Amber became mock-stern. “What kinda bullshit have you been talking about me behind my back?”

Maggie laughed. “Nothing bad. I’m out with my sister and her husband, they asked me if there was anybody cool in my class and you were the first person I thought of. What’s up?”

“Nothing,” Amber confessed. “Lonesome. Believe it or not, I just kinda wanted to hear your voice. But I can call back later if you’re busy. Seriously.”

A long, poignant pause followed. “That’s really sweet,” she said softly. She sounded as if she’d come to some kind of realization. “I wish I could talk to you, but – it’s my sister and her husband, they’re buying lunch...”

Amber forced past her own disappointment and made her voice sound light and breezy. “Don’t sweat it, girl, really. I understand,” she said. “But hey – d’you want to do something tonight? Hang out?”

Maggie almost sounded as if she wanted to cry. “I can’t,” she said plaintively. “I’m behind, baby, I have to study tonight. The whole group is coming and it’s at my house.”

“Are you okay?” Amber said, listening to the strain in her friend’s voice.

“Yeah,” she said, and sniffled a little.

“You don’t sound okay,” Amber pressed.

“It’s just – you’re gonna think this is stupid... It’s just that I’ve been hoping you were gonna call me and ask me to go hang out for a year, now,” she said. “And then when you finally do it, I’m busy.”

She’s been waiting... she thinks this is a date I’m asking for? Amber thought to herself. No, I just want to be with her, I’m lonely and all I can think about is being with her... never mind. I was asking her on a date.

“Hey, I should’ve known better than to call in the middle of finals week,” Amber said. “Just ‘cause you can’t do anything tonight, Mags, doesn’t mean I’m gonna give up. I’m a little tougher than that. Sooner or later we’re gonna go out.”

“I like that idea,” Maggie told her. “And just think about it – probably by the time we do, we’ll both be registered nurses.”

“Yeah,” Amber said. “Enjoy your lunch, sweetie, I’ll holler at you later. See ya, Nurse Maggie.”

“Bye, Nurse Amber. And... seriously. Thanks for calling. I really wish I could go out with you.”

“I know you do, baby. Me, too.”

Amber tapped 'End Call' with a long thumbnail and sighed, finishing her cigarette with one prolonged drag. The urge to be with Maggie did not abate in the slightest and the frustration carried with it the potential to be as maddening in its own way as the desperate horniness from last night had been. Amber sat up, ground out her cigarette in the ashtray, and searched desperately for something to do to distract her from the distinct lack of Maggie she suffered.

* * *

Three and a half hours passed. Amber cleaned her entire apartment, sorted her laundry and washed her silk stockings in Woolite in the bathroom sink, hanging them to dry over her shower rod. She studied pathophysiology and did a twenty-minute ab workout she found on a DVD on her shelf. None of it banished the persistent thoughts of Maggie plaguing her or made the redhead's absence any easier to bear. Amber found herself moving back to her laptop frequently – now a MacBook Air with a pink plastic skin – and checked Maggie's Facebook status repeatedly to see if anything had changed. Amber eschewed Facebook prior to her transformation, but found that the magic transforming her provided an account with a very robust 'friends' list – even though she knew cognitively that she never heard any of the names on the list before, she could identify them as people she knew from high school, cheerleading, Hooters and her brief stint in the Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority at State.

Searching for *anything* to occupy herself, Amber reapplied her sweat-ruined makeup and slipped into a pink Bebe 'baby' t-shirt and a pair of denim short-shorts, threaded some oversized pink metal hoops into her ears and got around to gathering up laundry for the trek to the apartment complex laundry room. She carried the loaded basket and her detergent and fabric softener on one curvaceous hip and grabbed her cigarettes and keys before she remembered the dirty bedding and uniforms in her bag by the door, brought home from the station.

Amber had been in such a rush to get home and relieve herself sexually that she never really looked closely at what she had grabbed from her locker at work. In the bottom of her bag, near her folder full of continuing education certificates, her stethoscope and a lint roller she never used, sat the plain brown shipping box with the teasing caption written by Engine 4 on the lid.



Amber sat on the couch, chewing her bottom lip as she opened the box in her lap and examined the 'slutty nurse' uniform the boys bought to tease the male her. None of them ever even considered seeing her in it, before her transformation, but now... the sizes she found seemed accurate, and Amber even had a pair of matching white platform heels to go with it.

The clothes make the man, Kellerman said jokingly.

*They certainly made me, Amber thought in reply. A wild urge to slip herself into the daringly-cut dress and the slutty lingerie welled up inside her, accompanied by fresh images of naked firefighters all around her, aroused nearly to bursting at the very sight of her. Amber worked too hard and too long today to keep those kinds of thoughts at bay, so she stuffed the costume back into the box and tucked it out of sight in the back her closet. But *out of sight, out of mind* failed her miserably – the slutty little white nurse's costume and lingerie beckoned to her, always just in the back of her mind, calling out to her even while she sat smoking and studying formation of care plans outside the laundry room.*

What would happen, anyway, if I did wear it? she asked herself silently. It seemed to be the thing that started all of this – why, I'm still not sure – but would wearing it change me further? Would something huge happen if I

put it on? It's just a cheap little lingerie store costume, there's hundreds like it out there. What's so special about this one?

Examining her feelings further, Amber discovered that simply wearing the dress and lingerie engendered no feelings of excitement in and of themselves – the sharp stirrings of horny arousal came from thinking about seeing Engine 4's crew *seeing* her in the costume. Something seemed to slip into place inside Amber's brain. She found herself laying plans before she even realized she made a decision.

Amber overheard that the fire crew attended a live-fire rescue class this afternoon from two to five o'clock. The boys acted nonchalant about the whole thing but Amber knew exercises around actual fire conditions excited them. They would be back at the training station – deep in the rural county – to clean and coil the hoses on the County's training engine by five thirty, she thought, and in the showers by six. The boys usually hung out in the fire bay – well out of sight of the general public, so as not to give any implication of firefighters drinking on the job – and had a few beers to brag about how bravely they performed in the training. None of them would be working the next day and none of them except Kellerman needed to report in with a significant other. Only Keith McCallum participated in anything even remotely like a relationship, but he described it as casual and non-exclusive to anyone who inquired.

Holy shit, Amber said, pulling her warm laundry out of the dryer and into the basket on her hip, I'm actually gonna do this. I'm gonna go over there.

But what the fuck am I expecting to do with them? Tap dance? I show up there in my little slut outfit and those guys aren't gonna want to just hang out and play cards, she thought. Matter of fact, I don't think I'd be satisfied by that either. But I can't even make up my mind which of them I like, much less what I'd be willing to do. I'm technically still a virgin, after all – even though the magic would probably steer me around the curves, I don't think I'm ready to fuck anyone yet. Hell, just masturbating nearly turned me into a fucking sex addict. Is going over there biting off more than I can chew?

She rubbed her temples in irritation. *But I really want to go over there, she groaned, beginning her walk back to her apartment with her laundry balanced on her hip. She noticed that her sexy sway drew admiring eyes from two or three young men out playing frisbee in front of the leasing office and she offered them a glittering and suggestive smile as she passed. I want them to see me. I want them to witness first-hand what the clothes made the man.*

I can't stand this, she thought to herself irritatedly. *I can't just waltz in there dressed like an extra in a porno movie and just 'see what happens.'* *I have to have some kind of plan in place, some idea of what I'm willing and not willing to do.*

She thought again about the fantasies she witnessed during her spirited session of masturbation that morning. About naked, sweating bundles of muscles driving the motion of hard, thick cocks – cocks that penetrated and entered her in every way, in her pussy, up her virgin ass, and...

