

**TGSTORIES**

**PRESENTS**

**The Royal Crown Trophy Company**

**Written and Illustrated by**

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THE  
**ROYAL CROWN  
TROPHY**  
COMPANY

STORY AND ILLUSTRATIONS  
BY VALERIE HOPE



HAYDEN ABERNATHY CLIMBED OUT OF his pickup and brushed lint from his only pair of good trousers in the parking lot. He cleared his throat and raked a hand through his longish brown hair, steeling himself to make that good first impression. *For all the fucking good that does me*, he thought sourly as he adjusted his clothing one last time for good measure and walked towards the front of the building with a hesitant stride. *One phone call and it don't matter what kind of first impression I make. They show me the fucking door.*

The Royal Crown Trophy Company stood large and a little dilapidated in front of him, having that indescribable image of long and hard use which made buildings seem worn around the edges and a little un-stuck in time. Hayden lost his last job, as a machinist at an auto parts factory, when his bosses discovered his predilection for surfing porn on company computers in his downtime. The twenty-three year-old knew *now* that it had been a stupid move, but at the time he failed to see anything wrong with his behavior. It wasn't like he had hurt anybody or stolen anything. Just a few quick peeks at some naked titties when he had a few minutes to kill and next thing he knew he found himself blackballed out of anything better than the french fry machine for the next six months. His little distraction cost him his apartment, his on-again, off-again girlfriend, his job and his dignity from then on. He couch-flopped with friends for as long as he could and now lived out of his pickup, penniless and feeling completely alone. If not for the tip from an old drinking buddy, Hayden would never have known about RC Trophies. Hayden called the next morning after a bender full of liquid courage and assurances from his buddy that RC “hired anybody.” Since his buddy, the ex-con, faced his own set of problems finding employment before landing his current gig at the chemical plant, Hayden felt inclined to believe his assertion. Miracle of miracles, however, they took his call and asked him to come in the next day, fresh from his shower at the Y and a quick prison-press of his dress slacks, hoping against hope that he would luck his way into a job which could help him start to dig out of the hole he occupied now. He pulled open the front door of the business office, adjacent to the large corrugated-metal shop, with a merry tinkle of the brass bell above the door.

A plump-but-still-attractive thirtysomething receptionist with a very nice expanse of cleavage looked up from her computer behind the front desk and offered him a friendly, guileless smile. “Can I help you?” she asked him brightly.

“Hope so,” Hayden replied. “I’m Hayden Abernathy, I called here yesterday? They said to come in at ten o’clock to talk with, um...” He looked down at the scrap of paper he’d torn from the phone book yesterday at the pay-phone. “...Don Trevor.”

“Okay, have a seat, honey,” the receptionist said, picking up her phone. “I’ll give him a buzz. He’s in the shop right now but he’ll come right back to get you, okay?”

Hayden sat quietly for about five minutes, thumbing through an ancient copy of *Popular Mechanics* on a side table, before a large and healthy-looking man with silver hair and laugh lines burst through a rear door, allowing the noises of a busy machine shop into the relative calm and peace of the business office. He wore a smudged tan overall and had safety glasses pushed up into his hair.

“You Hayden?” he asked in a booming baritone, without preamble.

“Yes, sir,” he said, standing.

The man smiled benignly. “You can forget the sir,” he said, sticking out his hand. “I’m Don. Thanks for coming in to see us. Come on back into the shop and talk to me.”

Hayden followed the man behind the desk and into a small anteroom, where he shrugged himself into a blue coverall. He tied a blue bandanna from his pocket around his longish hair and took a pair of disposable safety glasses from a bin near the entry to the shop while Don perused his handwritten application from his position leaning against the lockers.

“Says here you know your way around a shop,” Don commented. “You ever done any actual sculpting?”

“Nothing professional,” Hayden admitted. “Just messing around, mostly. But I can learn whatever you need me to learn.”

“Hell, most of that shit is handled in the computer now, anyway,” Don said. “I’m not looking for a sculptor – I already got three guys to do that. I need someone in assembly. That takes a machinist. You’re actually probably more than I need, but I’m kinda desperate.”

“That works out fine,” Hayden said, zipping the coverall. “I’m pretty desperate myself.”



“C’mon back,” Don said, pocketing the application. “Let me show you the set-up.”

They raised their voices to compensate for the whine and scream of the various metalworking tools throwing sparks and shavings around the large floor space of the bustling shop.

“Shop’s pretty straightforward,” Don said, gesturing grandly around the warehouse-style shop floor. “Prototyping and molding happens over there, then we either pour resin or bronze over in casting, right here. You’d be over there in machining, where we assemble the trophies after they’re polishing. Then you just walk them over there to shipping. Pretty simple stuff.”

“Looks like a good set up,” Hayden commented, looking at the simple efficiency of the shop and the quick, practiced motions of the employees.

“It works well enough,” Don said. “We had a guy in here six, seven months ago, I guess, with all these crazy ideas about how to make the shop more efficient. We tried, but before long we just went back to the way we always did it. Old dog, new tricks, y'know?”

“I get that,” Hayden said. Over the course of their quick conversation, Don led Hayden through the large floor past the industrial machining tools to a small, isolated office in a relatively unused corner of the shop. He opened the door into the cramped interior and gestured Hayden inside. The young man entered wordlessly and took a seat. The door did an excellent job of shutting out the noise of the machines outside – so well, in fact, that Hayden continued to half-shout for a few words before it dawned on him he no longer needed to speak up in order to be heard.

“Any questions?” Don asked him, rolling his squeaky office chair to one side of his cluttered desk and sitting across from Hayden.

“About the shop? No, sir,” Hayden answered.

“I guess we should probably stop pussyfooting around and talk about the elephant in the room,” Don said, scrubbing his chin with a callused hand. “I heard about your trouble. At your last job.”

Hayden felt the blood run to his cheeks. “Don, I don't know what to tell you. I...”

Don held up a hand. “Son, let me shoot straight. I don't give a damn why you did it. All I need to know is if you're planning on doing something like that again.”

Hayden almost laughed. “No way,” he said. “I never imagined it would screw up my life the way it has. Believe me, Don, I learned my lesson on that one.”

Don considered a moment, searching Hayden's face, then nodded abruptly. “Good enough for me,” he said. “Tell you what. I need to at least cover my bases. I'll bring you on, but on probation. Say, six months. You keep your nose clean – and I'm sure you will, son, I'm just being careful – and the job is yours with a three dollar raise. I know I'm

kinda taking advantage of your situation by lowballing you right out of the gate, but it would make me feel a lot better.”

Hayden didn't hesitate. “Done,” he said, sticking out his hand. They shook, then Don stood and clapped Hayden on the shoulder, opening the door to the shop and sticking two thick fingers into his mouth and whistling sharply.

“Mack! Come over here a second, I got somebody I want you to meet!” he hollered throatily into the bustle of the shop. A short, stocky young man in a stained coverall with his baseball hat turned backwards trotted into the office after a short few seconds, looking a little breathless.

“What can I do for you, boss?” the man said, wiping sweat and steel shavings from his brow with a dirty rag.

“Mack, this is Hayden,” he said. “We're hiring him on in assembly. Hayden, Mack here will be your supervisor. He'll show you the ropes. You two will be joined at the hip for a little while until you get up to speed.”

“How's it going?” the stocky shop supervisor said, jerking off a work glove and shaking Hayden's hand.

“A lot better now,” Hayden said. “Didn't have a job until a minute ago.”

“Long dry spell, huh,” Mack laughed. “Come find me when you're done talking to Don and I'll show you around a little bit. You in the trades?”

“Journeyman machinist,” Hayden answered. “Been doing this about six years. You?”

“Picked it up in the Army,” Mack answered. “Ten years or so. You're gonna like it here, chief. Great place to work and Don's a teddy bear. A year back I needed six weeks off to help move my mom into the nursing home, Don made that happen and somehow loaned me a panel van in the middle of it all. Can't ask for a better boss.”

“You're gonna make me blush,” Don laughed. “I like to take care of my people where I can.”

“Yeah, everybody working here probably showed up on Don's doorstep with some kind of fucked up past,” Mack said. “Don's that guy who will hire you when nobody else will. Kinda makes us into a little dysfunctional family. Ain't nobody here wouldn't lay down in traffic if Don asked us to.”

“Really?” Don chuckled. “Mack, wouldja go lay down in traffic for me?”

Hayden laughed, then noticed something on the wall that caught his attention. “Don, you went to M.I.T.?” he asked, pointing to a framed diploma hung carelessly on the wall between a bikini-babe parts calendar and a bulletin board encrusted with take-out menus and a rack of MSDS documents.

“Yeah, way back when,” Don said. “Did a little time as an engineer before I took over Dad's business when his cancer relapsed. I like it here. Good money, good people, and I can always freelance.”

“Wow,” Hayden said. “I'm working for a bona fide genius.”

“And don't you forget it,” Don said amiably. “Welcome aboard, Hayden. You start Monday.”

\* \* \*

Life settled into an easy, joyful routine for Hayden over the next three months. Following a very generous advance from Don, Hayden managed to get into a small apartment within walking distance of the shop and get himself a small television. Mack, his supervisor, turned quickly into a buddy and from there to a pretty good friend. Friday beer became a tradition between them in a large hurry, something Hayden found himself looking forward to all week long.

With the day done and behind him, Hayden swept shavings from his work table with a short brush and pulled the bandanna from his long, sweat-damp hair and looked up and across the floor to see his friend doing the same. Mack caught his eye and offered a brief smirk. They closed a particularly difficult day – morning had seen several of the mounting nuts for a large order of award plaques cut to the wrong length and they hustled hard to get them re-done – and the cold beer and easy conversation of their weekly outing sounded much more

tempting than usual to both of them that day. Hayden cleaned his work surface quickly and, admittedly, sloppily in his hurry to be out the door. They changed from their shop coveralls in relative silence in the locker room and headed out to the parking lot, already chatting about nothing in particular as a soft drizzle leaked from the leaden clouds above them.



They drove in separate vehicles over the short distance to The Front Stoop, a local watering hole near RC Trophies. Hayden and Mack immediately got to talking shop, reminding Hayden of a question lingering in his mind since his first week on the job. He took a long sip of Budweiser and stifled a burp.

“So what's the deal with the turnover at the shop?” he asked. “I mean, it seems like a pretty great place to work. How come so many people leave?”

“I dunno,” Mack said, shrugging. “I always kinda wondered that, myself. Seems like every time Don gets some big contract and goes traipsing through the shop with the guys in the suits, somebody takes off.”

“Like Julio,” Hayden said, referring to a very amiable young man who had

left from the casting floor about a week ago. “I mean, I might have been out of my mind, but I thought that Julio and me had become buds. But suddenly, *boom* – he just up and splits without a word. Didn't even come by to say 'see y'all later.' Kinda pissed me off, to be honest.”

“I hardly even noticed,” Mack said. “But that's just 'cause shit like that happens so often. Easy come, easy go, I guess. Still, it is kinda funny. That it happens so often, I mean.”

“Yeah,” Hayden said, slugging beer. “He walked through with that guy in the expensive suit yesterday. Wonder who's gonna leave us this time?”

“Fucked if I know,” Mack said, ordering another round.

\* \* \*

When Hayden got to work the next Monday, he walked in early. A constant, steady rain dissuaded him from his usual walk to work in favor of his pickup, which left him plenty of time to get some coffee from the break room and even take a quick browse through the newspaper. He waited to see his friend walk through the door so he could surprise him with a particularly funny joke he'd heard fishing at the lake that weekend, something he knew would have them both chuckling all day in reminiscence. But seven thirty came and went and his friend never showed. Hayden worked through until lunch and even called Mack's mobile phone from the break room, just to check and see if maybe his friend hadn't tied one on and called in from a hangover, but the phone went straight to voice mail both times he tried. By quitting time, Hayden was genuinely worried.





After work, he hopped in his pickup and drove the short distance into the blue-collar part of town where his buddy lived. The small one-bedroom house sat empty, locked tight, and no amount of banging on doors or windows roused the slightest response. The nice old lady who lived next door to Mack swore she hadn't seen him since he came home Friday, and from Mack's complaints Hayden knew that the old woman pried into the affairs of all her neighbors religiously and she would have known if anything sudden or unexpected had happened.

The week went by slowly for the young man. He found himself looking over to the part of the shop where Mack usually stood, head down and working on one piece or another, several times during the day. Numerous trips by his friend's house and countless calls to every phone number yielded nothing. No one at the Front Stoop had any information to add, nor did Mack's estranged ex-wife whom Hayden spent a considerable amount of time tracking. In desperation, on that Thursday, Hayden called the local police. They took his report but left the young man with the distinct impression they would not be looking very hard for the dishonorably-discharged soldier turned ex-con turned machinist, convinced that his past conviction for distribution of illicit drugs meant that Mack either returned to a life of drug dealing or perished silently

and far away in the midst of a deal gone bad, no matter how passionate Hayden's attempts to convince them his friend turned his life around.

A lingering depression seized the young man after his talk with the police, alarming his boss. That Friday morning, Don stopped by Hayden's work area with a sympathetic smile and a pat on the shoulder, watching the young man mill screw-bases for a large order of baseball trophies for the local Little League finals.

"You doing okay, there, Hayden?" he asked.

"I guess," Hayden mumbled. Even his mumbles needed to be full-throated over the screaming of the lathe he worked. Once he finished the piece in front of him, Don reached across him and snapped off the motor, letting the machine wind down in a descending arpeggio, leaving only a sad silence.

"Worried about Mack, aren't you?" Don asked. "That's why I came over. I just got a call from him, son. He told me to tell you not to worry."

"He called you?" Hayden asked, suddenly excited. "He's okay? What happened?"

"Settle down, Hayden, settle down," Don said, making placating gestures. "He's in Brazil."

"Brazil? What the fuck is in Brazil?"

"A cousin," Don told him. "They were apparently real close when they were kids. Anyway, his brother struck it rich down there. Found silver. His first call was to Mack, and off he went. The mine is way off in the forest, he told me, and he didn't have any cell coverage or any way to make a call. He just now got back to the town and called me to let me know. He told me to tell you he's sorry he didn't call or anything. It just happened really quick."

"He never told me about any cousin," Hayden mentioned.

"You've known me about five minutes longer than you've known him, son," Don said gently. "How many cousins do I have?"

“Good point,” Hayden admitted. “But still – we were just talking about how people leave so suddenly around here, just the other night. First Adam, then Jake, then Julio, now Mack. It just seems kinda weird.”

“Adam ran off with a stripper he met to Vegas, Jake had to head back north to take care of his mother, Julio's visa expired and he had to go back to Honduras, and I just told you what happened to Mack,” Don said without rancor. “You're way too young to be that suspicious, Hayden. Shit happens.”

“I guess you're right,” Hayden said. “Thanks for telling me. I better get back to work. With Mack gone, I'm gonna have to hustle to get this order filled by Wednesday.”

“Good man,” Don said, clapping his shoulder. “But before I turn you loose, I wanted to tell you that you're going to be heading this end of the shop from now on. Mack was my senior guy and now it's you. We'll be hiring you a helper before too long, but for now you're on your own... *boss.*”

“Thanks,” Hayden said. “I won't let you down.”

“I know you won't,” Don told him. “But I have somebody here I want you to meet. Hayden, this is Mr. Williams.”

Don gestured behind him to a graying, tanned man in a polo shirt and khakis standing well out of the way and behind him. Hayden knew the drill – Don was a big one for taking prospective clients on his 'nickel tour' of the manufacturing shop – and he bit the finger of his work glove and slipped his hand out with no hesitation, offering it to the slim, athletic and very patrician-looking older man.

“Pleased to meet you, sir,” Hayden said simply. “What can we do for you?”

The man eyed Hayden consideringly and then, seeming to find something he liked, smiled warmly. “I have a very big order coming up. I thought about going to one of the big houses, even looking in Europe, but I've been assured that Don is the best and there's nothing he can't get done.”

“We'll work our butts off, sir,” Hayden assured him. “Nobody here wants to disappoint. And the big houses don't have a patch on us. Here, you get hand-made. Not that cookie-cutter, soulless factory stuff. Every piece you order from Royal Crown passes personally through my hands. And I don't let shoddy work go out that door.”

“That's exactly what Don was telling me,” Williams said, seeming wryly amused. “The hand-crafting and the extra care with the work is what interests me the most.”

“You name it, we'll make it,” Hayden told him.

“I get that distinct impression,” Williams replied. “Pleasure to meet you, Hayden. I'm sure I'll be seeing more of you.”

“Certainly hope so, sir,” Hayden replied, eyeing Don. The boss seemed pleased with Hayden's PR and gave him another clap on the shoulder. Hayden tried to put his concerns over Mack out of his mind and returned to his work, trying to project the image of quiet, efficient industry the money-men who came through on their tours liked to see. His unexpected promotion didn't sink in until well after Don and Mr. Williams retired behind the closed door of his office.

\* \* \*

“If it wasn't for the assurances I received from my friend, Don, I wouldn't believe it,” Williams said over a glass of eighteen-year-old Scotch in the relative quiet of the office. He peered through the bent slats of the blinds into the shop. “That boy is just that – a *boy*. No doubt about it. And you're telling me...”

“Your friends – and I assume you trust them – told you what I can do,” Don forestalled. “I can do everything they say I can, and probably more. The process is established.”

“I can't help but wonder why, though,” Williams commented. “Why not just use a woman?”

“Biological females are great,” Don told him. “I married one, myself. The love of my life. Until she gained eighty pounds, spent me into the poorhouse, divorced me and took half of everything I owned just

because she decided she wasn't in love any more. I worked my fingers bloody to provide everything she could ever want and she couldn't even slide out of her nightgown once a week in exchange for a five-bedroom house, a country club membership, a two-karat diamond and a BMW for her anniversary. It was after all that happened that it dawned on me.”

“What was that?” Williams prompted.

“Men of means, such as ourselves, we have certain... *expectations*. From life, but also from women. The women who usually gravitate towards us do so because of a lifestyle which we provide, but they lack devotion. Loyalty. It's only a matter of time before they start looking around for more,” Don told him. “That was the core of my process. It is not too much to ask for a man who has devoted his life to success to expect certain things from his mate. Young and attractive, to be sure, but also loyal and devoted and attuned to the needs of her husband. And most of those needs turn out to be sexual in nature.”

“That still doesn't explain why,” Williams said.

“My original team and I worked on ways to, shall we say, *open* biological women to the possibilities of sex and sexuality. To tailor them to meet specific criteria. We had some early promise, but it always broke down along the way. It never stuck. That's when it hit me. Why re-invent the wheel? There is already a section of the population who is obsessed with sex in all its forms, no matter how depraved or outside the mainstream. Young men.”

“So it was their natural tendency to stick their cocks into anything that gave you the idea?”

“Basically. Changing the packaging actually proved to be much easier than altering the psyche. But the initial attempts helped us immeasurably in perfecting the process we use now.”

“So you're saying it's easier to turn a horny man into a horny woman than it is to turn a normal woman into a horny woman,” Williams said.

“In a nutshell,” Don said, chuckling. “We couldn't begin to find a way to engineer a woman to be as horny as a man is naturally. So we just took what was already there and did a little body work. And since men

already have a skewed impression of what a woman should be, how she should act and how she should dress, shaped by their upbringing and in no small part by pornography and mass media, it turns out they are far better candidates for the kinds of relationships my clients seek than any naturally-born woman. They're tailor-made.”

“I still have trouble believing it's even possible,” Williams said.

“Which is why we allow you to monitor the process as it goes,” Don told him. “I can't give you a better promise than that. Pay the deposit. Sign the paperwork and watch us work. If you don't believe us after six weeks, exercise the opt-out clause and walk away. We can always find a use for what we make. You have nothing to lose, and the perfect wife to gain from it.”

Williams looked out the window again. “A trophy company. Very amusing.”

“We all thought so,” Don said. “So?”

Williams downed a generous measure of scotch and turned to face Don. “Do it,” he said.

“What do you have in mind, Mr. Williams?” Don asked with an avaricious smile.

“First and foremost, a woman who likes football,” Williams said. “If I can be married and never hear another word about my season tickets again, that would be wonderful.”

“I can do better than that,” Don said, toasting him with a raised glass. “Ever want to have a cheerleader of your very own?”

\* \* \*

Hayden truly worked his ass off for the rest of that day and the next, filling two orders single-handedly and getting a sizeable dent put into another. He wanted nothing more than to prove that his impromptu promotion would be the best decision Don made in a long while.

In honor of his strike-it-rich absentee friend, Hayden made his way that

Friday evening to the Front Stoop and took his place at the bar in their customary spot, ordering a beer and a basket of onion rings as he and Mack always had. But just to offset his loneliness, he also ordered a shot of rye to go with it.



The shot and beer turned quickly from one into several, and Hayden attempted to clear the floating fog from his eyes as he lit another in a long line of cigarettes, staring into nothing and trying not to look as bleary-eyed drunk as he felt. He didn't remember hard liquor ever hitting him quite this hard – particularly on a full stomach – but it had been a while and he probably became a lightweight in the long dry spell between jobs when he couldn't afford beer, no matter how much he may have wanted to consume it by the gallon. Still, he felt a lot more drunk than he probably should have.

“Hey,” he slurred to the bartender, a pleasant-looking woman named Cindy who had always smiled at him and called him 'honey.' “Cindy. How much have I had to drink, anyhow?”

“Looks like one more than enough,” Cindy chuckled. “You got a ride home tonight, honey?”

“I can walk,” he told her.

“Doesn't look like it,” she chided.

“Well, why don't *you* take me home, there, gorgeous?” he said in a boozily-direct attempt to flirt.

“I would, but I'd hate for my husband to shoot you,” she told him. “He'd lose his new Sig Sauer to the evidence locker and I just know he'd find a way to blame me about it.”

“Don't worry about it,” a familiar voice behind him said. Hayden turned – too fast, since it took the world a few long seconds to catch up with how fast he turned his head – and squinted, finally managing to bring the tall form of Don Trevor into tenuous focus. “I'll get him home.”

“Hey, Don,” Hayden slurred with a stupid-looking smile. “I didn't know you came here.”

“I don't,” Don said, sitting next to him.

“I was just here, y'know, drinking to Mack and his silver mine,” Hayden went on. “Some motherfuckers, they just get all the luck, right?”

“They sure do,” Don said. “But I imagine you'll see him again. Probably sooner than you think.”

“I hope so,” Hayden said. “I don't have that many friends.”

“I see that changing,” Don told him.

“You do? Cool. That makes me feel better.”

Don gestured to the bartender. “How about one more round before I take this boy out of here?”

“You may have to carry him out,” Cindy warned.

“I'm counting on it,” Don told her cryptically.

\* \* \*

The first conscious perception Hayden Abernathy grasped out of the black, throbbing blackness behind his eyelids buzzed in his ears as a low, constant and pathetic moan. It took him a moment to determine that sound came from his own throat. He attempted to open his eyes – big mistake – and clamped them shut promptly as the white, painful light assaulted his vision. He rolled to his side and felt coolness against his cheek, farted stentoriously and ran his tongue across his upper teeth to check if, in fact, fungus really grew there. His tongue rasped against the inside of his mouth, testament to his hung-over dehydration and seeming to add, somehow, to his pounding headache.

His hands clutched at his splitting head and he noted a strange absence. Cognition struggled through the haze in his head, taking precious seconds to coalesce into realization that his fingers touched stubbled, bare skin where before long, thick hair resided.

“What the fuck? What happened to my hair?” he moaned in a frog-croak voice reminiscent of too much booze, too many cigarettes and most likely vomit. *Did I shave my head last night?*

Hayden went on benders before, but never with a blackout to the extent that he remembered *nothing*. He pushed himself to his hands and knees, trying to ignore the anvil chorus in his temples and the precarious churning of his abused stomach, then up to his knees. With an effort bordering on suicidal, he forced his gritty eyes open against the ice-pick piercing sharpness of the white light beyond.



He fought a wave of nausea as his eyes adjusted and looked down to see himself clad only in light blue hospital scrubs. *Did I get hurt or something? Am I in the hospital? Why would I have been on the floor, then?* he thought. His head seemed packed full of cotton pudding, making his thoughts sluggish and his realizations worse. He stared at the teal fabric covering him for several minutes, swallowing hard to keep down the rising tide of bile in his throat, before he recalled thinking that he had no hair. A hand across his denuded scalp confirmed his suspicion.

*Did I have brain surgery or something? Is that why I can't remember shit?* he thought fuzzily. But that wouldn't explain the new change he discovered, staring at his arm crossing his field of vision. An arm completely devoid of the wiry, thick hair there since puberty. Further exploration found the same absence of hair on his chest, legs and balls. An informative hand across his cheek and jaw foretold only baby's-ass smoothness closer than any shave.

“What the fuck?” he asked aloud in a voice barely above a croak.

As if waiting for him to speak, the lights in the room dimmed to a tolerable level and allowed Hayden to see a bit more of the room he occupied. Large and featureless, lined on walls in ceiling with white tiles over a dark tile floor set with drains. Hayden found no doors or anything resembling ingress or egress, no apparent sources for ventilation or airflow. The young man tried desperately to figure how he even got into the room, much less how to get out of it. In hung-over desperation, he slumped against the wall and sank to a seat, holding his aching head in his hands.

“Fuckers can't even give me a place to sit,” he muttered.

A soft chime sounded, snapping Hayden's attention from his palms. Several tiles in the floor slid noiselessly out of their positions to allow a plastic-looking chair and small table to rise from beneath, settling into position with a soft *click*.

Hayden circled the furniture like a wary cat, inspecting them from every angle before risking a touch. They seemed completely normal and mundane. He sank into the chair with a soft creak and looked around.

“So all I have to do is say something?” he asked the empty air. “How about giving me a door?”

Nothing responded.

“I see how it is,” he said. “Is this some kind of fucked-up jail? What kind of jail shaves a motherfucker's legs and balls? Where the hell am I?”

Again, only silence.

“Could I get some goddamn water, then?”

This time he heard the chime. A small section of tile on the wall he slumped against just moments before slid into a recess to reveal a small silver spigot and a plastic cup. A stream of clear water pattered into the bottom. Hayden took the cup once it filled – pleasantly cold against his palm – and sniffed at it warily.

“I don't suppose I could get some aspirin to go with this,” he asked the

ether. Another chime, and the spigot retracted into the wall to reveal a small chute. Two small tablets rested in the bottom.

He scooped them up and examined them. He stopped just short of touching one of the pills against his tongue and laughed roughly from a coarse throat.

“What if they are some crazy roofies or some shit?” he cackled. “What the fuck am I gonna do if they are? Whoever the fuck you are, you pretty much got my balls in your hands, right?”

He tossed the pills into the back of his throat, slugged down some water, then sagged into the chair again, waiting for what he believed to be the inevitable drug effects to take hold. An unmeasurable stretch of time passed and nothing happened but a slight easing of the pain behind his eyes. Hayden looked up at the ceiling and cleared his throat.

“Guess I should apologize,” he said. “All that fuss and bother, turns out they were aspirin after all. Sorry. I guess I'm a little on edge. I mean, look at me. I'm talking to an empty room.”

He rubbed his temples, fighting a bout of hysterical laughter.

“Somebody want to tell me what the fuck I have to do to get out of here?” he asked the air.

The chime sounded and a pleasant-sounding female voice emanated from out of the air around him, making Hayden jump and look around frantically for the source.

“Release comes when you complete the program.”

“What? What program? What are you talking about?” Hayden demanded, still looking around.

“You are beginning the program,” the voice stated simply. “When you complete it, you may leave.”

“Can you tell me what the fuck the program is?”

“Profanity is unnecessary and will not be tolerated,” the voice said.

“Seriously? You're making me watch my language?”

“If you want to complete the program, then you will comply,” the voice said.

“Okay, okay, okay,” Hayden said, making a placating gesture. “What do I do?”

“You will be informed daily,” the voice said. “Any questions may be addressed to me. You may call me Program.”

“Okay, then, Program – the sooner I start this sh- this *stuff* – the sooner I can get out of here. Give me something to do. Let's get started with this thing.”

“Personality profiling must be completed in order to proceed,” Program informed him.

“Okay, then, profile me,” Hayden said, leaning back in his chair.

“List five adjectives which you would most like to describe you,” Program asked.

“Five? I dunno. 'Strong,' I guess. Yeah, definitely 'strong.' 'Bad-assed.' Y'know, like Schwarzenegger in one of his movies. 'Tough,' definitely. Maybe something like 'respected.' Yeah. And then, I dunno – I guess I want people to think I'm good at what I do. 'Good at what I do,' maybe?”

“Processing,” Program said. “Input accepted. Descriptors 'strong,' 'bad-assed,' 'tough,' 'respected' and 'competent' logged and analyzed for later comparison.”

“And that's it? I'm done?” Hayden asked.

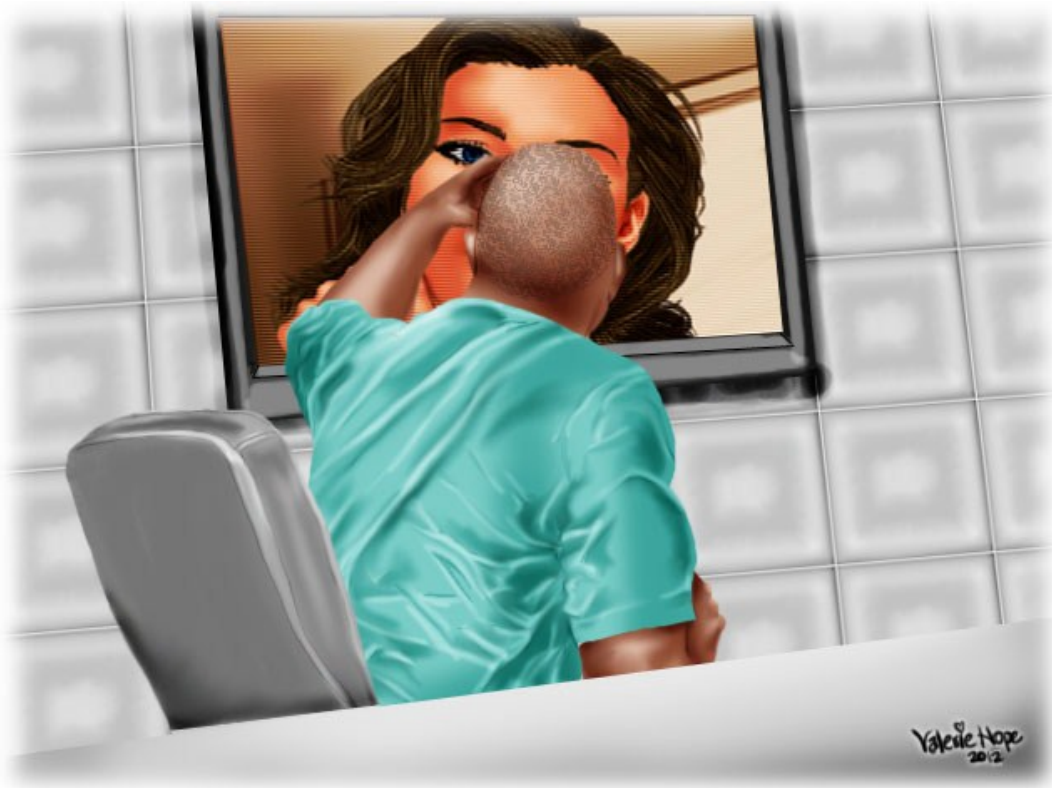
If a machine could sound amused, Program did. “No, Mr. Abernathy. You have only just begun.”

HAYDEN ABERNATHY LOOKED AROUND HELPLESSLY at the disembodied voice which spoke to him from the walls of the featureless white room he occupied. His hands on the plain table in front of him clenched into

fists, crushing the plastic cup he held into a formless mass.

