

“Once More With Feelings”

A new story by Night Hawk

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Chapter 20: The Game Goes On

Wendy was pretty excited for the next few days. She had been kissed by Einstein, liked it, and knew there was no jealousy on my part. She was actually looking forward to her next kiss from him! Her self confidence was growing in leaps and bounds, even to calling the shots on the Volleyball court, and together we were working hell out of the basketball.

Our lovemaking grew more intense as well, and as the semester progressed she just worked all the harder at her classes. Wendy was determined not to ever have to give up our room!

And the room had grown as well. Not physically, but we had a couple of posters on the wall, pictures of our outings with Mike and Ann, Tom and Rita, Father Ed and Julie and Linda, and of course Einstein.

We had more plants, the toaster oven that I had seen and admired, and our larder just kept growing.

Wendy and I enjoyed regular visits from Father Ed and Julie and Linda through the week and of course we had our regular weekend outings with the families as well. I had yet to meet Wendy's family but she shrugged it off, saying she had all the family she needed in me, and of course Ann had taken her under her wing as well.

It was through Ann and our biweekly “girls’ day out” that Wendy and I got new jeans and sweaters, and hearing of our desire for the toaster oven, Mike surprised us with one from his shop.

Ann was working hard as well. Her Alumnae Association contacts had made her one hot realty agent, and she was taking a day course toward her full license. She confided in us one afternoon that she was even thinking of opening her own agency some day.

(Ann eventually became a partner in the firm in 1978 and took over the agency in 1983. The dress shop where she once worked closed suddenly mid 1975, and rumor had it that Marjory and Belinda were lucky to escape charges of theft.)

Electronic and electrical repair jobs from St Ursula's and various other sources began turning up at Mike's shop, giving Mike and Einstein more than enough work. Mike was also looking at selling high-end stereo equipment, having been asked for advice on more than one occasion. However, it hadn't kept Mike, Tom, and Einstein

from their toy project, and Ann and Rita had enlisted the help of some of the retired nuns to make doll clothes for the hospital's long-term patients.

Annette surprised us all by being the first girl to donate her hair for the Toronto Cancer Center and as she was the expected Valedictorian of the graduating class, a lot of the seniors followed her example, making Father Ed very happy. By the end of the month, all the team and most of their ... *roommates*, had short hair, and almost one hundred and fifty of our six hundred students had donated or pledged their hair. It earned the school a special mention in the paper by Jim Blake, and the Toronto Hospital for Sick Children sent a very nice thank-you letter to the school.

School spirit had never been higher than it was in the fall of 1974. We didn't manage to shut out another team like we had Saunders, but we never played more than two out of the three sets against any team and it was rare if they scored more than two points against us.

CFPL had discovered a grass roots following for the Volleyball games and started sending camera crews to every game in Middlesex County. Much to the dismay of a lot of young kids, Saturday mornings were now local High School games; cartoon time was cut to accommodate the interest. We had even gotten into the habit of watching other schools compete against each other, comparing notes, and preparing strategies.

Our easy run ended when we came up against Beal, Einstein's school. In the first set, a big bull dyke decided to deliberately spike the ball into our players to cause injury, and as a tactic it was working – we were down 5-1. Chrissie was rotated out after getting slammed in the thigh, and I had a sore arm after blocking a body-shot. The crowd didn't appreciate it one bit, and the applause when Beal made their points was half-hearted, the crowd's muttering almost drowning it out. The ref called out their captain and issued her a warning after Chrissie got hit, but the big bitch just went straight back to it.

Then she hit Annette.

I saw it happening, and I couldn't stop it. Annette went up in front of the net, her arms outstretched ready to block a high pass, Georgina and I on either side of, and slightly behind, her, and I saw the big bitch let fly directly at Annette, the ball shooting directly at her chest. It caught her on the right breast, the impact twisting her in mid-air, tumbling her so she came down heavily on her shoulder, her head striking the court.

There was one long frozen moment as she collapsed and I turned to look at the bitch through the net, her sneer fading as her eyes flicked from me to Georgina. I was aware of Mandy rushing from the bench toward Annette and I had already taken two steps towards the bitch, when all hell broke loose.

The roar of rage from the crowd almost drowned the shrilling of the referee's whistle as I ducked under the net and walked toward her, not rushing, letting her know her doom was upon her. She was walking backward, bumping off her teammates, her

eyes only momentarily on me. I stopped, looking to see what else had her attention and found myself flanked by my team, then smiled at her. Well, showed my teeth, anyway.