Smiling, Amber finally had the first inklings of a plan. She slid her key into the lock and went inside, stashing her folded laundry in the drawers in her bedroom as the shock and initial *holy shit* reaction to the original idea faded to nothing behind a wall of horny, giddy excitement. She didn't know which of them she would find – honestly, it didn't matter, Amber would gladly and willingly do what she planned to do with any of them – but the first little stirrings of desire rose inside her and she hoped it would be Bobby. The shy one, the sweet one, the one who didn't have to brag and puff out his chest to prove himself. Amber lusted after all of them, to be sure, but something about Bobby made him the one that she could fantasize about doing something with *after* sex. Waking up in his arms, going to breakfast together – those thoughts didn't repel her the way they did when she tried to imagine doing the same with John Hanks or Keith McCallum.

She knew she needed to time her little surprise perfectly so that she could catch the boys finishing their showers after training, and her plan required a lot of preparation work. Not the least of which included figuring out just *how* to do what she planned to do with a man. She knew what felt good to her from her life as a male, but even inside knowledge such as that didn't change the fact that she had never done it before; she'd never even been in a position where there was nothing between her and someone else's cock before, not even in a gym shower or locker room.

Online resources offered very little help – most of them centered around oh-so-helpful advice like 'be yourself' and 'enjoy it' – so she relied more on past experience of having a cock of her own and her detailed knowledge of anatomy to generate her plan. She determined that she needed practice, however, and giggled to herself as she loaded her makeup and costume in the front seat of her Jeep.



All the way from her apartment to EMS Central Supply she practiced on the banana she brought along with her. Ducking inside the cramped quarters of the medical warehouse containing supplies for the ambulances county-wide, she grabbed a few foil packages of viscous lidocaine jelly, a topical analgesic with numbing properties which Amber intended to apply to the back of her throat to keep her from gagging. She piled back into her Jeep and opened another banana for practice on her drive back to the station. She parked around the corner, smoking cigarettes and doing her makeup in the tiny compact mirror from her purse while waiting to see the big red fire engine round the corner and head to the station, letting Bobby Resnick out of the back compartment to guide the big vehicle as it backed into the bay. Amber arranged her hair as best she could – she didn't go nuts with a hairstyle other than to tease it out and spray it heavily, since she figured any work she did towards that front would be totally lost on her intended targets – and then pulled into the parking lot, tossing her cigarette butt into the storm drain and sneaking inside. The firefighters banged and bumped around as they removed her clothing and farted and joked crudely as Amber tucked herself in the EMS supply closet and changed from her tee-shirt and shorts into the red bra and panties, white stockings and garter and the little white dress which barely covered the cheeks of her ass. She set her compact mirror on the shelf at eye level and attached the little nurses'

wimple to her sprayed-stiff hair by bobby pins, put the finishing touches on her makeup and applied a fresh coat of lipstick and gloss to her lips.

The preparation – clandestine and exciting – soon dampened Amber's thighs and made her panties clingy and moist with excitement and arousal. She heard the showers shut off one by one and envisioned the firefighters leaving the locker room to go and get dressed. When the final one shut off, Amber *click-clacked* across the tiles in her white platform 'stripper shoes' quickly and hoped to cut off the last of the firefighters leaving the shower and have him all to herself in the steamy locker room. She hoped the steam from the showers didn't make her mascara run or her hair go flat. She hoped the lidocaine jelly in her throat kept her from gagging. She hoped she didn't wind up looking like an idiot. She hoped it was Bobby in there.

She pushed open the door of the locker room, playing with her hair and trying on her very best 'seductive' face. She had intended – and rehearsed – saying something coy like 'Don't bother with a towel' to whichever of the firefighters waited inside for her.

It wouldn't have worked, however, because *all* the firefighters waited inside. They gaped at her in utter shock as all the cheesy pick-up lines Amber rehearsed in her head on the way over stuck in her throat and everything she'd planned flew promptly and irrevocably out the window.

“Um... hi!” she said brightly, cheeks crimson.

“What the fuck, Amber?” John Hanks said, jumping. They had all changed into clean uniforms, she noticed, forgetting in her new world of long preparation time for public viewing how very quickly the average man could shower and dress himself.

“Why are you dressed like that?” Keith added.

She bit her lip. “I... uh... this didn't go exactly according to plan...”



“Plan?” John asked. Amber looked questioningly at Bobby, who could only stare at her open-mouthed.

“Yeah, I kinda had this... plan. To get one of you alone in here,” she confessed.

“Seriously?” Keith asked. “Which one of us?”

“I, uh... hadn't gotten that far,” she said. “I know this makes me sound slutty, but I couldn't really make up my mind. I figured, y'know, whoever was in here, that would be the one. Like flipping a coin.”

John laughed. “You never let on,” he told her.

“Yeah, well, it's hard enough to get y'all's respect when I'm in uniform,” she said. “Drooling all over one of you guys would have made that worse. So I couldn't let you know. But – I dunno. I've just been kinda lonesome lately, and really stressed out – there's been a lot of changes in my life lately – and I thought, y'know, maybe now might be the time...”

Keith gaped. “I've never seen you nervous before.”

She stepped into the room without noticing, letting the door close softly behind her. Before she knew what happened, she stood in the middle of the room literally trembling with excitement, surrounded by muscular men showing telltale signs of sexual arousal, including their uniform pants tenting in front at the sight of her luridly erotic costume.

“I never had reason to be,” she breathed. The men stepped closer. She could smell them – clean, musky sweat and the soapy scents of a recent shower, plus something subtle and unnameable unique to each one. John smelled sharp and tangy, Keith spicy and earthy and the silent Bobby smelled woody and clean. Each scent caused a deep reaction in Amber's belly, drawing her in. She couldn't choose which one she more wanted to gravitate towards. They were close enough now that she felt the heat radiating from them.

“So, are you gonna make up your mind, then, or what?” Keith asked suggestively.

The nervous energy fluttering like a trapped bird in her chest turned to something altogether silkier, and she settled into it comfortably. “I told you. I can't.”

She put a soft hand on Keith's firm shoulder, tracing the barely-visible edges of his tattoos with a long fingernail, and tangled the fingers of her other hand in John's soft damp hair while leaning back against Bobby's hard, exquisitely defined chest. “So the way I see it, I only really have one choice,” she breathed.

Keith leaned forward and kissed her, stealing her breath away, before pulling back and running a rough, callused hand along her arm from shoulder to wrist. “What choice is that?” she heard Bobby's voice whisper from behind her, soft against her neck, as his lips started nuzzling the impossibly sensitive flesh along the side. His hands encircled her waist gently and she felt his firm rigid length press warmly against her ass.

“Not to choose,” she said, leaning over one shoulder to kiss him hungrily. John's hands closed roughly around one breast and she gasped, then turned to kiss John in a coiling snake-fight of tongues. Deftly, her hands reached down began working on John's belt and fly as Amber sank to her silk-stockinged knees, gazing up at them with open hunger and want.

* * *



Amber shouldn't have worried about technique nearly so much as she should have concerned herself with logistics. Had she foreseen kneeling in the center of three men, using her hungry mouth and hands to pleasure them all at the same time, she might have spent more time and energy figuring out how to keep them all equally excited and moving towards release without letting any of them lag behind the others. She might apply more of herself to the resource-management problem presenting her, but very little of her mind remained free of the desperately ravenous sexual desire burning through her to devote to anything. The thick, stiff cocks, glistening with a generous coating of her saliva dominated her every sense and she reveled in the sight, smell, feel and taste of them, the satisfied grunts and groans she elicited as she stuffed first this, then that, then the other one into her hungry mouth while stroking the other ones with her unoccupied hands. The boys thrust into her roughly as she sucked them, their fervor and arousal building, while Amber rocked her hips back and forth in order to rub her aching clitoris against the back of her silk-clad heel where she squatted. The orgasms she elicited from herself that way did not overwhelm her and leave her breathless and shaking the way

those she had earlier that day, but the 'short and sweet' ones proved immensely satisfying and gave her the opportunity to enjoy just how sweet

and sexual her voice sounded when she came with a cock tuffed in her throat.