“What do you mean, I'm only getting started? Will somebody please, for the love of Christ, tell me what in the hell is going on around here? I wake up hung over and shaved bald with no hair on my balls in some crazy prison where the chairs come up out of the floor when I say I want to sit down and there's some *Star Trek* computer voice telling me to watch my language and give her five adjectives about myself and all I want to know is where the hell I am! Is there somebody – not some damn computer, I mean a real actual person – who I can talk to about this? Am I in some kind of trouble?”

A soft *whirr* sounded behind him. Hayden spun in his chair to see a flat-screen TV appearing from behind a retracting section of tile in the wall. It flickered to life and showed the smiling face of a gorgeous, fashion-model brunette with sparkling brown eyes.



“Hello, Mr. Abernathy. How can I help you?” she asked in a throaty, phone-sex purr.

Hayden seemed to be taken a bit aback. “Uh... hi,” he stammered.

“Hello,” she said patiently.

“Are you for real?” Hayden asked.

She chuckled and smiled more broadly. “Of course I am. My name is Julia. How may I help you?”

“Can you tell me what's going on? Where am I?” Hayden asked.

“Of course. I'm sorry,” Julia said sympathetically. “This must be very disorienting for you. You have been selected for participation in a very special program. If you complete the program, you will find that your life will improve dramatically. You will leave in perfect health and physical condition, with a vast increase in your personal wealth and prospects. You will have friends and family which you do not possess right now, and a support network and means to accomplish your slightest whimsy. A vast amount of personal freedom to do whatever you'd like. You could go to college if you liked, and the money and means would be there. You could have a job or simply stay home.”

“You can't be serious,” he said.

“Completely,” Julia replied.

“And what do I have to do to get all this stuff?” Hayden asked suspiciously.

“First and foremost, cooperate. The program will work if you fight it, but it works much better if you participate actively and willingly,” Julia explained. “And secondly, for now, we need you to adopt a deep and abiding love of professional football.”

“Football? Are you messing with me?” Hayden asked.

“Not at all,” Julia assured him. “Our research indicated that you're a fan of the game, but we need more from you to meet our criteria. We need it to be close to an obsession for you.”

“So, like, join a fantasy football league or something like that?” he asked.

Julia chuckled again. "That wouldn't hurt, I suppose. But we need you to be able to quote statistics. To second-guess coaching decisions and be correct in your assertions. We need you to be a person who never misses a game. I'm not asking for football to be the most important thing in your life, but we do need you to be the type of person who can't wait for the next season to start."

"Hell, I'm halfway there already," Hayden said. "So, Step One. Football is awesome. What else?"

"There will be other lessons as the program progresses. Let's not get too far ahead of ourselves."

"Fair enough," Hayden said. "How long am I gonna be here? Do I ever get to go outside or am I stuck in this room?"

"You will be in this room for quite a while, but you will be moved from here to various medical and laboratory facilities as we progress," Julia told him. "Various doctors and analysts will be in here, conducting tests. While this happens, we think it best you be kept under constant observation."

"What about eating? Going to the toilet, that kind of stuff? Exercise?"

"Ask Program for what you need," Julia said. "If you need the bathroom, it will be provided. If you want exercise, then you ask and we can provide a treadmill or weights. What Program lacks in personality, it makes up for with usefulness. I just wouldn't recommend heart-to-heart conversations. Program is a bit inflexible."

"Yeah, I noticed that."

"I am in charge of monitoring your progress," Julia said. "Before this is all over, you will most likely hate me with a passion. But I hope that changes over time and you decide we can be friends. Believe me, I will keep your best interests at heart throughout the entire journey."

"You seem nice enough," Hayden said. "So I just ask for you if I need you?"

"I'm not Program, darling, I can't be at your twenty-four hour beck and

call,” Julia said wryly. “I have a home and a family I like to see in the evenings, and I have to eat and go to the bathroom too. I have this job and that requires going to meetings and other silly things like that. But if you need to leave me a personal message, the master console – where you're talking to me now – will record one for me. Just say 'Master Console' and it will appear. If I'm in my office, Mr. Abernathy, then I will answer you. But I am rarely in my office and when I am, I will usually be online with you anyway.”

“Just one more thing,” Hayden asked. “Am I some kind of a prisoner?”

“We would like you to consider yourself a guest,” Julia said. “But for the first parts of the program, when you may have your immune system compromised or be in the midst of some kind of medical procedure, we need to keep you close. The outside world might not be safe for you.”

“This sounds kinda sketchy,” Hayden said.

“Give it a week,” Julia said. “You'll see that staying here will be best for you. Now, Mr. Abernathy, I have a ton of data to sort through on what we've gathered on you since your arrival. Will there be anything else?”

“Yeah, you can start calling me Hayden,” he told her. “I hate that 'Mr. Abernathy' stuff.”

“As you wish,” Julia said. “Have a good evening, Hayden. I'll speak to you again in the morning.”

The console retracted as it switched off, becoming featureless wall once more. Hayden rapped on it softly with his knuckles and found only solidity and weight. No way to potentially break his way through. Talking to another human being assuaged some of his fear and helplessness, but had done nothing to allay his doubts or suspicion. Nothing about his situation seemed anything other than dodgy. Nobody just got swept up off the street after a bender and dropped into some magical program which would make you healthy, cut and rich. And nobody spent this kind of cash on something meant to be completely altruistic. No, Julia definitely hid something. And Hayden didn't feel much like sticking around to find out what it was.

The lingering headache and nausea from Hayden's hangover abated

enough for him to wonder how long it had been since he ate. A little bubbling gurgle from his midsection answered his question.

“Um, Program?” he asked aloud.

“Online,” the emotionless voice answered.

“I'm hungry. Can I get something to eat?”

“Beginning initial phase of training diet,” Program responded. A section of wall next to where the master console emerged and a strange grey metal cube extended out. The cube opened downwards, like a ramp, revealing two eight-inch long plastic tube which sagged and flopped a little bit when the door snapped open. Hayden eyed the tubes suspiciously.

“This is dinner?” he asked.

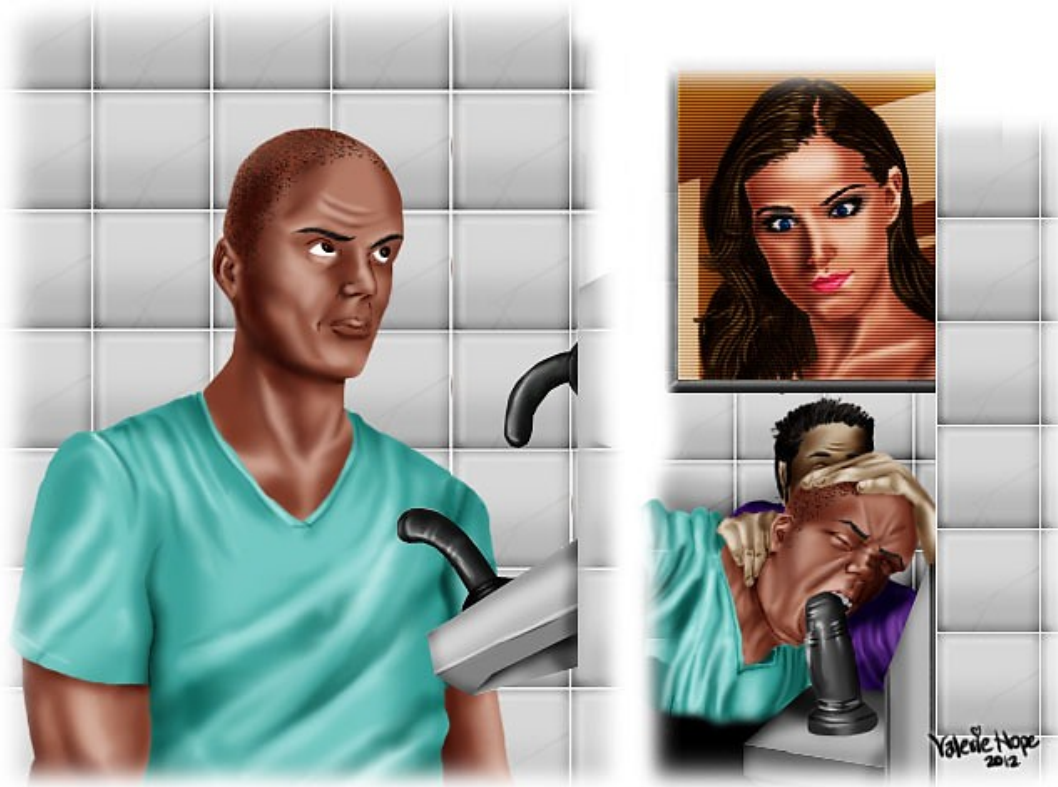
“Place your mouth on either of the tubes and suck,” Program instructed. “All necessary nutrients and medications will be delivered to you.”

“Oh, *hell* no,” Hayden said, putting up his hands. “I'm not sucking my dinner out of anything, much less something that looks that much like a dick.”

“You will eat,” Program said with its usual bone-chilling lack of emotion.

“Fuck you,” Hayden said simply, crossing his arms across his hairless chest.

The chime sounded and a section of tile across the room swished back to reveal a door. Before Hayden could make a break in that direction, two enormous men in hospital scrubs entered and the door thudded shut behind them. Wordlessly, the pair of silent behemoths grabbed Hayden in mid-stride and pinned his arms behind him. Another grabbed him beneath the jaw and roughly shoved him forward, forcing his mouth wide with a startled cry which gurgled shut as ungentle hands forced his mouth over and onto the plastic hose. Hayden gagged and coughed and spluttered but nothing stopped the semirigid tube from sliding over his tongue and down his throat, coated with his spittle just enough to keep it from catching.



No amount of force Hayden could muster could force himself upright or dislodge the invading tube from his throat. Before he knew it, the tube pumped a sour-tasting paste into his throat in several long warm jets. Hayden swallowed convulsively to keep from choking. Once his mouth cleared, the men released him and let him sag to the floor, panting and coughing. They exited through the same door, never having uttered a word. Hayden looked up to see the master console activated and Julia looking down at him in stern disapproval.

“I thought I told you about the value of cooperation,” she scolded.

Something strange seemed to be happening to Hayden. He tried to speak – to curse and rail at his treatment – but a slowly-spreading tingling numbness suffused his arms, legs and body, traveling up his neck and into his head and behind his eyes, bring a sense of calm and peace and utter well-being.

“You can't make me suck my meals through a rubber cock,” he groaned.

“As you just witnessed, Hayden, we certainly can,” Julia told him. “I’d advise you to re-think your approach to the program. I can send Isaac and Jeremy in here every day for mealtimes, and we can go through exactly what just happened. Or you can simply cooperate and do your best. It’s up to you, but the program will go better for you if you simply go along with what we ask of you.”

“I’m not a queer,” Hayden said, his voice slurring from the euphoric floating sensation filling his brain.

“Strange that your mind went there so quickly,” Julia commented. “You think anyone who drinks from a straw is homosexual?”

“That’s fucked up,” Hayden said, giggling a little more than he intended thanks to the drugged feeling. “Of course not. My dad drank through a straw and he wasn’t no faggot.”

“I detest that word,” Julia said sternly. “Do not use it again.”

“Sorry,” Hayden slurred.

“All you did was to take sustenance through a large straw. That’s all,” Julia said. “And you will either do it willingly or you will be made to do it. That is the simplest explanation I can offer. Now, rest. You have a big day tomorrow.”

The stress, the fading surge of adrenaline and the drugged feeling conspired to have Hayden snoring against the wall about the same time tiles clicked shut over the powered-down master console.

\* \* \*

The next – day? night? Hayden possessed no mechanism to tell – coalesced in his vision from black to smudged gray to dimmed white. The lights in his cell glowed just this side of visibility. A bed slid out from another retracted section of tile conformed comfortably to his body beneath him and soft cotton sheets lay atop him. Pleasantly cool air drifted across his exposed skin. Only a mild, lingering headache remained from his ordeal. He stirred, moaned, and sat, swinging his hairless legs over the edge of the low mattress and onto the chilly floor. A neatly folded seat of hospital scrubs and a pair of flimsy slippers lay

folded in a pile on the floor next to him. Hayden dressed quickly and silently and experienced no surprise when the lights brightened automatically the instant he stood.

The master console extended out of the wall to display a message in white letters: "Medical Exam 5 Minutes." Hayden muttered for a chair and slumped down, listless and defeated, as it rose from the floor. He barely managed to dwell on his situation before the door swished open – again, too fast to react, and no telltale hum or whirr to use for prediction – and a large overmuscled man entered, pushing a cart of machinery and medical supplies.

"Good morning, Mr. Abernathy," he said in a pleasant bass rumble.

"Call me Hayden," he replied dully.

"Hayden," the man repeated. "I'm Tom. Heard you had a tough night. How you feeling?"

"I could be worse, I guess," Hayden mumbled. "What's all that?"

The man looked down at his cart. "Need to get a better picture of your overall health," he said. "So this is pretty standard monitoring stuff. Heart monitor, pulse monitor, brain monitor. Then I have some immunizations for you and some medicine to help you with the program."

"What kind of medicine?" Hayden asked.

"Pretty fancy stuff, actually," Tom said. "This one here affects the cells that build bones. It's going to change your shape. These two together work on your fat cells to redistribute them around your body. And this one here is pretty cutting-edge nanotechnology. Real sci-fi stuff. It's going to personally visit every cell in your body and make little changes here and there to make sure they're all functioning as well as they possibly can."

"That stuff doesn't really exist, does it?" Hayden asked, suddenly curious.

"Sure does, and it's right here. That boss of yours sure is a next-level genius."

“My boss?” Hayden asked, eyebrows raising in shock. “You mean Don had something to do with all this, with my being stuck here?”

“He recruited you, son,” Tom told him simply. “He does it with all the people who come to work for him. That insurance physical you took also told Don whether or not you were a good candidate for the program, here. Guess you passed the test.”

“Lucky me,” Hayden said.

“Hell, I'd give my eye teeth to be in this program. You should see how you fellas end up. Healthy and happy and rich as shit. Worth ten times what you have to pay to put yourself through this.”

“Sounds like a dream come true.”

“Pretty much,” Tom said, chuckling. “Depends on what you dream about, I guess.”

“What do you need me to do?” Hayden asked. “See? I'm cooperating.”

“Yeah, I'll make a note of that,” Tom laughed. “Just come over here and take off your shirt. I'll take care of the rest.”

Hayden complied without defiance, crediting his sense of utter and complete defeat to his willingness than to any conscious choice on his part. He didn't think he could take a take like Tom in a fair fight, anyway, and wouldn't have known which direction to run even if he got out of the tiled room.

Tom secured electrodes and wires to every conceivable part of Hayden's body in a brisk, businesslike fashion. He instructed Hayden through all manner of little tests, having him jog in place for a few minutes, stretch and touch his toes, breathe in and out as deeply as he could for a long interval, all the while studying the computer monitor with its changing numbers and strange squiggly lines. He would pause him, here and there, to administer a shot of this medicine or that one. Hayden stopped asking him what they were after the fifth injection, unable to get anything but a vague or cryptic answer from the man attending him.



Easily twenty minutes passed of this or that test, this blood draw or that injection, before Tom finally packed all his machinery and syringes back onto the rolling cart and pushed them to one side. He rolled up his sleeves, revealing massive forearms as thick as Hayden's calves, adorned proudly with a U.S. Army Rangers tattoo on the left.

“Time to eat,” he said with a hint of warning in his voice. “Easy way or hard way?”

Hayden sighed, looking at the gray cube extend from the wall. “Easy way,” he said in utter defeat. Willingly, he stepped to the black rubber tubes and placed his mouth over the lowermost, sucking tentatively at it.

“You're never gonna get anything out like that,” Tom counseled. “Here. Get down on it, like this, and suck hard.” He placed his hands gently on the back of Hayden's head and pushed him down until he almost gagged, then pistoned his head up and down a little until spit coated the shaft. Hayden pulled at the tube as hard as he could but his lips slipped off with loud pops and smacks a few times before finally achieving the bitter jets of liquid – and the attendant euphoric high – from yesterday. And somehow, in his mind, the experience didn't seem nearly as

traumatic as the day before. In fact, for a few moments, Tom's strong hands under his jaw and behind his head felt almost – *good*. Hayden closed that particular fact in the deepest vault he found in his addled brain. That information, *no one* needed to ever know.

“See you around, there, Hayden,” Tom said, rolling his sleeves down and pushing his cart towards the concealed door. “You're gonna do great at this, I know you are. Just try hard, okay?”

“Yeah, sure,” Hayden slurred, waving.

He lay against the wall for a while, just enjoying his stoned feeling, eyes closed and head tilted back. Sometime during his trip, the master console had changed to read: “BPRU Fitting: 5 Minutes.” Apparently the change occurred somewhere about four minutes and fifty-seven seconds before Hayden opened his eyes, judging by how quickly the door slipped open to reveal another large, imposing man in scrubs, this one pushing a dolly.

“What in the world is a BPRU?” Hayden slurred, still very giggly and floaty from his 'meal.'

“Bio-adaptive Pedi-tarsal Reconfiguration Unit,” the man said simply and humorlessly.

“Fancy name,” Hayden commented.

“Fancy boots,” the man replied. He knelt in front of Hayden and removed the slippers, tossing them carelessly aside.

“You're going to be in these twenty-four and seven for about three weeks,” the man told him. “You'll bathe in them and sleep in them. Don't try to take them off by yourself. There are intramuscular injection pumps in both boots which will inject you – quite painlessly, once you get used to it – several times a day in different locations. Trying to remove the BPRU's without a medical professional could be *very* painful.”

“Got it. Ouch.”

The man slipped a hinged, clamshell type boot onto his right foot, which left a strange hard framework of plastic and black neoprene covering

him from knee to toe. They clicked shut and whirred and vibrated as the insides of the boot seemed to mold themselves to Hayden's skin. A few little mechanisms on the footwear clicked and buzzed and he felt some sharp stings in his calf and heel.

“Just the injections,” the man muttered in response to Hayden's pained hiss.

Wordlessly, he secured the other *Robotech*-looking boot to Hayden's other foot. The boots, although large and clunky, weighed surprisingly little but still seemed to drag a bit as Hayden stood. Balance eluded him for a moment or two but the silent man reached up to steady him until Hayden restored equilibrium. It felt a little like being forced to walk on his toes. Hayden's first unsteady, tottering steps faded quickly into a more easy and manageable stride, requiring only that he take shorter steps and drop his hips a little while walking.

“Won't be long before you can run a marathon in those and not even notice,” the man said. He packed up the small set of tools – doing a quick count to make sure Hayden had not swiped any to use as a weapon or a lockpick – and the empty containers and loaded them back on his dolly. He left as silently as he entered. Hayden busied himself a little bit with practicing his walking in the strange new footwear before the master console buzzed and Julia's gorgeous face appeared on the monitor.

“I see you got the BPRU's. Excellent. How do they feel, Hayden?”

“A little hard to get used to, but I think I'm managing okay. What are they for?”

“To improve posture, circulation, and to steady your skeleton. One of the many side effects of the medications you received today is brittle bones. The BPRUs will help make sure that your ankles and shins don't break as you go about your day. They'll be removed as soon as they've done their work.”

“I seriously have to sleep and bathe in these things?”

“I wore them myself, about a year ago,” Julia said. “The first day or two is a little awkward but by the end of the period you won't even

remember you wear them. Trust me.”

“Okay,” Hayden said.

“So what's next?” Hayden asked his captor.

“I thought we could just chat,” Julia said. “I'm sure you have a lot of questions. I do, too.”

Hayden summoned his chair – this one seemed a bit more like a recliner, deeper and more comfortable – and sat, balancing the heel of one clunky boot on the toe of the other. “So who goes first, you or me?”

“Oh, you, definitely,” Julia replied.

“Okay, then, Tom back there let slip that Don is the one I have to thank for all this,” Hayden said. “Where is he? Can I talk to him?”

“That's two questions,” Julia pointed out. “And the answers are he's around, and no, you may not. My turn. Tell me what the word 'success' means to you.”

“Wow, that's kinda random,” Hayden said. “Success. It means you made it. That you don't have to work any more unless you're just one of those people who needs a job just to feel right. But it also means that you can walk off that job any time you want to because you don't need it.”

“You don't consider being the boss success?”

“That's two questions, too. Guess we're even,” Hayden teased. “And no. Why would I want to be the boss? I don't want to be responsible for myself, much less a building full of people. I don't want to ever have to make a decision that affects tons of people. I can barely take care of myself, sometimes.”

“Interesting,” Julia commented, writing some notes on a paper held off-camera. “Your turn.”

“What about me did Don find that made me such a good 'candidate' for all this?” Hayden queried.

“You were young, healthy and not at genetic risk for certain conditions such as cancer or diabetes. Things that our technology can't guard you against, at least in its current incarnation,” Julia answered. “But truthfully, the fact that you had no real friends outside of the company and no surviving family, no wife or dependents, probably influenced Don's decision more than anything else.”

“He picked me because I'm alone?” Hayden pressed.

“Is that really what you want to spend your next question asking? I already answered it,” Julia said. “My turn, now. Tell me what happened to your father.”

“Damn, you are *all* over the map today,” Hayden said. “Didn't really know him. He walked out on me and my mom when I was eight. Left her alone with no job, a little kid and a pile of bills to pay. My grandparents took up the slack and I had a pretty good childhood. Mom said Dad died but never really said how. I found some old pictures of him in a Marine uniform, maybe he got shot in Kuwait or Bosnia or someplace. Mom didn't really like to talk about him, and I never really looked into it. Didn't really care what happened to the son of a bitch. All I know is he left us like we were garbage and never even tried to get back in touch with us.”

She made more notes. “Your turn,” she said without looking up.

“If you say this is all for my benefit, that this is all going to work out in my favor and be this happy fun land of milk and honey when it's all over, why are you treating me like a prisoner of war?” Hayden asked. “I'm not really a big fan of having stuff forced down my throat just so I can get something to eat. Truthfully, I'd kinda rather starve.”

“Because you have some very profound character defects,” Julia explained with no rancor whatsoever. “You're not the only person on the planet who is stubborn – far from it – but you're one of the ones who is stubborn for the simple sake of *being* stubborn. Your entire life history as we have collected it shows incident after incident where you could have simply taken a deep breath and played along and saved yourself no end of misery or heartache. But you insisted on being stubborn and clinging to paths which were so obviously self-destructive and stupid that you let yourself and all the people around you get hurt. It's why you

never had a productive or healthy relationship, why you never found your father and it's in no small part why we force you to eat when you refuse. Because we know what will happen if we try to give you time to change your mind. You said it yourself – you'd rather starve. All our data points to the fact that you *would* starve rather than simply do it the other way. We won't take that chance. Your turn.”

“You don't pull punches, do you?” Hayden said.

“Is that your question?” Julia said, chewing sexily on the end of her pen. Hayden tried not to notice.

“No,” Hayden said. “I want to know what's in the food that makes me feel high.”

“It contains nutrients and raw amino acids for the nanotech we injected into you to use in cellular adaptation, for the most part. Encapsulated sugar to keep your metabolism elevated – we need you to shed some body fat in a hurry and that's the best way to do it. And a mild sedative and narcotic. That's the high. It's to keep you calm, to keep you from trying so actively to escape, and also to mildly addict you to the food, so hopefully you won't fight us so hard around mealtimes. We'd actually like it if you looked forward to it a little.”

“You're addicting me to my food. Wow. You are a bunch of soulless bastards,” Hayden said.

“I don't guess saying it's for your own good would make any difference,” Julia commented. “My turn. What is your fondest memory of your mother?”

“Mom? I dunno – there were a lot of them. She was a super lady. I remember she used to wear her nails long and polished – all the ladies did back then – and when I couldn't sleep as a kid she'd come sit on my bed next to me and scratch my back and neck until I fell asleep. And she used to sing, under her breath, all the time. Vacuuming the carpet or cooking dinner or driving, whatever, she always used to be singing some song off the radio, just to herself to pass the time. If I ever got to feeling like I was all alone, I could get real quiet and hear her doing it in the other room and it reminded me somebody was there. There was some other stuff – like how she always wore makeup, even if it was just

to work in the yard or something, she was one of those ladies who put her face on first thing and wouldn't let herself be seen without it. The smell of her perfume. Don't remember what the name of it was, but I'd know that smell anyplace. How she laughed. That kind of stuff.”

“She sounds really great,” Julia told him.

“She was,” Hayden said. “Broke my heart when she died. Car wreck. She was on her way to go play cards with her buddies at the Senior Center and got t-boned by a garbage truck. Dead on scene.”

“I'm very sorry to hear that,” Julia said with genuine sympathy. “You must miss her.”

“I guess. Life goes on, y'know. My turn. Why did you shave all my hair?”

“Multiple reasons,” Julia said. “Probably the most immediate was because of all the medical tests we needed to run. Believe me, if you'd ever had to take off an EKG electrode with chest hair, you'd be thanking us.”

There was a long and vaguely awkward silence before Hayden prompted, “Your turn, Julia.”

“Oh, no,” she said. “I have plenty. I'm done for the day. You have a few hours before you have anything scheduled. Is there anything you would like to do?”

“I'd love to go outside,” Hayden teased. “No, no, I get it. No yard time. Fine. Maybe a shower, though. I feel pretty nasty.”

“That would be excellent,” Julia said. An entire section of wall slid away to reveal a small shower stall with a clear glass door. “Take what time you need. Hayden, are you really that upset about your hair?”

“Yeah, actually,” he replied, shucking his shirt. “I never thought I was all that much to look at, y'know, but I did have some pretty nice hair. Be nice to have it back.”

“Use the shampoo in the green bottle,” Julia recommended. “It stimulates hair growth.”

“Cool,” Hayden said, grabbing a towel from the rack beside the shower door and wrapping it around his midsection before dropping his pants. They got caught on the spacesuit boots he wore, forcing him to bend and tug and causing the towel to flutter to the floor in a heap anyway. He heard Julia's throaty chuckle behind him and he blushed crimson, ducking into the shower in a rush and slamming the door behind him.

\* \* \*

Hot, steaming water and silken lather streamed down his body as Hayden massaged the greenish goo into his scalp for the second time, according to the written directions on the bottle. The stuff tingled and itched a little when he first rubbed it in but that faded away into a warm feeling that felt wonderful.



He hummed some rockabilly tune he barely remembered hearing on the radio as he luxuriated in the hot water, deliberately wasting time just so he could stay in the steam and the flow. He drew it out for as long as he could until the chime sounded, then started sounding again more insistently. Reluctantly, he rinsed himself off and shut off the bliss of the water, wrapping himself in a towel and stepping out into the relative

chill of the cell. The master console bid him to get dressed, which he did after a quick towel-off, leaving his shirt on the table so he could enjoy a few moments of airing out.

Thinking it would be time to eat again soon, he steeled himself for the inevitable ordeal. Julia's comments circled in loops inside his brain and he tried to find a way to convince himself that sucking this – and all his subsequent – meals through a rubber cock might not be such a bad thing, after all. But his natural predisposition to stubbornness – and his fragile masculine self-image – seemed to harden into recalcitrance at the very thought, not permitting even a flickering image of himself stooping to eat that way willingly.

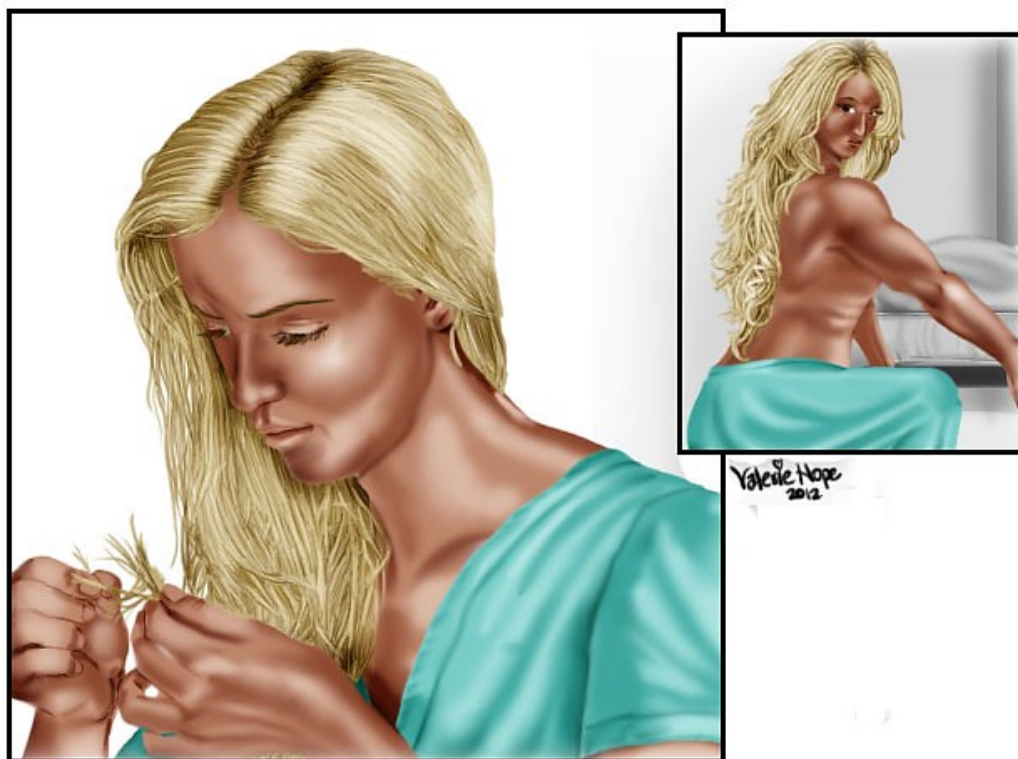
He groaned and scratched his head. His scalp seemed to be itching like fire. He wrapped the damp towel around it and got a little bit of relief.

Was Julia right? Was his refusal to perform such a task – even in relative privacy – just a sad function of his ego? His mother – fresh in his mind from recent recollection – always accused him of burying himself alive simply to prove he could handle a shovel. His mom had been a very perceptive lady, and her comments along that vein always seemed less humorous and more exasperated. Had she been attempting, in her own gentle way, to keep him from becoming more like his absentee father? Why did he see such glamor in 'sticking to his guns' even when he knew, deep down, that his 'guns' weren't all the special or even a good idea? Was he just being stupid?

He scratched his scalp again. The towel seemed to be loosening a little, and he wormed his fingers beneath the edge to scratch harder before drawing them back in shock. His fingertips, beneath the towel, encountered and buried themselves in a lush expanse of silky softness.

Julia said the shampoo promoted hair growth. *I didn't realize she meant in five minutes*, he thought.

He slipped the towel from its haphazard turban around his forehead and a thick, shimmery curtain of damp gold spilled across his eyes. A wet softness cascaded over both shoulders and down his back. He raked his fingers through it alarmingly, brushing his vision clear and pulling the ends of the long, golden tresses now sprouting from his irritated scalp before his disbelieving eyes.



“Program! I need a mirror!” he half-bellowed in shock.

A section of wall slipped away and a polished surface extended out, brass-framed and simple. Hayden turned and saw the lush fall of shimmering, soft and healthy hair – now drying from honey gold into a more ashen, vanilla color – tumbling from his scalp over both his shoulders and down his back. Hair straight out of a Pantene commercial, reflecting the light in a portrait of healthy shine. Hair to be proud of, hair to style and tease and showcase.

If you were a girl.

A sudden, chilling realization slammed into Hayden like a hammer between the eyes and he gasped audibly. He ran back through a series of frenzied recollections, every comment anyone made about the program, and realized that no one had ever come out and said, point blank, that he would come out of the program the same person he entered.