“Patti! Patti!”

I looked to my right to see Father Ed coming toward me, not really hurrying, but not moving slow, either.

“Patti.” He placed his hand on my shoulder. “There are better ways.” He stood beside me, facing the Beal team and put his arm over my shoulder. “What’s the best revenge, Patti?”

“Winning.”

He must have felt me trembling under his arm, but his voice was calm. “Right. We will take care of this. You do what you do best.”

By this time the bitch had disappeared, almost running off the court to the boos and jeers of everyone, including the Beal supporters. I gave Father Ed a quick one-armed hug and with a thank you turned to duck back under the net. Annette was sitting up, supported by Julie and Mandy while a familiar figure shone a penlight in her eye. Hovering behind them with a thunderous look in his eyes was her father. I went and hunkered down beside Dr. Mallard. He glanced at me and continued talking to Julie.

“... And get the physio to check the extent and depth of the bruising. Other than that, an ice pack for the evening to keep down the swelling.” He looked at Annette. “Do you want us to carry you?”

“No, I’ll walk!” she answered firmly.

“Very well, just take it easy.”

She looked at me. “Patti?”

I saw the question in her eyes, and smiled. “Oh, definitely! They’ll remember this night, that’s for sure! You just go get comfortable eh.” I looked at Dr Mallard. “Hey Doc, you sure get around.”

“Hello, Patricia.” His greeting was cut short as he and Julie helped Annette to her feet. Her wince of pain must have been plainly visible in the stands, but then she stood up straight and smiled to a wave of applause. Carefully holding her right arm with her left, she walked from the court toward the first aid room escorted by Julie and her father, followed by more applause.

Sister Gabe met us as we walked toward our team bench. “Girls, the referee has offered a forfeit. Do you want to take it?”

I looked at the others, and then put my arm over Mandy's shoulder. "Huddle!" I called, and in a moment all of us were locked in a circle.

"The ref has offered us a forfeit. I want to win. Is that what you want?"

"Yes! Win!" came the replies.

"Right! Are you angry? I'm angry. I want them to tremble when they even think of playing us again!"

"I'm so angry, I... I... want to rip their arms off!" Mandy hissed, trembling under my arm. Various noises of agreement came from the circle.

"Hold your anger, focus it, and use it. Focus on the ball, the ball is the tool we will use to break them. Everyone will focus on the ball, even those on the bench, so when we rotate, you will know what is happening. Know where your sisters are all the time and focus on the ball, and they will never forget this day!"

"Are you ready?"

"YES!"

I looked at the referee. "Play ball!"

They never scored another point. We took them apart, 25-5, 25-0.

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That night, we were exhausted, the game having taken its toll on all of us. Annette, her shoulder strapped, had watched from the bench during the second set, and said she was exhausted from just focusing on the ball with the rest of the team.

I spoke with Julie briefly after the game, and she said, "It was amazing! When Annette got hit, the entire team just started moving toward that girl! But when you talked to Father Ed, they all just stopped and gathered around you. I've never seen anything like it!"

The after match celebration was muted, with some mutterings of 'making them pay.' Cuddling with Wendy on the bus as we made our way back to school had calmed me a lot, and I knew we had already taken revenge in the best way. We were more effective than I could have dreamt: Beal won only two more games and ended up on the bottom of the table come championship time. The butch bitch never played again, at least not in this county.

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After practice the next day we all gathered in the big common room, and Annette showed us the purple-green bruises on her breast and shoulder. It was a little strange - as used as we were to being naked with each other in the showers, seeing Annette strip to her panties to show us her boobies was, err, different. We all tutted and made declarations of revenge should we see her again, but it was Mandy's loud and emphatic statement of "***I'll rip her fucking arms off!***" which told me for sure that she and Annette shared something as close as Wendy and I.

We didn't watch the TV coverage of the game, but read Jim Blake's story in the London Free Press, under the title of 'Avenging Saints', he wrote:

'I have never seen a more technically perfect game at this level. For all the difference Beal made to the Saints' game, they may as well have gone home. From the time the Saints restarted the game, they had total control of the ball and the game.

And in a late development, the coach and manager of the Beal Bobcats have been requested to appear before the registration board on Monday. It is believed that the board has also requested a special showing of the television coverage from CFPL-TV.'

