

“Once More With Feelings”

A new story by *(the)* Night Hawk

© 2004 by Night Hawk

Chapter 2: A Meeting of Minds

Patrick O'Donnell didn't even give me a second glance as I pulled my wheelchair next to his. That pissed me off a bit because I had always looked at every cute girl that crossed my line of sight, and I knew that **now** I **was** a good-looking girl.

For a few minutes, I just looked at my former body. I wasn't bad looking in 1974 I realized, but had never noticed it. Over the years, it was the lack of attention to my own health and fitness that landed me in hospital, overweight, short of breath and with a failing heart.

I looked around to make sure nobody was paying attention to us and I whispered, “Pat.”

He glanced at me and then deliberately looked away.

“Patrick,” I said more urgently.

He just told me to leave him alone. I didn't have time to be playing these games.

“Patricia!” I said, which finally got some attention. He looked at me and told me to fuck off. He probably figured I was yanking his chain over his claims that he was really a girl.

Obviously she didn't recognize her former self, or there was just something about that body that made who ever lived in it a total prick! I checked around again and since nobody was looking, I slapped him, hard, right across the face.

That got his attention.

“Listen you stupid bitch,” I said. “I know who you are. I am probably the only person in the world who does, so you better pay attention to me and start behaving yourself.”

He was mad, rubbing his cheek which had a red mark on it. I knew I had hit him hard as my own hand was stinging. His eyes narrowed. “You look like...” he started.

“Brilliant deduction Sherlock... I'm you.”

I thought he was going to cry. I had to remind myself that there was a girl inside that body, but barring another Divine Act of bad jokes, we were stuck with the bodies we had, and I didn't know how much time we had to swap stories.

"I need to know everything about you," I said, "and in return, I'll tell you everything about who you are now."

"But I don't want to be you," he sobbed.

"Unless you've got some really good connections Pat, I don't see where you got much choice. What's the last thing you remember before waking up in my body?"

He looked at me for a few moments. "You're wearing makeup. Mom didn't let me wear makeup till I was 16."

"Yeah, well things are different this time around in case you hadn't noticed."

"Oh, I noticed. Like this cock between my legs," he said, slapping at his crotch.

"Hey go easy on that!" I said.

"Why should I?" he retorted. "Stupid thing never goes down. All the ones I've ever known went soft all too fast."

"Known many?" I asked with a smirk.

"Quite a few, after that bastard screwed me over," he said. The mind of Patricia Johnson was starting to stir. I could see it in his eyes. I wondered who the bastard was that had screwed her over, then had to remind myself that like me, Pat was older than the body she had been thrown into. "I don't get it," he continued. "I'm not turned on in the least, yet I have a constant hard-on."

"Yeah, teenage hormones. Best thing you can do is beat it and that will give you some relief."

"You mean masturbate?"

I just shook my head. "Listen genius. It's called whacking off, jacking off, or any other term you like, but guys don't call it masturbating."

"That's disgusting," he said.

"Will you stop talking like a girl," I said. "People are going to think you're queer the way you're talking."

"It's 'gay'," he reminded me, "and so what if I am?"

“Pat... It’s 1974 for Christ’s sake. People haven’t accepted gays. If that’s the route you want to go, you’re going to have to stay in the closet for at least another 15 years.” But it made me think. I was in a female body, yet the only sexual thoughts I’d had so far were of the nurses. “Okay, I think I can understand, cause I’m not getting turned on by any of the males either,” I said.

We both thought about that for a bit. Finally I said, “Maybe we’ll change as we adjust to these bodies. Now tell me what your last thought was.”

“I was in another hospital having a hysterectomy because my ovaries had growths on them.”

“Another hospital? Are you sure?” I asked.

“I might have changed bodies, but my mind is still mine. I was at University, and when I woke up, I was here at the Old Vic.”

I looked around quickly and reminded Pat that the new teaching hospital named for this one hadn’t been built yet.

“Damn. Does this mean I’ve got to live my life all over again?”

“Hey Einstein, have you checked out your body? It ain’t your life anymore.”

“Then how come I still know who I am?”