Or even the same gender.

*They're turning me into a girl? Why in the fuck does Don want me to be a girl?* Hayden thought along the creeping edges of chilled panic.

The chime sounded and Hayden whipped around – his new, long tresses slapping against his face and back, causing him to spit them from between his lips frantically – to see the anemic message. “Superbowl XXXII Review: Five Minutes.”

He laughed with an edge of mania. *They expect me to watch football now? What the fuck does that have to do with anything?*

A strange, calm center formed in his mind. *If you don't, someone will just come in and make you, it told him. Sit down. Relax. Watch the game. The hair's not going anywhere, and you can probably talk to Julia about it later. Maybe you used the shampoo wrong. Maybe you used too much and they can bring somebody in to cut it tomorrow. Just stop being such a douche-bag and just follow the program.*

He took a deep, trembling breath and let it out. *That's got to be it. I used too much. It's really nice, and shiny and healthy. Way better than your old hair. Julia said they were going to make me healthier and better than I was before. This is just some kind of mistake.*

He sat on the reclining chair which rose from the floor unbidden and faced the master console, gathering the hair behind him and out of his field of vision, now resolved to just watch some football and try not to think about it too much. Julia didn't want him to worry. His mom, back before she died, never wanted him to worry. Maybe it was time, he decided, to give them what they wanted and just *stop* worrying.

It seemed like it was his decision to make, after all.

HAYDEN SAT QUIETLY IN THE recliner, watching two complete Superbowl broadcasts and then SportsCenter in a strange, detached haze. A barely-perceptible hum teased and flirted just at the edge of audibility in the room, lulling him into a blank-eyed lethargy. At times, the hum even seemed to be talking to him but he could neither understand nor completely hear what was being said. But he did notice an enjoyment of football and a deep appreciation of the sport he never experienced

before. Hayden admittedly like the games on Sunday as much as the next guy, but for him it always centered around the guys and beer and hot wings and not so much about who won or even who played. But now, watching the unabashed athleticism and strategy of the game unfold in front of him transfixed him, making him gleefully absorb every down. He found himself wanting to jump on the internet and learn more about coaching and play-calling, to immerse himself in research of players and injuries and the theory of the game.

He noticed with a bit of a shock that his fingers began idly toying and twisting locks of the long, silken hair over one shoulder while he watched. His resolve to not look at, touch or think about his new blonde mane ebbed and disappeared in the face of the football games. He even braided a section in a long, skinny plait down his left arm. Hayden didn't recall even knowing *how* to braid hair.

It felt wonderful in his fingers, though, and he grew to adore the warm, soft caress of it against his shoulders and back. For as much as it represented, Hayden loved the look and the feel of it and could barely resist the urge to touch it and play with it. If he could just keep from sitting on it and keep it out of his mouth, he might not even mind it at all.

*With a little more masculine cut to it*, he reminded himself after a disturbing lag.

Tired and a little stiff from sitting, Hayden rose in his clunky boots and muttered the command to summon his bed. It slid from behind the tiles noiselessly, now freshly made by whatever unseen hands lurked behind the wall. Hayden sank onto the mattress in a wild tangle of pale blonde hair and plastic boots, staring at the ceiling. His fingers began toying with the hair again, unbidden, twisting it around his index fingers and using the ends to tickle his various fingertips.

The emotionless, cold voice of Program sounded in the room after the ubiquitous chime. "It is the required time to eat."

Hayden sighed heavily. "I'm not hungry."

"Immaterial. Nutrition regimen states that sustenance be consumed on a schedule. It has been four hours, forty-five minutes and ten seconds

since your last consumption,” Program explained.

“Fine,” Hayden growled. “You gonna send in guys to force me? They have all his hair to grab me by now, probably makes their job easier.”

Soundlessly, the table slid from the sconce in the floor. Atop it rested a plate of food – *actual food*, Hayden marveled – under a cloud of steam. Green beans, mashed potatoes, roasted turkey with gravy and a big dinner roll. A tall glass of what looked like iced tea sat next to the plate.

“Waitaminnit – you don't expect me to suck it out of the big rubber dick this time?”

“Profanity will not be toler-”

“Fine, fine, whatever,” Hayden pre-empted. “Never mind. I'm starving.” He plopped unceremoniously behind the table and picked up the plastic knife and fork, sawing into the turkey breast with great concentration and passion, stuffing bite after bite into his mouth with loud smacks and intakes of breath.

He sat back, self-contented, mopping up the last of the mashed potatoes and gravy with the end of the dinner roll and popping it with great satisfaction into his mouth. He did nothing to stifle a large belch before downing the remainder of the cold tea.

“Now, that's a dinner you don't have to force me to eat,” he mentioned aloud, knowing it did no good whatsoever to needle Program but unable to resist the little jibes.

The computer forewent a response, instead retracting the table with its empty plate and glass into the floor and rolling out the master console, the screen representing his only link with the outside world. It flickered to life, showing the almost-too-perfectly gorgeous visage of Julia, giving him a wry smile.

“Enjoy your dinner?” she asked with amusement.

“Yeah, it was great,” Hayden said, lacing fingers behind his head and propping one foot atop the other in his clunky boots. “Really appreciated the delivery system.”

“Well, we figured you needed a treat,” Julia told him. “You have dental work tomorrow, and that will keep you from solid food for a couple days. And besides, we needed you to have a big meal.”

“You did? Why?” Hayden asked.

“I don't think we could deliver that big a dosage of medicine in the meals you've been taking.”

“A dosage... a dosage of what?”

“Sorry, Hayden,” Julia said. “Dirty trick. But pure biomass doesn't shed itself. I'm afraid you're in for rather a rough night, kid. Couldn't think of another way.”

“What did you do to... oh. God. Oh, God,” Hayden breathed, then lurched forward onto hands and knees and retched noisily into a floor drain. His entire digestive tract seemed scoured by razor blades and he vomited continuously for at least five minutes. The feeling of pieces of himself being ripped away from the inside out and pouring out of him in the painful, horrid spasms and waves of nausea demanded his imagination, dominating what thoughts he could muster during the seeming eternity of sickness.

Drained and spent, Hayden flopped over onto his back and groaned, fighting for breath. Even though the voice of Julia dimly registered, telling him not to rest on his back, he lacked the energy to even roll back onto his side. He lost track of how long he lay there, panting breathlessly and fighting the continued nausea. A team of people entered – the telltale swish of the hidden door, soft footsteps and hands touching him – and took the clunky boots from his feet, started an IV in his arm and started giving him intravenous fluids. No relief came, and certainly no medication to stop the nausea. With a groan, Hayden succumbed to the sickness again and rolled onto his hands and knees, retching and coughing. Abused, sore muscles expelled even more from Hayden's body – this time not looking anything like food, but more like yellow fat, blood and red fibers that could easily have been muscle, sharp shards which could easily have passed for bone. The wave of spasms and breathlessness seemed to stretch forever, wracking Hayden's body with pain and exhaustion. He sagged down, forehead on

wrist in a shroud of golden-white hair dampened with sweat and other fluids Hayden didn't bear to think about, moaning and whimpering pitifully.



“For what it's worth, Hayden, I *am* sorry about this,” Julia told him sympathetically. “Trust the program. This is all for the best, I assure you.”

Hayden heaved again, letting out a sound between a whimper and a roar, then sagged against the floor tiles, panting and spitting. “You're turning me into a girl,” he accused breathlessly.

“You figured that out quite quickly,” Julia said with no hint of denial. “Most of our other candidates take much longer to put the pieces together.”

“But why?” Hayden groaned.

“The reasons are immaterial. It just *is*. You're going to be a woman, and that's all there is to it. I suggest that you get used to the idea,” Julia said sternly. “The process has already begun, as you can plainly see. But

think about it. On the one side, you have youth and health and strength, wealth and security. On the other side you have a disused cock which hasn't been touched in months and cost you your last job. When you weigh the change entirely on its merits, isn't the bargain easy? I think it's a no-brainer.”

“You wouldn't... speak so fast... if I threatened... to stick... a dick on you... after... a lifetime... of something else,” he panted, clutching at the squirming, hot cramps shooting through his belly.

“Perhaps not,” Julia replied. “But I can say that I would at least give it some thought.”

“I can't... think... of anything... except... how much... this fucking hurts,” he rasped.

“I suppose that's fair,” Julia said. “I apologize again for the night you have to face. It does end, Hayden, and it will get easier. Just promise me that once you can use your mind again, you will at least consider what I said?”

“Whatever,” Hayden said.

“Very well,” Julia said briskly. “The techs are just outside the door. I suggest that you drag yourself into the shower when you regain a little bit of strength. You'll want the hot water at some point. I'll have people come in and check on you throughout the night, keeping you hydrated and making sure you're in no danger.”

“You're... a real peach,” Hayden hissed. “Just... leave me... alone.”

The master console shut down and retracted with no further word from Julia. Hayden did take the woman's advice and crawled about four feet towards the open shower before clenching around another floor drain to vomit out more of the sour-smelling, blood-streaked sewage which never seemed to end. The cramps and the unnerving feeling of having parts of himself ripped away from the inside out continued, unabated, until Hayden collapsed again. The rest of the ten feet between himself and the shower stall continued along the same pattern – crawl a few feet, vomit into a floor drain, collapse, recover and begin again. It felt like years before the dark gray tiles of the floor gave way to the royal blue of

the shower.

Hayden must have drifted into an exhausted sleep for a little while, since he opened his eyes to reveal a fresh bag of IV fluids above him and his clothing removed. The lights in the cell outside dimmed to their usual nighttime low glow.

With an effort, Hayden pushed himself to his knees and unscrewed the water taps. The water sluiced oily, sick sweat from his skin in dirty rivulets. Hayden turned his face upwards, into the spray, and just let the tiny relief of the warmth and moisture transport him away from the wracking cramps and exhaustion for a moment.

It took a bit of time for Hayden to realize he no longer felt nauseated. Daring for a moment to think that the worst might be behind him, he pushed himself through supreme effort to his feet. The cramps still squeezed his insides like a clenched fist and the feeling of being eroded away inside continued.

No sooner had Hayden gained his balance when a tidal surge of pain and malaise wracked his body. What felt like hot oil leached from Hayden's pores, feeling like heated needles along every inch of his skin. A horrible stench filled Hayden's nostrils. As he watched, a thick coat of viscous, orange fluid the consistency of mixed paint covered his skin and dripped noisily onto the tile floor.

“Oh my God,” Hayden breathed between teeth clenched in pain. “What's happening?”

The words *pure biomass* filtered through splintered consciousness, something Julia mentioned when the horrible symptoms first hit. If he was to transform into a woman, he would need to be shorter and lighter. He would have to lose inches of height and girth, muscle mass and cells. That discarded material had to go somewhere. His digestive system had processed all of it that it could, and now his body attempted to excrete it in other ways. Hayden felt his bladder relax and hot, splattering thick fluid like pancake syrup ran down his inner thighs into the circling waste water of the shower. And the orange fluid ran from his every pore to drip off of him in thick *plops*, filling the shower with its horrid grave-stench and bringing on fresh waves of nausea.



Standing erect slipped out of the purview of possibility and Hayden sank back to his knees in a swirling puddle of fetid orange fluid. Fluid which served once as bones and muscle and skin. Fluid which existed once as himself.

With a final groan of pain and exhaustion, Hayden toppled sideways to splash into the decaying pool of himself and surrendered consciousness.

\* \* \*

The rest of the night passed in fits and starts of pain and the most abject misery Hayden could ever remember. Even by the time the soul-deep vomiting, body-wracking cramps and oily orange sweat passed, the painful and exhausted feeling of being a wrung-out rag suffused him, leaving him with just enough energy to lay stock still and labor for breath. Strong hands extending from the blur of Hayden's tear-edged vision lifted him during the night, drying him, cleaning him, changing bags of intravenous fluid and carrying him physically from the cold, hard floor of the shower and laying him in bed. The stink of the biomass still filled Hayden's nostrils and coated his tongue, a gruesome reminder of the ordeal through which he, by some miracle, survived.

The only relief came during the night when Hayden's strength failed him.

He remembered the turning point in clear relief. Trying to stay strong and impassive while hot cramps wrenched every muscle in his gut and a fresh round of vomiting, accompanied by explosive diarrhea, locked his upper and lower body in tense, contorting spasms for breathless minutes at a time. He fought until his last erg of effort and once he expended that, he did something he had never done before in his short life.

He surrendered utterly.

*Strange*, he thought miserably in retrospect, *I thought it would feel like failure. Like I was less than I was before. I never expected it to feel... good.*

The misery continued – nothing seemed to stop it – but it eased. Its sharp corners softened a bit and the dull weight of exhaustion seemed to meld into him, becoming at once easier to bear in the moment and also taking the sting from the thought of enduring it further. Even the cramps lost their edge of torture, fading into the realm of simple pain.

All from the act of *not fighting*. If the travail took anything less from him than every shred of dignity, patience and endurance from him, Hayden would never have known the blissful relief he experienced from laying down his determination to soldier on and to simply embrace his pain and misery and find a way to live with it. Something told him he learned a valuable lesson, but Hayden labored too hard just to breathe and not wait to absorb it.

The hard claws of fatigue dragged at him anew and he sighed, wondering if more surrender would bring additional relief. Pride gone, he threw aside his lifelong assumptions and gave up again. Hot tears leaked from his eyes as he rolled to one side, curling up in a little fetal ball and began to sob loudly. Not the dignified, theatrical tears of his mother, but the wracking, hiccuping, snot-filled kind which denoted the true end of stamina and forbearance. Hayden lost track of how long he lay there and cried, cried far beyond the point he thought he could cry any more. A part of him wondered if he even wept for himself and his situation any more, or if these tears flowed from him for other reasons. If maybe these tears needed to be cried years before, over other tragedies, and Hayden only saved them up. Maybe, he wondered in a calm isle of philosophy in the midst of his personal hell, every person

took their first breath with a predetermined number of tears to shed over the course of their life. And the number would be met, either in the course of life or all at once on a deathbed. Maybe the time had come for Hayden Abernathy to meet his quota.

\* \* \*

Apparently, gut-wrenching crying jags coupled with IV fluids proved sovereign for the pain secondary to the explosive shedding of biomass. Hayden awoke an unknowable time later feeling, while not *good* at least *human*. He sat up in bed, throwing his legs back over the edge of the bed and expecting the cold slap of his soles against the tiles.

His feet dangled an inch or so above the floor, and that included the strange clunky plastic BPRU boots which some faceless med-tech reattached to him in his comatose slumber. Hayden looked down at his body in shock. He remembered all too well being a tall man, six foot two, with a barrel chest and brawny arms and legs, weighing in at about two hundred twenty pounds of lean muscle and just the tiniest hint of a beer belly. He stood on weakened, unsteady legs and realized that he barely topped five foot six now and could easily count his own ribs through his taut skin. His formerly bulky muscles shrank during his ordeal, now long and tapered into graceful curves and arcs where powerful, imposing bulges resided before. He might tip a scale at a hundred ten or a hundred twenty pounds, tops, and the hard bony edges of his body showed an almost total lack of fat.

Hayden slumped down onto the edge of his bed again and spat hair from his dry lips. Somehow, the blonde mane seemed to have grown and avoided the ashen, dessicated look of his skin. The ends of his hair tickled the top of his derrière and shone with gloss and health where the rest of him resembled a wax figure. Hayden pulled at his long, silken hair frustratedly and pushed it over a shoulder now far too narrow to keep it from spilling back across his face.

“Program,” he said in a cracked, dry voice which barely sounded like his own. “I need something to keep my hair out of my face. And I'd like to get dressed now.”

The chime sounded and a small table extended from the wall next to his bed. A bottle of body lotion and a small assortment of no-tug rubber

hair bands sat on top. Hayden lost no time in pride, gathering up his long fall of hair into a tight horsetail on the crown of his head and securing it in place with one of the rubber bands. He slathered his arms, legs, torso and neck with the rich, soothing lotion, glad to be rid of the dessicated, sandpapery feeling of his painfully dry skin. His skin seemed suffused with a warm glow after he rubbed it in, becoming noticeably more taut and soft and possessed now of a rich, sun-kissed amber hue. Hayden opened the drawer below the table, expecting another pair of the everpresent blue hospital scrubs, and stopped short with a sharp intake of breath at the shimmery white satin that he found. He drew out and stared in utter disbelief at the small pair of white satin bikini briefs – *no, call them panties*, he thought darkly, *that's what they fucking are* – and the snarled mass of stiff rods, laces and panels of white brocaded satin which took Hayden nearly a minute to identify as a corset.

The master console slid from the wall and Julia's ridiculously gorgeous face appeared. “Good morning,” she said simply.

“Yeah, hi,” Hayden muttered. “I can't wear this.”

“Of course you can,” Julia said, voice thick with amusement. “Slip your legs through the holes, and...”

“Cute,” Hayden pre-empted. “You know what I mean.”

“That you can't be seen in girl clothes?” Julia half-mocked. “I have news for you, cutie. You won't be able to wear anything else, soon. You better start getting used to them sooner rather than later.”

“You're not going to leave me anything to hold on to, are you?” Hayden accused.

“You're looking at it all wrong,” Julia said. “We're *giving* you things to cling to. Just because they're new doesn't mean they won't serve the purpose. Take the corset, for instance. Sure, it's feminine. It's even sexy. But it will improve your posture and help shape your body correctly while your bones and muscles redevelop into their new shapes. If you just wear it for a day or two, you may come to hate it. Some girls do. But others grow to love it. We have women from the program who wear them under their clothes every day, even just to work in the yard or shop for groceries. They say it became a part of them during the

program and now not wearing one feels like not being whole.”

“I don't *want* to feel that way about a corset,” Hayden said. “I don't want to feel that way about anything, to be honest.”

“Ah, there lies the rub,” Julia said. “Why? Why don't you want anything to feel like a part of you?”

“I just don't,” he said.

“That's not an acceptable answer, not for either of us,” Julia cautioned. “C'mon, now. Why?”

“Because... shit. I dunno,” Hayden said.

“Yes, you do,” Julia urged. “Just say it.”

“Because it makes me weak,” Hayden spat.

“Weak? Hardly. Do you remember what you just went through last night? Nobody could watch you walk away from that train wreck and *ever* say you're weak,” Julia said. “Do you feel weak right now? Are you not just a tiny bit proud that you survived what you survived?”

“It's not that,” Hayden said, mind in turmoil as only Julia could concoct. “It's... something *happened* last night. While all that was going on. I *did* something.”

“What did you do?” Julia prompted.

“I *gave up*,” Hayden said, brushing away hot tears which he thought expended. “I just stopped fighting. I used to think I would never give up. That it just wasn't in me to do. I kept going when my dad walked out, when mom died, when I lost my job – I never copped out or turned into a drunk or any of that stupid shit other people do. I kept going. I thought there wasn't anything out there that could make me throw in the towel. Until last night. I just couldn't do it any more. I wanted to – I just *couldn't*. So I gave up. I quit.”

“And what happened?”

“I *liked* it. Things got easier. Better, somehow. And then I spent an hour crying about it like a little baby in a ball on this bed,” Hayden growled. “And *that* made me feel better. That's what makes me weak, Julia, not what you're doing to my body. It's what you're doing to my head.”

“Oh, honey,” Julia chuckled, “that's not giving up. That's acceptance. You didn't stop fighting – you're fighting me right now, over a simple article of clothing, for Heaven's sake. You haven't stopped fighting for one second. You stopped trying to be in control of the pain and the sickness and you *accepted* it. Learned to live with it instead of trying to master it. Then you cried. You accepted that the whole thing was roundly horrible and you had strong emotions in response to it, and then you accepted that you needed to let them out. Nowhere in that entire equation does *giving up* enter into it. You may have surrendered to it, but you did not quit. Do you actually think we'd be spending this kind of time and effort on you if we hadn't looked into your background and personality to find whether or not you were a quitter? We picked you *specifically* for your tenacity.”

“But I thought – I thought if I stopped fighting...”

“You would lose?” Julia offered. “Dear heart, you are sitting on a bed with a body changing more rapidly than you can imagine, facing the greatest challenge a man can face. The total and complete re-invention of his life in another gender. You have a hell of a fight in front of you. Last night will probably seem like a cake walk in comparison with what you'll have to adapt to and achieve. You haven't lost anything. Last night – and discovering what you've learned about surrender and acceptance – was a smashing victory. A slam dunk.”

“I guess...”

Julia smiled patiently. “Just put on the corset,” she bade. “Don't pass judgment so quickly. It's only a piece of clothing – a therapeutic one, in your case, but just a garment. Try it before you decide it's worth fighting about. And for Heaven's sake, slip into those Big Girl Panties and get tough. Women endure, darling, that's what we do. You're proving you've got what it takes to be a woman, and that isn't something I can say about very many men. I'm not saying you're weak. I'm saying you *might* be strong.”

Hayden sat there, staring at the beautiful face, for a long time, an unreadable expression on his face.

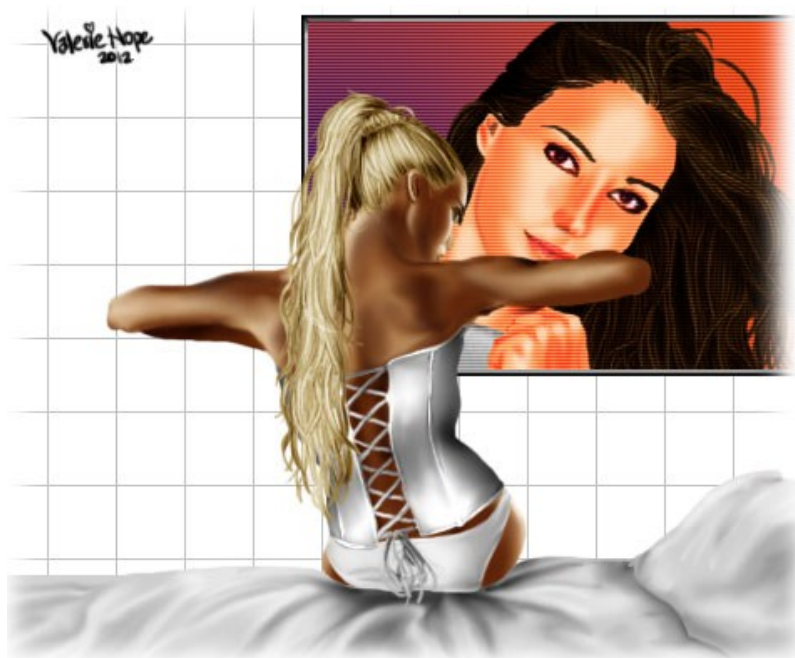
“Well?” Julia finally prompted as the silence stretched on.

“Uh... this is embarrassing,” Hayden muttered.

“We’re friends,” Julia assured him. “Just say it.”

“I don’t know how to put it on,” Hayden admitted.

“Oh, sweetheart, that’s nothing to be embarrassed about at all,” Julia said. “Unhook the front, first. The hooks are between the two stiff pieces in the middle – they’re called boning, by the way – and pull it into two pieces. Loosen the laces almost all the way, then wrap it around yourself...”



It took a few minutes, but Hayden finally managed to secure the corset around his body and draw the laces tight enough to take his breath away – Julia’s instructions to the letter. The difference made to his overall shape alarmed him and, to his surprise and chagrin, delighted him a little. Hayden looked at himself from multiple angles in a mirror summoned from Program, admiring and marveling at his trim wasp-waist

and subtle curves. Only the sad, empty sacs of the bra cups served to remind him of what lay ahead, but their flattened orbs made him wistful and a bit hopeful.

“What is it, honey?” Julia asked, reading his face.

“Nothing,” Hayden muttered.

“Don't play a player,” Julia chided. “I can tell something's bothering you. It's those cups, isn't it?”

“Yeah,” Hayden said. “I don't want to talk about it.”

“Sweetheart, anybody would want to see those filled. You have a dynamite shape,” Julia said. “Breasts are the only things missing from the whole picture.”

“Yeah, well, I don't want them,” Hayden snapped.

“I highly doubt that,” Julia said. “But we'll put a pin in that for now. You have a big day ahead.”

“Big day?”

“You have dental work this morning, and mask training to reshape your face,” Julia explained. “You'll be out of it for most of that. Then you report for your very first training session in the sensorium. I think you'll actually like that. A lot of our patients say it's like nothing they've ever experienced.”

The door swished open and Hayden turned to see several men in scrubs entering. Any thought of rushing the door vanished utterly – Hayden might have had a shot at escape at six two, two hundred twenty-five, but at his vastly diminished height and weight, no hope remained. He sighed and waited patiently for the techs to surround him, ushering him into a chair summoned from the floor. A medication drip fastened to the IV still taped in his left arm soon left Hayden woozy and floating, barely aware of the strange sensations of hard plates being attached somehow to the different surfaces of his face and blocks being placed into his mouth to expose his teeth and gums.

He never lost consciousness, but the drugs given to him made the measure of time or the recollection of specific details impossible. The next stretch of time became an non-interconnected series of sensations and images – a masked dentist with a light on his head, probing and working inside his mouth. A series of painless injections into his face along the browline, the jaw, the cheeks, the lips and the nose. A long interval of insistent pushing and pulling from the hard plates – attached to some kind of articulated mask, Hayden could see from the little wires and hoses protruding across his hazy field of vision. The whine of the dental drill and the hiss of the pressurized water. The little tugs and stings of the BPRU boots, which he ordinarily tuned out. Soft music and *sotto voce* conversations above him. Little needles and tweezers tugging and pulling uncomfortably at his eyelids and lashes.

After however long – Hayden had no idea – the techs removed all the apparati from his face and mouth, took several pictures, then removed his IV and left him comfortably ensconced in the reclining chair. Hayden slept for a little while, dreaming strange dreams which he was unable to recall later, and stirred an unknown time later, blinking roughly at the harsh white light of his cell. His face and jaw ached, schooling him to a neutral expression. The master console, extended, played some random professional football game which engrossed Hayden for a few moments before he rose on unsteady legs. The BPRUs shifted a bit underneath him, making him feel like he stood on tiptoe a little, and he rocked back and forth for a moment until he regained balance. His stride needed further shortening, he noticed, and more dropping of his hips in order to maintain a fluid gait. He also discovered he could no longer swing his arms from the shoulder without risking a topple, instead needing to keep his arms closer to his narrow, corseted waist.

“Program, mirror, please,” he ordered in a voice thick and lisping from the numb soreness in his mouth. The polished surface extended soundlessly from the wall and Hayden gawked at what he saw there. A face still generally recognizable as his own stared back at him, but softer now – fuller lips, a more slender nose with a little upturned button on the end, higher cheekbones, arched brows and a narrow chin, a more slender jaw with a much softer angle and a higher forehead. The scars of his youth – a small one near his eye from falling from his bike when he was ten, another on his chin from falling off a ladder, several pitted acne scars on his cheeks and a small birthmark on his right cheek – were gone, replaced only by the smooth, unblemished, perfectly even amber

glow of healthy skin. He touched his face in disbelief, surprised to see the reflection of his slender, tapered fingers against a cheek. Feeling the sensation of touch on a jaw and nose that were not, according to visual cues, his. Like another person – *a pretty girl*, he thought – stared back from the mirror where only a lantern-jawed shop worker who needed a shave had ever looked back before.

“My God,” Hayden breathed. “This is really happening.”

The dim sounds of the football game behind him ceased, drawing Hayden's attention away from the stranger in the mirror and towards the master console. The message “Training Session, Sensorium: Five Minutes” showed on the display and Hayden spent the intervening time studying his new face – still in denial that it was actually *him* – and waiting for the inevitable techs to come and direct him.

Confusion reigned when the door swished open and no one emerged into the room. Cautiously, Hayden tottered on his plastic boots towards it, poking his head out into the hallway to look around for long moments before finally stepping out into a small foyer. Medical carts and machinery lined the walls of the little anteroom and another open door led out into a hallway beyond. Thinking this might be his one and only chance, Hayden hustled for the door as quickly as the boots would allow, almost bumping into a tall woman emerging into the hallway from a doorway directly across from him.



She wore a silver corset and panties identical to his own, except for the color, and a clunky pair of BPRU boots as well. Long, tapered legs and arms swayed and fought for elusive balance exactly like Hayden's. She had a gorgeous, regal face with full, bee-stung lips and wide brown eyes, and a thick curtain of wild sable curls spilled over her shoulders and down her back, framing her heart-shaped face perfectly. She offered a shy smile to Hayden, which Hayden returned despite the soreness lingering in his face and jaw. The girl across from his was breathtaking, sexy and gorgeous in a very haughty, Middle-Eastern sort of way. Hayden's cock – long forgotten in his ordeal, trapped inside the skin-tight panties – stirred at the sight of her. She looked exotic, sexual, delicious – and disturbingly *familiar*.

Hayden searched the face. Mostly the eyes. Eyes he had seen before. Over beers at the Front Stoop, behind safety glasses...

“Mack?” Hayden breathed.

“Hayden?” the girl answered. “Oh, shit, man, they got you, too?”

“Look at you,” Hayden said. “My God, Mack, you're... you're... *gorgeous*.”

To Hayden's shock, the pretty girl with the familiar eyes smiled broadly and actually *blushed*, brushing thick mink-soft curls behind one ear. "Thanks," Mack said. "That's really sweet."

"Sweet? Wow, man, you've changed," Hayden marveled.

"You're one to talk, there, blondie," Mack shot back. "Why are you smiling?"

"I'm not... wait. Am I? I can't even tell," Hayden said, pressing on his abused face with fingertips.

"Grinning ear to freakin' ear since the moment I saw you," Mack stated. "It makes your nose wrinkle up a little. Kind of adorable."

"I am smiling," Hayden said. "I can't seem to stop."

"That's 'cause they want you smiling," Mack said. "Whatever they want, they *get*. Just look at me."

"What do they want out of you?" Hayden asked. "You look different, but other than saying shit like 'sweet' and 'adorable' you seem to be the same old Mack to me."

Mack quirked an eyebrow and rattled off a long string of guttural syllables, incomprehensible to Hayden, but obviously structured and syntactic like a language.

"What was *that*?" Hayden asked.

"Hebrew," Mack replied. "Perfect fucking Hebrew. Apparently, I'm meant to be Jewish. Like I said, Hayden, whatever they want, they *get*."

"I wonder what they want for me," Hayden breathed, looking back into the room. "Hey - nobody's watching. Let's get out of here."

"They're always watching, Hayden," Mack said sadly. "It's not even worth trying. I made, like, three attempts. You don't want these guys punishing you. Besides, I don't even know where we are. If I even got out the front door, I wouldn't know which way to go. And being a skinny

girl-boy with only a corset and panties to wear, I don't think I'd want to be caught outside for very long. What did they let you out for?"

"I'm supposed to go to something called 'Sensorium Training,'" Hayden replied.

"I'm going there, too," Mack said. "C'mon, I'll show you where it is. I'm not gonna say you'll like the Sensorium, but it's definitely a trip. You're in for a ride. Right at first, they gave it to me every day and it was like having my head inflated by a bicycle pump. Woke up one morning knowing *exactly* how to cook a Passover seder and speaking perfect Hebrew. The next day I couldn't tell you how to make change for a dollar but could tell you anything you ever wanted to know about how to pick a caterer and how to get the best deals on outdoor tents. It's wild."

"I guess you start figuring out who they expect you to be that way," Hayden said.

"In little bits and pieces, yeah," Mack replied. "Nice thing is, though, you don't mind it. The Sensorium kinda helps you come to terms with it all. Makes it easier, almost. You still get a little pissed off, sometimes, but you adapt a lot quicker. If you play the game, you go down to once a week or so and it gets a lot easier to sort out."