That afternoon, judging from the time they took, Father Ed had quite a few confessions of violence undone. When it was my turn, we had a long talk on the nature of sin, Father Ed having revealed he also had reason to confess when the visiting priest was done with Mass the following day.

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With St. Ursula's having a three-semester school year instead of the standard two, the time for our first break was fast approaching, and it was time for me to go home.

While we technically had two weeks off, the other schools didn't and so the Volleyball team had to show up those two weeks or forfeit games. A few of our girls were heading out too far to return for the games, but we still had had nine girls on the roster. We also had three new recruits we had been working with during practice and this was the perfect opportunity to see how they worked with the team in a match.

Mandy was one of those who should have gone home to her family, but she had arranged with her family to stay over with Annette during the semester break, even before our spectacular winning streak. I had grown to like Mandy during the time Wendy and I had been on the team, finding her early aloof attitude was just shyness. Her family lived in Calgary, and was one of those who were stretching their finances to send their eldest daughter to one of the most prestigious schools in the country. When Mr. Denure offered to host her for the semester break, they were glad of the opportunity of saving the airfare.

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Wendy had never told me much about her family. I knew they were a farming family, she had three older brothers, and she was attending St. Ursula's courtesy of a scholarship she had earned by achieving straight A's her final year of elementary school, the highest in Norfolk County.

As the end of the semester approached she became increasingly moody, one moment clinging to me and telling me she never wanted to leave, then withdrawn and irritable. I held her when she wanted to be held, knowing what I was like during my menses. When I pressed her, all she said was her parents were coming to get her at the end of the semester.

I didn't understand the implications of that simple statement, thinking it was sweet that she didn't want leave me to go home for the semester break.

Then I met Joseph and Agnes Miller.

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They arrived in a twenty year old pickup truck.

Joseph, his face partially obscured by a scraggly graying beard, wore black pants supported by suspenders and a plain long sleeved blue shirt buttoned to the collar. His wife, always one step behind, was if anything dressed even more plainly in a shapeless black ankle length dress and of all things, a bonnet worn over hair pulled back so severely it gave me a headache just looking at her.

Had I not grown up in this area once before, I would have wondered what on earth they were, but I had encountered Mennonites before. An offshoot of strict orthodox German Protestants, they lived by their interpretation of the Bible and eschewed modern ways except when absolutely necessary. They even kept to their own language, a German dialect mutated through the generations.

Seeing them, I was surprised that Wendy was allowed to have an education past elementary school, - and in a Catholic school at that! But perhaps the local boys didn't find her as desirable as I did.

Then I remembered what Wendy had told me. *'They're coming to get me at the end of semester.'* And remembered that with parental consent, marriageable age was fourteen - and the Mennonites had their own rules and customs, one of which was early marriage.

And Wendy had just turned fourteen.

I was getting a nasty feeling about this.

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Wendy introduced me; they nodded in my direction and then promptly ignored me. Joseph spoke only to Wendy, Agnes saying about two words the entire time. I didn't speak their language, but understood Wendy's responses of '*Ja, Vater*' and '*Nein, Vater*' easily enough. They left after ten or fifteen minutes, brushing nuns aside as so much furniture.

Wendy turned to me, her eyes tearing. "They're coming to get me at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. *Vater*, Father said to eat..." she hiccupped through her tears and tried to smile, "...to eat well at breakfast as we would not stop for lunch. And to be packed, or it would stay behind..."

She spent the rest of the morning and lunchtime curled in my arms on our bed, her tears eventually drying to despairing sobs.

"They don't care about me, Pete," she wailed, "nothing I've achieved means anything to them! They have found a man to marry me when we get back to Delhi, and I'll never see you again!"

I felt the taut body in my arms and knew they'd have men lining up to take her off her parents' hands!

I held her for a while longer, seething that this could happen to a girl in this day and age. I gently disentangled myself and went to make us a cup of tea, my thoughts whirling.

About half way through the cup, I put it down and stood.

"*FUCK this!*" I snarled. "I have had *enough* of this!" She looked at me, her mouth open. "You are *mine!* Do you wanna *stay* mine?"

She gulped, looking uncertain at my mood, then nodded.

I bent over her as she sat on the bed, placing a hand behind her head and crushed my lips to hers in a short savage possessive kiss.

"Stay here. I'm gonna go kick some ass."

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"Sister Elizabeth, Wendy and I have a problem." I was fortunate to find Sister Elizabeth in her office, and when I said, "Her parents are taking her away to be married," I had her full and undivided attention. I explained the problem, and what I knew of the sect and their practice of arranged marriages.