Never having had a proper girlhood, Amber realized she never developed the hang-ups and taboos which haunted so many other girls her age. Her only true experience of overtly sexual women came from pornography viewed through the filter of being a guy – willing and completely uninhibited beauties as horny and excited about whatever depths of depravity being performed as the male participants. A 'normal' girl finding herself kneeling in a circle of cocks, sucking first one, then another and then another might freak out or suffer some sort of emotional trauma as a result, but not Amber – embroiled in a day of discoveries like today, taking on three men like she did now only set a sexual baseline for her, letting her act the same way as her sexual 'mother figures' did and make herself more like her ideal women.

So she happily dove from one cock to the next, tugging and twisting the others with her hand, rubbing her clit against her platform heels and having the time of her life. She would have planned for this from the very beginning if she had any idea of the amount of excitement and arousal associated, and even the outright humiliation of being the willing recipient of this demeaning treatment only fueled the smoldering fire inside her.

In fact, Amber hoped after this she could bring herself to settle on only one guy.

The thrusting hips around her began to take on a demanding, rhythmic edge, and none of the boys looked down at her any more (costing her the opportunity to gaze up at them with her wide green eyes, a view of women in her particular position that always drove her wild when she still had a penis of her own), instead leaning back and squeezing their eyes shut.

Oh, shit, Amber thought. I didn't get this far in my planning. What do I do when they...

The question was simple enough: was Amber McRory a 'spit' girl or a 'swallow' girl? Or did she just take it all over her face like her porno paragons? She had no idea. Amber only planned as far as the door and just chalked everything else up to letting nature take its course. The thought of having semen in her mouth didn't repulse her – after all, she had erect cocks in that same mouth right now, and that used to disgust her but now quickly moved up the list of her favorite things to do – but it seemed like such a change from who she thought she was.

She was. Amber realized parts of her still existed that saw themselves as male. Many parts, which acted just under the radar of her consciousness, conspiring against the completion of her transformation. Tied somehow to survival – as if Pete Harrison would die if this magic took its course and he intended to rage, rage against the dying of the light from his space inside her mind and soul – they maintained a great deal of power over her, steering her away from the very things that would reinforce and prove her womanhood by throwing up obstacles like fear, anxiety, disgust and social taboo. So the decision presented itself very clearly. Boy or girl? There could be no in between. She either had to be all of one or all of the other. She clearly felt the potential inside herself and in the world around her; choosing 'boy' would unravel every change she underwent these past four days, and she knew she would wake the next morning in her original, middle-aged male body.

Or, she could choose 'girl' and see what this new world, with its strange sensations and challenges and hopes, held in store for her. Would it be the new or the comfortable? The original or the manufactured? The well-lived or the not-yet-lived? Both had their upsides and their downsides, their relative pros and cons. Amber spent several long stretches – her head still pistoning up and down on the rotating succession of cocks, slicking them with spit and sliding in and out of her willing throat – trying to consider which answer would give the most benefit, which one held the most value as opposed to the other. She tried to reach a well-reasoned decision.

Stupid, she thought to herself, popping John's thick cock out of her pouting lips in favor of Bobby's longer, skinnier one. *This isn't a job for reason. This is a decision of the heart.*

Or is that me just thinking like a girl? she wondered.

All my fucking life I've been reasoning my way through this world with logic, she continued, licking Bobby's musky and warm balls while his slick cock throbbed against her cheek. She moved from his to Keith's fat dick with the mushroom head and amused herself by alternately stroking the cocks in each hand to the beat of the Pussycat Dolls' *Buttons*. *Maybe it is time for me to just let go and do what makes me happiest.*

She paused for breath, panting and licking. "I have to decide," she breathed.

"Decide what?" John asked raspily.

She looked up at him. “Which one of these cocks I like sucking best,” she teased. She slipped him back into her mouth and he groaned. *I do have to decide, she said. And soon.*

Boy or girl? the world seemed to whisper to him.

I don't know. I can't make up my mind. They both have their benefits, and they both have their problems. And they both made me happy in their own ways. Neither is inherently better than the other.

She attempted to pull John's cock out of her mouth but his strong hands took her by the hair and beneath the jaw and began fucking her face, gently at first but more and more roughly as it began exciting him. Amber thanked providence that she swallowed that numbing lidocaine before she began this, or his spirited thrusts might have gagged her. Not that the thought of gagging on a cock being forced down her throat didn't provide its own measure of dirty, slutty satisfaction. Amber discovered with a bit of amazement that she actually liked her sex a little bit rough, and the being grabbed and pulled like that turned her on immeasurably.

She finally pulled her face away and gave him an open-mouthed, breathless smile. “Nasty boy,” she panted. “You need to learn to share with the rest of the class.”

She twisted his cock hard in her hand, making him hiss with a mixture of pain and arousal, and Amber never broke eye contact with him as she leaned to one side to suck Keith's erection into her waiting mouth. John looked at her as if to say 'you dirty slut.' She returned a look that said 'damn right.'

So maybe I'm asking the wrong question, she realized. Maybe it's not a matter of 'boy' or 'girl.' Maybe it's more specific than that, and the question is 'Pete' or 'Amber?' Which do I like better? Pete – I've known him longer. We've been through a lot together. He's funny and smart and capable. But Amber – she's so alive, so vital and in-the-moment. So much potential. And so beautiful.

That's the clincher, isn't it? she realized. Beautiful. Physically, emotionally, she's breathtaking. And one decision away from being me forever.

I think if Pete were here, he'd want it to be Amber, she thought. He would gladly sacrifice himself so that beauty like that could live on.

Keith began to moan and buck his hips a bit wildly and Amber knew the time had come to decide what life she would choose to live. With no regret

whatsoever, she tipped back her head and stuck out her tongue, gazing up at Keith with open lust in her eyes as he took his cock in hand and directed jet after jet after jet of hot, salty cum onto her tongue and down her throat.



The taste smashed all her preconceived notions of what it might be like – musky and salty and hot, tasting so intrinsically *male* and utterly sexual. But beyond just the shock of actually *liking* the taste of come, the jolt of utter completion, of being *one* with herself at long last, flooded through her and brought a level of satisfaction and happiness neither life ever showed her before. She

swallowed dutifully, letting the delicious fluid slide down her numbed throat and suffuse itself into her, changing her the way that Christians described communion, feeling a true and otherworldly power spread throughout every cell in her body, changing her at her most basic level.

I'm a girl, she thought happily. A real girl, finally.

No more did she pursue the dream of promotion to district command and eventual retirement from County EMS, of being known as one of the best. The thought of opening a bar with two other buddies and spending old age

pulling beers for off-duty medics and firefighters, going fishing and playing golf into his dotage no longer appealed the way it had, being the carrot which dragged her through endless bureaucratic nightmares and long, thankless shifts.

I do want to be good at my job – both as a paramedic and a nurse – but I don't give a damn about getting promoted or being the best. What I care about is making friends like Jill and Maggie, going out and having fun, meeting somebody and getting married.

And having a baby, she thought, a shudder of utter satisfaction and peace covering her. What I really want is to have a baby. Or two. I want to be a soccer mom and bake cupcakes for the school bake sale. I want PTA meetings and dirty diapers and college funds. I've never wanted anything more in my life.