Mack stopped them just in front of a thick steel-core door. "This is it," he said. Suddenly, impulsively, Mack lurched forward in his tottering boots and wrapped Hayden in a soft-skinned, tight hug.

"I'm really glad you're here," Mack breathed into Hayden's hair. "I missed you."

"It's nice to know I'm not alone," Hayden said, returning the embrace after the initial awkwardness faded. "Think they'll let us talk sometime?"

"No idea," Mack said. "But we can at least ask. I talk to Jill all the time, I'll see if she thinks it's okay."

"Jill, huh? Mine's Julia."

"Makes me wonder. How many of us are here? This place doesn't seem *that* big," Mack mused. Hayden never remembered his friend being this

distracted and flighty. The Mack he recalled focused like a laser beam. Another of the little changes which added to the sense of utter flux.

“You better go in, Hayden,” Mack cautioned. “You’ll be late.”

\* \* \*

The Sensorium turned out to be a large, empty room occupied only by a large mechanical chair. The antiseptically clean walls and floor reflected his new face and shape from every visible angle. Wordlessly, Hayden made his way to the chair and climbed up onto the footrest, like mounting a barber’s chair. A pair of clear glasses surrounded by computer chips and wires sat in the seat. Hayden slipped them on his narrow, aquiline nose obediently and sat back into the chair without any prompting.

No sooner had Hayden’s shapely derrière hit the warmed vinyl of the seat than the seat whirred and clicked, reclining and reshaping until Hayden found himself almost laying flat. Some kind of retaining arms or pins clicked into the BPRUs on his feet and rendered him incapable of moving his feet. Lights began flashing and blinking all around him, and strange tones filled his ears. Like some eerie, futuristic orchestra tuning up. A stretch of large, reflective tiles across from him lit up and flashed test patterns, revealing themselves as flat-screen monitors.

“Verify identity as Subject A-3. Hayden Abernathy,” a masculine version of Program’s pleasant contralto said emotionlessly.

“Uh... yeah. That’s me,” Hayden answered.

“Loading program. Stand by,” the voice commanded.



Hayden tried to shut his eyes against what happened next. A barrage of rapid-fire images and words slammed into his consciousness, overflowing what he could process in a matter of seconds. His hand clutched the arms of the chair roughly, attempting to brace himself against the onslaught. Weird, almost otherworldly tones ranging from low tones more felt than heard all the way up to earsplitting whistles assaulted him. Hayden could not tell if his eyes were open or closed – it didn't seem to matter to the tidal wave of images blasting into his brain. He thought he remembered screaming. No thoughts would coalesce of their own accord, and no amount of concentration could focus through it. Only words and pictures, words and pictures. *Eager. Always cute. Cheerful. Obedient. Sexy. Positive.*

“Please,” Hayden said in a soft mewl, inaudible beneath the screeching cacophony. “Please stop.”

The soulless machinery gave no answer, and the hammer blows of light and sound continued to fall on a brain taxed already beyond its capacity.

HAYDEN TRIED TO REMEMBER THE walk back from the Sensorium to his cell but failed. His head felt ripped to shreds and reassembled haphazardly, with pieces missing and malpositioned. Thoughts which should have come easily and without effort eluded his grasp, and strange logics existed in place of tried-and-true processes, giving weird

and uncharacteristic results.

Strangest of all, however, proved to be how damned *good* he felt. Like a boil had been lanced, or a weight had been lifted. His soul felt free and unencumbered for the first time in adult memory. Giggles and chuckled surfaced from nowhere, simply in walking around the featureless cell to practice his unfamiliar stride, and the mask-generated ear-to-ear smile he wore permanently now actually shone genuine. For as much pain and panic as the Sensorium generated, Hayden found himself looking forward to when he could go back and do it again.

Hayden spent a little time just looking at his new face in the mirror and changing from the plain white corset and panties – the Sensorium caused him to vomit and wet himself – clinging to him into a pretty lilac-colored set with black lace trim. For once, Hayden didn't mind the feminine attire, feeling much more confident as he applied the corset unassisted and in half the time it took him earlier. A small assortment of tubes and compacts on the tabletop extended from the wall where the garments had been piqued his curiosity. Using knowledge previously not possessed but now granted by seeming magic from the Sensorium, he spent a giggling interval applying dark eyeshadow, liner, mascara and a hint of pink lip gloss which perfumed his lips and made them stick together. He primped and preened in the mirror, toying with the mounds of thick, silken blonde on his head and blowing his reflection playful kisses and flirtatious winks.

The chime sounded and Hayden bounced up and down a little on his toes in excitement and anticipation. The gray cube which distributed Hayden's meals through a long black tube extended silently from the wall. The door descended, lowering like a ramp, revealing the feeding tube. With one notable exception.

The featureless black plastic dispenser no longer extended from the gray cube, as before, replaced by a rubberized replica of a large cock, complete with veins, a swollen mushroom head and a dangling pair of testicles. Hayden's good mood evaporated instantly.

“Oh, no. No way,” he said, backing away from the dispenser.

“Mealtime,” Program said simply. “Eat.”

“No. Not from *that*,” Hayden protested.

“Mealtime,” Program insisted. “You have ten seconds to comply.”

Hayden looked around frantically for something he could use to defend himself, some kind of weapon in the unadorned room, finding nothing in the featureless tiles and knowing full well what happened next. The hidden door swished open and two burly techs entered, limbering and loosening for the fight they knew would ensue.

“No,” Hayden said defiantly. “You can't do this.”

“Sure we can,” one of the techs growled. “You're the dumb bitch that picked the hard way.”

“Don't call me a bitch! I'm not a bitch!” Hayden screamed as they grabbed him by the arms and around the waist, picking him up effortlessly in a windmilling of kicking legs and flailing arms. “I'm a man, dammit! I don't suck cock! I'm a man!”

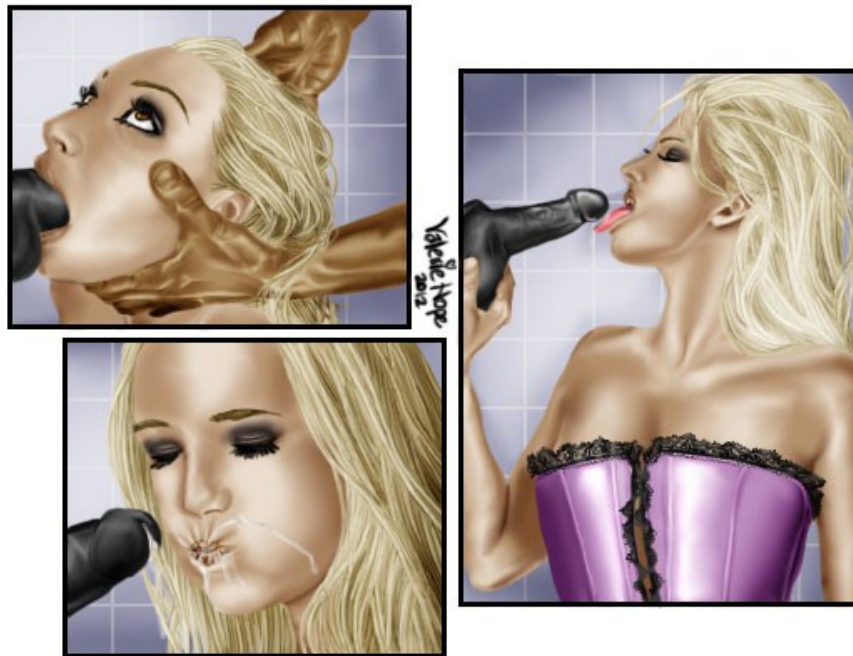
They dragged him, screaming and fighting, across the room and forced him physically to his knees. Eye-level with the rigid, imposing ersatz cock, Hayden fought the urge to vomit, having never looked at a penis from this angle, even a fake one. Fear and revilement surged in him. Strong hands pinned his arms behind him and seized him roughly beneath the jaw, forcing his mouth open and pushing his full, bee-stung lips onto the warm rubber, over the head and down the glistening length.

The hands did more than hold him there. They pushed his head forward and back, forward and back, pistoning it up and down on the cock in a rude approximation of a blow job. Drool ran down Hayden's chin in thick rivulets and his shouted protests, muffled by the invader in his mouth, stopped wetly on every downstroke as the huge rubber member occluded his throat and stopped the air. Hayden tried to bite down, to apply any kind of friction, and earned himself a sharp slap across his already-aching cheek from one of the techs.

“No teeth,” he grunted. “Be a good little girl.”

They resumed the pistoning motion, ignoring Hayden's protests and

then his subsequent tears, making him give head to the unfeeling black rubber, shredding the remnants of his manhood and tearing them away, leaving him feeling naked, exposed and utterly violated.



Relief flooded through Hayden when the hot, sticky jets of fluid splashed against the back of his throat, presaging the end of the torment and humiliation. A massive quantity of fluid filled his mouth this time, much more than he remembered, and it leaked out of his lips to run down his chin. An errant final jet even shot warmly across his cheek to cling there. Lips pursed and cheeks puffed with the huge mouthful of bitter fluid, Hayden briefly considered spitting it out but dreaded the consequence of such defiance from the hateful techs, who would stand laughing as he licked it from the floor if she was lucky. Humiliated and defeated, Hayden swallowed, bracing for the expected high which always came.

Instead of the calm, sedated euphoria, Hayden shuddered beneath a rush of pure energy and well-being which infused his entire body until he truly expected his skin to start glowing. The flavor in his mouth changed from bitter and acrid to the most delicious thing Hayden could imagine, the best of every wonderful and satisfying meal he ever consumed all rolled into one thing. Slapping away the restraining hands, Hayden scraped the remnants of the ejaculation from his face and chin with a finger and sucked it clean, then laved the head of the black

rubber cock – all revulsion forgotten – with lips and tongue, massaging the *faux* balls with one hand in an attempt to coax every last drop of the magical fluid from the mechanism.

Hayden failed to notice, in his preoccupation, that the burly techs withdrew from the room and left him alone while he milked the black rubber cock dry and the master console slid from its place behind the tiles, flickering to life with Julia's beautiful face looking down on him with a mixture of pride and amusement.

“You seem to be enjoying yourself,” she commented.

“Oh, God,” Hayden moaned, licking his fingers and running his tongue along the base of the rubber dick to get any last traces. “More.”

“Not right now,” Julia said. “There will be plenty, later.”

Hayden sat back on his haunches, squirming a little at the insistent tug of the satin panties against his erect cock which struggled valiantly to free itself from its confines. “I don't know what you did to me in that Sensorium place,” he muttered, “but nobody can feel this good. Not like this.”

“Oh, I assure you, Hayden, it's just beginning,” Julia said. “Just wait till you get your lips around a real one. You won't believe it.”

Hayden's bubble burst a little but the feeling of utter joy and exhilaration remained untouched, despite the wane in enthusiasm. “I don't think I'm ready for that.”

“Of course you're not,” Julia said. “But it can be something to look forward to. Once you're completely female, I mean.”

“Completely female?” Hayden asked. “Am I not female enough for you?”

“Not even close, darling,” Julia chuckled. “That little pup-tent in your Victoria's Secrets should be proof enough of that. And those flat cups on that precious little corset.”

“But once you knock me out and I wake up with a pussy and tits, then you're saying I have a whole lifetime of sucking cock to look forward to?”

That's what a complete female means?"

"Don't be absurd," Julia chided. "Female is *so* much more than your physical body. You'll need those things, of course – but you won't be knocked out and dragged. No, when it comes to your breasts and your vagina, we expect you to ask for those."

"Fat chance," Hayden spat.

"Oh, everyone says that, at first," Julia said. "I think you may surprise yourself. No, I mean a *complete* female. How you feel. How you think. How you talk and interact with others. Remember these, Hayden?"

Words superimposed themselves over Julia's face. *Strong. Bad-assed. Tough. Respected. Competent.*

"They're the ones I told Program," Hayden said. "The ones I most wanted to describe myself."

"When those words change, Hayden, then we can start asking the question of whether or not you're a complete woman. In the meantime, there's something I want you to see."

Julia's face faded into a high-angle scene from some kind of hallway camera, looking down on two burly men in surgical scrubs washing their hands and changing into street clothes. Their muscular physiques inspired no feeling in Hayden, thankfully, but even his masculine self could admire the long hours at the gym necessary to achieve bodies like theirs. Their conversation clicked in shortly after the video.

"Man, I hate that part," one of the techs was saying. "I know it's all part of the program, but it still feels like raping them, a little. I always feel like I need a shower after we do that."

"I know what you mean," the other replied. "If I didn't see the end result, I probably couldn't go through with it. But did you see her? She was fucking *loving* it by the time we left."

"Yeah, she's a real hellcat," the other commented. "And even halfway done like that – she has the *greatest* ass I've seen around here since we started. Wow."

Julia's face faded back in. "Did you hear that?"

"Sure," Hayden said. "I'm glad they feel bad. Nobody should do that to another person."

"It was necessary," Julia said dismissively. "But I didn't mean that. Did you hear what they said?"

"I just said I did," Hayden complained, then his voice died in his throat.

*She. Her.* They called Hayden *she* and *her*. They looked and saw a female. A girl. A *she*. A *her*.

"They thought I was a girl," Hayden whispered in shock.

"Why wouldn't they?" Julia said. "You look like one. You even smell like one, from what I've been told. Your hair, your body, your clothes, even the sexy little wiggle in your walk. Very girly. And that *giggle* of yours. Sugar and spice and everything nice, honey."

"Do you see me as a girl, Julia?" Hayden asked in a small voice.

"Do you want me to?" she countered.

"I dunno," Hayden said. "I mean, I don't want any of this. I never asked for it. But I don't want to be stuck somewhere in between. I feel like... I feel like if you saw me as a girl, if *everybody* saw me as a girl, then maybe I would want to be what people saw me as. Maybe I would start wanting this and everything could stop being such a fight."

"Why don't you want this?" Julia pushed.

"It's unnatural," Hayden said. "I wasn't born a girl. I never even thought about being a girl. I never knew anything but being a boy. I *liked* being a boy."

"You said 'liked,'" Julia pointed out. "Past tense."

"Look at me, Julia," Hayden said. "Look at my hair. I'm wearing makeup. I don't even know how I knew how to put it on, but I saw it and just did

it. I have panties on. How can anyone look at me and think I was a boy?"

"So you just answered your own question," Julia said. "You said it yourself, Hayden – people look at you and don't see a boy. So if not a boy, what else could they possibly see?"

"Not a girl," Hayden argued. "Something stuck in between."

"Then I think that means you have a choice to make," Julia said. "Fight for your masculinity, if you want. Struggle against this and know nothing but humiliation, degradation and defeat. You know we're going to win, Hayden. You can feel it in your bones. This is going to happen to you, and keep happening to you, until we break you down."

"You're right," Hayden said just above audibility. "I know."

"Or you can embrace what's happening," Julia went on. "Anticipate it. Use your own ideas and feelings and try to become not just a woman, but your *own* woman. Learn to cherish the joys of femininity – and believe me, there are *many* joys to be had – and truly participate in this miraculous transformation. Be a part of the program instead of a subject. Get out in front. Guide it."

"I dunno," Hayden said. "It would mean leaving behind everything I've ever known."

"Courage isn't the absence of fear," Julia said. "It's what you do in spite of the fear. Yes, it's a big leap into unknown darkness. But you have me. You have a massive team of people you don't even know, all of us here to do nothing but support you and ease this transition. It won't be that bad."

"I have to think," Hayden said. "I don't want to watch football tonight. I don't want to do anything. I just want to wash my face and be alone. I have to think."

"I think that would be acceptable," Julia said. "If that's everything, Hayden, then I'll just say good n--"

"Julia?"

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“Would it be possible for me to talk to Mack again?”

“Not right now – Mack is very busy right now. Having a procedure. Perhaps tomorrow.”

“Please,” Hayden said. “I miss my friend.”

“I’ll arrange something soon,” Julia said. “You know, Hayden – vulnerability suits you.”

“I hate it.”

“You won’t always,” Julia said. “It’s one of the hallmarks of being a woman. Our vulnerability is our strength. You’ll find that out on your own.”

“‘Our’ vulnerability? ‘Our’ strength?” Hayden said. “You *do* see me as a woman.”

“You’re a lot sharper than your profile suggested,” Julia said. “Fine, have it your way – *sister*.”

The screen retracted and the lights dimmed a little. Hayden summoned a basin from a sconce behind the tiles, complete with a gentle cleanser, an exfoliating scrubber, and various moisturizers and rejuvenators in their tubes and pots. Hayden took a long time washing, just to study the feminine face in the mirror in close detail as he gently wiped away the smeared makeup and dried fluids on his cheeks. Wide, guileless eyes under regally arched brows. High cheekbones and full, plump lips over a narrow chin. Smooth, flawless amber skin which nearly glowed with health. An adorable slender nose ending in an upturned button. Chalk-white, perfectly straight teeth displayed in an unconscious wide smile all the time, even when upset. Long, curling, thick lashes always tinging the edges of vision.

He thought about Mack, and her mountain of curls and her own wide, sparking eyes. Hayden realized with a start that he, too, now thought of his friend as *she* and *her*, unconsciously and unbidden. That he saw

Mack as a girl – and a beautiful girl, to boot – and it was more than likely that Mack saw Hayden the same way. He made a mental note to ask the next time he saw her.

Hayden patted his face dry with a soft towel, brushed and flossed his teeth and dismissed the washstand into its hidden recess, then summoned the bed and collapsed onto the mattress. The coolness of the room which he ordinarily considered so pleasant now chilled him and he pulled the thin sheet around his shoulders, shivering a little. Even that did not stop the chill, so he queried Program for a blanket. Even combined with the sheet, the chill in the room seemed to close around Hayden's skin like a grip. He fought to stop his perfect teeth from chattering.

“Program, I need another blanket or something,” Hayden said into the semi-darkness. “Can you adjust the temperature. It's *freezing* in here.”

It dawned on him how girly that sounded – every girl he ever knew in his life seemed *perpetually* cold.

“Multiple blankets available,” Program informed him. “Ambient temperature seventy-two degrees Fahrenheit. Adjust to which temperature?”

*Seventy-two?* Hayden thought. *I used to keep my bedroom at around sixty-five and I was still warm.*

“I dunno, anything. Just make it warmer in here.”

“Do you wish to adjust ambient room temperature or request the bed heater?” Program asked.

“What-- oh, never mind. Gimme the bed heater. That sounds nice,” Hayden said.

A smaller section of tiles slid aside, above Hayden's resting head, and the bed pushed out further to expand to roughly queen-size. A large, bulky weight slid out across the bed, pushing blankets and sheets out of the way, to rest full-body alongside Hayden's shivering form. He put out his hands to explore in the gloom. A wide, barrel chest furred lightly with wiry hair. Firm pectorals and a trim belly barely dented by an

abdominal six-pack. Strong, trunk-like legs. A large head covered on scalp and jaw with soft, short hair.

Hayden gaped in the deep twilight of the cell. A complete facsimile of a man's body lay in the bed next to him, a CPR dummy covered in lifelike skin and hair, staring eyelessly at the ceiling with an expressionless face. And radiating the most blissful warmth Hayden ever imagined.

Something about the darkness provided a sense of privacy and secrecy. With the confidence that no one could see, Hayden wrapped his legs around one thigh of the body-double and threaded his slender arms around the neck and shoulders. The fingers of one hand idly stroked the short, oh-so-soft hair at the nape of the dummy's neck. Sighing as the chill fled his body and glorious warmth suffused aching, tired muscles, Hayden lay his cheek against the broad chest, blonde hair fanning out across the dummy's midsection, hearing a manufactured heartbeat within the chest, and closed his long-lashed eyes in relief and comfort.

\* \* \*

Hayden awoke in the darkness, feeling for just a moment like he wasn't alone, wrapped around the warm, comforting weight of his *faux* bedmate and luxuriating in its companionable warmth. What little sleep he managed seemed far away, given the weight of exhaustion and stress behind his eyes. He stared into space, thought awhirl, trying to sort and make sense of it all.

Girl. Boy. Female. Male. Such powerful words, so laden with meaning and so dominant in a life. But what did they really mean? Could his entire life be distilled down into that one word? Did it really matter which one he was, so long as the set of character traits and thoughts and beliefs at the core did not change? Was being a girl a step down, the way Hayden originally imagined, or was it a step up, the way Julia described? Sure, it would be a total departure from what Hayden knew. His life experience would count for nothing. But it might not be *all* bad. And it would certainly spell an end to the torture and degradation of the transformation up to this point. Julia told him, all he needed to do was ask. Just swallow his pride the way he swallowed the fake semen that evening and hope it would reward him with the same bliss and exhilaration. That the taste of it would change on his tongue the way the semen had and a new world would open before his long-lashed eyes.

A huge gamble, to be sure. It might cost him everything he knew. But the payoff might be more than he could possibly imagine. He would never know if he could fly until he summoned all of his courage and jumped from that cliff.

The stress and uncertainty built up to the point of pain; Hayden used his newfound coping mechanisms to offset it and clear his mind by giving into the flood of emotion and having himself a good, soul-scouring cry in the darkness. His sobs echoed loudly off of the silent tiles. Pulling – no, *prying* suited it better – his body away from the security and warmth of the construct body beside him, Hayden wrapped himself in a blanket and summoned a little light and the washstand again. He washed his face again, wiping away tears and a desperately runny nose, and patted his wild, unkempt nighttime locks into some semblance of order. He shed the corset – stained with tears, now – and replaced it with a red satin one, this time with shoulder straps. The fact that the corsets fit his body better – or actually, that his body fit the corsets better – did not escape his notice. He was being reshaped. He noticed how much tighter he needed to pull the laces now in order to achieve the same breathless embrace he grew to crave.

He looked back at the bed, and the comfort he had felt from being snuggled next to that body.

No, not the comfort *he* had felt.

With a sudden surge of passion bordering on mania, Hayden shouted for the master console, demanding an audience with Julia. *She* – it could be nothing but *she* now, such a simple little correction in language to mean so very, very much – pounded on the screen with tiny fists, panting breathlessly, afraid that Julia would not get to the monitor before Hayden's courage flagged and she lost her nerve.

After a breathless eternity, Julia's face appeared. Even at the late hour, fatigued and snapped from sleep, she still looked ethereally beautiful.

“Hayden? What is it?”

“I need to know something,” Hayden said. “Right now.”

“Yes?”

“Do you like this corset I'm wearing?”

“You woke me up to ask me that?” Julia said, a bit irritated.

“Do you like it?”

“Yes,” Julia snapped, unsure of where this led. “I think it's very flattering with your coloring.”

“I hate it,” Hayden said. “It doesn't fit right. Maybe if there was something, y'know... *up here*. To fill it out a little. Then I might like it.” Hayden gestured to his flat, featureless chest.

“Are you asking me what I think you're asking me?” Julia asked.

“The cups on the corset. On *all* the corsets,” Hayden said. “I want to fill them up.”

“Be sure,” Julia warned.

“I'm completely sure. Now will you do it before I lose my nerve?”

Julia studied Hayden's face for a long second before nodding curtly. She moved her arms below the view of the camera and a small black device extended from the wall below the master console. A clear plastic medical mask rose from its interior.

“This will not be forced on you, Hayden,” Julia explained. “If you truly want what you're asking, sweetheart, then just put your face in that mask and take a nice, deep breath. We'll take care of the rest.”

Hayden didn't hesitate before pressing her mouth and nose into the mask and inhaling deeply. The world seemed to sway and lurch beneath her feet. She sat hard against the tile floor, groggy and dizzy, and barely even felt the strong hands of an unseen tech lift her body beneath the shoulder and drag her towards the door, the heels of her bulky BPRUs scraping loudly in the silence and gloom.



Valesie Hope  
2012



Hayden floated just on the edge of consciousness, dimly registering being placed on a stretcher and loaded into an ambulance, driven a short distance while various monitors attached to her slender body and another IV placed in her arm. She wheeled through glass doors and tried to count the fluorescent ceiling lights as they whizzed by one by one above her down the hallway. Incomprehensible medical jargon banded about from ambulance crew to nurses to doctors. By the time she reached the second set of double doors, Hayden knew no more.

\* \* \*

Hayden awoke upright, feeling nauseated and dizzy. Her weight seemed distributed oddly, and her arms wouldn't move correctly. A long, warbling moan escaped her lips and she swallowed hard, fighting back a surge of bile.

“Easy, honey, easy,” a warm, friendly female voice spoke from the blur of Hayden's coalescing vision. “You've been through a lot. Just take your time. How do you feel?”

“Like I'm gonna hurl,” Hayden croaked.

“I'm gonna give you something for that, okay? Just hang in there,” the

voice said. Hayden felt pressure against the side of her neck and heard a faint *hiss* and a pinch.

“Better?” the voice asked.

“Yeah. A little,” Hayden croaked again. “What’s wrong with my voice?”

“Well, you had a tube down your throat so we could help you breathe,” the voice explained. “But mostly it’s because you got a little work done on your voice box. I know you have a lot of questions, honey, but I suggest you rest your voice and talk as little as possible for a bit. Don’t want to irritate anything. Do you need something for pain?”

Hayden assessed her body in increments. Her chest ached like fire and seemed to weigh a ton. Sharp pains beneath her armpits hampered her attempts to move her arms.

“We have your arms restrained, dear,” the voice said. “Try to relax. You can take a look, if you want.”

Hayden blinked her eyes rapidly to clear them, then looked down. She actually expected to see her feet and gasped, shocked at the perfectly spherical masses blocking her vision of the floor beneath her.



Hayden shook her chest a little, watching them bounce and wincing slightly at the painful, abused tug against her chest. They threatened to draw her forward face-first.

“Well, we only kept them loose so you could get a look at them,” the attendant said. “They are gorgeous, that’s for sure. But you need to keep them supported, sweetheart, for the next week or so, so they heal correctly.”

The attendant – who turned out to be an older but very shapely woman in khaki slacks and a dark purple sweater – released Hayden’s wrists from the broad nylon straps attached to a chain above her. She helped Hayden remove the little waist-cincher she wore around her midsection to provide posture support and wrapped her in the comforting embrace of a full corset, white brocaded satin. The first one she’d ever worn in the program, Hayden noticed, bringing a little smile.

“There you go, sweetheart,” the woman said pleasantly, patting Hayden’s slender back. “Off to bed, now. You’re dopey on painkillers but you do NOT want to be awake when they wear off. You’re back at the lab, by the way. Your room is right through those doors. Now, scoot.”

Hayden mouthed a silent “thank you” and squeezed the woman’s

forearm before tottering off on her plastic space-boots, windmilling sore and abused arms trying to establish a new equilibrium around the large, bouncing spheres on her chest. Large, pink nipples – much larger than before, about as big around as a baby food jar – jutted against the tight confines of the corset, peeping occasionally over the top in proud erection.

Two of the everpresent techs took pity and assisted her, steadying her with outthrust arms which she clung to gratefully, pressing her new breasts against the unyielding muscles. Dull aches penetrated her entire upper body, making every step a hissing ordeal. One of the techs opened a door for her, gesturing her through, bringing her up a little short.

*He opened the door for a lady,* Hayden thought, letting the full impact of the realization sink in.

“Why thank you, kind sir,” she rasped mockingly. The tech smiled.

They left her on the edge of the bed, sighing with relief and groggy with sedatives and complete physical and emotional exhaustion. Hayden barely had time to summon the infinite comfort of her bed heater – she decided to call him 'Ralph' in a fit of silliness – and curl around it, asleep in moments.

\* \* \*

Life, such as it was, settled into a long but satisfying routine. Hayden awoke to find her cell more like a room, decorated with simple furniture and visible choices of things like clothes, cosmetics and even a vase of pale yellow flowers next to the bed and washstand, which now stayed permanently extended from the walls, along with the mirror and master console.



The console now constantly played football games and commentaries on football games unless Hayden slept, talked with Julia or viewed her schedule. The rest of her time she spent engaged in some activity or another, something to usher her a bit further down the path to her new female life. Many more mind-blasting sessions in the Sensorium awaited her, but she also grew to relish the actual physical exercises tasked to her. Every morning now, Hayden awoke and showered, stretched, and applied makeup to her face, now with the additional confidence of lessons received on the master console. Her cell door now opened at her request, allowing her to walk unescorted to the Sensorium if necessary or else to the small gym, where she began working out religiously with forty-five minutes of cardio on an elliptical trainer or stair-climber, twenty minutes on the rowing machine – once it stopped making her new 36C breasts ache like mad just to perform the motion with no resistance – or the test kitchen where she rehearsed an implanted but comprehensive knowledge of gourmet cooking. She discovered a knowledge of dance, as well, and practiced everything from ballet to jazz to hip-hop in a private studio across the hall from the kitchen. She found that she loved dancing more than cooking, finding a depth of expression and satisfaction she never realized existed in the simple act of moving her lithe new body to music.

The “work” the aging attendant referred to regarding Hayden's voice box turned out to deliver a dusky, throaty mezzo, the tiniest bit of sexy hoarseness tinging the low end. A voice infinitely suited to any phone-sex line in existence, and perfect for singing old Sarah Maclachlan tunes to herself in the shower. She could cover anything from the range of a hellraising *woo hoo* to a deep-throated purr of utter satisfaction and never sound like anything less than one hundred percent female.

She began receiving information now in written form, instead of just video and Sensorium, and she loved to curl up next to the comforting warmth of Ralph and read in the afternoons until she sank into a short power-nap. Julia also provided her with headphones, and Hayden spent many long hours just sitting and listening to music, finding a predisposition which may or may not have been implanted for pop and dance, particularly mindless thumping dance beats like Ke\$ha, Beyoncé, Nicki Minaj and the ilk. Hayden still liked good old-fashioned Southern rock, from her life before the program, but could no longer claim it as a favorite. She did have to write off metal, however. Anything harder than Kiss turned her off as too aggressive and too in-your-face. Gone were the days when Hayden could kill an afternoon working on a car engine while listening to Metallica's *Master of Puppets* on repeat. Now it consisted of hours spent preparing a crème broulée while listening to Madonna. So long as Hayden didn't think too hard about it, the shock seemed much easier to accept and move away from.

But the music lulled her to sleep far too easily, and the occasional telltale hum of some kind of implanted subliminal programming occasionally peeked through the beats, telling Hayden that the program still had its little invasions to make into her consciousness. Many times Hayden would make up her mind about something – like deciding that platform wedges were ugly or that she didn't think dark chocolate was all that – and then fall asleep listening to music only to awaken later thinking platform wedges were adorable and dark chocolate was the closest thing to an edible orgasm there was.

One very nice change, however, came when techs entered her room – she seldom considered it her cell, any more – and removed the BPRU boots from her legs. One of the closemouthed men did break radio silence long enough to inform her that she still needed to wear them for about two hours a day for a little longer, but it opened the door to an

assortment of sexy heels, newly-loved wedges, boots, slippers, sandals and even a pair of pink toe shoes for ballet that Hayden nearly salivated at the thought of trying. She spent a blissful hour, before lights-out, slipping her now *very* petite and delicate size-six feet in and out of various pairs. She tottered around the room of a pair of sky-high clear stripper heels with a two-inch platform, then jogged in a pair of Nike running shoes with a cute pink stripe, then finally decided on a pair of delightfully naughty python-print spike heeled pumps with the signature red Christian Louboutin sole.

The chime sounded, lowering Hayden's new favorite toy, the big black rubber cock which distributed the nutrient paste and the euphoric drug that she seemed to crave every waking hour of every day. She knelt easily, coating the long cylinder with a generous amount of saliva to ease its entry into her throat, and placed her lips around the head. She pistoned her head up and down – *chicken-heading*, she thought with a bit of amusement and leftover shame – a few times, waiting for the delicious payoff. But it didn't arrive. So Hayden 'chicken-headed' a little more. Nothing. She growled around the invader deep in her throat, sucking hard enough to make herself a bit dizzy. Nothing.