“What I don’t understand,” she mused, “is why they allowed Wendy to come here in the first place.”

“I think I know,” I replied. “She came here on an academic scholarship, for topping Norfolk County, right? Well, what better way of removing her from the public school board’s eye than sending her off to a nice private Catholic girls’ school until she turned fourteen.” I grinned savagely. “No boys to complicate things while they arranged a husband for her.”

Sister’s brow was clouding over as I went on, “And they knew she was rather shy as well, so if they took her away at the end of the semester, practically no-one would notice if she didn’t come back!”

“Those...those...!” She clamped her lips tight for a moment, and then went on, “They *used* us!”

“Yes, they did. And if Wendy had done poorly in class, they had the excuse of pulling her out for shaming the family.”

Sister looked at me sharply. “No, no, you couldn’t possibly know, could you?”

“Pardon me?”

“At the beginning of the semester, Wendy’s marks were... slipping. You know she took on a very heavy schedule, and I thought it was too much for her. But she improved markedly shortly after you joined us,”

“But, but,” I stammered, “I’ve never seen her do any less than brilliant!”

“No, you wouldn’t, would you,” she said with a small smile. “Anyway, this brings us no closer to a solution to Wendy’s problem.”

“I’ll hold ‘em,” I grinned, “You hit ‘em!”

“What, with these?” she chuckled, displaying her small hands. “I am an educator, not a pugilist!”

“I’ll get you a baseball bat!”

She laughed out loud, but stopped suddenly with a little shiver. “Oh, Patti, please don’t do that! I shall have enough to confess tomorrow...”

“Okay, seriously?” I began. “Basically, what we need is a restraining order to stop them from taking Wendy away. Which we need a judge to sign, so we need someone to persuade a judge that it’s necessary, which probably means Children’s Aid



Services, so we need to twist their tail as well. Today, because they're picking her up at ten o'clock tomorrow.'

"Is that all?" she asked. "Such a small miracle, at that."

I smiled grimly. "Sister, the Good Lord has given us all the tools we need. We just need to call them! May I use the telephone, please?"

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I quietly let myself into our room and shut the door behind me. Wendy sat cross-legged on the bed staring at the door, her back to the brilliant afternoon outside the open window. She raised her tearstained face to look at me, hopelessness in her eyes. I sat on the edge of the bed beside her, and took her hands.

"Honey, I have to be sure, **you** have to be sure. You know that once this starts, there will be no going back. Your parents will quite likely disown you or excommunicate you or whatever it is that Mennonites do. You probably won't have parents anymore."

I brushed back the hair from her forehead. "But you **will** have me. Is that enough?"

Her lips were on mine in an instant, kissing me as she cried "Oh yes, Pete, I love you, Pete, I hate them, I don't want to go away!" then she dissolved in great heaving sobs as I held her close, her tears wetting my blouse.

When she had quieted a little, I pulled her upright and smoothed her hair again. "Honey, I have to go, I have to do some more things. Now Sister Elizabeth wants to talk with you, then I want you to lie down and think happy thoughts until I come get you. I shouldn't be more than about an hour, okay?"

She clutched at me desperately and I soothed her some more. "Happy thoughts, remember!"

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Sister Elizabeth came out of our room and closed the door gently behind her, looking at me grimaced. "Those people should be ..." she trailed off. "I will see you back at my office."

I nodded and headed to my next stop.

Annette peeked around the door just I raised my hand to knock again.

"Hi guys, look I'm sorry to interrupt, but Annette, I need your help. Wendy has a problem and I need your Dad."

“Pardon me?” said Annette, stepping aside to let me in.

“Wendy,” I replied. I held my hand out a little above shoulder height. “You know, about this tall, dark hair, fabulous tits, kisses to die for?” I changed to my serious face. “Annette, I’m not kidding. We have a serious problem and we need someone with real clout, so I thought of your Dad.”

A quick explanation and it was “Oh shit, lemme get some clothes on!”

“You better wash your face,” I contributed. When she shot me an enquiring glance, I added “Wash off the pussy juice.”

“Oh, I didn’t ...” she answered, then blushed all the way down her chest.

“Gotcha!” I grinned.

“Oh, *you!*” She punched me lightly in the shoulder with her left hand and finished getting dressed. “Do you always make jokes in situations like these?”