The feeling of total and complete peace suffusing her got interrupted then by John's strong hands on either side of her face, turning her towards him. With a silly series of bestial grunts, he stroked his cock roughly and shot her mouth full once again. His cum tasted bitter and a little acrid, like burned toast, but still wonderful and sexual and delicious. A little bit dribbled out of the corner of her mouth and she stuck out her tongue to clean it, not wanting a single precious drop to go to waste. He sagged against the rusted blue lockers, panting and groaning, before turning her sole attention to Bobby, something she found herself wanting to do from the very beginning.

“Hey there,” she said huskily.

“Hey,” he breathed.

“Having a good time?” she asked, stroking his cock lovingly, rubbing the spit-slick head against the soft, smooth skin of her cheek.

“Yeah,” he told her. “You?”

“Time of my fucking life,” she whispered. “The other guys were fun, y'know, but this... baby, I've been fantasizing about this since I met you.”

His eyes widened a little bit. “Really?”

“Really,” she said, smiling lasciviously. “I've had a crush on you for, like, forever.”

“I didn't know,” he told her.

“Course you didn't,” she smiled. “I never let you. But it's true.”

“I had a crush on you, too,” he told her.

“I know,” she said with a satisfied glint in her eye. “Now, how about we get down to business?”

He only stared at her with open hunger, fueling her fires even further. Having 'bumped off' the other two participants, Amber used one of the free hands she now had to push aside the waistband of her sodden panties and stroke her clit a little, making her moan and gasp.

“Honey, you have no idea how bad I've wanted to do this,” she said. “I'm gonna *enjoy* this.”

She opened her mouth wide and sank his entire length into it, letting out a moan of utter satisfaction as he slid over the surface of her tongue and down her wide-stretched throat.

The moan sounded, for the first time, completely girlish to her ears.

* * *

She stood in front of the mirror, looking down at the utter ruin of her clothes with a wrinkle of distaste on her pretty face. The slutty nurse uniform hung in one hand, completely unwearable from having sat on a wet locker-room floor and being covered with stray drops of cum, both male and female. She wadded the garment – and the underwear and stockings as well – into a plastic grocery bag scavenged from the kitchen. Her other hand clutched the sodden remnants of her civilian clothes, the pink tee shirt and denim shorts she'd worn over. She mistakenly left them in the EMS supply closet under the leaking air conditioner condensation tray where they accumulated a rather mildewy soaking. Even the little pink ballet flats she wore on her trip over came out unwearable. She tucked the whole thing into the plastic bag, hoping she could save the clothing before it was ruined.

Her naked reflection looked different to her eyes, somehow, even though she could not put a finger on any definite changes she saw. The same green eyes, the same blonde kinky curls, the same full 'bee-stung' lips and perfect breasts, glowing amber skin and narrow waist, flat stomach with the pierced navel and wide, lushly curved hips. But the individual pieces just seemed to go with one another now, fitting together in a way they hadn't prior to her choice, making her more than just an assemblage of various girl pieces and, finally, a complete and whole girl.

She took a few moments to repair her utterly devastated makeup, smeared and run from the sweat and rough treatment she received at the hands – and cocks – of the fire crew whom she just sucked to orgasm. She still tasted the lingering flavor of their cum, still felt the ghost of hard, insistent flesh pushing its way down her throat and the intoxicating smell of them.

But mostly she tasted Bobby. Sweet, shy Bobby who had been the last to cum, giving her the opportunity to devote all her attention on him, learning his noises and where his most sensitive spots lay, what kind of touch excited him, what teased him, and what was simply too much. Amber deeply cherished lavishing her whole attention on him, driving to the heights of ecstasy and finally having him explode inside her mouth, coating her tongue and throat with a startling quantity of the sweetest and most delicious cum of the three, his fingers tangled in her sweaty hair. She loved how his thrusts – insistent but always gentle – faded in speed and intensity while he came, waning away to nothing until he sagged against her, the hard muscles of his ass relaxing under her squeezing hands and his rock-hard cock deflated in her palm.

It alarmed her how her heart jumped at the thought of him, much less the smell or scent of him. She knew without doubt she would do anything he asked of her, letting him use her for his pleasure in any way he wanted, just so she could feel that gradual fading of energy, that sense of having him utterly spend himself inside her, again.

Jesus, she thought as she applied fresh eyeliner in the mirror. I've only been complete for a few minutes, and I'm already in serious jeopardy of falling for a guy.

She blinked, almost smudging her careful application of makeup. Falling? As in, in love? No, can't be. I don't even know what that means yet for a girl. It must be lust. Maybe even gratitude, for being so nice to me and being a part of that incredible experience.

But it couldn't be love.

She repeated that like a mantra to herself while she reapplied eyeshadow, mascara and lipstick, fluffing out her hair with her fingers and judging herself sexy enough to be presentable. She didn't know what her actions on the locker room floor might mean for the dynamic at work – a sacrifice she willingly made, but now a much more looming problem than before – but resolved herself to face them head-on and not just hide her head in the sand. She'd been around enough firefighters in her day to know that they didn't make great decisions – they tended to think with their balls instead of their brains for the most part – and refused to trust any of them to stay

professional when everyone showed up back in uniform. So it fell to Amber to be the adult, to be the one in control.

“Hey,” Bobby's soft baritone said from behind her. “We found you something to wear. It's not exactly high fashion, but at least you won't have to drive home naked.”

“Thanks,” she said. “Hey, Bobby, are you okay? With what happened, I mean.”

He scratched his forehead nervously. “I guess I am,” he said. “I mean, I never took you for the kind of girl to take on three guys at once. I thought shit like that only happened in pornos.”

“I get that,” she said. “But I *need* you to be okay with this.”

“I am,” he said. “Or at least I will be. Mostly because of all that stuff you said there at the end. That surprised me, you know. If I hadn't been so horny at the time, I might've shown it more, but – you really knocked the wind out of me.”

She reached out for his hands – which he provided – and drew them around her waist, drawing him close so she could inhale the clean, masculine scent of him. She draped her arms around his neck and gazed into his eyes. “That's not exactly the reaction I wanted, but I'll take it,” she told him. “I wasn't kidding, y'know. I really do like you – a lot. And not just a friendly or a co-worker way. I like you... *that* way, if you get what I mean.”

“Yeah,” he said. “I like you *that* way, too. I just didn't expect you to show it by giving head to an entire engine company.”

She traced a lazy circle on his broad chest with her fingernail. “Well, maybe we could try again with something a little more traditional,” she suggested. “Maybe, like, dinner and a movie or something?”

“You mean a *date*?” he asked in mock-shock. “But that doesn't involve group sex.”

“Asshole,” she giggled, giving him a playful shove. “I mean it. Take me out.”

“And they say romance is dead,” he teased. “Okay, sure. A date the lady wants, a date she gets. Are you free Friday night? I know you're not working that day.”

“Perfect,” Amber said. “That's the night after my nursing school final. I'm either gonna be in the mood to celebrate or seriously need a shoulder to cry on. Think you can handle those choices?”

“No problem,” he said. “You should get dressed, though, and come out. The guys are out in the bay, drinking beer. We should probably get out there. They're trying to figure out what happened in here, and you know what deep thinkers John and Keith are. Probably better head out there and set them straight before they get a lot of wrong-headed ideas.”

She pulled him close and kissed him tenderly, breaking away from him slowly and with an effort. “You are the sweetest guy,” she told him.

“I try,” he said.

“No, you don't,” she said. “That's what makes you so special.”