*Goddamit*, she thought impatiently, trying another bout of frantic pistoning on the false cock. *What does it take to get what I want out of this thing?*

*Out of this... cock?*

*What does it take to get anything out of a cock?*

Inspired and hopeful, Hayden changed her approach. Instead of the fierce, demanding strokes she delivered, she popped the member from her lips and kissed it lovingly, licking it from base to tip, rubbed it against her soft cheeks and caressed it with her puckered lips. She moaned throatily, her new voice perfectly suited, and stroked the shaft in long, twisting motions with her hand while she caressed and fondled the swinging balls with the other. Deep thrusts interspersed with little rapid-fire bursts of intense motion, copious amounts of saliva which left white streamers of drool hanging from her lips and the tip of the cock, licks and tender kisses, even a daring little nibble here and there. She placed the warm weight of the member against her forehead and licked and gently sucked the ersatz testicles, teasing them with her long and

nimble tongue, even going so far as to whisper little “Oh yeah”s and “Give it to me, baby”s to unseen ears.

Her ploy worked, rewarding her enthusiasm with a huge load of the delicious, joy-inducing liquid. The ejaculation took her a bit by surprise and the first jet sprayed all over her face before she could get her mouth open and take the remainder onto her waiting tongue, making her giggle girlishly and sigh in satisfaction, unable to suppress a heartfelt “Oh, yeah, baby! Fuck! That's it!” at the unexpected deluge. She extended her high a little bit by toying with the thick, ropy strands of fluid drizzling down her chin and onto her new, perfect breasts before scooping them up and licking them from her fingers greedily.

Even as the near-perfect state of rapture and infinite possibility brought on by the drugged semen suffused her, Julia's words whispered hauntingly in her ears. *Wait till you get your lips around a real one.* Could it possibly be even better than this? Could *anything?*

Hayden's performance on her knees, sucking the cock – *no*, she thought in retrospect, *that was a blowjob. I gave head just now* – left her with a very insistent hard-on pressing painfully against the ill-fitting confines of her thong panties and a breathless flood of sexual arousal to manage in addition to the deep craving for *more* she always associated with her 'meals.'

Looking around furtively – even though she knew there was no place in the room she could be unwatched, the gesture made her feel better – she rose smoothly, semen – *no, cum*, she amended to herself – drying on her pretty face as she *click-clacked* in her python stilettos across the tile floor to the extended bed. Not waiting for Ralph to emerge, Hayden tore her panties down her hairless, smooth legs in a fluid motion and flopped onto the bed, drawing her knees up and jerking roughly at her cock. Her balls had long since disappeared upwards into her body, leaving her scrotum just a deflated, wrinkled sac, letting Hayden stroke herself from base to tip without interruption. She used no finesse or tenderness, just wanting the release, driving herself to that inevitable explosion she knew awaited. Then, just when she thought she could bear no more, all the tension and arousal exploded from her, jetting out the tip of her cock to run warmly down her fingers, like champagne after the cork popped.



But instead of the expected lethargy, Hayden instead felt herself rejuvenated and ready for more, even as her greedy tongue licked every drop of her own cum from the sticky fingers and her cock deflated in her still-stroking hand. She managed to make herself hard again after a long refractory period of insistent stroking, caressing and petting, but the ensuing orgasm produced only a few meager droplets of sperm, consumed in a single swipe of her tongue. But the burgeoning feeling of joy, satisfaction and utter wonder suffused her afresh, as Julia had promised. Perhaps not as acute as her 'meals,' but certainly as intense and a little more mellow, as if promising a longer duration and more satisfaction over the long run.

Spent and satisfied, Hayden summoned Ralph and wrapped her naked body – except for the designer shoes, which she forgot to kick off – around it, drifting off into a very contented sleep as a cocksucker for the very first time.

“I THINK IT’S TIME THAT you leveled with me,” Hayden told Julia on the master console the following morning, her throaty mezzo tinged with irritation. “Look, I did what you said. I embraced it. I’m on board. I know you saw me sucking that cock last night. I’m a girl. You made me into a girl and I *love* it. I’m trying as hard as I can. But even I’m not dim enough to miss the fact that everything you’re doing to me is leading up to something. It all has a purpose. I want to know what it is, Julia. I think I earned the right to know.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Julia answered simply. “Tell me, Hayden – who do you think funds all of this? Someone has to foot the bill, right? And it’s a big bill, let me tell you. My salary alone would bankrupt some companies.”

“I dunno,” Hayden said. “I never really gave it much thought. I was a little preoccupied.”

“Fair enough,” Julia said. “It’s private investors. Customers, actually. We sell a service.”

“What service?” Hayden pressed.

“Custom wives,” Julia answered. “You’re being remade into someone’s perfect, made-to-order wife.”

Hayden fish-mouthed silently for a moment. “Somebody... *ordered* me?”

“In essence, yes,” Julia said. “The fee covers everything being done to you. Several million dollars.”

“But why?” Hayden asked. “Couldn’t these people just find a natural-born girl?”

“Of course they could. And then run the risk of infidelity, divorce, loss of assets, child support... the list is endless. Marriage, for the wealthy who come to us, is a terrible risk to take without certain assurances,” Julia explained. “We can make those assurances. Believe me, the millions they spent up front on your transformation is nothing compared to what they stand to lose in the average divorce.”

“But why change a man?”

“Men who become women come with certain advantages,” Julia told her. “A wealth of sexual expression, for one thing. A total lack of fear of new sexual experiences that most women don't have. Think about it. Most heterosexual guys fantasize about things like threesomes, or having anal sex with their partners. The women they know usually, over ninety-nine percent of the time, answer with an unequivocal *no*. They're threatened, scared, overwhelmed and just generally averse to ideas like that. But you take a woman who was once a man, and you mention anal sex or a threesome – well, that woman will *get* it. She'll understand because she's felt it herself. She is automatically more open to the idea than any average biological woman.”

“So I'm being transformed because I'm more willing to take it up the ass?” Hayden said in disbelief.

“That's part of it, yes,” Julia said. “Men are biologically more loyal, which makes divorce less of a factor. They bond with other men over the long term and provide companionship and comfort the way other men *want* it, not the way other women *think* they want it. They are naturally more aggressive and assertive, and the men who marry transformed women uniformly report being less worried about protecting their spouses than with biological women. The upsides go on and on, Hayden. Once all the research came in, when we first started studying this, the simple fact became impossible to ignore: men make the best wives.”

“That's messed up,” Hayden said.

“But true,” Julia persisted. “Think about your own relationships. When you had a problem, where did you usually turn for understanding? To a woman?”

“No,” Hayden said. “I got advice from my guy friends.”

“Exactly. Now imagine a spouse who could provide the same support *and* give you a world-class blowjob the same night. A spouse who would wear fishnet stockings and a garter belt to bed because it was *her* idea, because she found it as sexy and arousing as her partner did. A spouse whom you could talk to about anything – wanting to fuck another girl, for instance – and not fear judgment or jealousy.”

“Sounds like the best wife in the world,” Hayden said.

“And so you will be,” Julia pronounced. “We just have to build you a life to go around the rest of it.”

“What kind of a life?” Hayden asked. “Just what kind of woman does Daddy Warbucks want me to be when this is all over?”

“You're already well on your way, sweetheart,” Julia said. “I don't want to reveal too much at once. Part of the program's success depends upon you occasionally being surprised. But he wants a sweet wife, compassionate. One who can cook and dance and quote chapter and verse about professional football.”

“Okay, okay, I get it. The program is already getting me there.”

“It is,” Julia confirmed. “There's really just the one big piece of the puzzle left to fit in.”

“And what piece is that?” Hayden asked suspiciously.

“Head down to the lab next to the kitchen. The one that says “No Admittance” on the door, the one you've been curious about since you first got freedom to roam the place. You'll find that missing piece in there.”

\* \* \*

Hayden took a moment to change – slipping into a pink corset with white trim and matching panties – and stole a moment to relieve herself. She pushed the tight silk panties down and pulled out her cock, pointing it towards the open bowl of the toilet as she always had. Standing in the moment, waiting for the heavy hot flow to begin, it occurred to her all in rush. She stopped, lowered the seat, and sat, pushing down her panties further until they stretched taut between her knees. After the last drops drained from her body, instead of the usual 'double-tap' of a lifetime's experience, she broke off a little wad of toilet paper from the roll beside the commode and dabbed daintily at the tip. The whole experience struck her as sanitary and feminine. Another step in her journey towards completion.

She tottered down the hallway, unsteady in her new heels – a pair of six-inch stilettos, the highest she'd ever worn – past the dance studio, the Sensorium, the restroom and a supply closet, to the kitchen and the thick steel door marked with “No Admittance” amidst all the biohazard and chemical hazard placards. She tapped gently on the door, shifting from foot to foot while she waited for an answer.

The door opened after a long pause, allowing Hayden into an expansive lab lit to a glowing, antiseptic white by fluorescent lights. The walls disappeared behind banks of complicated machinery which hummed, whirred and blinked as it went about its byzantine tasks. Racks of test tubes, beakers and other glassware coated the tops of every table.

A young Japanese man with thick glasses, wearing a lab coat and face mask stood behind the open door. He eyed Hayden up and down, the faintest glimmer of arousal in his dark eyes. “May I help you?” he asked in lightly accented English.

“I'm Hayden,” she said brightly. “Julia said I should come down here.”

“Ah, Julia,” the man said. “I'm Dr. Fujiwara. I'm overseeing the production of your family.”

“My *family*?” Hayden asked incredulously. “What are you talking about?”

Fujiwara looked confused. “Your family,” he reiterated. “Were you not informed? You're going to be a mother.”

“A... *mother*?” Hayden gawked.

“Here. Let me show you,” Fujiwara said. He opened a door adjoining the lab and stepped inside, then emerged leading two small children – a bright-eyed African boy showing a few signs of malnutrition and clutching a weatherbeaten storybook to his chest and a shy-eyed, silent Korean girl. Fujiwara put a comforting hand on each child's shoulder as they looked up at Hayden, who could only stand mute and shocked, with questioning, somewhat frightened eyes.



“Hayden, meet Edgard Tolosi, from Sudan. He is a refugee, a member of the Dinka ethnic groups displaced during the Civil War. His parents died in the fighting and he made his way here. He is to be your son. Edgard, say hello to your new mother.”

“Hello,” the boy said thickly, offering Hayden a shy smile. She could not help but return it, seeing the horror of war reflected dully in the boy's bright eyes and wanting to offer him any comfort and friendship she could.

“And this is Park Hyori, from Pyongyang in North Korea. Her parents were assassinated as political dissidents two years ago and she was sold to sex traffickers from Singapore. She was liberated by an American nonprofit fighting the sex trade and brought here for asylum. *Hyori, sae eomma hante anbu jeonhaejuseyo . geunyeoneun yeppeuji anhnayo?* I told her, 'say hello to your new mother. Isn't she pretty?’”

“*Eomma, anyeong,*” the little girl said in a breathless voice.

“Hello, Hyori. I think you're very pretty, too,” Hayden said.

“*Annyeonghaseyo, Hyori. Nado, dangsin-eun aju yeppeun geos gat-ayo,*” Fujiwara translated, and the little girl cast her eyes demurely at the floor, blushing around a shy but genuine smile.

"I don't understand," Hayden said, following as the young Japanese doctor ushered the two children back into the brightly-colored play room where he found them and shut the door gently. "How can they be *my* children? We're not even the same race."

"Yet," Fujiwara said. "It has been decided that you will be the mother of two children, but our science has not progressed to the point, yet, where you could bear them yourself. That process is still years away. Instead, we will use your genetic material to make these children into your genetic offspring – almost clones, but with certain genes spliced in to add diversity and particular genomorphic traits desired by your benefactor. No test will be able to distinguish them from children born physically from a biological woman. I've been told that you will be allowed to name them."

"Me? Their mother?" Hayden breathed. "I don't know if I'm ready for something like that."

"You will be," Fujiwara said. "Your psychoemotional training will be comprehensive. We are quite adept at generating instinct, you see. Your maternal instincts will be instilled in you this week and developed over time until you cannot imagine any role more fulfilling than that of a loving, caring mother. It will seem the most natural thing in the world."

"You talk about it like it's so simple," Hayden said. "You're talking about changing my most basic instincts. You shouldn't be so... so... *lighthearted* about it."

"I did not mean to offend. I apologize," Fujiwara said with a shallow bow. "Now, if you have seen everything you wished, if you will please excuse me. I am very busy with my work."

Hayden knew a curt dismissal when she heard one, and decided it wouldn't be worth the fight. She turned on her heel – too quickly, she realized too late, feeling her new and still-unfamiliar boobs sway and jiggle painfully on her chest – and walked back to her room. She stopped short as the door to the Sensorium swung open and a dazed but smiling Mack, the massive tumble of sable curls swaying behind her, emerged, using the walls to steady herself.

"Mack!" Hayden said brightly, cheering immediately. Her ability to cheer

up after hard news and to remain positive in the face of any adversity still astounded her a little. “How are you?”

“Whassup, girlfriend?” Mack said with a slurring giggle. She sounded drunk.

“Are you okay?”

“Oh, I am so good,” she said. “OhmyGawd, sweetheart, I *love* your new tits! They're fucking *gorgeous*! I'm *totally* jealous. I get mine tomorrow and I'm *super* excited about it. Do they hurt? It's really good to see you, baby.” She babbled rapid-fire, then lurched forward a little and half-embraced, half-leaned-on Hayden.

“I can't wait to see you with them,” Hayden said. “You're so pretty already, once you get the girls you're going to be a *hottie*.”

“I'll come by once I heal up. We can hang out,” Mack said, standing unsteadily after planting a wet kiss on Hayden's cheek. “Oh, listen to me. What a selfish bitch. How are you doing, honey?”

Hayden smiled in spite of her shock over the 180° change in her friend's demeanor. “I'm okay. A little rattled. I just found out they're planning to make me a mother.”

“Holy shit!” Mack said, clapping and bouncing on his toes with excitement. “That is so awesome! I love it! You are gonna be *such* a kick-ass mommy! And I'm gonna be, like, the greatest aunt *ever*! We're gonna have so much fun!”

“I hope so,” Hayden said. “I really do. Right now I'm just freaked out and scared.”

“Well, fuck *yeah* you are!” Mack said. “Anybody would be. But you can relax, baby girl, you're gonna be awesome at it. Best mommy ever. I just know it. Hey, baby, love to hang right now but I *gotta* bounce. Jill is waiting for me back in my room. Come by soon, okay?”

“I will,” Hayden said. “I've just been really busy.”

“Yeah, me too,” she said, then kissed Hayden's cheek fondly, wiping off a

smear of lip gloss with a slender thumb. “*Ciao*, sweetheart, love ya!”

Hayden watched in complete disbelief as the shallow, hyperactive bubble-head that had once been her closest friend sashayed down the hall with mincing steps, tracing a delicious little weaving pattern in the air behind her with her pert bottom.

\* \* \*

Hayden sank onto the recliner summoned from the floor, trying to ignore the bright pink glitter banner strung across the entrance to her room displaying the words 'Congratulations Mama' between a cluster of foil balloons. She willed herself to get lost in last season's playoff games, trying to analyze the gameplay and determine what, if anything, she would do differently as head coach in the same situation with the same roster. She lapsed into a fitful nap, just below consciousness, dreaming strange disjointed dreams, then snapping awake with wide eyes and a panicked gasp.

The master console chimed softly, telling her to report to the dance studio in five minutes. She yawned and stretched – her new, kittenish voice made the yawn and moan sound like one uttered by a little girl – and levered herself up and out of the recliner. She took a moment to run a brush through the tangles of her long blonde hair, apply a light coat of pink lip gloss – *God, I love pink*, she thought as she admired the shade in the little mirror – before hurrying down the hallway as fast as the BPRUs, reapplied for the rest of the day – would allow.

The dance studio overflowed with equipment and a team of people Julia did not recognize. The nearest to her – a tall gawky man with lank, dark hair – pushed his glasses up his bulbous nose and offered her a shy smile.

“You must be Hayden,” the man said. “I'm Tommy. We're here to take some scans of you.”

“Scans?”

“Yeah. Laser body topography. We need a detailed computer image of you in three dimensions for your history,” he explained.

“What does that mean?” she asked, unconsciously twisting a white lock around one finger.

“You can just exist in a vacuum,” he told her. “You had to've come from *somewhere*, right? We're the team that's gonna give you a history. Pictures, paperwork, records, that kind of thing.”

“Oh,” Hayden said. “I didn't know I was posing for pictures. I would've done something with my hair.”

“Not that kind of picture,” Tommy explained. “Tell you what. Let me get a scan of you and I can show you instead of trying to explain all the technology behind it, okay? Just come with me and stand right here and try not to move.”

He led her through a snarl of wires and cables on the floor, past several photographic lights on tall aluminum stands, to a small backdrop hung from a portable stand. The plain white backdrop, marked with a grid, stood across from a large, very complicated-looking machine with a very large, polished lens pointed at her.

“Right there,” Tommy said, placing her feet in a very specific section of floor. “Now, when I give you the signal, stand absolutely still. Hold your breath. The whole thing takes about fifteen seconds.”

He stepped back, leaving her squinting and blinking against the harsh photographic lights, and made some quick adjustments to the machine with the lens. A red light flashed several times. The rest of the team made their way to various stations around the floor, each in front of an open laptop computer.

“Everybody ready?” Tommy called, then looked around to tally the nods and thumbs-up's he saw around the room. “Okay, here we go. Completely still, Hayden.”

The lens flashed and a very intense red light appeared, focusing into a thin strip of red which began about an inch above Hayden's head and traveled slowly down her body, inch by inch, until stopping below the level of her feet, then reversing and traveling back up. She struggled not to blink as the light passed over her long-lashed eyes, managing to keep completely motionless, even from breathing, until Tommy gave her the

okay to move again.

“Great job,” he said. “Now we need one from the each side and from the back.”

She repeated the process three more times, standing facing each wall and then facing the singularly uninteresting backdrop. Once the last scan completed, Tommy smiled and brought her over to the laptop he operated with a friendly 'come hither' gesture.



“You'll like this,” he told her, sliding to one side so Hayden could position herself in front of the hi-def monitor. “It's really cool. Okay, so now we have an incredibly detailed digital representation of your body. Every hair, every freckle.”

“I don't have freckles,” Hayden giggled, giving him a little playful shove on the arm.

“I know,” he said shyly, “but you get the idea. The software I'm running has a huge database of backgrounds and lighting schemes, and the stuff that Marcus over there is running can make changes to the digital scans so that it can age you forward or back. So now all we have to do is figure what kind of pictures we're going to need.”

He brought up an image of Hayden on the screen. She couldn't believe how feminine she looked, how shapely and lush her curves appeared, how carelessly sexy her long blonde hair looked falling loose around her shoulders. "Okay, here we go. Hi, Hayden."

He tapped a key and the image raised a hand in a stiff wave. Hayden giggled.

"Okay, so, for example, everybody needs a prom picture, right?" Tommy said. "So first thing we do, we put you in a nice dress. Give you a nice hairdo and some makeup. Like this."

He clicked a few mouse buttons and the image appeared in a white sheath gown, spangled with sequins, and a teased-out evening coif gathered with a rhinestone clip. Dramatic but well-done evening makeup appeared on the image's cheeks, lips and eyes.

"I wish it was really that easy," Hayden commented.

"I know, right?" Tommy chuckled. "Movie magic. So, next thing, you figure you go to your prom when you're fifteen or sixteen. Gotta figure somebody as pretty as you would get asked before her junior year, so we'll say fifteen. Marcus runs the aging software and boom, you're fifteen."

The image morphed quickly into a younger, less ripe version of herself – more subtle curves and a little less of the lushness of womanhood about her. Features a bit softer and more reminiscent of baby fat. A mouth full of braces. "Wow," Hayden said.

"Now we need to put you in front of a cheesy high-school prom background," he said, clicking more icons with the mouse. A tacky balloons-and-streamers background appeared behind her, lit exactly as her image was.

"Oh, and I guess you need a date," Tommy said. "How about Kenny, over there?" He pointed to a somewhat pudgy, moon-faced man who stood several laptops away. He appeared next to her image, with more hair and less pudge, a bit of acne around his mouth and a hairstyle appropriate to about a decade past. Her image's hands moved in the

picture to place one around his waist and the other against his chest.

“A little processing, and presto,” Tommy said. “One prom picture.” A high-speed photo printer nearby whirred to life and spat out a glossy 4x6 print which he handed to her proudly.

“Wow,” Hayden said, looking at it in wonder. “You could never tell this actually never happened.”

“Oh, you *could*,” Tommy said, “but it would take an army of nerds and a couple million dollars of equipment to pull it off. I'm pretty confident that your past is safe.”

“What other kinds of things are you going to do?” Hayden asked.

“Well, we got a profile. We have a lot of stuff to generate, it's going to take a few days. Particularly for candid shots taken with a flash in low light. Those take longer to get right. But the profile says we need some pictures of you winning several beauty pageants, a few studio shots, then stuff like birthday parties and dance recitals. A lot of junior cheerleading competitions, gymnastics, and then most of it will be high school. Parties, friends. They specified they wanted lots of shots of you doing cheerleading. Sideline stuff, competitions, that kind of thing. Then there's all the Facebook stuff, of course, like shots off people's phones where you're tagged and the stuff for your own page. And they asked for one or two sexy ones, too. Stuff from old boyfriends, or getting too wild at parties or something. I guess every girl needs stuff like that tucked away.”

“Really?” Hayden asked. “They're making me a cheerleader? And a beauty queen?”

“Apparently,” Tommy replied. “The profile calls for a lot of it, all the way from elementary school through college and then to the professional career.”

Hayden looked down at the thick folder next to him containing her new life story. “I'm a professional cheerleader,” she said in sudden realization. “That explains all the interest in football. And the dancing. Whoever paid for all this wants his wife to be a cheerleader.”

"I think you'll make a great one," Tommy said. "Hey, listen. I know it's not exactly allowed, but are there any that *you* think you might want? Y'know, just for yourself? Something silly like you flying over the Manhattan skyline in a Superman outfit or walking on the moon or something?"

"More like Wonder Woman," Hayden mused. "Do you have scans done of Mack?"

"Mack... Mack..." Tommy said, rifling through files on the computer. "Wait - the Israeli girl? Oh, yeah. We did her scans a while back. What do you need?"

"I would really like some pictures of the two of us doing stuff. Nothing crazy or silly, just hanging out," Hayden said. "Make us look like we're best friends?"

"Sure," Tommy said. "No problem."

"Thanks, that's really sweet," Hayden told him. "So, are you all done with me?"

"For now," Tommy told her. "Thanks a lot."

She gave him a little hug - *I'm still not used to all the physical contact women do*, she thought, *but it's getting easier. And it feels kinda nice* - and returned to her room, calling for the master console and Julia right when she entered the door. It must have been office hours, since the beautiful brunette appeared right away.

"You could've told me I was getting turned into a cheerleader," Hayden grumped, pouting a little with her plump bottom lip stuck out. "It didn't need to be such a secret."

"It wasn't a secret," Julia said. "The pieces were all there. Pushing you to be cheerful and positive. How you smile all the time, out of habit. The dancing and the music and the big blonde hair. It wasn't rocket science, sweetheart."

"But I would've participated more," Hayden complained. "If I'd known. I would've tried harder."

“You try plenty hard,” Julia replied. “You're one of our very best, actually. Far ahead of schedule. You've already caught up to your friend Mack and will most likely be out of the program before she is. Why is this so upsetting?”

“I don't know. Maybe that it's because I *like* cheerleaders. I guess now that you mention it, yeah. I actually *want* to be a cheerleader. I kinda feel like I could've been doing more,” she said.

“Fair enough,” Julia said. “I'll rearrange your schedule. We'll push up your cheerleading training and get you started ahead of schedule. This afternoon. Would that be okay?”

“Sure,” Hayden said. “Julia, is everything about me going to be written down in some file? Don't I have any choices of my own left?”

“The program doesn't leave a lot of room for that,” Julia said. “Your benefactor...”

“He's not my benefactor,” Hayden corrected. “Just call him what he is. My *fiancé*.”

“Okay, then,” Julia said. “He was very specific about what he desired in a spouse. We have our work cut out for us just trying to accomplish what he asked for. Do you have something in mind?”

“Lots of things,” Hayden said. “But I can start small.”

“Like what?”

“Before we got brought here,” Hayden said, “I was getting to be really close to Mack. I miss my friend. She's changing so fast, into something I can hardly recognize. I don't want to lose her. Can we still be friends? Maybe even best friends?”

“I need to acquaint myself with Mack's profile a little better,” Julia said. “But that doesn't sound unreasonable at all. I'll talk with her case handler about it.”

“And could I have a hobby or something that my fiancé didn't order

specifically. Something that doesn't interest him, something I can do just by myself when he's not around?"

"You'll have plenty of things to fill the hours, between your family and your cheerleading career," Julia said. "I wouldn't go too far overboard. What did you have in mind?"

"Just something I can have that's just mine. Somewhere I can go to get away if I need," Hayden said. "Back when I was still a boy, if you can believe it, that used to be the golf course."

Julia looked down at something off-camera for a long while. "Your fiancé prefers tennis. I have no record of him being much of a golfer at all farther than the fact that he owns a set of clubs. I can make that happen. I can't allow anything extreme, like being on the Tour, but I can make you an above-average golfer without too much trouble."

"That would be great," Hayden said. "That's exactly what I was talking about. I could have the occasional eighteen holes of peace and quiet if I just needed to get away."

"A bit manly, though, don't you think?"

Hayden pushed up her breasts with both hands. "Don't think anybody's going to mistake me."

"Fair enough," Julia said. "If Jill decides to deepen the relationship between you and Mack, do you want her to share your interest in golf?"

"That might be fun to have a golfing buddy," Hayden said, twisting her hair. "But only – and I do mean *only* – if Mack agrees to it. Don't do anything against her will on my account, okay?"

"I won't," Julia said. "Now, you need to get changed. Your first cheerleading session will be in here, since the photo technicians will be in the dance studio for several more hours. I'll have someone come in momentarily to take off the BPRUs so you can work. Your workout starts in thirty minutes."

\* \* \*

Hayden could scarcely contain her excitement as she slipped out of her signature corset and into a stretchy, form-fitting little football jersey that bared her midriff and a pair of lycra shorts that laced tight as sin and left *nothing* about her to the imagination. She wore thick pantyhose – she knew she wore them on game days and wanted to rehearse the same as she would perform – and black *faux* leather go-go boots with a low, blocky heel. The same tech who entered to remove her plastic 'moon boots' left a box behind, containing a pair of black, silver and teal pom-poms.



The master console proved to be a very efficient way to work out. Hayden watched and copied the routines of several professional NFL squads, running and re-running the tapes until she could mimic every move flawlessly and perform along in perfect unison. Her Sensorium-bred talent and drug-induced flexibility made the moves easy to pick up and allowed her frontal cortex enough freedom to begin analyzing the choreography, wondering what she might do differently and imagining routines of her own as her body worked more or less on auto-pilot. Her remarkable stamina delighted her, as well. After six high-energy routines and two kick-lines, Hayden barely felt out of breath, even though a light sheen of perspiration covered her.

She slugged a little water out of a clear plastic bottle once she finished,

feeling completely invigorated from the high-energy dance. The pom-poms felt born to be in her slim hands. A sense of purest joy and *completion* shone from her, beaming from her wide, toothy smile and shining from her twinkling eyes. The dark screen of the master console flashed once and Julia's ephemerally beautiful face appeared.

“My God,” she said softly. “You look beautiful.”

Hayden blushed prettily. “Thank you,” she said. “I feel really happy.”

“You really seem to take to cheerleading,” Julia commented.

Hayden put on an adorable little moué of a pout and theatrically massaged the backs of her thighs. “I need to stretch more,” she grumped playfully. “That kick line really made me sore. But you're right, Julia. I think just then, when I was dancing like that – that may have been the first time in my life I've ever been truly *happy*.”

“I'm so glad to hear that,” Julia said. “I hope the news I have will make a great day even better.”

“What news?” Hayden said, blotting her moist face with a towel and brushing her hair behind one ear.

“You're moving out,” Julia announced. “All your recent assessments and progress evaluations say one thing: you no longer need the environment of the behavior lab to make progress. We're moving you into the apartments on the second level. A place of your own while you finish the program.”

“Really? My own place?”

“Yes,” Julia said. “And it just so happens that your next door neighbor will be Mack. You can go there any time you like, dear, the place is all ready. We've had a few things delivered. Just little things you're going to need for your new life.”

Hayden barely waited for Julia to finish her sentence before she leapt into the air with a delighted little squeal and ran out the door of the cell. In the hallway outside, she found a revealed staircase which had been an unremarkable wall only moments before, and scrambled up the stairs in

a thumping cacophony. The hallway just beyond the landing sported tasteful paint, some framed art and decorative lighting sconces. A



doorway marked “A” stood open directly across from her. Hayden brushed past a white couch and knelt on a gorgeous Persian carpet over polished hardwood, tearing into the stacked boxes. Clothes, shoes, and cosmetics filled most of the boxes, but a smaller one marked “personal” grabbed her more immediate attention. She found a few sundries – some hairspray and an InStyler tool, several boxes of tampons and a starter kit of Bare Minerals makeup – but beneath those lay a pink Android Razr phone, a ring of keys with a pink rhinestone heart fob, a pretty locket in the shape of a silver heart, a few pairs of clip-on earrings and a wallet containing nothing more than a few hundred dollars in cash.

Clacking steps on the hardwood made her look up and smile broadly. Mack entered her open door, wearing a gorgeous purple cocktail dress which hugged her every delicious curve, including the truly massive spherical breasts on her narrow chest. She perched on skyscraper-tall 'stripper' heels with a high platform, forcing her to bend low and offer a very informative glimpse down her deep cleavage when she kissed Hayden's cheek.

“Hey, baby! We're neighbors!” she said happily.

Hayden hugged her friend tightly. “I know. I'm *so* happy about it. Now I can see you all the time.”

“I know, right? How cool is that?” Mack answered. “Been through all your stuff yet?”

“No, I just got here,” Hayden said. “Is that where you got that dress?”

“And the shoes, too,” Mack said. “Boxes and boxes of it. I was gonna try it all on later. Wanna come over and have margaritas for my fashion show? They gave me a blender and everything.”

“Sounds great,” Hayden said. “But maybe I should put stuff away first. Y'know, get my stuff all organized. I can't take a messy place, you know that.”

*I can't? Hayden thought in wonder. I used to live in a disaster area. There was shit everywhere. I hated cleaning. Now if I think about living like that it makes me almost nauseous.*

“Neat freak,” Mack teased. “Look, skip it for tonight. I'll help you with it tomorrow after I get back from training, I promise. Just come over tonight and we can hang. You don't even know your way around or nothing, yet. This floor is awesome – there's a salon, a gym, a pool and a tanning booth.”

“Okay, okay,” Hayden laughed. “So, where's the master console around here?”

Mack gave her a slightly pitying look. “There isn't one,” she explained. “We're out of that part of the program. They don't think we need shit like that any more. You get your schedule on the smartphone now, every day. The rest of the time you organize your own life. You know what you need to get done, right? You should, anyway, or at least know how to figure it out.”

“But what if I need to talk to Julia?”

“You call her. She's in your phone,” Mack said.

“Well, there's definitely stuff I need to do,” Hayden mused, tapping her bottom lip.

“Like what?”

