

“Once More With Feelings”

A new story by Night Hawk

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Chapter 12: Waking Up is Hard to Do

A cool damp cloth wiped my forehead. “Hush now, Patti,” said a familiar voice.

I tried to see the source of the voice, but couldn’t move my head and immediately the flush of fear again rushed through my body.

Linda’s familiar face came into my view, with Julie beside her. “Don’t try to move, Honey, you’re in a head restraint, and you’re on a backboard as well. We’re waiting for the X-rays to come back.”

“How’d I get here?” I croaked.

Julie slipped some ice slivers in my mouth, and I tried to smile my appreciation. God, my head hurt!

“We were just coming in to see you when all hell broke loose,” Linda explained. “One of the girls ran out of the chapel screaming for an ambulance, and we thought we could help.”

“We nearly shit when we saw it was you,” added Julie.

I got more of the story over the following days. Apparently, when Julie and Linda got into the chapel, I was lying on the floor, and Wendy was crying over me as I lay on the hard wooden floor in front of the confessional. Sister Gabe had Father Bob in a hammerlock, almost bending him backward as he alternatively cursed me as the spawn of Satan, or prayed for his damned soul, tears all the while pouring down his face.

When the ambulance arrived, one of the crew tranquilized him and stayed while the other rushed me to hospital with Linda riding along.

I looked a question at Linda. “Emergency nurse,” she said.

“With honors,” added Julie.

“He was taken away in another ambulance,” Julie said. “He was wearing an oversized white jacket if you know what I mean.”

“What happened?” Linda asked, and then changed her mind. “Never mind. You can tell us later.”

“There was a dark haired girl holding you and shielding you from that madman,” said Julie. “She came in the ambulance with you. Is she your special friend?”

“Wendy,” I managed to say. Julie slipped me more ice slivers.

“I wouldn’t want to tangle with her!” said Julie. “We had a hard time convincing her that we knew you and that we were your friends.”

“Your parents are waiting to see you and the school principal and another priest are here as well,” said Linda. “You have a lot of people worried about you. Can I tell them you’re awake?”

“Yes. How long?” I asked.

“You’ve been unconscious for over an hour,” Julie said. “It looks like you’ll be spending a couple more nights with us.”

Linda was squeezing my hand and I knew what that meant. They thought this was serious.

“How long, X-rays?” I asked.

“Maybe another 15 minutes, sweetheart,” said Linda. “They called in a specialist to look for damage.” She unconsciously squeezed my hand tighter.

“Don’t worry,” I said. “I can’t be seriously injured. It’s not in the plan.”

Linda left to tell everyone that I was awake and even though I wasn’t supposed to have any visitors yet, they all stormed in. I was surprised they had let Wendy ride along in the ambulance and even more so that they had let her stay. I still couldn’t move my head and while Julie kept slipping me ice to suck on, I got to see everybody as they leaned over the gurney one at a time.

Ann looked at me first, or at least she was the first one I saw and I could see the fear in her eyes. This was the second time in a month that she had been worried for my life.

“Don’t worry, mom,” I said, “it’ll make your hair turn gray.”

She turned away with tears in her eyes. Mike’s face appeared.

“Hi, Daddy,” I said.

“Hey, Patti-cake,” he said. I could see he was trying to be strong, but I also sensed the anger in him.

“Daddy, hold my hand,” I said.

He did and I squeezed his fingers. “Don’t be angry, Daddy,” I said softly. “It’ll take a lot more than that man to keep me out of action.”

I could see in his eyes the struggle between wanting revenge and just hoping that I would not be paralyzed. I didn’t have the words to reassure him. I couldn’t see God giving me this chance only to disable me. But I could feel the wetness running down my cheeks. God, I was scared!

Wendy’s face came into view as Mike turned away. I could see the makeup and eyeliner I had put on her earlier in streaks on her face. She had been crying. She couldn’t talk.

“It’s OK, Wendy,” I said. “I’ll be all right. You just wait till I get you out on that basketball court!” I tried to put the conviction into my voice that I was praying for, but Wendy just burst into tears again. It was Julie who put a comforting arm around her shoulder for me.