THE 'CLOTHES' THAT ENGINE FOUR found for her to wear consisted of a size extra-small white Under Armour tank top that only just contained Amber's large double-D breasts and an old set of bunker pants with red suspenders. She slipped into them – devoid of any alternatives – and slipped her feet back into the white platform spike heeled “stripper shoes” she'd worn with her slutty nurse costume. Not exactly the height of fashion, but comfortable enough and sufficient to get her home. Her nipples poked prominently out of the front of the abbreviated undershirt and the stretch fabric conformed alarmingly to the spherical contours of her breasts. She could plainly see the relief of her belly-button piercing through the fabric. It rolled up to bare her midriff every time she moved, and to save herself the aggravation she just left it there, slipping the wide red suspenders over her shoulders to hold up the oversized tan bunker pants, stained with soot and with ripped seams and some stains better left uninvestigated.



Amber *click-*

clacked on her heels into the vehicle bay, her hips swaying sexily in the oversized britches, to where the fire crew stood shirtless and sweaty around the front of the reserve engine, sipping beer from brown bottles and talking to one another quietly. She took a beer from the cooler beside the wheel well, twisted off the top in a practiced motion, and lit a long, skinny Virginia Slims cigarette before sitting on the front bumper of the engine, one foot propped up. John and Keith gathered around her immediately with the eager confusion of men who knew they needed to say *something* but had utterly no idea what. Amber let them stew for a few minutes, amused at their feeble attempts to start up a conversation, before taking the onus off of them and starting the ball rolling herself.

“So, did you guys have a good time?” she asked brightly.

“Hell yeah,” Keith said. “But I guess I’m kinda confused, a little. Wanting to know just what the hell brought that on.”

Amber sipped her beer – unused to the bitter taste now that she magically transformed into a wine drinker – and took a drag from her cigarette, blowing the smoke towards the ceiling. “Look, fellas, I like you guys. You’re my friends. But you seem to think that you’re the only ones checking out asses on medical scenes. You guys are fucking *hot*. I’ve

thought about fooling around with all of you at one time or another for as long as I've worked here," she stated.

"I just needed to know that you respected me, didn't look at me like a helpless little girl, or worse, like tits and ass," she said. "I guess I finally started feeling like you did. And then I just stopped seeing any reason why I shouldn't make a move on one of you.

"So I got this fucked-up idea in my head when y'all gave me that slutty little costume to show up one day wearing it," she continued. "I never expected all of you to be in there. Honestly, I was looking for Bobby."

"Bobby?" John asked, a little shocked.

"Yeah," she said. "Don't be jealous, honey. I wanted to fuck around with all of you. Bobby is the one I want to date. Just because I decided 'to hell with it' and went down on everybody doesn't mean I'm y'all's property, now. Or your mascot, and sure as *hell* not your personal fuck-toy. I got everything worked out that I needed to work out and now I'm over it. I'm not gonna say it's never gonna happen again, but I'm certainly not ever gonna go to any trouble like I did today. I'm not gonna plan for it.

"And I'm sorta going out with Bobby, now," she finished, giving her new *boyfriend* a sly wink which brought abashed color to his cheeks.

Keith rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I guess I can live with that," he said. "Gonna be hard not to treat you different, now. 'Cause I can't promise you that even with you barking orders at me on a CPR call I'm not gonna be thinking about you all naked and sweaty on your knees in the locker room with my dick in your mouth."

"Me, neither," John confessed.

"Shit, that doesn't change anything," Amber laughed, blowing out another cloud of fragrant smoke. "You guys used to look at me all the time after *imagining* I'd sucked your dicks and it didn't change how you treated me. Now, you can look at me and *remember* me sucking your dicks and still not let it change how you treat me. It's up to y'all. I'm deciding to trust you about this. I hope you don't let me down – y'all never have before."

Bobby gave her a covert 'thumbs up' where only she could see, approving of the way she approached the problem, even while Keith and John both nodded grimly.

“Yeah, we never let you down before,” John said gruffly. “And we won't start now.”

“And shit – if this makes me immune to some of the practical jokes and ball-busting for a few weeks, then cool,” she laughed. “Look, guys, seriously. I had *fun* in there. I wanted to do it, so I did it. You can think I'm a total slut or a complete crazy bitch, I really don't care. All I want is for you to acknowledge that I earned that uniform I wear with my brain – not my tongue – and even if you look at me and see a naked bitch sucking cock on the locker room floor, at least see a naked bitch sucking cock who *seriously* knows her shit on an ambulance.”

“You do know your shit,” Keith averred. “You act like somebody with twice your experience in there. It's like you took over for another person who's been doing this for ten years sometimes.”

If you only knew, Keith, Amber thought, but betrayed nothing with her expression. “I appreciate that,” she said softly. “More than you know.”

“Do you think *you* can handle it?” John asked. “I mean, you weren't the only one in there who showed everything their 'O' face. Are you gonna treat *us* any different?”

“Not if I can help it,” Amber replied. “Guys, I *finally* got my life sorted out. I trusted you guys enough to share something with you, something private and intimate. Please don't tell me I didn't just shit where I eat.”

“You didn't,” Bobby said, speaking for the group before Keith or John could form a response. “I can't promise that nothing's gonna change. But I can promise that we're not gonna treat you different.”

“Yeah,” John said. “I promise, too.”

“Me, too,” Keith echoed.

“Good, then it's settled,” Amber said, killing her beer in one long, bitter swig and grinding her spent cigarette beneath the platform toe of her shoe. “Listen, y'all, I need to motor. I'll see everybody at work, okay? Thanks again. I had a lot of fun.”

She swished out of the vehicle bay with the loud *click-clacks* of her heels, giving them a little show by adding some extra wiggle to her walk, looking over her shoulder to blow a playful coquettish kiss to the assembled company. She giggled all the way to her car, and continued her amusement all the way home to her apartment.

* * *

Maggie called her on the way home. “Hey, sweetie, are you busy?” she asked.

“Nah, just going home to change clothes,” she replied. “Just finished, um... working out.”

“You hungry?”

She tried not to laugh at her own wit. “Sorry, honey, I just ate,” she told her. “Just going home to do some last-minute studying and make it an early night. Why? What did you have in mind?”

“I dunno,” she replied. “I just couldn't stop thinking about you calling me, earlier. About how I really do want to just bail on study group and come hang out with you.”

“Don't do that, sweetie,” Amber said, blushing pink at the backhanded flattery. “You need to study.”

“It's only supposed to go until nine,” Maggie told her. “Can I come by afterwards?”

“Sure,” Amber said. “I was gonna rent something out of the Redbox on the way home and just have a quiet night in. Want to watch a movie with me?”

“I don't care what we do,” Maggie said. “I'll be over about nine or so, okay?”

“Sounds really good, baby,” Amber told her. “I'll see you then.”

She tapped 'End Call' with a long thumbnail and let out a breath she didn't realize she held. She never expected the potential for two meaningful experiences in a single day. Amber honestly hoped that she had what it took to manage everything that eventuality might entail.

Luckily, Amber didn't need to tidy up or anything because of her earlier spate of frantic cleaning in an attempt to offset her stirred feelings regarding Maggie. She dropped the bunker gear and the too-tight shirt in a heap on her bedroom floor, not sure what to do with them, and slipped into a clean pair of her nursing-school scrubs, made herself a quick dinner of lentil stew with wild mushrooms and tofu, and cleaned the kitchen while pausing between tasks to look over her notes on treatment of the comatose patient. The talk of decubitus ulcers – bedsores – and muscle atrophy

failed to capture her attention, much less hold it, and she spent more time washing dishes and putting them away than actually studying.