“I need to get a workout in,” she said, half of her mind wondering *where the hell did that come from* and the other half delighted at the prospect of a few hours in the gym, sweating. “And I need to get this mess organized, like I told you. And I have to make dinner for myself – hey, do you want me to make some for you, too? And do some studying before I go to bed.”

“Studying what?” Mack asked.

“Football,” she answered. “Need to at least watch SportsCenter or something.”

“Eww, yuck,” Mack said, pulling a disgusted face. “Well, I have to go to dance practice downstairs and I need to tan and get my nails done. Want to come over to my place, like, seven o'clock? We can make dinner over there and hang out. You're a way better cook than me but all my shit is kosher over there.”

“Sounds great,” Hayden said, digging into one of the boxes where she noticed some workout gear earlier. “See you at seven, honey.”

A quick hug and kiss, and Hayden hustled down the hall to the small but very well-appointed gym. Hayden got to lose herself for a while, starting with a forty-five minute run on the treadmill and then getting down to the serious business of weight training, concentrating on the muscles she determined needed more work for her cheerleading.



From there she made her way back to her new apartment and took a quick shower – luxuriating in the brief opportunity to release her contorted cock from the tight panties and shorts she wore all day – scooped her hair into a loose damp ponytail and dusted on a little bit of the mineral powder makeup. She shrugged into a casual little loose dress and sandals, tucking her keys and phone into a little beige leather purse she found in one of her boxes, then headed next door for dinner and girl talk with her new best friend.

LIFE BECAME VERY DIFFERENT AND much more complicated once Hayden found herself with a method for telling time. She liked the ability to set her own schedule, particularly surrounding sleeping and rising, and she really appreciated the addition of 'alone time' to her regimen. Much of the program, and the sweeping changes it brought, seemed less fearsome and overwhelming when she could just go into the gym in the afternoons and think about things while she worked out.

And Hayden found herself working out a *lot*. Two, three, sometimes even four times a day. Weights and cardio in the mornings, then an hour of Zumba right after lunch. Down to the studio just before dinner for an hour and a half of dancing and cheer practice, then usually a half hour or so of yoga before bed. Without even realizing that the program did not predispose or force her into it, Hayden transformed herself into a real gym rat. It progressed to the point where the rank, sweaty smell of the

gym began to smell comforting and even good to her nostrils. The program now expanded a bit, giving her daily classes in movement and manners, and they now expected her to cook every night.

Julia called her twice a week just to check in and see how Hayden adapted, occasionally ordering her a session at the Sensorium to help things along. A call from her one Tuesday – how great to know what day it was, again – in the morning while she worked out took her a bit by surprise.

“Hey, Julia,” Hayden answered, a bit breathless from her exercise. “What's going on?”

“Sorry to interrupt your workout, Hayden, but I'm afraid I need to shake up your schedule a little bit,” Julia said. “You need a bit of intensive training in the Sensorium today. We have some things we need to move along a little more quickly.”

“What kind of things?”

“We have to get you ready to leave,” Julia said.

“Leave? I'm leaving?” Hayden asked in disbelief. The program dominated her life. She had trouble imagining not being a part of it.

“Not permanently, sweetheart. But there are some things coming up, and you need preparation. Mannerisms, speech patterns, experiences, reactions and some external personality modifications,” Julia told her. “But we can't wait. You have tryouts on Friday.”

“Tryouts?”

“For the local professional cheerleading squad,” Julia said. “You're going to be a Tigerette.”

“I am?” Hayden said.

“You're going to audition, at any rate,” Julia said. “Originally, we tried to buy your way onto the squad, but the women in charge take their job and their standards very seriously. They resisted any attempt to influence their choice for who dances and who doesn't. So you will have

to audition the same as any other girl. I have a great deal of confidence that you will succeed – we gave you the genetic predisposition, for one thing, and we have subtly influenced the movement center of your brain in order to make you nearly perfect for that style of dance. Your own efforts and practice already surpass that of many of their veteran cheerleaders. But you must go through the process.”

“But I'm going outside?” Hayden asked. “Is that going to be okay? I mean, I'll probably be in a locker room. Julia, they're going to see my *thing* down there. They're going to know.”

“We can help with that,” Julia told her.

“You mean cut it off?” Hayden gulped. “I don't know if I'm ready for that. I think about that – and I *do* think about it, just like you told me to – and I still get really scared. I start crying.”

“That's not what I meant,” Julia said. “If for no other reason, darling, because you wouldn't have enough time to recover from the surgery before you needed to try out. Your fiancé was very specific that you be a professional cheerleader *before* you marry him. It's Friday or nothing. No, we will provide garments which will disguise your, um, genital misfortune during tryouts and the ensuing training camp. But the time has come for you to start your move into the outside world.”

“I'm so scared,” Hayden breathed in a small voice. “Someone could find out.”

“No one will find out,” Julia told her. “Trust the program, darling. And get to the Sensorium. When we're through with you, no one will even suspect you're not a natural-born girl.”

“Just let me shower,” Hayden said.

“No time,” Julia told her. “Go sweaty. The techs won't mind, I assure you. We have very little time. I have already called and cancelled your 'girl's night' with Mack.”

“I don't know if I can do this without Mack,” Hayden said.

“She will be there for you,” Julia said. “Just not right away. She needs to

undergo some preparation, herself, before she can support you the way you need. We will take care of everything, sweetheart. Don't burn precious energy worrying. You're going to need every bit of it to make that squad."

"Okay," Hayden said, toweling herself off and pausing just long enough to rack her hand weights. Gyms had rules, after all. "I'm on my way, okay?"

"You'll do fine, darling. I'll be with you every step of the way."

"You better be," Hayden said. "'Cause I'm scared out of my mind about this."

"You can't live in here forever, Hayden. It's time."

"I know," Hayden said. "But I don't have to like it."

"You will," Julia said, ending the call.

\* \* \*

Hayden only thought she knew the Sensorium's capabilities before that morning session. She realized how very little she actually comprehended about the capabilities and scope of the program in the brief moments of lucidity interspersed between the maelstrom of haze and shattered images whirling in her mind after the first session. She didn't know how anyone expected her to do this again that evening. Her mind felt scoured raw and bleeding, and parts of it even seemed irreparably broken. Thoughts that should have coalesced and formed effortlessly now simply would not appear, like her intrinsic logic no longer clung together. A pair of techs assisted her up the stairs and lowered her gently onto the couch in her living room since her sense of balance no longer functioned adequately, much less any sense of direction. She doubted she could have even located her apartment, much less walked there. They left her staring blankly at the ceiling, drooling a little, before exiting the door as silently as they entered.

Uncountable moments passed – it might have been an hour or a few seconds or a week for all Hayden could determine – before the clacking of heels on the hardwood announced her best friend. Mack's warm, soft

weight settled on the couch next to her, and her gentle hand shook Hayden's shoulder.

“Sweetie? You awake?”

“Yeah,” Hayden answered.

“They really zapped you, didn't they?” she asked, a bit amused but still sympathetic.

“Yeah,” Hayden said.

“I just came over to check on you. Are you hungry or something?”

“No, baby,” Hayden answered. *Baby?* she thought dimly. *Do I really talk like that?*

“What can I do for you, Hayden?” Mack asked.

“Hayden? Is that my name?” she giggled drunkenly. “I don't think so, li'l mama.”

“What?” Mack asked. “You can't be serious, right? What is your name?”

“Not Hayden,” she said. “Like that, though. Almost Hayden. Wait. Heidi. That's my name.”

“Heidi?” Mack said. “That's pretty, honey. That's what you want me to call you?”

“You have to call me that,” she answered hazily. “That's my name.”

“If you say so,” her friend chuckled. “Hey, baby, get up. I'm putting you to bed.”

“Don't wanna go to bed,” Heidi complained. “Not time for bed.”

“You and your scehdule,” Mack laughed. “At least let me take your shoes off and put a fucking blanket over you or some shit. You need at least some sleep before you gotta do all that again.”

“Mmm. Okay,” Heidi said. “Thanks, baby.”

“Sure,” the tall brunette said aimably, tugging at Heidi's shoes. “You know I'll take care of you.”

“I love you, 'Kenzi,” Heidi mumbled, through a sloppy smile.

“What did you call me?” Mack asked, eyebrows raised.

“Kenzi,” Heidi answered. “I've always called you that, baby, since we were girls. Short for Mackenzi, remember?”

“Mackenzi,” Mack – Kenzi – mused thoughtfully. “I don't know if that's the Sensorium talking or what, baby girl. But I do know I like it. Mackenzi. That's a really pretty name.”

“Pretty name for a pretty girl,” Heidi slurred. Suddenly and guilelessly, she lurched forward, tangling slim fingers in the thick sable tangle of her hair and planted a passionate but very sloppy kiss on her friend's lush lips.

“Wow,” Kenzi said softly when they broke apart. “I didn't know you liked me like that.”

“I do,” Heidi said softly, caressing her face. “You're so beautiful and so sweet and you have these amazing tits now... how could I not want you?”

“Maybe after you get to feeling better, baby,” Kenzi told her. “I'd feel like I was taking advantage 'n' stuff if I went for you now, y'know? And besides, you totally need to concentrate right now. I don't want to be messing up your shit right now.”

Heidi sighed softly. “I guess you're right,” she said. “Dammit.”

Kenzi laughed. “I know, right? Now get some sleep, sugar, you need to be sharp. And you have to get your brain scrambled again later. And tomorrow, too.”

Heidi groaned. “I don't know if I can take it,” she moaned into a pillow drawn over her face.

“Sure you can,” Kenzi said, stroking her hair. “You can do anything. And it's all to make you a cheerleader, right?”

“Totally worth it,” Heidi said.

Her friend sat beside her, stroking her hair and chatting gaily about nothing, until Heidi fell asleep. She awoke later, still feeling dazed and overwhelmed, to an empty apartment. A soft but insistent knock at her door filtered into her slowly-awakening perceptions. She stood unsteadily and half-staggered to the door, where a pair of techs in their everpresent scrubs waited outside. Heidi half-groaned as she allowed herself to be led away, back to the Sensorium. The chair, and its assault of light and sound, seemed even more intense than before. Heidi normally tried to keep some kind of focus through a typical Sensorium program – this time she clung instead just to consciousness. She did not remember being dragged home or put into bed, only waking alone in her room. The clock on her phone read four a.m. The shapely blonde nearly crawled into a hot shower, then made her way into the dance studio for a quick rehearsal of her audition steps. Her legs felt like lead and responded about as quickly. She barely managed to complete the short but high-energy routine before slumping listlessly against the wall. More techs found her a short time later, just as she finished an Odwalla protein bar for her breakfast, chasing it down with a few long draws from her pink Susan G. Komen aluminum water bottle. They led her back to the Sensorium wordlessly.

It went on like that for another day – attempts to continue her normal life interrupted by long periods of brain-blasting sessions in the Sensorium and long periods of time simply lost to her perceptions. The punch-drunk Heidi finally dropped into her bed on the second day of the regimen and passed out. She found that her new body and mind only needed a few hours of sleep a night in order to feel completely rejuvenated and refreshed for her day. But now she succumbed to a comatose, dead flop for hours and hours on end. This time, thankfully, no one came to awaken her, and she slept until she woke naturally, finally felt something approaching human. She brushed her teeth in what seemed the first time in weeks, then got in a short but very satisfying workout in the gym and few flawless run-throughs of her audition routine. By the time she struck the last position of her third repetition, the leaden numbness of her ordeal in the Sensorium seemed

but a distant memory. She felt better – *younger*, even – and more full of energy, life and happiness than she ever remembered feeling.

By the time of her audition the next day, Heidi positively glowed with health and energy. A silently grim man in khakis, a polo shirt and dark glasses dropped her off early in a plain Toyota Camry, so she could show up at the door of the football stadium, dressed in bright green and looking as young, fresh and beautiful as spring wildflowers. She signed in at one of the tables, passing over her new identification – fresh from the presses at the program lab – with her bright-faced picture next to the name Heidi Elizabeth Allan, one hundred twelve pounds, five foot six, sex female. Even with her cock wrenched painfully up and back in a tugging garment designed especially to disguise it, she stretched herself out among the hundreds of other hopefuls, chatting here and there with girls she met and trying to coach them gently through their nervousness and fear. In no time, Heidi heard whispers about herself between the other girls, about how sweet and how helpful a girl she was, how beautiful and how talents and how much they hoped she made the squad. Hearing herself spoken about in such a way made Heidi swell inside with a pride and satisfaction she never knew before. It carried her through the preliminaries and into the first learned routine with no problems, making the first cut without incident.



The end of the first day found all the girls clustered against one wall of the huge auditorium, waiting breathlessly for the announcement of the second cut. A pretty young blonde named Brittany and a gorgeous amber-skinned Latina named Michelle held one hand apiece, squeezing and trembling, as the choreographer and director entered the room and

walked to the microphone.

“I just want to remind you all that everyone here is a winner. The competition was really stiff this year. Believe me when I say that you all made our decision very, very hard,” the director said. “When we call your name, please come to the front of the room. If we don't call your name, then thank you very much and we hope to see you again next year.

“Our first finalist is number eight-seven, Dawn McIntyre,” she announced. A squealing, jumping redhead with exceedingly long legs ran to the front, holding her hands over her mouth. The list went on for a while – she got to give a very heartfelt congratulatory hug to Michelle when her name was called and the young Salvadoran girl scampered to the front of the room.

After an interminably long series of names, the director finally said, “We're down to our very last name. Thanks to everybody who showed up today. Our last finalist is number forty-seven. Heidi Allan.”

Heidi smiled broadly and leapt to her feet, joining the twenty-five women at the front of the room. She offered a sympathetic smile to young Brittany, who mouthed *congratulations* to her silently through her tears. Try as she might, Heidi could not simply force the young women who did not succeed from her mind as she once could. Their tears weighed at her heart and made her own happiness bittersweet.

They milled about for a while, chatting and hugging one another, while the also-rans filtered slowly from the room. When they were at long last alone, the director and choreographer turned to them.

“Congratulations, ladies,” she said. “You are the best, but you're not quite through yet. We will only be inviting fifteen of you to camp this year, which means there are ten more of you still to be cut. The rehearsed dances and your individual dances are tomorrow, starting promptly at eight a.m. We look forward to seeing everyone tomorrow morning.”

Dismissed, an emotionally-drained but very happy Heidi went into the parking lot to find the same dour, plainly dressed driver from that morning waiting beside a dark SUV. She walked around to the passenger's side door and opened it partially, stopped by the driver's

firm hand against the door.

“Not necessary, ma'am,” the man said with clipped military politeness. “Here you go.” He passed her the keys to the vehicle.

“I'm driving?”

“This car is yours, now,” he said. “I'm to tell you it's a gift. From your future husband. You are expected back at the complex by seven o'clock. The destination is in the GPS navigation system.”

“A car? A *Mercedes*?” she marveled, noticing the logo on the grille. “For me?”

“That's what I was told, ma'am,” the driver said. “Will there be anything else, ma'am?”

“No, thanks, sweetie,” she said, placing a hand on his firm forearm, enjoying the feel of his hard, unyielding muscles in a way she never recalled feeling about a man's arm before. A brief desire to see the young man without his shirt flashed through her mind and she recoiled a little, consoling herself by imagining Mackenzi with no shirt and grateful that the same desire reared itself in her.

“Have a good night, ma'am. If you need us for any reason, all you have to do is dial star-nine on your phone and we can track you down immediately,” he said, backing away and climbing into a nearby town car with deeply tinted windows. He drove away, leaving Heidi staring mystified at the keys in her hand.

Shrugging, wondering just what else might be in store for her, she walked around and climbed into the drivers' seat of her new, very expensive car. She wondered what the car might cost her later just as she cranked the engine into a quiet, precision-engineered purr.

\* \* \*

Heidi opted out of any diversions and headed directly back to the complex for a few more run-throughs of her routine and a nice, quiet dinner with Kenzi. The brunette pressed her relentlessly for details of the audition throughout their dinner of asparagus and artichoke risotto

Heidi prepared, with a dry chablis chosen from Kenzi's small but very complete stash of wines, a green salad and boiled rosemary new potatoes.

“Not bad for a girl who couldn't, like, even boil water three months ago,” Heidi commented, dabbing her lips with a napkin.

Kenzi dug into her purse for a minute, finally holding up a long white cigarette held between two slender fingers. “D'you mind, baby?”

“Since when do you smoke?” Heidi asked.

“I always smoked, since we were teenagers, remember?” Kenzi said, ripping a match from a book and striking it alight with a sizzle.

“Yeah, I do remember that,” Heidi said. “But it's, like, really weird and stuff. I also remember that I was the one who smoked. You used to, like, ride my ass about it. I remember that, too.”

“I don't,” Kenzi said. “Weird. What else do you remember about me?”

“Everything, y'know?” Heidi said. “We've been BFF's for, like, ever. That school play we were in, the one where we both liked the same boy – what was his name?”

“Oh, God,” Kenzi laughed. “Kyle Taylor. He was *such* a douchebag.”

“A really cute douchebag,” Heidi said. “And when we got so drunk at your bat mitzvah? Remember that? I thought your mom was gonna, like, freak. She got it in her head that I was a bad influence and wouldn't, like, let us hang out or anything for, like, a month – even though the whole thing was your idea.”

“Yeah, you *so* covered for me, there,” Kenzi said.

“Remember how we met?” Heidi asked. “In the machine shop?”

Kenzi blew out a cloud of smoke into the air above them and beetled her brow. “Machine shop? What are you talking about, mama? We just moved into our new house after immigrating from Israel. You were bouncing on that trampoline and I just saw this blonde head popping up

over the privacy fence every couple seconds. You first talked to me two words at a time until I finally climbed over the fence.”

“Oh, yeah,” Heidi said, sipping wine. “That's what happened. Why do I remember a machine shop?”

“Whatevs,” Kenzi said. “So, what d'you got going on for the rest of the night?”

Heidi checked the clock on her microwave. “Well, I thought about running through my dance one more time, but I think I'm gonna, like, get up early and do that tomorrow morning. Instead I called the salon. Gonna get my nails done and my hair cut before I go, so I look my best for my audition.”

“Dunno why you're sweating that audition, baby girl,” Kenzi said airily. “You're *so* gonna get it. You've been cheering since you were in knee socks. It only makes sense for you to be a Tigerette.”

“Wish I felt that confident,” Heidi said. “But still. I thought a manicure and a trim might be a nice way to relax, y'know, like, help me unwind for a little while.”

“Totally,” Kenzi said. “I better head out and let you get some rest, sweetie, or we'll just sit here and talk all night like we always do. Go get all pretty 'n' shit and the go kick some ass tomorrow. I'm totally taking you out afterwards. Our fiancés got us both memberships to the country club, did you know that? So whether we're drowning sorrows or celebrating we're going out drinking tomorrow, okay? Love ya! Call me tomorrow when you find out, okay?”

She puffed out a final lungful of smoke, kissed Heidi very passionately but briefly, and sashayed out the door, tracing a delectable back-and-forth, up-and-down with her divine backside as she walked away. Heidi giggled, giving her little dining area a liberal blast of air freshener to rid the room of the smell of cigarette smoke, and threw her purse over one shoulder to head to the salon for some last-minute polish to her image.



Heidi thanked Maureen, the stylist, and Kathy, the manicurist profusely, tipping each of them generously from her small store of cash for staying late to help her. They worked in tandem, filing and buffing on her fingertips while washing, combing and clipping behind her. Heidi truly relished her first real experience with being pampered, even allowing herself a quick massage and pedicure before admiring herself in the mirror. Her white-gold hair shone in the lights, cut and styled to the perfect high-volume, flyaway 'cheerleader' style worn by so many of her hopeful future colleagues. Kathy glued short, square-cut extensions to her nails, making them long and glamorous, tipped in white in the classic 'French' manicure beneath several coats of gloss. Polished and primped for tomorrow, Heidi walked back to her apartment and went directly to bed, setting her bedside alarm for five a.m.

She awoke a minute or two before the alarm, laying quietly in the gloom before the chimes sounded from her little pink smartphone. Yawning and stretching, she slipped into some workout togs and trotted to the studio for a last-minute 'cram' session on her dance. Then a quick shower and nearly an hour and a half using every shred of her implanted knowledge to get her hair and makeup perfect. She stuck on false eyelashes and went heavy on the makeup, as she remembered doing before every performance or sideline show in her life, sprayed and moussed her hair into last night's flawless, high-glam style, and put on her dance outfit. Her individual dance costume hung in a plastic bag behind her front door and lay slung over one shoulder with her pink

Adidas dance bag and her purse as she twirled her keys around one finger on her way to the parking lot and the new black Mercedes SUV she still struggled to believe was hers. The drive to the stadium encountered no traffic, thankfully, and she pushed her way through the doors to get her number from the registration table at precisely seven thirty. She made her way into the auditorium and started her stretch.

“Hey,” a soft voice said, and Heidi lifted her nose from her knee in a deep hurdler’s stretch to see Michelle, the friendly little Latina from yesterday, dropping her own gear behind her. She laid a top hat and cane next to her dance bag, props for her own individual dance.

“Oh, hi, baby,” Heidi said brightly. “You ready for today?”

“I hope so,” Michelle replied. “I’m so nervous I threw up twice this morning.”

“Just relax, sweetheart,” Heidi said, offering a toothy smile. “You’re gonna do great. I just know it.”

“You are so sweet,” Michelle said. “How about you? Are you ready?”

“Baby,” Heidi replied, wrapping both hands around the sole of her foot and pulling her stretch deeper, “I’m as ready as anybody has ever been for, like, anything.”

\* \* \*

Kenzi waited in the parking lot, puffing on a cigarette and pacing nervously back and forth along the curb in her skyscraper platform shoes, as Heidi pulled up and put her car in park. She stepped out of the car with a sad, hang-dog expression.

“Wait,” Kenzi said, “you look bummed. Oh, God, did you not make it? Oh, *shit*, Heidi, those judges were assholes! You are totally the best dancer I ever...”

Heidi couldn’t contain the joyous smile as she looked up and laughed, opening her button-front shirt to reveal the gray t-shirt underneath printed with “Tigerette Training Camp Candidate” on the front. Kenzi stopped mid-sentence and squealed, gathering her friend up in a breast-

crushing hug and laying a snail-tongued, deeply arousing French kiss on her smiling lips which made Heidi's cock stiffen painfully against the restrictive panties she wore to disguise her genitalia.

“You bitch,” Kenzi laughed. “You so had me going.”

“Couldn't help it,” Heidi said. “Michelle made it, too, so I have a friend.”

“I totally knew it,” Kenzi said. “I knew you'd make it.”

“Funny, I actually kind of knew it, too,” Heidi commented. “Not sure how, but I, like, knew.”

“Cause you fucking *rock*,” Kenzi said. “Now get your ass upstairs and change. We're heading to the country club to get fucked up and eye-fuck the caddies. We bitches got to celebrate!”

Heidi obeyed, hurrying upstairs to slip into a flirtatous little blue cocktail dress and a pair of peep-toe heels. She wore her new locket – sadly devoid of pictures, she noticed – and slipped a silver heart-shaped ring around one finger for accessories. She just finished taking off the day's overdone, sideline makeup and reapplying a softer, less dramatic look and tucked a pair of white-rimmed sunglasses into her hair when Kenzi came in, wearing a daringly low-cut sheath dress in 'fuck-me' red with a matching wide-brimmed sun hat in her hand. She had a large, wrapped box with a large pink bow in both hands.

“Little present,” she said, handing it over.

“Baby, you don't need to get me presents,” Heidi protested.

“Shut up and open it,” Kenzi said. Smiling, Heidi tore the paper and opened the box, revealing a gorgeous black leather purse with gold accents.

“It's Gucci,” Kenzi said proudly. “Thought any future professional cheerleader needs some label on her shoulder. I was gonna get you Vuitton, but it's like every bitch has a Louis on her arm these days.”

“It's beautiful,” Heidi said, kissing her friend's cheek. “I love it.”

She busied herself transferring her personal items into the new designer purse from her old one. Kenzi arranged her wide-brimmed hat over her thick curls while she waited, then threaded one arm through Heidi's and escorted her into the parking lot.

\* \* \*

The table overlooked the first tee of the tour-level golf course, eliciting covetous glances from both women as they took their seats and ordered the first round of drinks. Kenzi insisted on champagne to celebrate, ordering a bottle of Dom Perignon, and Heidi ordered a frozen daiquiri as well.

Heidi tried to relax, but the day's excitement clung to her. She barely managed to sit still while waiting for the champagne. The glasses and tray arrived in the hands of a very tall, ruggedly muscular young man with a vandyke beard and full, dark hair who offered her a very mischievous, boyish smile.

"My name is Jason, I'm your server today. Are you ready to order?" the young man asked.

"What do you suggest?" Heidi asked, playing with her hair subconsciously. Her eyes kept wandering across his trim belly and to the bulge in his tailored trousers. Kenzi noticed her friend's gaze and smiled behind the lip of her crystal champagne flute knowingly.

"Are you in the mood for breakfast or lunch?" Jason asked. The tryouts had ended at ten-thirty that morning, bringing the women to the club at eleven fifteen, just at the borderline.

"I skipped breakfast," Heidi told him. "Got *way* too busy. Everything sounds good, I'm positively starving. What would you get?"

"The chef's specialty today is braised beef medallions and penne pasta in a white wine and tarragon sauce that's really good," Jason said. "It got written up in the paper last week."

"That sounds good to me," Kenzi put in. Jason wrote her order down but did not take his eyes from Heidi. "Does that sound good to you, too?"

Heidi stuck out her tongue. “Ugh, no,” she said. “Not beef. I'm vegetarian.”

*I am? Since when?* she wondered to herself in shock not betrayed by her glittering smile. *But it feels like I've always been. I decided back in high school. Because of that show I saw on veal and beef farms. I haven't eaten meat since.*



“I think the spinach and portabello omelette sounds wonderful,” Heidi went on. “Egg whites only, please. And maybe some fruit, too?”

“I'll get it right in,” he said, turning and hustling through the tables.

“Slut,” Kenzi chided, laughing softly.

“What? What did I do?” Heidi asked in genuine wonder.

“I saw you, *totally* macking on that cute waiter,” she said. “You're engaged, remember?”

“I wasn't hitting on him,” Heidi protested defensively.

“Oh, the hell you weren't,” Kenzi said, smiling naughtily. “You were so

checking out his package. And I saw you ogling his ass when he walked away. You totally want to fuck him.”

“No, I don't,” Heidi replied lamely, no real indignancy left in her.

“You're thinking about laying on your back underneath him right now,” Kenzi accused with great amusement. “Riding that cock like a rodeo queen. Bet he has a nice, big, thick one for you, too.”

Heidi lowered her eyes and blushed. “Yeah, he probably does,” she whispered. “He had thick fingers, did you see? You know what that means.”

“Wonder if he knows what to do with that tongue,” Kenzi wondered aloud. “Shit, girl, you *know* you would have a good time finding out, though.”

“God,” Heidi said, all propriety forgotten as her pent-up desires escaped her in a flood. “I want to suck his cock *so* bad right now.”

“Ask him if you can,” Kenzi said. “You aren't married yet, baby girl.”

The thought stuck in Heidi's head much more strongly than she thought it should have, playing out in any of a dozen different scenarios in her imagination. She sucked thoughtfully on a straw in her drink, loving the sensation of pulling sweet flavor through her lips that way, thinking fondly of kneeling before the young waiter, unzipping his fly and pulling out her sweet reward through the parted fabric, feeling it harden against her warm tongue. Of applying every trick she knew to coax the hot jets of sweet release out of his balls and down her waiting, hungry throat. She found herself sucking the straw more and more deeply and having trouble suppressing a throaty moan.



“You are so turned on right now,” Kenzi laughed, reaching across the table to push playfully at her friend. “I didn't mean to get you going *that* bad.”

“It's okay,” Heidi purred. “Probably good for me. Every girl needs a few dirty little secrets to take into a new marriage, right?”

“Seriously? You planning to fuck around on him?” Kenzi asked. “Before, y'know.”

“Haven't really thought about it,” Heidi confessed. “What about you?”

“Oh, *hell* yeah,” Kenzi replied. “It's weird, baby, but it almost seems like my fiancé, like, *expects* me to or some shit. I feel like I know what he's thinking and stuff, even though I haven't even met him.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” Heidi said. “I mean, I know he likes blueberries in his pancakes and I know he reads the *Wall Street Journal* every morning with breakfast. I can tell you exactly the look in his eye he gets when he wants me to go down on him and how he hates being late. How do I know all this when I don't even know what he looks like?”

“That's the program,” Kenzi said. “And besides, it's all good stuff, right?”

He's gonna be your husband and shit. That's all stuff any good wife needs to know about.”

“It's just really strange to me, sometimes,” Heidi said.

“Ooh, here comes your boyfriend again,” Kenzi teased, quirking an eyebrow. Jason arrived a moments later, a fresh round of drinks and a cup of fresh fruit on his tray.

“Your breakfast will be here in just a few minutes,” he said. “You looked like you could use some fresh drinks. Anything else I can get for you ladies?”

*A hot load in my mouth?* Heidi thought wickedly as Kenzi said, “Not right now, sugar.”

He seemed a bit disappointed at the lack of flirtation but devoured the wanton look of lust offered to him by Heidi. He backed away dutifully, his gaze still lingering on Heidi's cleavage, and disappeared back into the restaurant.

“You are such a tramp,” Kenzi teased.

“I guess I must be,” Heidi replied honestly, sipping her drink.

\* \* \*

Breakfast lived up to its four-star reputation. The women chatted gaily, watching the foursomes tee off just beyond the decorative fence, eating sparingly and spending much more time talking than paying attention to the expensive and delicious food set before them. Heidi seemed to remember, through a deep haze, a time when she cleaned her plate of every scrap of food on it, and it made her feel a bit surprised to push her plate away half-finished and still feel absolutely stuffed. Stranger still, the utter revulsion she felt just looking at the meat on her friend's plate, the grease sparkling on it literally making her stomach turn and making her want to shake Kenzi and ask how on earth she could eat that.

When the check came, Heidi laughed quietly to herself to find Jason's number scrawled on a scrap of paper underneath it. She looked at him meaningfully and tucked it into her cleavage theatrically while he

watched, making him smile and bringing a near-ridiculous expression of hopefulness to his face. Kenzi hid her knowing smile behind her latest of many glasses of champagne while he cleared the table, then lit another cigarette and leaned forward, puffing contentedly.

“*Mazel tov*, baby girl,” she said, raising her glass. “I’m so proud of you.”

“Thanks, sweetie,” Heidi replied. “This was so much fun. We need to do it again really soon. Like, make it a once-a-week thing or something.”

“Yeah,” Kenzi agreed, “but next time I’m signing us up for a tee time, too.”

“Oh, for sure,” Heidi replied. She signed the check – which would go on the country club account to be paid at the end of the month – and took a moment to recognize the rounded bubbles of handwriting as her own. It did not look familiar, even though she knew that she had written that way since grade school, dotting the *i*’s in her name with little hearts like any good cheerleader would.



She pulled a compact from her new designer purse and repaired her pink lipstick – certain, all of a sudden, that pink was her signature color – quickly, applying a fresh coat of gloss atop it to give her lips the wet, sexy look she loved. Across from her, Kenzi set her cigarette down in the ashtray and did the same, even running a puff over her nose to even out the matte finish of her face. Heidi stowed the silver Montblanc pen engraved with her name back in her purse and reclined in the chair, crossing her ankles, full and happy and more than a little tipsy.

“It's only one o'clock,” Kenzi said, looking at her phone. “I don't have anything going on until tonight, back at the program. What do you want to do until then?”

Heidi looked her sexy friend up and down, not caring if it was the alcohol or her own desire which led her to say, unequivocally, “You.”