I guess somehow I figured I’d catch the blame for Father Bob going off the deep end. After all, I had sent him over the edge hadn’t I? But he must have been close to that edge, anyway. I opened my eyes and saw Father Ed making the sign of the cross over me and saying a prayer under his breath.

I caught his eye and said I was sorry for causing such a disturbance.

I caught a flash of anger in his eyes before he composed himself. “It wasn’t your fault, Patti. We should be the ones apologizing to you. Father Roberto... I don’t know what to say, child.” He shook his head sadly. “I think he has been disturbed for some time and for some reason he finally snapped with you. We should have seen it, his fixation with your soul...” He grew introspective for a moment, and then his eyes caught mine. “I am *so* sorry, Patti.”

“It’s not your fault either, Father Ed,” I said. “You couldn’t have known.”

Father Ed moved aside to let Sister Elizabeth Ann forward. I saw the rosary beads as they slipped unconsciously through her fingers, the familiarity giving her comfort. This was something she was unprepared for, totally outside her experience or expectations, and it had severely jarred her world. She was at a loss for words.

“It’s okay, Sister,” I said. “I’ll be back if you’ll allow me.”

“Allow you?” she asked with shocked eyes. “Patricia... Patti...” she corrected herself. “All of us are praying for you. Sister Gabriella is beside herself. Of course we want you back, if you’ll come back.”

“Oh, yes, Sister, I want to come back!”

A doctor came in and blew a gasket when he saw all the people in the room. I heard him hustling everyone out, telling them he had work to do, then he said ‘Oh. Father?’”

“Yes,” came Mike’s voice.

“Er, right, will you please go to the waiting room? I’ll see you there in a half hour or so.”

“Thirty minutes, Doctor,” Mike replied, and I knew from his tone that the doctor had better be there in thirty minutes, or Mike would come looking for him.

When he was done only Linda and Julie remained.

“They stay,” I gasped out.

He shook his head in exasperation and said, “Only because they are nurses and you’ll be spending the night on their ward. You are becoming all too much of a regular visitor here, Miss Johnson.”

“Best place to stay in the entire city,” I said.

He chuckled at that and asked Julie to see what the hell was keeping the X-rays.

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As I had expected, there was no serious damage though Linda told me I had a really nasty bruise on the side of my neck and face.

They called Doctor Mallard in for a quick evaluation, and he displayed an unexpectedly dry sense of humor. With a grunt of “Humph, you again,” he proceeded to gently examine me and shine a light in each eye. After a few questions, he pronounced I still had a brain. “Possible concussion, 24 hour watch, bed,” he said to the other doctor.

“And stay there,” he said looking at me. “If you have any dizziness or blurred vision, TELL THE NURSE! Understand?”

“Yes, doctor,” I said meekly.

His lips twitched in the tiniest smile, and then he left without another word.

As Julie and Linda removed the restraining straps, the doctor said they would keep my neck wrapped with an ice pack for the night, and would have someone with me constantly for the next 24 hours.

Since Julie and Linda were working tonight anyway, it was decided that one of them would be with me at all times through the night, and tomorrow they would run tests to see if I had suffered any permanent damage.

I was wheeled back to the same room I had left just two weeks earlier. Father Ed was in there with Sister Elizabeth Ann, my mother, father, and Wendy. Since I could now turn my head a bit, the ice on my neck an awful nuisance, I looked at Wendy and winked. "Guess this means we make the basketball team after all," I said to her.

"Oh... You are such a goof!" she said, laughing through her tears.

An orderly came in and cranked my bed up to a comfortable 45 degree incline, and the duty nurse told me that Linda and Julie would be back later on when their shifts started.

I was allowed an hour with my visitors before the head nurse finally came and told them all to come back tomorrow during regular visiting hours.

Ann and Mike both kissed me goodbye and said they'd see me in the morning. I guess they didn't plan on going to Mass.