Amber poured herself a glass of wine and sat on the balcony with a cigarette, letting the cool breeze stir her hair and trying to unconfuse herself. She did not doubt her choice to become intimate with Bobby – she liked the young, shy firefighter a great deal, and those feelings became more and more tender with each passing moment – but her feelings towards Maggie equaled them. And Amber had been interested in Maggie for much longer than she had Bobby, a crush which spanned both her genders. Her actions on the floor of the locker room probably negated any claim Amber had to the term *lesbian*, but her interest in women as sexual partners suffered no decrease from her transformation from boy to girl. *Is it even possible to carry on some kind of relationship with both of them?* Amber thought.

Her approach of total, disarming honesty seemed to work with the fire crew – the possibility existed it would do the same with Maggie. Amber mulled through what she might say in her mind, formulating and subsequently discarding idea after idea as the sun sank below the treeline, turning the sky from a lurid orange to a velvety purple, pocked with stars. Amber upended the bottle of wine beside her and found it empty, along with the pack of cigarettes she brought out as well. The clock on her microwave showed 9:15 and a soft knocking sounded at Amber's door. She stood a bit unsteadily, a touch tipsy from the wine, and walked to the door, wishing she'd paid more attention to the time so she could have changed her clothes and redone her makeup.

Maggie stood outside her door, clutching her purse against her chest and looking nervous. She'd dressed up a little – a short brown suede skirt and some really cute little matching ankle boots, black opaque leggings and a curve-hugging burgundy cardigan unbuttoned to provide a lovely glimpse of milky cleavage. She wore a bit of makeup and curled her hair, as well, which took Amber aback – she only saw Maggie on clinical rotations and at school and there, Maggie only scooped her hair into a careless ponytail and wore no makeup.

“Hi,” Amber said with a bright smile which wrinkled her nose. The magic transformed her with a toothy, 'Mary Lou Retton' smile that showed every tooth in her mouth.

“Hey,” Maggie replied.

“You look amazing,” Amber told her. She looked down at her rumpled scrubs. “You make me look like I just fell out of a tree.”

“Oh, *please*,” Maggie snorted. “You always look incredible.”

They stood facing one another for a long moment, searching each other's eyes, before Amber snapped back to reality with a small jump of startlement. “Come in, baby, seriously,” Amber ushered, gathering Maggie up into a quick hug. Her friend pressed her body against her tightly. Amber could feel her hard nipples, through both her sweater and her bra, poke lightly against Amber's midsection.

Amber fluttered around for a few moments, seeing to Maggie's comfort and ensconcing her on the couch with a glass of wine from a new bottle. They attempted some inane forays into conversation which ended abruptly in a peal of laughter from Maggie.

“I can't believe how nervous I am,” she said. “I swear, it feels like I'm in junior high.”

“Yeah, I'm nervous, too,” Amber confessed.

“In case I haven't been dropping enough lame hints today,” Maggie said, “I came over tonight because I like you. Not just like you, but I actually *like* you like you. A lot.”

“I like you, too,” Amber told her.

“I never realized you were into girls at all,” Maggie went on. “You never gave off any signals at school or anything. I'm still not a hundred percent sure but I just get this funny feeling now. So I had all these speeches and sexy shit to say mapped out. I rehearsed them in the car on my way over. I had this big grand plan to seduce you and turn you to the lesbian side of the force.”

Amber laughed. “It's not like you needed to work very hard,” she confessed. “Sweetie, I've been into you since I first met you. But I've had a lot going on in my life lately. I didn't even find out you were gay until a couple days ago. I guess I just didn't make a move right away because I didn't want to lay all my complications on you. Maybe that was wrong, but it seemed like the right thing to do at the time.”

“Complications?”

Amber rubbed the back of her neck beneath her hair, coloring slightly. “I'm kinda seeing somebody,” she confessed. “It happened really recently, actually.”

Maggie seemed to deflate a little bit. “Oh,” she said. “I get it.”

Amber laughed. "I don't think you do," she said. "We've only just started going out. Nothing is exclusive or even defined, yet. It's not like I'd be cheating on him or anything."

"Him?" Maggie asked, quirking up an eyebrow.

"The *rest* of the complication," Amber said.

Maggie let out a long breath from puffed-out cheeks. "Yeah, you're right. That *is* a lot."

Amber swept her hair from her face with a toss of her head and paused briefly to light a cigarette. "But none of it changes the fact that I'm crazy about you," she said. "I mean, shit – it's frustrating. If I'd've known you were into me, I never would have gotten involved with Bobby."

"That helps, a little," Maggie said, "but I don't know if I'm okay with being 'the other woman.' If I was only looking to hook up with you, then fine. But I want you for a girlfriend, and I don't like the idea of having to share you."

Amber blushed bright. "Wow," she breathed. "I didn't know you felt *that* strongly."

"Neither did I, until just now."

Amber leaned back on her couch, crossing her legs at the knee and taking a long drag from her cigarette. "Maybe you're looking at things backwards," she said after a long moment thinking.

"How do you mean?"

"I'm not trying to make you jealous or anything, honey, but I like Bobby. A lot. And I can't lie to you – I *love* cock, and Bobby has an amazing one," she said. "But I've never looked at him as anything more than somebody to occasionally bounce up and down on. I don't really want a relationship with him, at least not a boyfriend-girlfriend thing. At most I just want friends-with-benefits. Unfortunately, I haven't discussed any of this with him, but I don't see why he couldn't see things the same way."

"What does that have to do with me?" Maggie asked.

"It means, if I was your girlfriend – I like the sound of that, by the way – if I was your girlfriend, do you think you could stand it if every once in a while I let Bobby buy me dinner and he let me make him breakfast? If you knew that it meant I was coming home to you every time, and that I wasn't going to fall in love with him or make any kind of commitment?"

Maggie rubbed her chin. "It's not exactly ideal," she said.

"Sweetheart, if you want ideal, you need another lesbian girl," Amber said. "I'm a lot of things, but girls-only is *not* one of those things. Even if you and I tried to be exclusive, eventually I'd *have* to – I like boys, plain and simple. But who I fuck is one thing. What I'm saying is that I'm willing to *commit* to you. To me, you get the better deal. And I'm telling you that I need the condition because I never want to break your heart by cheating on you."

"You're serious about this, aren't you?" Maggie asked, a light of realization dawning in her pretty eyes.

"Deadly," Amber said.

"You honestly think it could work?"

"If we both stay honest with each other," Amber said, "I think it can. And as long as you don't let yourself start thinking that me going to be with a guy every now and then means that you're not enough for me."

"How do you know I'm not enough for you?" Maggie asked.

"A feeling I have," Amber replied, blowing out a cloud of smoke.

"I'm not sure about this," Maggie said. "I've never done anything like this before. I've never even considered anything like this before. This is all new ground for me."

"Me, too," Amber said. "But like I said – I just have a *feeling*."

"Wish I trusted my feelings the way you trust yours," Maggie said a bit forlornly.

Amber leaned close, threading her fingers in Maggie's soft, shiny hair and kissed her as passionately as she could, their lipsticks smearing together as Amber crushed her lips against the other woman's. They broke apart a breathless eternity later, a bit lightheaded and panting.

"Trust that, then," Amber whispered.

Maggie took the cigarette from between Amber's fingers and stubbed it out half-smoked in the ashtray, then took her by both hands and stood up. "Take me to bed," she said simply.

* * *

Amber lay curled around Maggie's sleeping form in the half-light, watching the vivid stripes of moonlight through the blinds follow the contours of her face and shoulder. She inhaled the fresh, clean scent of her and pressed a soft kiss against her temple, brushing her hair from her face with long nails. Maggie made a sleepy baby-noise and snuggled her face more deeply into the pillow.