THE TWO WOMEN BANGED HARD against the door of Kenzi's apartment, locked in a desperate kiss, as they tried to manage the dual tasks of foreplay and key-finding with limited success. Alcohol lowered inhibitions already just above propriety to start with, and they tore at each others' clothing and groped at one another's breasts, pulling hair and delivering none-too-gentle bites and scratches as their desire built even higher.

Kenzi initially resisted her friend's initial forays at seduction, opting instead for something more sedate like shopping or a massage. Heidi attempted to comply, going into her apartment to change clothes into something more suited for a day out, a light cropped sweater and a casual denim skirt with wedge sandals and most importantly, the absence of the restrictive underwear which held her cock in check from earlier that morning. She dressed quickly and waited in the hall for her friend to emerge. Kenzi came out, wearing a similar ensemble but hers all designer labels. The Bebe corset top and leather mini-skirt clung to her every mouthwatering curve. Any banked desire Heidi managed to curb in an attempt to settle down and move on to a more mundane pursuit flashed immediately back to wildfire, and Kenzi barely had time to sling her purse over one shoulder before Heidi attacked her, pushing her physically against the wall and pinning her wrists beside her shoulders, pressing a hungry kiss on her friend's plump, glossy lips.

They made out in the hallway, not caring who saw, for a long time before

they broke apart, and the unspoken conversation between them ended definitively with a tacit green light for sex. The kiss resumed in force, leaving the two women desperately trying to re-open the door which had slammed shut behind Kenzi upon her exit and locked automatically.

Once inside, Kenzi took charge a bit more, pulling Heidi's hair back roughly to plant hard kisses on her friend's exposed throat, making Heidi gasp and moan. Kenzi turned her friend harshly in place, pushing her over the back of the sofa and flipping Heidi's short skirt up over her pert bottom.



Fingers threaded in Heidi's lush blonde hair, Kenzi moistened her other hand with a wet tongue and rubbed the fluid around the head of her erect cock and into the warm crack between Heidi's cheeks, positioning the head against her friend's tight rectum and applying gentle pressure. Something in Heidi's mind rebelled at the thought of receiving anal sex – something told her that wasn't her thing – but she floated too far gone on the waves of arousal to listen. Instead, she pushed back against her friend's thighs, hearing her gasp as Mackenzi's cock slipped through the tight sphincter and sank into the warm, tight depths until her pelvis came to rest against Heidi's tailbone.

“Is that good, baby?” Heidi whispered throatily.

“You feel incredible,” Kenzi whispered back, reaching around to give Heidi's breasts a firm, teasing squeeze through the fuzzy material of her sweater. Heidi took a brief moment to let the pain of penetration pass – a not-inconsiderable amount of pain, but easily overcome by desire – and to acclimate to the foreign invader in her backside before starting a slow back-and-forth rhythm on Kenzi's cock.

“You're fucking me,” Heidi said. “You're really fucking me.”

“Yeah,” Kenzi said. “You like it?”

“Mmm-hmm,” Heidi replied. “I *love* being fucked. Fucked like a girl.”

“I want you to do it to me next,” Kenzi said. “I want to feel it inside me.”

“It's perfect,” Heidi breathed. “Fuck me, baby. Use me and then cum in my mouth. I want it.”

Kenzi answered by grabbing Heidi's shoulders and picking up the pace, her thighs slapping noisily against Heidi's. The blonde began to grunt and squeal in a mixture of pleasure and pain, rocking her hips up and down to increase her partner's pleasure. Kenzi responded with a deep-throated moan and an aggressive series of thrusts into Heidi's ass.

“Shit,” Kenzi panted. “I'm gonna cum. I can't hold back.”

“I don't want you to hold back,” Heidi said, slipping Kenzi's cock out of her ass and dropping to her knees to jerk the slippery member with her hands until several small but strong jets of hot and bitter semen launched into her open mouth, bathing her tongue and sliding down her throat. A familiar, drug-like euphoria spread through Heidi's brain and she smiled happily. The high from her training still existed.

Kenzi sagged against the couch a little. “Oh, wow,” she said. “Now do me.”

The tall brunette bent and slid over the back of her sofa, stepping out of her skirt laying on the floor and kicking off her heels to allow Heidi

better access. She knelt and covered Heidi's slightly longer and thicker cock with a thick coating of saliva before resuming her 'ready' position, moaning deeply and passionately as Heidi stood behind her, perched on her platform sandals, and pushed gently against her friend's rear opening.

The pressure built until she finally passed through the tight ring of muscle and into her friend's depths. Kenzi squealed, not expecting the sharp pain, but Heidi kept her cock still inside her friend until she could adjust to the feeling. Heidi set a slow, easy rhythm and expected to hear more of the moans and grunts from before and jumped a bit with surprise to hear, instead, a convulsive sob.

“Kenzi? Are you okay, baby? Do you need me to stop?”

“No,” the brunette sniffled.

“What's wrong?”

“Nothing,” Kenzi replied. “I just *really* feel like a girl right now. Like it's the first time. It just made me kinda emotional, that's all. Don't you *dare* stop.”

Heidi quickened her pace, feeling something stir deep in her midsection. Building slowly, but insistently, driving her forward into wildness. Her hair whipped around her face as she sawed into her friend with utter abandon, squealing and growling. Below her, Kenzi grunted and screamed, pushing back onto Heidi's length and making them meet in loud slaps. A light sheen of sweat covered them both by the time Heidi could bear no more, grabbing her friend's hips roughly and driving as deep as she could, spending herself in deep jets inside her friend until she collapse, breathless, against Kenzi's smooth back. Heidi buried her face in the soft, fragrant curls and pressed soft little kisses against the back of Kenzi's neck as the brunette reached behind and gently massaged the back of Heidi's neck.

“Wow,” Kenzi breathed. “That was... fucking wow.”

“You're so beautiful,” Heidi whispered.

“So are you, baby,” her friend replied.

They slid onto the couch and curled up around one another, caressing and kissing softly, whispering endearments to one another and luxuriating in the divine afterglow of their frantic coupling. Heidi lost track of time, not caring how long they spent in their cooling, soft tangle of limbs.

“We should do this more often,” Kenzi announced.

“You mean, like, before we're married?”

“I mean all the time,” Kenzi corrected. “I don't fucking care if I'm married or not. I love you.”

“You love me, or... you *love* me?” Heidi asked.

“I *love* you,” Kenzi clarified, kissing her gently. “I want us to be a permanent thing. Girlfriends. I don't know how I know, but somehow I don't think my husband is gonna mind.”

“Yeah,” Heidi said. “I think that idea will turn him on. I think maybe he will, like, want to watch and stuff. Maybe you might have to fuck him sometimes, or I might have to fuck your husband every now and then. But *totally* worth it if that means we can be together.”

“Yeah,” Kenzi agreed. “So do you like that idea, baby? Being my girlfriend?”

“Does it matter that I'm not Jewish?” Heidi teased.

Kenzi nipped playfully at Heidi's breast. “Only if we want to get married, *bubula*. Then you have to convert. It's okay, though. I can totally help you, there.”

“I need to get up,” Heidi said suddenly, seized by a sudden burst of energy. “I should go home and change. I need to call Julia and tell her I made the squad, I need to work out...”

“Yeah, I know. Busy little bee,” Kenzi giggled. “That's the Heidi I love, right there. Always going.”

“Like the Energizer Bunny,” Heidi laughed. “Hey, can you hand me my purse, sweetie? I need to check my phone.”

Kenzi passed it over and Heidi paged through a few random text messages – uniform fittings for the squad, rehearsal schedules, an invitation to drinks from Michelle – until she found one from Julia, maked with a red exclamation point denoting urgency. She opened it and gasped.

“What is it?” Kenzi demanded. “Bad news?”

“No, not bad,” Heidi stammered, sitting up. “But I have to go, baby. Right now. It's my kids. They're ready. I'm going to get them this afternoon.”

\* \* \*

No amount of training or artificial conditioning prepared Heidi enough for the sense of utter fear and overwhelming nervousness she felt walking on her wedge sandals down to the lab on the first floor. Heidi didn't even know if she *wanted* to be a mother, much less if she would like her children or they her. She would rather have faced a dozen cheerleading auditions or Miss Teen USA finals than this.

A strong sense of connection drove her forward, though, an unquestionable feeling of knowing these new people she went to meet were once *inside* her. She pushed through the door of the laboratory and saw Fujiwara inside, hunched over a computer. He looked up as she entered.

“Ah, Miss Allan,” he said, smiling. “They're playing outside. I think you will be most pleased with my work. They are remarkable.”

“They're healthy? Nothing went wrong?” Heidi rasped through a throat gone suddenly dry.

“Nothing whatsoever,” Fujiwara said with great pride, his chest swelling. “They are perfect. We regressed the boy to three years old. He will grow into the model of physical perfection. An athletic masterpiece. The girl is five – we did not change her age – and will be very similar to you in every way. Genetically suited to dance and gymnastics, a potential

athlete every bit as promising as her brother.”

He gestured to the window. Outside, in a small but very well-appointed playground, two blonde-haired children ran and played boisterously. Both ran and jumped exceedingly fast and far for their ages.

Heidi's heart leapt at the sight of them, making her breath catch in her throat and her pulse flutter.

“Would you like to meet them, Miss Allan?” Fujiwara asked softly.

“I'm frightened,” Heidi breathed.

“You needn't be,” Fujiwara assured her, placing a warm hand on her shoulder. “You are their mother. They have been conditioned to your image and your scent. We attuned them to your pheromones. And both of them have told me repeatedly how much they look forward to your coming. They are dying to meet you.”

“Take me to them, please,” Heidi said, threading her fingers through the doctor's and letting him lead her up a small staircase to the exterior door. She squeezed his hand in anticipation over the four or five steps to the edge of the small gravel bed marking the boundary of the playground.

The girl noticed her first. She threw her arms wide. “Mama!” she squealed – how short a time ago she had only spoken Korean – and barreled into Heidi's arms. Heidi only just had time enough to squat down and spread her hands wide, the little blonde missile moved so quickly on her stubby little legs.

The boy arrived just moments behind his sister and launched himself into her embrace. Heidi, not knowing what to expect, could *never* have expected what she felt at that moment. She nearly trembled from the effort of containing the surging wave of love and fierce protection that arose in her, blacking out everything else in her mind. Nothing she had ever known – not cheerleading, not Kenzi, not the high from the hot white jets – could even approach the titanic, nearly desperate sense of love and devotion flooding through her.

“Oh, my God,” she breathed, pressing kiss after kiss into the little warm

blonde heads beneath her.

“Mama I have one, two cars,” the boy crowed happily.

“You do? *Two* cars? Can Mama see them?” she asked happily.

“Yeah,” he said, running full-tilt back to the playground.

“Mama, look, I have a new Dora backpack,” the girl said happily, displaying the backpack on her narrow shoulders.

“It's so pretty,” Heidi said, unable to contain her happy smile. “It's pink! Pink is my favorite!”

“It's my favorite, too,” the girl said.

“Mama, Mama, look!” the boy said, jumping up and down in the sandbox in a roiling maelstrom of flying sand. “I can make it snow!”

“That's great, sweetheart,” Heidi said. “But don't get all dirty, please.”

“Mama, Dr. Fujiwara said you had something for us,” the girl said.

“He did? What?” Heidi said.

“He said you had our names, Mama,” the little boy yelled, dancing around her in a happy circle.

Heidi gathered both children up into a tight hug, one arm around each, pressing kiss after ecstatic kiss into each one of their cheeks in turn.

“Let's see,” Heidi said from the midst of rapturous happiness. “Names for Mama's beautiful babies. What can Mama pick that will suit the pair of you?”

The boy giggled. “I want to be named Yo Gabba Gabba,” he announced.



“I think you should have a strong name,” Heidi said, “for a strong little man. Something that's going to sound, like, really great for a quarterback, 'cause I know you're gonna be a Heismann quarterback.”

“Yo Gabba Gabba is a good quarterback,” the boy protested.

“I like Scott,” Heidi said. “Do you like Scott for a name?”

“Yeah,” he said. “My name is Scott! Scott, Scott, Scott, Scott, Scott...” He danced away in wild circles, throwing his arms up in the air and spinning in circles until he fell onto his backside, laughing.

The girl remained a bit more subdued. “What about my name, Mama?”

“Well, I saved your name for last because it's so special,” Heidi whispered to her. “We need a beautiful name for the most beautiful girl in the whole world.”

“No, you're the most beautiful,” the girl replied, kissing Heidi's cheek. Heidi melted inside.

“More beautiful and more precious than diamonds,” Heidi mused.  
“Maybe that's it! Do you know where to get the prettiest diamonds in the world?”

“Where?” she asked, bright-eyed.

“Tiffany's,” Heidi said. “You could be Tiffany.”

“That's *so* pretty,” the girl said. “I love that name, Mama.”

“And I love *you*, Tiffany,” Heidi said, kissing her soft cheek. Heidi looked up hopefully at Fujiwara. “Would those names be okay?”

The young Oriental doctor nodded. “The choice is yours,” he said. “I will start the paperwork immediately. What are your choices for middle names?”

“Scott's middle name will be Richard,” Heidi said, seeing a dim picture of a smiling, gray-haired man – a grandfather, perhaps – from a distant and nearly-forgotten life. “And I think Tiffany's middle name should be something pretty. Like Nicolette. Tiffany Nicolette.”

“I will have birth certificates and immunization records by the end of the day,” Fujiwara said. “Will that be all, Miss Allan?”

Heidi couldn't bear the thought of leaving. “Can I stay here? I don't want to leave them.”

“Of course,” Fujiwara said. “They're your children.”

*My children*, Heidi thought. Something inside her heart seemed to jell and set hard. She reluctantly released Tiffany from her embrace and let the girl run back to the playground to play with her brother, sitting there in the warm sunshine dappling through the trees for a blissful, maternal eternity, all other considerations for her day forgotten for the moment.

\* \* \*

When Heidi returned, her apartment had expanded to include a large, brightly-painted room for her kids, full of toys and stuffed animals. The birth certificates sat on her table, naming her as the biological mother for Scott Richard Williams and Tiffany Nicolette Williams. Another, smaller envelope held pictures of the two as babies, held in Heidi's happy arms. Everything from first birthdays to births to even

sonograms.

Her first exposure to her new surname – her *married* name – took her aback for a moment as the thought of being *Mrs. Heidi Williams* sunk in happily into a heart and mind already full to bursting with fluttering happiness. She made a quick dinner for herself and her children – *my children*, she giggled happily. *I'm a mom, a real mom* – and sat with them in utter content as they ate, telling their innocent and pointless baby stories to Heidi's delight.

She took them to the gym shortly after dinner, letting them play and frolic in the little day-care room which now adjoined the workout room where nothing had been before while she pushed herself back into her exercise regimen. She loved how the kids came out and tried to learn her exercises with her, but her protective instinct kicked into high gear among the dangerous equipment and she hovered, stopping them from doing things which might injure or strain. Her workout took much longer than usual, but she didn't mind, ending with a frantic, squealing dance which left them all collapsed on the mat, laughing breathlessly.

Heidi took *her* kids home and put them to bed afterwards, helping with pajamas and drinks of water and several stories before the little eyes closed and sleep took them. Heidi spent a little time in quick clean-up, trying to keep her house neat as best she could in the face of the energetic little tornadoes now suddenly an integral part of her.

She sat on the couch tired but satisfied, hoping her skills as a mother measured up and wondering how she would manage to keep all the balls in the air. Motherhood, her new cheerleading career, her fitness and her new affair with Kenzi. Even with her genetically decreased need for sleep, it seemed like far too tall an order for one person.

She snuggled herself into bed next to Ralph – thank heavens they let her keep Ralph when she moved into her new place – still worried, a short time later. Unremembered but troubled dreams descended on her overworked brain, leaving her restless and overwrought all night, her thoughts drifting constantly to the other room, where every noise or movement awoke her into protective alertness.

\* \* \*

The answer to her worries came in the most unlikely form – Kenzi met her the next morning coming out of the dance studio after spending a happy hour teaching ballet to Tiffany while Scott played with toy cars in the corner. A plump, smiling woman followed her.

“Hey, li'l mama,” Kenzi said to Tiffany, kneeling down to give the girl a fond kiss, wiping away the traces of lipstick she left on the smooth cheek.

“Aunt Kenzi!” Scott bellowed as he barreled headlong into her. Kenzi laughed and mussed his hair.

“Hey, baby,” Heidi said as she rose, kissing her girlfriend and embracing her warmly. “Who's this?”

“I got to thinking after you left yesterday,” Kenzi explained. “About how even little Miss Organized like you might get, like, run down and crazy with all this shi- I mean *stuff* you got to do. So I talked to Jill about it and she hooked me up with her. Heidi, this is Karen. She's a nanny.”

“Hi,” Heidi said. “A nanny?”

“Not full-time or live-in,” Karen said. “I'm one of the maternity coaches here at the center. I've been working with program for years and I was starting to think about moving on to something different. As you can imagine, the program isn't too keen on letting people run free after working here. But maybe as a consultant, who helps with other people's kids. Are you interested?”

“I dunno,” Heidi said. “I mean, I just got them.”

“I understand,” Karen said. “I helped design your maternal instincts, so I understand *very* well, actually. And I have children of my own. They're grown, now, but I remember how motherhood feels. I don't mean to replace you or take any time with them away from you. But you have certain expectations to meet, Heidi, and I can help free you up. Once you're with your husband, you have the options of daycare and school. But for now, while you're getting set up, you could use me.”

“I guess I could,” Heidi said.

“Why don't we start small,” Karen suggested. “Let me have an hour or so. See if they like me.”

Heidi turned to her children. “What do you think, babies? Do you want to go play with Miss Karen?”

“I was going to go build towers with blocks,” Karen said. “Do you guys want to help me?”

“Can I, Mama?” Tiffany asked. Scott already held Karen's hand, describing the tower he planned to build at high volume.

“Sure, baby,” Heidi said. “Go have fun. I'll see you after lunch, okay?”

“Bye,” Tiffany said. “I love you, Mama.”

“I love you, too, Mama,” Scott shouted.

“Hugs and kisses,” Heidi said, squatting low to receive them and lavishing her parting affection on them before they went off, chatting happily with Karen, down the hall of the upper level.

“Wow,” Kenzi said, watching them go. “Makes me almost want to be a mommy.”

“You should,” Heidi said. “I can't describe it. It's the most incredible feeling.”

“Maybe later, baby,” Kenzi said. “I came by to see if you wanted breakfast.”

“Yeah, I'm *totally* starving,” Heidi said. “Want me to make something?”

“Actually, Jill said we could use the old behavior labs where we used to live,” Kenzi said naughtily. “Maybe you and I could share one of the old feeding tubes? I never got my fix yesterday after you fucked me, after all.”

“Let's go,” Heidi said, swatting Kenzi's butt playfully to get her on her way.

They dropped out of their clothes as soon as the door to the lab swished shut, kissing each other and fondling each other's cocks with long-nailed fingers. The lab, formerly Kenzi's cell, lay in the midst of a refurbishing or something – the tile sections on the walls stood removed and open, revealing circuitry and machinery beneath. A red pattern rug lay on the floor and the rubber cock on its stand lay nearby, still connected to its sconce in the wall by wires and tubes.

Kenzi lit a cigarette from her purse and took Heidi by the hand, leading her into the disassembled room, stepping carefully around removed machinery and wires and drawing her down to lay on the floor. They kissed and caressed one another for a while, then settled down to the happy business of licking and stroking the big black member, passing it back and forth between one another happily, watching the other's technique. Kenzi sucked at the enormous cock like a starving woman, moaning throatily as she pumped her head up and down in a billowing of thick curls, whispering dirty little endearments in Hebrew as she paused for breaths. Heidi, on the other hand, performed more submissively, pleading for the explosion of fluid instead of commanding, mewling softly in her throat instead of Kenzi's aggressive growl.

When the cock finally exploded, it bucked in Kenzi's hand like a live thing, spraying them both in an astonishing amount of the synthetic cum. A thick jet crossed Heidi's cheek and into her eyelashes, making her squint and back away, giggling. Kenzi swallowed as much as she could, then offered more of the spurting fluid to her friend and lover. Heidi fastened her lips over the head and took as much as she could, but the overflow still leaked from her lower lip to splash over her naked breasts.

“It must be broken or something,” Kenzi giggled. “It never gave that much before.”

“Oh, yeah,” Heidi said, feeling the first wave of euphoric high pass through her. “That's what I wanted. God, that feels good.”

Kenzi playfully licked a little bit of the residue from Heidi's breast. “It seems, like, more powerful,” she said. “The high, I mean. It's hitting me really fucking hard for some reason.”



“Yeah,” Heidi agreed, her speech slurring. “I should be okay, though. I think I just need a little nap.”

The two women nestled next to one another, trying to talk and enjoy one another, but the high overwhelmed them quickly. They never even noticed the teams of technicians, in their scrubs and rubber gloves, who came and took them away.

\* \* \*

“Where's Mama?” Tiffany asked plaintively, looking at the door for the hundredth time. Karen knew she could use the program to distract the child if the insistent pleas continued past her ability to bear, but the young girl had only just imprinted on her mother, and such separation anxiety came as no surprise to the technician.

“She's very busy right now, angel,” Karen said placatingly. “She's with the doctors right now, getting fixed up for later. Is it okay to stay with me for a while? I promise we will have lots of fun.”

The little girl returned her attention to the Barbie doll – dressed as a

cheerleader, Karen noticed wryly, and a very astute replica of her mother – and helped Karen calm her brother, who ran amok around the room in an endless surge of toddler energy. Karen made a note to inform the program managers to perhaps decrease the young man's manic exuberance, both to make him easier to control and also to ease the strain on his mother. Tiffany took to the role of surrogate mother easily, however. Karen thought the maternal instinct showing so strongly from Heidi might have been passed genetically to her daughter in the transformation process. Heidi proved to be a natural at mothering, and her daughter seemed to be following right along. *There might be a paper here*, Karen thought academically.

Neither for the first nor the last time, Karen's thoughts wandered to the surgical suite upstairs where Heidi lay under anesthesia, intubated and unaware, while skilled doctors worked a procedure close to wizardry on her, speaking only in the short, clipped medical *patois* they favored.



Karen knew, academically, what they did on those operating tables, separate teams working on Kenzi and Heidi at the same time. Using the testes which had migrated up into the midsection naturally during the transformation process as anchors, the doctors installed a uterus, vagina

and clitoris force-grown from clone tissue in a lab over the last month. A breakthrough new drug caused the nerves to graft themselves onto the old stubs left from the surgical removal of the penis and its associated glands, leaving behind a brand-new and perfectly functioning set of female genitals. Although the teams could not master the science behind fertility, since the testes were not replaced with ovaries, only mutated pharmaceutically to produce the requisite estrogen and progesterone in a monthly cycle, the uterus could support a pregnancy if a fetus were to be implanted artificially. The true miracle, Karen thought, was the speed at which the clone tissue – using undifferentiated stem cells – would graft seamlessly to the native tissue. Heidi and Kenzi would heal in days, without scarring. No one would ever be able to tell they had been born any other way. And the new genitalia grew according to specifications provided by the future husbands, designed to be the perfect depth and tightness for their cocks. The new women would be a 'perfect fit' for their husbands in every sense of the word. And the clitoral sensitivity provided buried the needle. These women would cum at the drop of a hat, Karen mused. *We should all be so lucky. Maybe I should volunteer myself.*

Karen snapped herself from her imaginings with an effort and returned to the present, re-focusing on the coloring book she shared with Tiffany.

The girl looked at her measuringly. “Are you worried about my Mama?” she asked.

“Not worried, pumpkin,” she said soothingly. “But I was just thinking about her, yes.”

“Is she okay?” Scott asked.

“I'm sure of it,” Karen told him. “She will be more okay than she ever was before, once the doctors finish what they're working on. I guarantee it.”

\* \* \*

Heidi stirred, whimpering softly into the lush curtain of her soft blonde hair. A strong but gentle hand grasped her shoulder and kept her from sitting.

“It's okay, Heidi. Just relax,” a kindly female voice said softly.

Heidi kept her eyes closed tightly, knowing that allowing the harsh light in would make her sick. “Who're you?” she mumbled.

“I'm Dr. Kellerman,” the voice responded. “I'm just here to examine you.”

Strong hands manipulated her legs, fastening them into some kind of apparatus that lifted her knees and separated her thighs. Cold air struck her nether regions, making her shiver.

“This may be a little cold, honey, I'm sorry. Necessary evil,” Dr. Kellerman said. “Now, let's get a little peek inside, there, shall we?”



“Inside?” Heidi said, suddenly alarmed. Her eyes snapped open to find herself perched on the edge of a table with her legs up in metal stirrups. The cold tip of a gynecological speculum nosed against her pelvis, in the center of what Heidi felt sure must have been her scrotum. She gasped when the speculum met no resistance and slid deep inside her, looked down and saw the metal implement disappearing slowly into a perfectly adorable little pussy.

“Oh, my God,” Heidi breathed. “My cock.”

“Not any more,” Dr. Kellerman laughed. “I'm no expert – wait, yes I am, the diploma says so – but I'm pretty sure I am *not* looking at a cock. You're gonna feel a little bit of pressure, honey.”

She extended the speculum and Heidi hissed with pain, trying just to wrap her head around the feeling of expansion *inside her body*, a feeling for which she felt as much fear as she did curiosity.

Kellerman clicked the speculum shut and withdrew it, leaving a strange, chilly emptiness inside Heidi. “Absolutely perfect,” the doctor said brightly. “All pretty and pink. I'm gonna let you have a day or two to heal up, Miss Allan, and then I want to see you again for a full work up, okay?”

“Um, okay,” Heidi said. “How did this happen? I wasn't like this before.”

“You had to know it was coming, though, sweetheart,” Dr. Kellerman said, dropping her instruments on a tray and stripping off her blue exam gloves. “You can always request a little readjustment time in the Sensorium if it's that hard to stomach.”

“Maybe if I just took a few minutes,” Heidi said. “Do you need anything else?”

“No, Miss Allan, we're all done,” she said. “Get dressed and take as much time as you need.”

The doctor withdrew from the room quietly, leaving Heidi alone. The blonde cheerleader slipped into clothing she could not recall bringing, a little pink tank dress with black trim and black, strappy platform sandals. She could barely manage to keep her eyes or fingers away from the strange, warm *absence* between her legs, sitting on the edge of the little unmade hospital bed and just taking a long moment to examine herself, exploring with fingers and the little compact mirror from her purse, afraid to touch the sensitive little nub at the apex of the thick, moist labia and utterly terrified to use a finger to explore inside.

A small monitor on the wall flickered to life, showing Heidi the glowingly beautiful face of Julia, not seen in weeks. “Hello, beautiful,” she said warmly.

"I can't believe this," she said distractedly, looking down at the petite little womanly pucker between her lips beneath its tiny thatch of golden fur. "Look, Julia. Look what they did."

"It suits you," Julia said. "The last little piece of the puzzle."

Heidi looked up in shock. "You mean it? I'm done?"

"Oh, there are a few more little formalities, here and there. One or two loose ends to tie up," Julia said. "But we've sent word to your fiancé to save the date. You're getting married in two weeks."

"And Kenzi?"

"She's fine. Resting comfortably," Julia said. "We took the liberty of booking two adjoining wedding halls. Your wedding and Kenzi's will be right next door to one another."

"I'm not sure I'm ready," Heidi said.

"Maybe, maybe not," Julia said. "But the time has come. You need to go out and start your life."

"I'm scared," Heidi told her honestly, in a very small and girlish voice. "I don't want to go."

"Go home," Julia counseled. "Take a bath. Explore your new body. Play with your kids and be with your friend. Think about things. This is happening, Heidi. You have to make your peace with the idea. You have everything you need. You're ready."

"I hope you're right," Heidi said.

"I am," Julia told her. "I know it."

HEIDI FELT THE SAME POWERFUL connection to her children she always did when she collected them from Karen's little play-room, but her distraction kept her consigned to simply going through the motions as she played with them, made their dinner and put them to bed. She

decided not to call Kenzi – sure that the statuesque brunette would be as preoccupied with her vast new adjustment as Heidi was herself – and instead just ran a steaming hot bath, lowering her flawless body into the fragrant suds with a pent-up sigh of relief.

Her thoughts whirled as the hot water eased the kinks and stresses from her muscles. The training she received since her imprisonment erased much of the life before and made it seem distasteful to say the least simply to think about, but the memories of being a young man in his prime still surfaced from time to time. Nothing from that life could have prepared the wide-eyed young professional cheerleader for what she experienced now. Her bright, effervescent personality, no matter how exhaustively and painstakingly constructed, struggled to stay positive in the face of such sudden and sweeping changes. A new career, an impending marriage, a new lover and best friend, two unfamiliar children and the accompanying hurricane-force feelings of love and protection they brought, and now a completely alien feminine mound between her legs where only a cock dwelt prior to that afternoon.

*At least now I won't feel so freaked out by liking guys,* Heidi thought, remembering the young waiter from the country club and how terrified she felt at the thought of the intimacy she so ardently desired with him, all stemming from the cock between her legs which no longer served as an impediment.

She tried to think further along into the sea of her life-altering adjustments but could not seem to tear her mind away from the taut belly and tempting glimpses of an elaborate tattoo at the young waiter's wrist, covered by his long-sleeved dress shirt. The thick, muscular legs and the *very* interesting bulge in the front of the dress slacks. The boyish smile full of mischief and promise. The thick dark hair begging to have fingers run through it.

Without even realizing it, Heidi jumped at the feeling of her long-nailed fingers pressing gently against the swollen, yearning nub of her clitoris and feeling a jolt of purest pleasure drift up her spine and cause her breath to catch.

Images of the young waiter continued through her mind. Deep, passionate kisses while her long and slender fingers struggled with the buttons on his shirt, finally ripping them away and exposing his

chiseled, athletic torso. Sinking to her knees and sucking his cock to breathless rigidity, then laying back beneath him, feeling the blunt head of his swollen cock pressing against the entrance to her pussy.

Her legs parted more, her fingers migrated downwards. Wetness not entirely from her bathwater coated her fingertips and required only the most slight pressure to part the hot velvet flesh. She slid her first two fingers – careful of her long fingernails on the beyond-sensitive flesh – in, deeper and deeper, moaning deep in her throat, until her palm came to rest on the swollen point of her clitoris. Her free hand teased her nipples to fierce points of hungry pleasure.

The visions in her fevered mind seemed at the same time alien and familiar – looking up at a lover instead of down, legs spread wide and open instead of together, bucking and writhing instead of thrusting. The almost-painful bounce of her breasts in time with his thrusts, the feminine squeals and moans from her throat instead of guttural, masculine panting and grunts.

Something strange built in her, starting from her innermost core and radiating outwards. A little chilling tingle, woven into the mind-melting pleasure she felt from her fingers against her clitoris and her sensitive inner walls. It spiraled out of her in expanding waves, taking over her hands and her mind, pushing her to frantic, hungry new rhythms. Her fingers slid wetly in and out, all semblance of gentleness and tenderness forgotten, and her eyes closed as her head tipped back, a rising arpeggio of breathless squealing screams escaping her throat.



Heidi could never have expected, much less prepared for, the flood that ripped through her consciousness next. She screamed – no longer even caring if she woke the kids – and thrashed, shuddering and bucking her hips, feeling the painful but delicious scratch of her manicure against the hard lump of her cervix. Clinging wetness flowed down her fingers and inner thighs to mix with the bathwater. She bit her bottom lip hard enough to hurt in an attempt to stifle her cries.