Father Ed ruffled my hair gently and made the Sign of the Cross on my forehead with holy oil. He smiled at me "God must have plans for you, Patti."

"St. Ursula's will be waiting for you, Patti," Sister Elizabeth Ann told me. "Get well soon. A lot of people miss you."

Wendy stayed an extra few minutes, and used one of them to massage my tonsils with her tongue.

"I love you, Pete," she whispered, tears once again running down her cheeks.

“I love you, Wendy,” I replied. “Go and dream of me tonight. I’ll be dreaming of what happened last night,” I said.

The smile got wider and the blush grew darker. “Just wait until you get back,” she said, and then scooted out.

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They had a candy striper student stay with me the rest of the afternoon, and for supper I was back on a liquid diet. The doctors didn’t want to take any chances with solid food causing me a choking hazard until they were sure the swelling had gone down.

No TV this time, and I was confined to bed rest. Oh well... at least I had the night to look forward to. I was wondering where they had taken Father Bob when a familiar voice woke me up abruptly.

“Hey there, Peppermint, how’re you doing?”

“Einstein!” I said loudly. “What the hell are you doing here?”

“Dad drove me up. I told him that I had a sick friend in the hospital.”

“And he went for that?” I asked incredulously. “Aren’t you grounded or something?”

“Things have changed,” he said almost nonchalantly. “Tom is a pretty decent guy, and Rita, she just loves the new you.”

I laughed and asked him how things were going. Then something in the back of my mind tweaked.

“Hey,” I said. “How’d you know I was in here?”

He sat cross-legged on the end of the bed. “I was working with your...” A funny little smile came over his face. “He’s *my* Dad now, isn’t he?”

“Yes, he is,” I replied. “He’s a pretty nice guy, isn’t he?”

“Yeah. Hey, Patti, we really fucked up the first time, didn’t we?”

“Yes,” I whispered, my eyes tearing. “But this time we can do it right.”

He hopped off the bed and grabbed some tissues for me, then blew his nose at the same time as me. The familiar BLAT sound as I blew my nose made me giggle.

“What?” he asked.

“I don’t blow my nose like that anymore,” I replied, and he grinned.

“Anyway, I was with Dad and we were staining some wooden toys, and I fainted. Dad said my head just went sideways and I fell over. He thought it was the fumes, so he turned on the fans, and we stopped for an hour. I told him I felt all right, and so we did some more, and I was okay.”

He looked at me.

“But I didn’t tell him how it felt. It felt like I was hit in the side of the head,” his eyes slid down, “about where you got that bruise. I didn’t even have a headache later,”

His eyes rose once again to mine. “But I know what it feels like. I’ve been hit like that before.” His voice had changed, the tone of a bitter, downtrodden woman showing through for just an instant.

“Pat,” I said in a whisper, “I don’t know what my fate is in this life, but I think you’ve already done your penance.”

“Anyways,” his voice growing brisk, “So just before supper, I rang Linda and she told me you were here. So I asked, and here I am.”

“You really made an impression on them, didn’t you,” I smiled. “I’m so happy for you and them. I’m realizing just how much of a shit I was to them.”

“Yeah,” he said. “A lot has changed eh?”

I nodded in agreement. “I understand far better now how to work with people, how to find the best in them, how to help them.”

“I changed my courses,” he said. “I’m gonna get a scholarship to university. Maybe study law. Maybe make some new ones.”

“That is so weird,” I said. “I’ve been thinking the same thing.”

“By the way, Pat,” he said. “What the hell were you thinking having two nurses ask me if I knew how to jack off?”

I laughed out loud. Ooh! That hurt my neck!

Seems Linda and Julie had seen him again and did as I asked. I tried explaining to him that he had such a difficult time with his constant erection I wondered if he had figured out how to manage it.

“Hey... I gave a fair number of hand jobs in my time,” he said, “back when I was the woman and didn’t want a guy to push for anything more. I do know how to ‘handle’ myself.”

We both chuckled at the pun.

“It’s strange,” he said, “but I seem to have more girls coming on to me than any other guy in the school, and I’m only in grade 9. I’m not really interested... but... you know. The idea doesn’t repulse me like it did three weeks ago.”