“Oh, yes!” I replied. “I would be quite happy to tap-dance on Mr. Miller’s head to the tune of ‘*Singin’ in the Rain*’ if I thought would help!”

She looked at me strangely. “Jeez, you’re scary!”

“You’re going to Sister’s office?” asked Mandy. I nodded and she said “I’ll meet you there.” She blushed some more. “*I* have to wash first!”

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We hurried back to Sister Elizabeth’s office where Annette called her father and explained the situation, then handed the phone to me.

“Yes, sir, we’ll need a lawyer, preferably with child custody experience, and someone to light a fire under Children’s Services, otherwise they’ll turn up too late as usual. Yes, sir.” I handed the phone to Sister Elizabeth. “Sister?”

“Mr. Denure. Yes, Robert. Yes. Oh, yes, I’m quite certain. Very well, we’ll see you shortly... Just a moment, please.” She covered the mouthpiece and looked over to where I was frantically waving at her.

“Sister, would you ask him if he knows any Judges he could call? Let’s not allow Children’s Aid any room to maneuver if possible!”

“An excellent idea, Patti.” She spoke into the phone again. “Robert? Robert, do you know...”

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Sister Elizabeth Ann, Annette, Mandy, and I were doing ‘what-ifs’ when there was a hesitant knock on the office door. “Come!” she called, and the door opened to show the hesitant face of the duty nun.

“Sister? There are some people to see you...”

She was almost shoved aside as Ann made her way into the room, followed closely by Rita, then Mike, Tom and Einstein!

“Honey, are you all right?” she asked me, then without waiting for an answer, looked at Sister Elizabeth. “Sister, what the *hell* is going on? They will *not* take Wendy away if she doesn’t want to go!”

“Quite right, Mrs. Johnson.” Sister smiled briefly, a little twitch of the lips. “Ah, Father,” she greeted him as he came in. The door was no sooner closed than it opened again to show Julie and Linda looking anxiously over the faces in the room.

Sister Elizabeth looked around the crowded room. “Is everybody here?” Another knock brought a flash of irritation and she called “Yes?”

The door opened to show the short duty nun once more with a tall figure looming over her. “Err, Sister?”

I bounced up, saying “Thank you, Sister!” She withdrew, thankful that someone else was taking over.

“Sister Elizabeth Ann, you remember Mr. Jim Blake of the London Free Press. Thanks for coming, Jim.”

Sister Elizabeth looked flustered. “Mr. Blake, I’m not sure it’s appropriate for you to be here...”

“It’s okay, Sister,” he assured her, “I’ve kept more secrets than I’ve written stories! This will go no further than this room without Wendy’s approval!”

She looked sharply at him as I said, “Jim, I just want you to sit in the corner and look like a concerned father.”

“Oh, I love a good plot,” he chuckled, and went to talk with Mike and Tom.

And there was another knock on the door!!

“WHAT!” bellowed Sister Elizabeth, startling everybody into silence.

Jim Blake was standing beside the door and opened it to show the bemused face of Mr. Denure, a nondescript older man at his shoulder.

“Oh dear, I am sorry, Mr. Denure!” Sister Elizabeth sounded flustered. “Everybody, I think we should move to a larger room! Would you all move across the corridor to the staff lounge! Sister Beth!” she called, “Would you please show any more callers to the staff lounge?”

We had all made ourselves comfortable when Mr. Denure asked, “Shouldn’t Wendy be here?”

“She’s a bit... overwrought at the moment,” I replied, “After all, her parents are coming to get her tomorrow so they can *sell* her!”

There were some shocked faces, and I went on, “I thought first we should all know what’s going on, and what we’ve done so far.” I told of what had happened that morning, and what I guessed of her parents’ intentions in letting her come to St Ursula’s.

Sister Elizabeth took up the story. “I talked to Wendy earlier, and her parents informed her this morning that they were taking her away tomorrow to be married. Next Sunday.”

There were gasps of horror from the women, and I must have looked stricken, for she patted my hand, saying “It’s all right, dear, we won’t let it happen.”

“I am certain that this is *not* a ruse, and that this child will be in moral and possible physical danger if this is not stopped!” she concluded.

“Well, I called...” Ann faltered a bit when everyone looked at her, “I called Adele Richardson. I met her through Cathy Link, on the Alumnae Association, and she’s married to Judge Richardson, so I thought that would be a good start.”

“I called Judge Richardson myself,” boomed Mr. Denure, “and he told me his wife already had been on to him. You know,” he went on as he looked around the room, “he has no great love for the Mennonites. He is of the opinion that they use their religion to flout a good many...” He broke off. “And you never heard that.”