Nothing Amber could have imagined prepared her for the night she just spent. Where her frenzied, desperate encounter with the crew of Engine 4 centered around rough, urgent release, her night with Maggie meant taking her time, learning and discovering and leaving no area of total satisfaction unexplored. The two girls spent at least forty-five minutes just undressing one another, kissing every exposed inch of flesh as it came to light. Foreplay alone took two hours – Amber literally vibrated by the time Maggie touched, then entered her with fingers and then with tongue. They sat face-to-face, legs intertwined, and simply rubbed their clits together, they rolled back and forth on her bed in the reverse embrace of sixty-nine position, they spent time on their knees between the other's legs. Amber did nothing for her partner she did not return later – sex among women, Amber discovered, based itself on an equal partnership in a way that sex between men and women did not. With the boys, Amber had been subjugated, placed *below*. She enjoyed it, actually *loved* the feeling of being the lesser partner, but not as much as she loved being a total equal with Maggie.

They fell asleep curled around one another sometime after two a.m., exhausted and thoroughly satisfied. Apparently, the magic which overwrote Amber's life laid in some extra groundwork between herself and Maggie – they both remembered shared experiences together which Amber knew never actually happened in her own experience. But those experiences, plus the utter compatibility between the two girls physically, led Maggie to arch her back after one particularly powerful orgasm, then collapse against Amber's chest, bury her face in blonde curls and whisper, “I think I'm in love with you” against her neck.

“I can't tell you that yet,” Amber said softly, stroking her cheek. “But I *want* to be.”

“That's enough for now,” Maggie said happily, kissing her neck and throat.

Her alarm blared in the semi-darkness a painfully short time later, making Maggie stir and moan into the pillow. “Make it stop,” she moaned.

“Can't do it, baby,” Amber said softly. “We have our final in a few hours.”

“Ugh,” Maggie moaned.

“C'mere,” Amber said, shutting off the alarm and rolling Maggie around to face her, close enough that their exhaled breaths intermingled warmly between them. “This is a much nicer way to wake up.”

Amber kissed her partner – her *girlfriend* – awake with deep passion and a promise of things to come, then playfully gave Maggie's superb rump a light *smack* to get her going. “C'mon,” she bade. “Come get in the shower with me. I'll give you a ride to class.”

The distraction of one another's naked bodies posed a real danger of making them both late, but they each managed one or two sweet, short and intense orgasms in one another's soapy embrace. Amber took a great deal of joy in washing Maggie's soft red hair and brushing it afterwards as they stood in her small bathroom, wrapped in towels. Their individual morning routines meshed brilliantly – Maggie brewed a pot of tea while Amber enjoyed a peaceful morning cigarette on the balcony, Amber made toast for both of them while Maggie did her crossword puzzle. A graceful and tailor-made flow around one another punctuated by tender kisses and soft caresses.



Their heights and builds were similar enough that Maggie could borrow some fresh clothes from Amber – a pair of boot-cut 'skinny' jeans and a plaid boyfriend shirt. And Amber got help for the first time being laced into

her 'lucky' black satin and leopard print corset. Amber chose a flirty blue halter dress and her trademark hoop earrings with a pair of platform wedge heels.

“God,” Maggie breathed as Amber dusted on a light coating of powder over the day's makeup, “do you *always* look like the cover of *Vogue*, or do you occasionally let yourself appear ordinary to mere mortals?”

Amber blushed a little as she applied her lip gloss. “I like to look good, is there anything wrong with that?” she teased. “If you're planning to make me a lesbian, then at least I'm gonna be a lipstick lesbian. Besides, if you let me, I know I could make you look every bit as good. With that gorgeous face and slamming body of yours, baby – hey, idea. Let me take you shopping this weekend. I know this cute little boutique on Myrtle Avenue with some stuff that would look so fucking cute on you. And there's a little lingerie store about three blocks away where I can get you some stuff that I want to see you in.

“I'm not trying to change you, though,” she said, suddenly afraid that Maggie might take the offer the wrong way. “You don't have to if you don't want to. I like you just exactly like you are, I just thought maybe you might like... y'know what? Forget it. Stupid idea.”

Maggie laughed aloud. “You are so fucking cute,” she said. “I would *love* to go shopping with you. But only if you let me get some stuff for you, too. Particularly at that lingerie store.”

“Deal,” Amber said happily. “Shit – look at the time. We gotta get going, baby. We're late.”

“After you,” Maggie said, gesturing towards the door. “Let's go become nurses.”

* * *

The final came and went – the class hung out in the cafeteria for a few hours until the results got posted. Maggie took Amber around the corner to a secluded alcove next to the bookstore and pushed her roughly against the wall to kiss her passionately enough to curl Amber's toes inside her sandals.

“Congratulations, Nurse Amber,” she whispered.

“Why, thank you very much, Nurse Maggie,” Amber replied.

“Wanna go and celebrate?” she asked.

Amber looked a little crestfallen. “Actually, sweetie, what I really want is to go home and sleep,” she said honestly. “I, um... had a late night last night.”

“Me, too,” Maggie giggled. “And you work tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah,” she said. “But the night after – I promise. I want to cook for you.”

“That's so sweet,” Maggie said, caressing her cheek. “Will you call me while you're at work?”

“Unless I'm on a call. Better if I text you, if that's okay.”

“I don't care, just as long as I can talk to you,” Maggie told her. “I can't believe I'm not gonna see you for two days. What am I gonna do for all that time?”

“Knit?”

“Bitch,” Maggie snorted. “Now I *won't* be sending you all the dirty naked pictures I intended to shoot while you were off saving lives and being a hero.”

“You'd do that to me? Your own girlfriend?”

“Mmm,” Maggie said. “Girlfriend.”

“Sounds good, doesn't it?” Amber said.

“Don't forget me while you're gone, now,” Maggie said, pulling her back in close.

Amber kissed her. “Couldn't if I tried, baby. Not if I tried.”

* * *

Amber McRory – licensed paramedic *and* registered nurse – went home and took a quick catnap before heading out for a quiet dinner at Reale's, an intimate little downtown *ristorante* catering to couples. She enjoyed being the lady, having doors opened for her and chairs pulled out. They had pasta, drank wine and held hands, talked about nothing in particular and looked deep into one another's eyes. They made out in the parking lot, leaning against the fender of his pickup. He never pressed, even though the look in his eyes clearly described how deeply he wanted Amber to invite him back to her place. She demurred – for one thing, she really did need the sleep before work in the morning, and for another, she actually

found herself thinking of the bed in her apartment as hers and Maggie's bed and felt wrong about inviting another person into that bed. She sensed Bobby's disappointment and resolved to make it up to him later – she had a red brocade corset and some handcuffs that insured he would forgive her – but relished collapsing into her bed that night with no distractions other than sleeping.

* * *

The next month flew past Amber in a blur – she and Maggie passed their nursing boards with flying colors and took jobs in the Intermediate Care Ward of the local trauma center, working with patients



on their way out of the ICU but not quite ready for the lower level of care on the medical/surgical floors. The two girls quickly discovered the most secluded areas of the hospital that they could, seldom-used supply areas, a few maintenance areas and a chemical exposure decontamination shower, where two very amorous nurses could duck on their breaks for a little one-on-one time without being accidentally walked in upon. Amber only worked two nights a week – EMS remained her full-time job, and expected to quit the hospital soon, having a line on a nursing job at a plastic surgery clinic tending to rich women getting boob jobs and liposuction.

Their relationship flourished, to say the least – only a week passed before Amber broke down and returned the whispered “I love you,” breaking a dam inside her and letting out a flood of emotion she honestly doubted herself capable of feeling. They resolved to simply date one another for a while before making anything 'official,' maintaining their own apartments despite the overwhelming urge to move in together, not wanting to rush anything that might risk ruining what the two women had together. Amber even managed to convince her girlfriend to start wearing makeup and styling her hair in the mornings and recently won a dare which sent Maggie to work with a white satin basque corset under her scrubs. Amber loved the way it made Maggie stand up straight and push out her boobs.