“I don’t know,” I said, but I was slowly starting to see the light, “but I think we just got another chance. You were here for your appendix in 1974 right?”

He nodded.

“And I was in at the same time for that popped knee you have now. I think we died last Monday, and by some strange twist of fate, we’re now in each other’s body.”

“Why couldn’t I have come back to my own body?” he asked.

“I’m going to take a wild stab here,” I said, “but I’m willing to bet you weren’t very happy with the life you had.”

“How’d you know?”

“Because I wasn’t happy in my life,” I said.

“Well you hit that one on the nose. I wasted my life, and I had such a promising start.”

“Yeah, I figured you had it pretty good at this point. I’ve met your parents, they seem like really nice people. What went wrong?”

For the next two hours Patricia and I swapped our sorry tales.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Patricia had been a shy girl. She was a good student and loved her family as much as they loved her, but she was not a social person. She had felt awkward and gangly and tended to avoid her peers. But she had been an excellent student and had finished grade 8 with honors and was hoping High School would be better. It turned out that High School was just more of the same. She was taller than any of her classmates - including the boys - and flat chested to boot when the trend for the perfect female was just over 5 foot with lots of curves.

Her Mom had stuck fast to the rule about not dating till she was 16 and then nobody asked her. Finally, just before her 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, one of the school jocks had asked her out for a date. She had immediately accepted - and lived to regret it. Instead of a romantic time at the movies, he had taken her straight to lover’s lane and put the moves on her. She was amazed and excited that he wanted to get physical with her and despite early protests, he soon won her over and they had ended up in the back seat of his dad’s Impala.

He hadn’t worn a rubber, and of course she wasn’t on the pill, He had promised to pull out, but she was still a virgin and so tight that he came within a few minutes, injecting his fertile sperm deep into her as she trembled and bled beneath him.

He had told her not to worry since it was her first time and you couldn’t get pregnant the first time. Needless to say, she’d gotten pregnant. He denied it was his, but her father had gone to his father and because pregnant girls in the 70’s couldn’t go to school, she had dropped out. There was a shotgun wedding, then apprehensive; their parents grim but determined that their children would do the ‘right thing’. He had to leave school as well and ended up apprenticing as a welder.

She had the baby, a beautiful daughter they named Catherine, after Patti’s one remaining friend. Then came the blow. Catherine was deaf. Their relationship, always shaky, nearly foundered but they made it through. Times were hard and they were barely making ends meet, Paul working long hours while she nursed their daughter and attempted to make them a home. They were estranged from their families, both bitterly resenting their parents for forcing them into this loveless marriage. The only thing holding them together was that both idolized young Cathy.

A couple of years later, Paul got to the legal drinking age, and things really started to go to pieces. He never came home after work any more, spending his time and their money in bars and strip clubs, becoming abusive and violent, slapping her around more

than once. However, his love for his daughter never wavered, and she hid his abuse, thinking that Children's Services would take her daughter if she reported it. She had already seen it happen to others in the trailer park where they lived.

Then the nightmare of the beginning of the rest of her life. A moment's inattention on her part, and...

The scene was indelibly etched into her memory - her daughter, her most precious Cathy, her blonde hair glowing in the random beams of sunlight shining through overhead trees, looking up smiling at her from where she hunkered down to examine the flat toad on the road. Then her expression slowly changing as she took in the look of horror on her mother's face as Patti ran toward her, her head turning toward the motion she caught from the corner of her eye...

Then the eighteen wheeler, its wheels locked, went over her like a thresher, turning her into a shattered thing of pink denim and red, red blood.

He blamed her, she cried, he left, and she fell into a depression, never to recover. By the time she hit her forties; she was living on borrowed money, and borrowed time. She didn't know it and usually was too drunk to care, but she was growing cysts on her ovaries. When the pain got too bad, she finally had to see a doctor and was immediately scheduled for a total hysterectomy.

Pat started to cry. "I wasted my life in a single night, and I haven't really lived since."

Her story shook me. I felt her pain, and awkwardly put my arm over her shoulders. "Pat, you have to stop crying. You're a guy now, and guys don't cry. The sensitive male won't make an appearance for another 20 years."

"But I don't want to be a boy!"