The feeling ebbed away slowly, leaving little clinging streamers of pleasure here and there throughout her body. No longer the feeling of the entire world of sensation concentrating in a cock and balls, this pleasure seemed to last an eternity and involved her entire body. She came from her toenails and every strand of blonde hair. And no creeping lethargy afterwards. Her appetite seemed to grow from its own satisfaction and she wanted more. Her fingers slowed to spare herself overload from an increased sensitivity but did not stop, driving her forward again in a much shorter amount of time to a second, third and even a fourth screaming climax, leaving her wrung out and blissfully exhausted in the cooling water. Curiously, she tasted her own juices by sucking on a finger gone pruny from immersion deep within her wet interior and found the taste delightful, like honeyed strawberries and salty musk.

“Jesus,” she breathed.

If her husband could make her feel *anything* like that on a regular basis...

She started organizing how to pack in her mind before she even finished bathing. Curling up in her bed next to the comforting warmth of Ralph, she imagined for the first time crawling in bed next to her new husband, satisfied and comfortably sore between her legs from his ministrations, soaking up his warmth and safety and sleeping peacefully wrapped around him, her fingers in his hair and her cheek against his rising and falling chest.

And for the first time since her transformation began, Heidi Allan found herself looking very much forward to being a married woman.

\* \* \*

The next few days passed in a busy blur. Rehearsals for the training camp began, leaving her kids in the care of Karen every morning while Heidi learned her routines and worked out in the gym as she never had before. Her few meager possessions packed away quickly into boxes, dwarfed by the boxes full of toys, bedding and clothes for her kids.

Heidi made more room in her schedule for Scott and Tiffany, taking time to play with them and read to them every afternoon. She contented herself with two workouts – one in the morning and another before dinner – and the second usually involved her children, running and screaming wildly. She smiled with pride to see that Tiffany took to Zumba and other dance workouts like a duck to water, mimicking the moves with an unnerving accuracy for a four-year-old. Scott was much more of a lost cause – just whirling around and jumping, screaming and falling on the floor to roll around – but Heidi loved that every bit as much.

Kenzi – now insatiably horny now that she possessed a pussy of her own and explored it as thoroughly as Heidi had, that first night – came over nearly every night after dinner to play with the kids before bedtime, reading stories with them and bringing little gifts she found here and there. The children adored her and looked forward to her visits excitedly. Heidi did as well, but for different reasons – reasons usually expressed later, after Tiffany and Scott went to bed, behind the closed doors of the bedroom or bathroom.

It seemed such a short little idyll, painfully brief, before the burly moving men came and packed the stacked boxes in her living room into a truck outside, leaving the furnished apartment empty and ready for the next man-turned-woman to move in and await her marriage to another rich stranger.

She left her children playing downstairs with Kenzi, ready to be buckled into the twin car-seats which appeared in the back seat of her Mercedes, while she went back upstairs to drop her keys on the dining table as instructed. A small box awaited her, along with a short handwritten note – “The final brushstroke on the masterpiece. Love, Julia” – on the table. She pried the lid up on the box to reveal a breathtaking engagement ring crowned by an enormous, three-carat diamond. Smiling wistfully, Heidi slid the huge rock onto her left ring finger and admired it at arm's length for a moment, sparkling in the dimmed lights of the apartment.

“Yes, Mr. Williams,” she whispered to the empty air. “I *will* marry you.”

She giggled girlishly, blowing a kiss to her huge sparkling diamond, and scampered downstairs in a spectacle of jiggling boobs and toothy fifty-yard-line smile.

\* \* \*

The house on the four-acre lot in the high-end neighborhood where the moving van stopped took Heidi's breath away. A massive house in a postmodern Victorian style, with enormous dormer windows and a columned front porch, stood nestled between a stand of enormous, hundred-year-old oaks. A circular drive led to the tall front door.

“This is gorgeous,” she squealed, snapping a picture with her phone and texting it immediately to Kenzi. “Look at our new house, babies! Isn't it *beautiful?*”

“It's so big,” Scott commented, pointing with a stubby little finger.

“I like the trees,” Tiffany added.

“Let's go inside,” Heidi said excitedly, turning in her seat to unbuckle their safety straps. They ran past the lumbering movers opening the

back door of their truck and Heidi fumbled her new key into the brightly-polished lock, throwing the door open into a huge tiled foyer.

They spent a glorious hour just exploring around the slow stream of slow-moving workers unloading box after box into the luxurious house. The downstairs foyer led into a huge sitting room, perfect for entertaining, looking out over a perfectly-manicured back yard with an Olympic-sized swimming pool and nearby hot tub and sauna and a fenced-in tennis court. A detached garage and what looked like a separate gym and dance studio occupied its own special outbuilding as well. An enormous, restaurant-style kitchen complete with stainless-steel appliances and polished granite countertops sat just off the main room on one side, and a huge media room with a seventy-four inch flatscreen television and billiards table – which Heidi naughtily thought she couldn't *wait* to get fucked atop – and a giant carpeted playroom for the kids on the other side. Upstairs she found the master bedroom, easily the size of the foyer, with a four-poster king-sized bed and a walk-in closet which would fit her Mercedes with no problem. Scott and Tiffany each had their own room, as well, Scott's decorated with a bright football motif down to the green gridiron carpet and Tiffany's all in varying shades of pink.

They all lay sprawled across Heidi's enormous bed, talking happily about *Blue's Clues* and *Sesame Street* and discussing the possibility of getting a dog, when the work foreman entered with a clipboard. “That's it, ma'am,” he said softly, clearing his throat. “Do you need anything else?”

“I can't think of anything,” she said. “Tiffany, hand Mama her purse, please, honey? Thanks.” She dug inside the Gucci bag and dug out a fifty dollar tip, which she passed over to the man.

“For you and all your workers,” she said. “I really appreciate it.”

He pocketed the money with a grunted thanks, a little abashed. Heidi noticed that his gaze lingered on her cleavage more often than not, so she leaned forward a little to offer him a more informative glimpse. *Consider it part of your tip*, she thought mischievously.

“Do you have any idea when my fiancé is coming?” Heidi asked. Then, realizing that was an odd question to ask a moving man, she covered weakly. “He hasn't called. I think my battery died, and my charger is in

one of these boxes.”

“Sorry, ma'am, I haven't gotten any word from him,” the man said, leafing through the papers on his clipboard. “All I know is that he has us scheduled to move his stuff from his old house next week. The, uh... let's see... the 16<sup>th</sup>.”

*The day after the wedding, Heidi thought. How sweet! He's old-fashioned! He doesn't want us to live together until after we're married!*

“Thank you so much,” she gushed to the man by way of dismissal.

“Sure thing,” he said, ducking out. Heidi stood and saw him to the front door, *clucking* her tongue softly after the door closed at the dust, mud and clutter left behind in her once-spotless foyer. Heidi marched back upstairs and clapped her hands sharply, making both of her giggling, wrestling children snap to instant attention.

“Okay, kiddos, time to get this place cleaned up and looking pretty,” she said. “So get to your rooms and start unpacking all your boxes. Mama will come in and help you find places to put everything when you're done. Now, scoot! January, February, *March*, troops!”

The kids obeyed, heading to their rooms in a clomping thunderstorm of tiny feet on hardwood. Heidi busied herself unpacking her own boxes. She found a pink iPod and a docking station in one box and plugged it in, queueing up a playlist of dance tunes to help her work.

She got her clothing moved into the cavernous closet and got the boxes broken down, then helped Tiffany and Scott do the same in each of their rooms. She found an enormous box downstairs filled with pictures fresh from the lab, both framed and loose. She found hammer and a box of picture hangers and flitted around the various rooms and hallways, hanging framed pictures of herself as a girl in junior cheerleading, winning the Miss Teen pageant, performing at football and basketball games in college, and pictures of herself holding her new babies. She took her framed poster of the Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader squad, autographed by every cheerleader, into the fantastic gym across from the pool and hung it on the wall next to a large framed print of sweating, gorgeous women working out which served both to spur her competitive instinct during workouts *and* to turn herself on staring at all that firm,

glistening girl-flesh.

She swept and mopped the gleaming foyer floor back to its original pristine state when the doorbell rang. A UPS delivery man in brown uniform unloaded several dolly-loads of boxes in the foyer. They contained new clothes, everything from sexy lingerie to evening gowns, jewelry and accessories. She squealed and clapped her hands excitedly with every new discovery, then carried the entire enormous load upstairs and into her closet, sorting them gleefully into drawers and hangers until her phone rang.

“Hello?” she asked, answering her phone.

“Hi, is this Heidi?” a rich, polished baritone voice asked happily.

“Yes, it is,” she said. “Who am I speaking to?”

“This is Robert Williams,” he replied. “I’m your fiancé.”

“OhmyGawd!” she cried. “Finally! It’s so nice to hear from you!”

“You, too,” he said. “Did you get my present?”

“Those clothes were from *you*? OhmyGawd, baby, they’re *beautiful*. I love them! Thank you *so much*! I’m just putting them away now. Have you *seen* the house? Sweetheart, you won’t *believe* it! It’s huge!”

He chuckled amusedly at her gushing. “I’m so glad you’re pleased,” he said. “You deserve the very best, Heidi. How are the children?”

“They’re perfect,” she said. “Absolutely perfect. Scott is this little spitfire, it’s all I can do just to keep up with him. And Tiffany is an *angel*. I love them both *so much*. I can’t wait until you can meet them.”

“I feel the same way. Listen, the reason I called – I’m getting back from Berlin a little earlier than I expected. My business here concluded much quicker than I originally planned. Since I have an evening to myself, I wondered if you’d like it if I took you out to dinner.”

“A date? That sounds *perfect*,” she said. “What time, honey?”

“Say, eight o'clock? I'll send a car.”

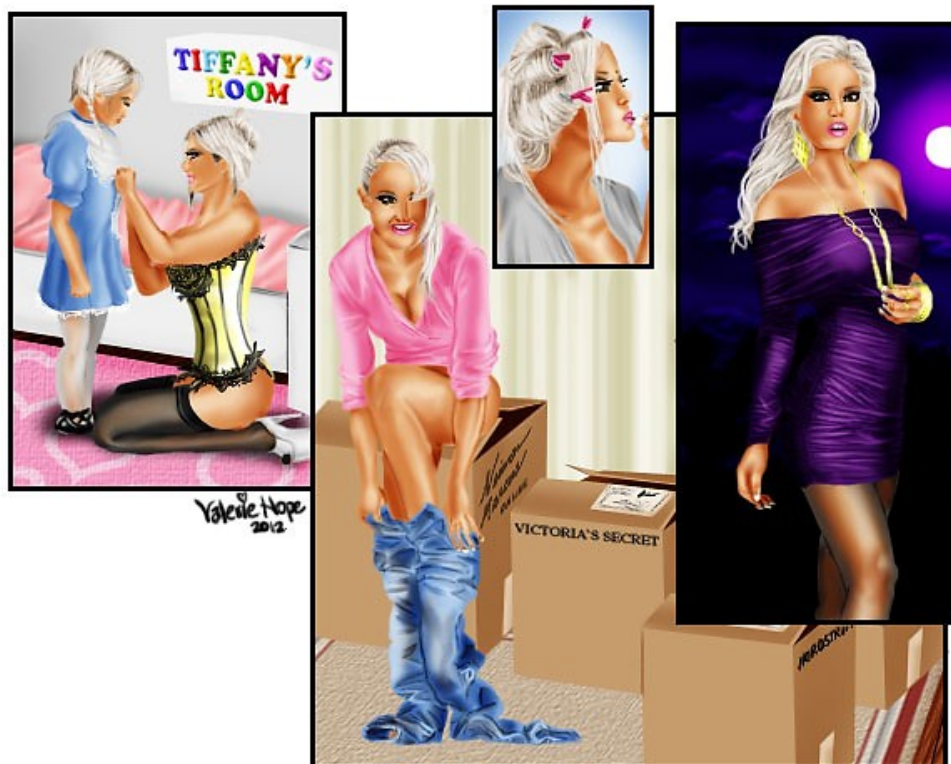
“I have my own car – thanks to you, again,” she told him. “Oh, wait – the kids! I don't have a sitter!”

“I've already arranged for that,” he told her. “I called the program. Apparently, there is a woman that you've used before – Karen is her name? Carol? – and she is willing to come and watch the kids. They didn't inform you, apparently, that her services were intended to be permanent. She's still the children's nanny.”

“I didn't know that,” Heidi mused. “That's awesome. So, I guess I'll, like, see you at eight and stuff?”

“I look forward to it,” Williams said.

Heidi checked the clock next to the bed and gasped as the connection fell silent. *God, it's already five o'clock*, she thought in a panic, horrified at the thought of making her fiancé late.



Heidi slipped out of her jeans and loose t-shirt, a little sweaty from housework, and took a very quick shower and dried herself, dressing in

a yellow satin corset with lace trim and attached garters to hold up smoky gray hose. She took a few moments to help Scott and Tiffany both put on fresh clothes, as well, not wanting Karen to come over to care for two dusty little ragamuffins. She curled her hair and did her makeup interspersed between boiling some whole wheat pasta, straining it and mixing up a quick dinner for the kids of macaroni and cheese and steamed broccoli. She set them to eat and rushed upstairs to finish her makeup, brush out her hair and spray a light mist of perfume on her neck. She slid sinuously into a ruched purple cocktail dress, off the shoulder, in a deep royal purple. She added a gold necklace and some dangling chandelier clip-on earrings, then hopped her way into a pair of black Christian Louboutin stiletto pumps with gold chain accents on the heels on her way down the stairs to answer the ringing doorbell. She just managed to finish greeting Karen and kissing each of the children goodnight by the time the dark town car pulled up in the circular drive in front.

The silent driver, dressed in a dark suit, held the door open for her. She brushed past him, smoothing her dress subconsciously behind her thighs and keeping her knees together as if born in a skirt, and watched the lights of the high-society neighborhood drift past the tinted window, giving way to the brighter lights of the city, a little nervous thrill in her tummy at the thought of finally meeting the man who began this whole thing.

She man she now knew she loved from the very first moment she heard his voice.

\* \* \*

Heidi spent most of the long car trip trying to picture him in her mind and found, as she made her way into the expensive restaurant and saw him stand at her approach, she had been at the same time quite close and also nowhere near accurate in her imagination.

The time she'd seen him before – working in a machine shop and seeing him walk by, speaking softly with his boss – seemed an eternity ago and made very little impression on the person she used to be. Now she looked at him with much different eyes. Tall and rakishly slender, with graying hair and a neatly-trimmed mustache. A superb, patrician physique hinted at her beneath the sleekly tailored lines of his two-

thousand-dollar suit – *Gucci, I think, with an Armani shirt and a John Bartlett tie*, she thought. His blue eyes twinkled boyishly as he admired her, and she couldn't help but smile widely at him, leaning into his embrace and loving the feel of his arms closing around her, inhaling the clean masculine scent of him. Her pussy dampened in response to the feel and smell of her fiancé and she tipped her head back for a kiss, which he delivered lovingly. She took a faltering step back, her legs not seeming to work properly for a moment.

“My God,” he breathed, holding her out at arms' length to take her in from top to bottom. “You are *exquisite*. Absolutely breathtaking. Please, have a seat.” He pulled her chair out for her and waited for her to be seated before pushing it back.

“Such a gentleman,” she said delightedly. Ordinarily, leftovers from Heidi's previous life and her own flawless physical condition made her bristle a little bit at such chivalry. But not when he did it. When he did it, it thrilled her.

“I can't believe how gorgeous you are,” he said, seating himself across from her. “You are *exactly* what I was looking for.”

“I'm glad you like me, Rob,” she said happily.

“Rob?” he asked, one eyebrow quirked in curiosity.

“I never liked 'Bob,’” she told him. “And 'Rob' sounds sexy to me. I thought I'd call you 'Rob.’ Oh, God, you don't absolutely *hate* it, do you?”

“You would be the only one ever called me that,” he said, amused. “I think I like that idea.”

“You said you were in Berlin?” Heidi asked.

“On business, yes,” he replied.

“Was it beautiful?” she asked. “I've never really been anywhere.”

“Parts of it are gorgeous,” he told her. “And I would be honored to show you the world, my dear. Anywhere you want to go. London, Paris, Rome, Vienna... just tell me where you'd like to start.”

Her eyes sparkled at him. “I don't know where to start,” she said. “I always thought Paris would be romantic. Or someplace like a James Bond movie, y'know, like Monte Carlo, where I can wear a sparkly evening gown and sip champagne and play blackjack and stuff and all the guys have on tuxedos and speak with sexy accents.”

“You are adorable,” he said. “I want to take you to Monte Carlo now, just to see that.”

She dabbed at her mouth with a linen napkin and pushed her half-eaten plate away. “That was delicious,” she said. “Thank you so much, Rob.”

“You're very welcome,” he told her. “Would you like some dessert?”

“I would, but I can't,” she told him. “Training camp, y'know. Have to keep my weight down.”

He smiled. “I forgot to say congratulations,” he said. “On making the squad. Should we order some champagne?”

“I don't dare,” she said. “I have camp in the morning.”

“It's nice to see how seriously you take your career,” he told her. He stifled a yawn behind his hand. “Forgive me, Heidi. Jet lag.”

“Poor baby,” she said, caressing the back of his hand. “Let me take you home and put you to bed.”

“Oh, no,” he said. “I want to wait for that. Until we've made it official. I want to tease myself with the thought of you until that night. That way, when we finally get to be together, it will be explosive.”

“You know I'll do whatever you say,” she said honestly, “but I don't know if I can wait that long. I already want you so badly right now I can barely sit still.”

He chuckled. “Likewise,” he admitted. “But trust me. It will make our wedding night quite intense if we wait. I have it on good authority.”

She offered him a very naughty smile, then sat back in her chair and

made a little back-and-forth wiggle and shimmy for long moments, her hands held under the table.

He looked at her strangely. “What on earth are you doing?”

“A little something to make you regret your decision,” she said softly, “and something to remember me by, to top it off.” She reached across and pushed her filmy yellow panties, damp with her sexual musk, into his hand.

“You are a wildcat,” he told her throatily.

“Baby, you have *no* idea,” she told him, squeezing his hand suggestively.

\* \* \*

She awoke the next morning as frustrated and wild as she went to bed – Rob stuck to his guns and left her with only a deep, probing kiss at the car. She'd crawled into bed still wearing her corset, garters and stockings and rubbed her aching mound against the side of Ralph's synthetic thigh until she came twice. It did little to relieve the maddening want making her squirm as if she itched. She masturbated in the shower with her fingers, bringing herself off just enough to be able to make breakfast for Tiffany and Scott, get herself dressed and off to training camp. She tried to dance off her sexual frustration, throwing herself into the routines with total abandon. She made the day's cut and continued towards her goal of dancing on the squad at the season opener with very little satisfaction. She towed herself off in the locker room, changed her clothes and slung her dance bag over one arm, walking quickly to her car before she became entangled in any lunch plans or extended conversations with the other girls. Normally, she treasured her time with the rest of her potential squadmates, but today her preoccupation dominated her every thought and action. She dialed and pressed her phone to her ear as she walked towards the parking lot through the dim hall leading outside.

“Karen, it's me. How are my babies?” she asked over the line.

“They're great. We're drawing pictures for Daddy when we finally meet him,” Karen said.

“That sounds like fun,” Heidi replied. “Listen, sweetheart, something's come up. Can you stay?”

“Of course,” Karen said. “Any time.”

“Thank you *so* much, sweetie,” Heidi said. “I'll be home by dinner.”

“No problem,” Karen said. “We'll see you when you get here.”

Heidi ended the connection with a French-manicured thumbnail and then paged through her address book – filling up quickly with numbers from her fellow cheerleaders, the staff, and people she met over the course of her life – before tapping the command to call her best friend.

“Hey, bitch,” Kenzi said happily on the other end of the line. “What's up?”

“Can you get us a tee time?” Heidi asked. “I need to work some shit out.”

“Sure, baby, no problem,” Kenzi said without hesitation. Meet you there, like, at three?”

Heidi looked at her little pink watch. That gave her an hour and a half to kill. “Sure, sounds great.”

“You okay, honey?” Kenzi asked.

“Yeah, I'm fine,” she replied. “Just really frustrated. Need to get out and *do* something.”

“Or somebody, sounds like,” Kenzi laughed. “See you at the club, baby.”

Heidi dropped the phone back into her purse before climbing into her car, pulling out of the stadium lot in a squeak of tires, knowing *just* how to pass the time before she left for the country club.

\* \* \*

Heidi pulled hard at the light beer she held in her hand, her third, and looked up at the aging Latino man who waited for the go-ahead.

“Do it,” she said.

He placed a little metal device around the lobe of Heidi's ear and pressed a trigger. A sharp pain lanced through her earlobe and she gingerly touched the little metal stud left behind. He repeated the process for the other ear, and then again and again until Heidi sported three piercings in her left ear and four in her right – three in each lobe and one through the cartilage. She drained her beer and leaned back in the chair, putting up her feet and raising the hem of her little tank top to expose her belly. A younger man didn't hesitate in painting her bellybutton with a harsh-smelling antiseptic, clamping the flesh painfully with a pair of forceps and piercing her navel with a little dumbbell adorned with a dangling rhinestone charm in the shape of a little pink heart.

She wordlessly passed over a hundred-dollar bill and accepted another beer from the refrigerator of the dingy little piercing parlor next to the store where she just passed her platinum card to pick up a set of 'signature pink' Callaway golf clubs and a little outfit for herself. Looking at her watch, Heidi polished off half the beer in her hand and pitched the bottle, walking a little unsteadily to her car and making her way to the country club. She ordered another beer – thank heavens for Michelob Ultra and its low calorie count, keeping her recovery time in the gym from this little bender to a minimum – and changed into a pink shirt, a black stretch skirt, pink golf shoes and a black baseball cap through which she threaded the long, golden-white ponytail of her hair. She availed herself of the driving range for a few minutes, knocking ball after ball perfectly straight from the tee to about the two-hundred yard mark consistently.

“Nice swing, cutie,” Kenzi said from behind her, wearing a purple tank-top and checkered skirt, dragging her own clubs over one shapely shoulder.

“Thanks,” Heidi replied, grunting as she slammed another one downrange.

“What's wrong, honey?”

“Met my fiancé last night,” she muttered, teeing up another. “He's fucking *gorgeous*. But he wants to wait until our wedding night. Left me hanging and I can't jack off enough to scratch the itch.”

“And you thought 'golf?' I would've been glad to do the honors, y'know,” Kenzi said, sipping a glass of white wine.

“You *know* I love you, baby,” Heidi protested, whipping another one down the range. “You know that. But I'm sorry, as good as your tongue might feel, I need some *dick*. Not rubber dick, either. The real, throbbing, cum-squirting genuine article.”

“So you thought, 'golf?’” Kenzi asked again.



“Actually, I thought 'golfers,’” Heidi said. “C'mon, let's tee off.”

The two women evenly matched one another in skill, shooting close to par or one under on every hole with amazing regularity. Spying a cute couple of guys on an adjacent fairway, Heidi tapped her friend on the shoulder and pointed. Getting the nod of approval, the blonde purposefully shanked her tee shot deep into the rough between the fairways and generated the perfect excuse to introduce herself to a tall, well-tanned young man with a polished, salesman smile and twinkling brown eyes who gallantly offered to follow her into the bushes and

search for her ball. Heidi expended very little effort in her quick-and-dirty seduction and fell to her knees in front of him, taking his cock deep into her throat and then equally as deep into her sopping pussy, braced against an elm tree as he took her roughly from behind. She knocked her ball back onto the fairway a few ecstatic minutes later, a belly full of the young man's sperm and the tingling, delicious high spreading through her body.

She waited in front of her ball, lining up a long fairway shot between two raised bunkers, before Kenzi emerged from the trees a few yards ahead of her, licking her lips and stumbling from the first onset of her own cock-high, offering the now completely relaxed and satisfied Heidi a conspiratorial smile.

The dizzying high, coupled with the alcohol and relief, served to make them giggly and drunk for the remainder of the round. Heidi finished the eighteenth by missing an easy two-foot putt to bring her in at four over par. She didn't mind a bit.

\* \* \*

She settled back into her routine easily enough after that, talking daily to her betrothed on the phone before bed every night and getting to know him over distance, then awakening to go to her rehearsals and using her boundless energy and scientifically-generated talent to survive cut after cut until her spot on the squad became official at last. She hurried home to spend time with her children, who became more and more precious to her every day, even when they misbehaved. Her patience and forbearance seemed as boundless as her physical energy. Evenings consisted of dinner and preparing the house for her fiancé's arrival, stories and baths and bedtimes. Kenzi usually came over from her own house – being prepared for her intended's arrival by a paid staff – in the evenings for a nightcap, which usually devolved into a make-out session at the very least, or more likely very spirited sex.

Heidi began and survived her first menstrual period, too, a very sticky and uncomfortable three days which made everything from her dance rehearsals to her workouts feel vaguely unclean. She did not mind the feeling as she thought she might but felt very glad to see it end and put the large box of tampons in the bathroom back into the cabinet beneath the sink.

She resumed her practice of wearing corsets every day, as well, sleeping in them and wearing them beneath her casual clothes as she went about her day-to-day routine, removing them only for rehearsals and workouts, feeling naked and unsupported without them.

Without even realizing the time had passed, the wedding planner showed up at her door almost unexpectedly, despite the chiming reminder on her phone which alerted her to the appointment. The next two days disappeared behind a flurry of preparation. Dress fittings and seating charts dominated her normal routine, forcing out time for workouts and playing with her children as they seemed to stack one atop the other. Heidi came to treasure every precious moment she could squeeze for herself or with her beloved children. Kenzi vanished, neck-deep in her own preparations, the two girls keeping in touch solely through hurried text messages throughout the day.

The day finally arrived. Karen – who proved to be a godsend – took the children early, leaving Heidi free to place herself at the mercy of the hairstylist, manicurist and makeup artist charged with her bridal transformation. She took her own car to the wedding hall, a beautiful idyllic complex placed deep within the trees on the edge of a state wildlife preserve. Heidi only had time to review the final seating arrangements and okay the food for the reception before the time arrived to put on her Vera Wang wedding dress. Taking the last few moments to herself before the ceremony, she stepped out of the little dressing room and onto a little arbor next to a stone fountain for a breath of air. The sizzling hiss of a match being struck broke the relative silence, and Heidi peeked around a corner to see Kenzi, dressed in a beautiful white gown, leaning against the low wall and lighting a long, skinny cigarette, pulling deeply in a cheek-hollowing drag.

“Hey, baby,” Heidi said softly, making Kenzi startle a little and turn, releasing a huge volume of smoke. “You're gonna, like, wreck your makeup doing that.”

“Whatevs,” Kenzi replied sassily. “As much as my little Michael is paying for the makeup girl, she can fix my lipstick before I go out there.”

“So, the big day, right?” Heidi said.

“Yep, this is it,” Kenzi agreed. “You ready?”

“Damn right,” Heidi said. “Hey – I wanted to ask you something. My marriage certificate needs a witness. Now, since we can't be each other's maid of honor like we *should* be, can you at least be my witness? That would mean a lot to me, baby, knowing you were any part of my marriage at all.”

“You mean more than being your 'thing on the side?’” Kenzi giggled. “Baby, I would *love* to.”



And for the first time in her new life, Heidi got to sign her name as “Mrs.” in the thrilling realization that she would soon – and forever after – be a wife and mother.

Kenzi looked down with pride at her own “Mrs.,” squeezing her friend's hand affectionately. “C'mon, *Mrs. Williams*,” she said happily. “Let's get in there and say 'I do.’”

\* \* \*

*Do you, Heidi Elizabeth Allan, take him, Robert Jefferson Williams, to be your lawful wedded husband; to have, and to hold...*

Heidi's wedding night, true to Rob's prediction, proved to be completely explosive. She awoke the next morning completely satisfied, having just fucked her husband – her *husband*, at long last – in every conceivable way and position. The imminent start of the football season – just two weeks away – precluded a honeymoon until the next year, but that didn't bother Heidi. She just wanted to move into her new house with her new family and begin her new, happy life.

With training camp over, her cheerleading rehearsals moved into the evenings, three times a week instead of every day. It allowed her to spend much more time with her children than she had during training camp, which delighted her no end. Scott seemed to settle down immeasurably now that he had a father in the house, and gravitated immediately to his daddy once he got home in the evenings, leaving Tiffany to spend the greater share of time with her mother, going with her on her errands and keeping her company during her workouts. She gleefully serviced her husband's ever-ready cock at every opportunity. All he needed to do to pique her arousal and instant sexual attention was to simply unzip his pants and show it to her. She could barely make it through a bath, it seemed – if he needed to use the toilet, and she caught the barest glimpse of his naked cock, she found herself kneeling before him and taking it into her waiting mouth, then trying to navigate her way through the next two hours with the dizzying, disorienting high. The newlyweds adopted a routine of their own, curling up together on the couch every evening and watching SportsCenter together, having murmured conversations about draft picks and predictions for the upcoming season.



She used her phone and her inherent skill to organize her life as best she could, ferrying her children to and from the expensive private kindergarten, Soccer-Tots and junior cheer practices, gymnastics and daycare, putting mile after mile on the Mercedes SUV, and then managing to never miss a rehearsal on the lead-up to her first performance as a professional cheerleader on the field, just off the fifty yard line, pom-poms held high and a beaming smile on her face, finally in her element. She spent a breathless, happy time posing for pictures with fans and signing autographs after the game, then going home in her uniform – under express orders from her husband via text message – to become the recipient of a nearly-savage fucking from Rob, a release of ages of pent-up fantasy into her waiting pussy.

The sideline smile which she wore while cheering found its way to her face permanently once Kenzi returned from her honeymoon in Honolulu and all the pieces in her happy life fell into place. She hardly even wondered why, in her utter contentment, such a happy and predictable life required the transformation of a man into a multimillion-dollar *über*-girl when, it seemed, any old biological girl would have done just fine.

Heidi couldn't shake the suspicion that she would soon find out.

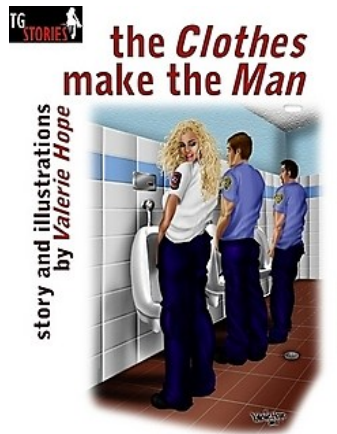


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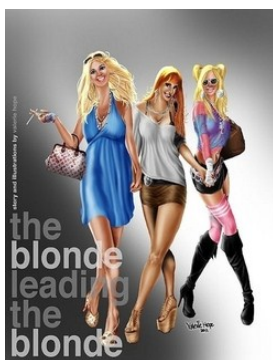
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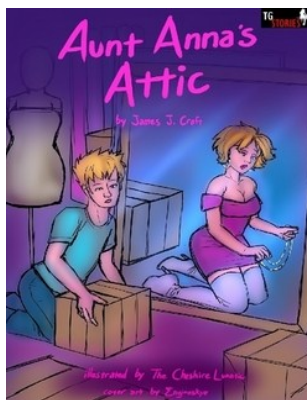
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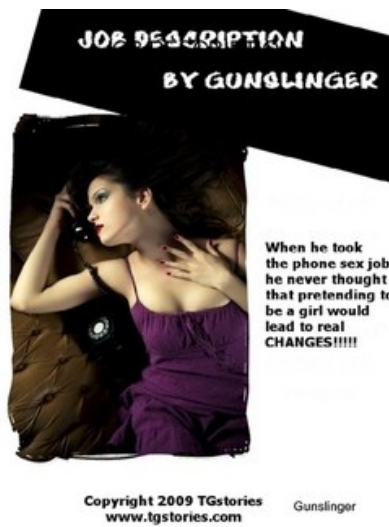
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