The relationship she pursued with Bobby grew in its own way as well. They dated occasionally, more to assuage his guilt about the strings-free sex she offered him than any deep emotional attachment the two of them had formed. She did like the little endearments and tender touches Bobby added to the arrangement – holding hands on their way to and from calls where no one could see, little moments at the station spent kissing one another, sweet little things he did for her like helping her change the heavy oxygen tanks in the ambulance and buying things he knew she liked when

his time came to cook dinner for the on-duty crews. But more than that Amber enjoyed his big hard cock sawing in and out of her pussy, the sweaty, groping sex they shared in every position and opportunity they could manage. It made Amber giggle to think that there really wasn't any square inch of the station where at least some of her juices hadn't dripped at one point or another. She would never love Bobby – no room remained in her heart for anyone but Maggie – but she did like and respect him very much. So much so that she considered the possibility of asking him if he would be willing to be the father of the child she so desperately wanted to bear one day. She wondered what that conversation might be like, asking this sweet shy man if he would take her to a nice hotel for a long weekend and not stop nailing her until her belly swelled to bursting with his baby. The thought of it thrilled her to the point of glowing, made it difficult to stop in the middle of their sweaty assignments to roll a condom onto his throbbing member, just wanting nothing more than to throw caution to the wind and get herself well and truly knocked up however she could.

No vestige of any discomfort with the feminine trappings of her life remained. Even though the casual disrespect and focus on her looks above her skills and merit at work still annoyed her, Amber found a quick equilibrium with the treatment and found a way to just continue doing what she did and even wound up liking when certain of her co-workers called her 'honey' and 'sweetheart' instead of using her given name. Her enjoyment of the covetous looks she got from men when she walked by or offered them a flirtatious smile did not abate, but now she began truly enjoying the looks of jealousy she started noticing from the women she encountered, as well. And nothing matched the pride and satisfaction she felt from simply *looking good*, spending hours on her hair, clothes and makeup until she would not look out place on the cover of any magazine and then going out in public, even for something as mundane as buying groceries or filling a prescription. And the better service she received from male waiters at restaurants and male attendants at the gym didn't hurt, either.

The feminine pursuits in her life – her every third day at the tanning salon, weekly visits to the nail parlor to have her acrylic extensions redone, her monthly forays to her hairdresser, even the distinctly feminine nature of her workouts at the gym – provided her more than enough distraction to keep her occupied on the days she didn't work or wasn't with Maggie. She spent any extra free time hanging with new friends she seemed to make wherever she went. Jill, from work, and Karyn and Brandi, some of the other girls who worked for County EMS. Susan and Dori from nursing school, and her new buddies Heather and Amanda who worked at the hospital in the IMC with her and Maggie. A much fuller life than the one she knew before, a life with dreams and hopes and friends and laughter.

A great life.

She sat cross-legged on her bedroom floor, going through her closet and filling boxes for the Red Cross clothing drive to help the victims of a huge wildfire in the eastern parts of the county. Maggie stood at the closet door, holding out hangers with questioning looks while Amber gave either the thumbs-up or the thumbs-down.

“Not that one,” Amber said when her girlfriend held up a red Lycra tube dress covered in sparkling *paillette* sequins. “I like that one.”

“Yeah, but how often do you actually wear it?”

“Don't start,” Amber said mock-sternly. “A girl needs one or two slutty club dresses in her closet. I'm getting to be friends with my gay hairdresser, Mags, and that means dancing.”

Maggie laughed. “Okay, okay, I'll put it back,” she said. “Y'know, baby, eventually we're gonna *have* to start going through your shoes. There's got to be at least one or two of the nine million pairs you own that you can let go.”

“Don't even joke about that,” Amber said.

“So what about this box?” Maggie said, pointing into the closet.

“What box is that?”

“This one here,” she said. She dragged it out into the bedroom floor and pried open the flaps. “This looks like all men's clothing.”

Amber peered in and saw, neatly folded, all the clothing she ever owned from her previous life. Her one-time favorite, a threadbare Wolverine t-shirt, adorned the top of the stack.

“I'll be damned,” she whispered.

“Whose is it, baby?” Maggie asked.

“Old boyfriend,” she said quickly. “He got deployed to Afghanistan and we never really got back together after he came home. I thought I'd gotten rid of all that stuff.”

“What do you want to do with it?” Maggie pressed. “Do you still have his number? Think you ought to call him and ask?”

“No, I think it'll be okay,” Amber said. “We'll just take it. He never called me looking for it, and there's people out there who lost everything who need it a lot more than he does.”

“Sounds good to me,” Maggie said. “Anything you want to keep? Y'know, for sentimental reasons?”

“I'll look through it,” Amber said. “Now, we still gotta do my chest of drawers.”

* * *

The clothing drive at the nearby church fellowship hall hopped with activity, people coming in from near and far to give what they could to the needy. Amber sashayed past in her platform wedge sandals, watching a couple of sweaty and *exceedingly* well-muscled men unloading furniture from the bed of an elderly man's pickup. She and Maggie made three trips to get the four boxes and seven garbage sacks full of clothes, kitchenware and various household things she and Maggie cut loose from their individual apartments. A bald and burly volunteer took the old television from Amber's back seat for them, seemingly satisfied with being rewarded by one of Amber's toothy, flirtatious smiles.

Maggie took the kitchenware to the table dedicated to those items, leaving Amber to manhandle the clothes towards the table in the back where volunteers waited to accept them. She dumped two stuffed garbage bags on the table with an effort, in front of a frumpy looking woman with dyed red hair and a friendly face mapped with wrinkles who smiled brightly at the donation.

“Oh, my. This is very generous, sweetie,” she said in a very high, nasal soprano.

“Oh, there's more,” Amber said. “My friend and I emptied out both our closets.”

“It's going to a good cause,” the woman told her.

“Besides, it's an excuse to go out and buy some more,” Amber laughed, and the woman joined in knowingly. “Can I help you sort through these or something?”

“Oh, no, honey, don't go to any trouble,” she said.

Amber tore open the ties on the first bag. “It's no trouble,” she said. “I've been out there, it's really bad. I want to help in any way I can.”

“You've been out there?” the woman asked, eyebrows raised.

“Yeah,” Amber answered. “I'm an emergency paramedic.”

“Oh, my goodness,” the woman commented. “Thank you for what you do, sweetie.”

“It's Amber,” she replied with a smile.

“Amber, nice to meet you. I'm Dorothy.”



Amber started pulling out clothes by the handful, handing them across the table to Dorothy as she identified them. They did this for all the boxes right up until the very last of the bags. Amber paused, just for a moment, her hands stroking the last remnant of her life as a man, before gathering them up and handing them over. Dorothy accepted them gracefully, never knowing just what the donation truly meant, only seeing a pretty girl donating clothes to charity. Amber turned her back on the last of her male life gladly, taking Maggie's hand and walking back to her car – and her new life – with no regrets and happiness – true happiness – in her heart. It wasn't until they got home that night, and Maggie waited in her bed, that Amber let it be known that she did keep one item of clothing from her old

male life to keep, but not for sentimental reasons. *Everybody* needed a well-cut suit, after all – one of the things the dim memory of her father taught her, or taught the little boy she had once been – in their closet, just for weddings and funerals and job interviews. *No sense breaking that rule*, Amber had thought as she ran her fingers across the slick silk.

She *did* need a good suit in her closet.

And it had *never* looked so good on the man she used to be. Maggie certainly agreed, if the look of outright hunger on her face was any indication at all.

THE END