"Yeah, well I didn't want to be a girl either, but it looks like we're getting a second chance and I don't intend to blow it!"

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

The nurses were coming around checking on the kids in the ward. Temperatures were being taken, some kids moved back to their rooms to have dressings and such replaced and it would be supper before too long.

"Listen up," I said. "You don't know it yet, but you're in a shit pile of trouble. Have my folks shown up at all?"

"Nobody has been here to see me except the doctors."

“Okay, then that part hasn’t changed. Unless we can straighten up this mess, you won’t see them until the day you get discharged. That gives us time to set things right. Ann was here this morning, so I don’t think I’ll see your folks again until tomorrow. As of right now, stop pouting and be extra polite with the nurses. They think your whole memory loss is just a tactic to save your ass from the mess I put you in. Stop acting up and try to meet me here after supper.”

He looked at me with a glimmer of hope.

“By the time the night is over, we’ll get you caught up to date on your new life and find a way out of what happened to me next. But I can’t keep on calling you Patti or Patricia. One slipup and it’ll just cause more trouble if anybody overhears it. We need code names; you know, nick names to call each other.”

“Why?”

“Because we don’t know each other, Einstein!” I said. “Ann made it pretty clear that I could use makeup if I went real easy with it, but stuck to her guns about the dating rule you mentioned. I shouldn’t even be talking to you, much less know all that I do about you. She’d shit and I’d probably get locked away until I turn 16.”

“Yeah, okay, that makes sense. We’ll be getting out of here, hopefully sooner than later, and you’ll want to know if you get a message that it’s from me.”

“Exactly! I think I’ll just keep calling you Einstein.”

“Why do you keep calling me names like that? First you called me Sherlock and now you seem stuck on Einstein.” The girl in him was coming out again.

“Because you’re such a fucking genius,” I said.

“Yeah,” he snapped at me. “Obviously I was smarter than you. I didn’t get here courtesy of the cops!”

Ouch... that stung!

“And, knowing what I know about the future, maybe I can do something good with this life.”

Hmmm... I hadn’t thought of that.

A nurse was walking in our direction, so we pulled apart and I said, “Catch you later Einstein!”

They checked my stitches, changed the dressing, and then I got my first real solid meal.

My breakfast that morning had been something that they called scrambled eggs. No toast, no coffee, and no bacon. But there were the two cartons of milk and some kind of juice. They were starting me out easy. Lunch had been just slightly better. A limp salad with what I think was French dressing, and more milk. I looked forward to supper.

It was by far the worst hamburger I had ever eaten, and it was the best. After three days of milk and juice and Jell-O, at least this was something that needed chewing power. Not much though, just a single bland rubbery patty and a scoop of instant mashed potatoes and some thoroughly limp green beans. To say they added gravy to the mix would be an insult to gravy everywhere, but I ate it all anyway, watching the news as I chewed. I really needed to rediscover this time period. The history books covering this era hadn't been written yet.

Then it struck me. If the history books hadn't been written yet, then neither had the books on Patrick O'Donnell or Patricia Johnson. I had a chance to change the rest of my former life. I explained it all to Einstein after the trays were removed from our rooms and we were allowed out again. The youngest kids were kept in their rooms, and the older ones were watching "Happy Days" on the TV in the common room.

Einstein and me wheeled ourselves to an empty card table and pretended to be playing two-handed euchre.

"First of all," I started, "your full name is now and from here on in will be Patrick Charles O'Donnell. Your middle name was your mother's father. Her maiden name is Morgan, her first name is Henrietta, but everyone calls her Rita. Your father's name is Tom."

Einstein repeated this information, memorizing it. I continued filling in the details, my birthday, aunts and uncles and surviving grandparents and as much family history as I could fill in.

"You weren't a bad kid, just not very motivated. Actually you were a bit of a lazy slob but your mother kept hoping you'd grow up and take responsibility. Your Dad's a machinist, and you and him used to be pretty close, fishing trips and stuff like that but your preference for TV ended all that by the time you were ten. He tolerates you, but doesn't really think that you'll ever amount to much. It's going to be hard, but you're going to have to convince him that you've really changed. Your Mom doesn't work and has the most hope for you. That's all going to change because of what you did on the weekend."