“Yeah, well just keep your big head thinking about the future,” I said to him.

He chuckled again. “I intend to keep my pecker tucked safely away, but just in case, Linda gave me a box of condoms.”

“Holy shit!” I said. “She thinks of everything, doesn’t she?”

“Yeah, but I’ve got them stashed. I’m still too young to be going on those kind of dates, remember? Besides... I said I wasn’t repulsed by girls, I didn’t say that I was going to get cozy with any.”

“Maybe that’s why you’re attracting such a following,” I said. “I think girls know when a guy is just trying to get laid. Maybe they see you as a safe haven.”

“That could be,” he said. “Anyway, how are you doing as female? How’s life?”

I spent the next hour explaining how I had ended up at St. Ursula’s and how I was making out (and how I was Making Out!), how his mom and dad were doing and how I had met Wendy.

“This is so weird,” he said. “It’s like looking in a magic mirror, you know? Seeing yourself the way you wish you were. You look nearly the same as I did when I was 14, but you’ve changed your hair, you’re wearing makeup and you aren’t shy like I was. Even if I had had the chance to go to St. Ursula’s, I can’t see me joining any teams, and I know that I wouldn’t be making out with another girl.”

“Do you find yourself losing any memories of your past?” I asked him.

“Yes, but it seems selective,” he replied. “I remember history and what is going to happen, but all those things that I did that I regretted are fading away. I was going to ask you about that.”

“Yes, it’s happening to me too,” I said. Then I explained how since he had taken over my body and I had taken his, and we were making such drastic changes in our personal lives that those other things we had done in the previous trip through were being

replaced by new experiences. “Actually, we should call it ‘Einstein’s Theory of Relative History’!”

He laughed. “Yeah, we really are making a new history, aren’t we, much more positive experiences. Listen, I don’t want to make you feel bad, but I think that your folks like this Patrick a whole lot more than they did the first time around.”

“That doesn’t make me feel bad, Einstein,” I said. “In fact I’m really happy for them. I wish I could do more to make your folks feel better.”

“How do you know they’re not feeling better?” he asked.

“Because I’m gone 11 weeks at a time and they’ll only see me for two weeks between semesters.”

“Yeah, well at this point in time, last time, they weren’t exactly thrilled with me,” he said. “I didn’t do anything, wasn’t involved in anything, had no friends... Hell, you’ve probably made them proud just by having friends and being on the volleyball team!”

“But what about my screw-up with Father Bob?” I asked. “I feel like I’ve done you and your family a big disservice.”

“Don’t you worry about Bobby, Peppermint. I’m remembering there was something strange going on with him when I was your age. The only difference is that nobody talked about it back then. We come from a time where the scandals have rocked the Vatican itself. If anything, you might have actually saved some poor kids that we don’t know about. I didn’t keep up with where or what happened to Bobby after I turned 16, but I think I remember him having to move to a different parish.”

“That makes me feel better,” I said. “I can handle a shot to the face if it will save some other kid. I was thinking though that he was mighty touchy to begin with. Somebody with nothing to hide wouldn’t have reacted so violently to what I said.”

“Well listen, Peppermint,” he said looking at the clock. “I’ve got to split cause Tom will be back shortly to pick me up. We won’t need notes any more though. Linda and Julie were saying they *know* there’s something unusual about us, but they said that you had promised to fill them when we all can get together. If I have to get a message to you, I can call them any time.”

“Yeah, we don’t want to be seen together too much,” I agreed, “not at this age. But... this project you have going on with dad for making these wooden toys for the Children’s Hospital... that’s fine for the boys, but what about the girls? If you could think of something for them, I think I could get the nuns to let the girls at the school help out and then we would officially meet through Linda and Julie. Sort of a combined effort.”

“That’s a good idea!” he said. “Let me give it some thought, maybe ask Rita, cause I know that’s she’s itching to get involved too. I’ll get word to you.”

“Catch you later, Einstein,” I said as he left.

To be continued...