"What did YOU do?" Einstein asked reminding me it was my fault.

"I busted some windows at my former grade school," I explained. "That's how come you've got a busted knee. Don't worry though. It heals just fine. It popped when you... I jumped off a garage roof trying to outrun the cops."

“So that’s why the cops keep checking in on me,” he said. “Why’d you do it?”

“Christ, I don’t know. Just generally pissed off with life I think. I was just getting to that stage where I thought it was cool to be a rebel.”

“But you got caught.”

“Yeah, the cops brought me in here. They didn’t catch me at the scene but saw me running when they pulled in to the parking lot and they gave chase. When I did it, I was just plain stupid, but then I copped an attitude and even Mom gave up on me. I could tell you all the horrible stuff I did after that, but it hasn’t happened yet, so you get to start fresh.”

“Gee, thanks. No clean slate for me I guess,” Einstein said.

“Hey, quit bitching. It’s not that big a deal. It wasn’t really bad until later. Right now is the point where my life started going downhill. You have a chance to make things better.”

“And how do I get out of this mess?”

Then I explained my plan. First of all, Patrick had to ask to talk to a doctor. He would explain that he had been upset because he was starting High School and the kids he had grown up with, well, most of them were going to other schools. Patrick was going to a school for those less academically qualified. He was to say he hated himself for having passed up the opportunity when it was available and was out one night and just lost it. This was something that would be acceptable in 1974. Then the hard part; Patrick had to tell the doctor that he had been playing stupid since that night because he didn’t know how to explain to his parents how sorry he was that he had blown it. He was really to play up the fact that he knew he could do better but that he had disappointed his mother and father and now he might go to jail and he just didn’t know what to do. He really wanted to prove to his dad that he could make something of himself if given a second chance. He’d do anything for a second chance.

“This time you can really cry,” I added.

Einstein seemed to think about it for a while. “Yeah, I think that would work. But what school are you supposed to be going to?”

I filled Patricia in on all the details of where I had lived, the name of the school I had just finished and tried my best to remember all the details of my room and life back then.

“It’s going to be hard to pull off,” he said.

“Just keep your head down as if really ashamed and that way, if you stumble over things, you’ll be able to recover.”

“No brothers or sisters?”

“Nope, Mom couldn’t have any more after me.”

“I was an only child as well,” Einstein said, and then went on to tell me about my new life.

It was 9:30 when we had finished swapping information and I thought my brain had fried. But I was pretty sure that I could convince Mike and Ann and, more importantly, the doctor, that I had recovered most of my memory. And I found out that I had a best friend, someone who I had been close to since we started kindergarten: Cathy.

Regretfully, there was no one I had been close to that Patricia could rely on to help her adjust to being me. Maybe that was just as well. The fewer people who knew the new Patrick O’Donnell, the fewer questions there would be.

It seemed that only a twist of fate had sent Cathy to a different High School than Patricia, which is why she had felt so alone and abandoned after the first few months of starting the next step in her education. Cathy had been allowed to date at an earlier age and by the time this year was over, Cathy and Patricia would have gone their separate ways, Cathy being more ‘in love’ with her flavor of the month while Patti ended up alone. The rude and nasty comments about her lack of bust and her height had just made her more withdrawn.

“So, you ask the head nurse tonight if you can see a counselor,” I said. “That will get the ball rolling. But how are we going to keep in touch? I don’t know how much longer they will keep me here once I’ve ‘recovered’ my memory.”

“If things work out, and you’re not here when I get discharged, I’ll know where to find you,” Patrick said. “Remember, I know more about you than you do!”

“Yeah, and I also know more about you. If we need each other, I’m sure we’ll find a way to get together.”

We laughed at that and cursed the fact that cell phones weren’t invented yet. Patricia had hoped to see her real parents one more time before she or I had to leave the hospital, but who ever was pulling the strings on this game wasn’t going to let that happen.

As we parted for the night, she said to me, “I hope you remember something about Catholics. Mom and Dad still go to church every Sunday.”

Fuck! Just what I don’t need.

To be continued...