“Anyway, he said he would call Judge Jenkins and the director of Children’s Aid Services to get someone out here as soon as possible.”

“Oh, I should introduce my good friend, Mr. McKay, who is the lawyer for London Bus Lines. Harold, would you like to add anything?”

I didn’t see how a corporate lawyer would be able to help us.

“Thank you, Robert. Yes, there are two things which would expedite matters,” he said in his precise manner. “Firstly, Miss... er, ...”

“Miller,” Sister Elizabeth supplied.

“Yes, Miss Miller should have legal representation in this matter. Secondly, it would help enormously if there were an adult willing to act as her legal guardian until she comes of legal age. Preferably a married couple.”

“We can do that!” The response came simultaneously from Tom and Rita and Ann and Mike, and I smiled gratefully at them.

He nodded to them in thanks, and went on. “The statutes covering education require that a child attend school to the age of sixteen, but he or she may choose to leave earlier with parental consent. Board of Education approval is mainly a rubber-stamp process, but a responsible person in the department of education must process the request and interview the child. *Nobody* can force the child to withdraw from school!”

This guy was starting to impress me!

“Now, Children’s Aid are notoriously reluctant to deal with cases involving religious, ah, *sects*, and it would be helpful if their representative was to understand just how much pressure would be brought to bear upon them if this matter is not settled satisfactorily.” By his tight smile, we all understood he meant ‘*in our favor!*’

“I’ll show them pressure!” Jim Blake growled from his seat in the corner and Mr. McKay swung around, startled.

“Oh, for those of you who don’t know him, this is Mr. Blake, of the London Free Press. Mr. Blake is here this afternoon as, ah, an *observer*,” said Sister Elizabeth.

I stood up, saying, “I’ll just go get Wendy. She must be getting frantic by now.”

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Oh *shit!* Wendy was curled up on the bed, her arms wrapped around her drawn up knees. She lay with her back to the door and didn’t move at the sound of the door closing behind me.

I went to sit on the bed behind her and bent to gently kiss her cheek.

“Your knightess in shining armor is here to save you, my darling Princess!” I breathed in her ear.

“Pete?” She turned hopeful eyes to mine, and I kissed her gently on the lips.

“Awaken, my sweet Princess. Your faithful knightess has a fucking great army all ready to smite the evil wizard, and it’s time to meet your loyal followers.”

“Oh, Pete!” She hugged me stranglingly tight around the neck. I gently untangled her, saying, “First a quick shower, darling.” She looked at me questioningly, and I said, “While I lay out your clothes.”

When she was dry, I dusted her with baby talc, and then helped her dress.

“My *vest*, Pete?” she asked. “**And** my school uniform?”

“Yes, and no bra. You’re an innocent little girl, and the evil wizard is out to get you. If your hair was long enough, I’d put it into ponytails.”

On the way back to the teachers’ common room, I prompted Wendy on what she should do.

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There was a new face in the group waiting for us, a thin woman of medium height with short hair, dark circles under her eyes, and wearing a dress suit with matching low heels. Her eyes flicked between us as we entered the room, and I thought she looked both tired and irritated.

“Girls,” said Sister Elizabeth, “This is Miss Knowles from Children’s Aid Services. She has very kindly taken the time this afternoon to help us sort out this... situation. Miss Knowles, these are Wendy Miller, and Patricia Johnson,” as she indicated us in turn.

Miss Knowles moved her thin briefcase to her left hand and shook hands; first with Wendy then me and I noticed she wore an engraved gold band on the third finger of her right hand, but no other jewelry. I looked at the ring, then at her face. Was it my imagination, or was she the tiniest bit flustered?

“Miss Knowles,” I said quietly, giving her a grateful smile and squeezing her hand, “Thank you for giving up your private time to be here this afternoon.” Now, she really was a little flustered!

“Wendy,” Sister Elizabeth said, “I think you know everyone here?” At that, Mr. McKay stood up. “Oh, yes, this is Mr. McKay, who is the lawyer for London Bus Lines. Miss Knowles started, and turned to watch as Wendy went up to Mr. McKay and took his outstretched hand.

“Pleased to meet you, Mr. McKay,” she said shyly. “Sir, I think I may need legal representation. Would you consider representing me please, Sir?”

He smiled. "Yes, Miss Miller, I would be pleased to represent you."

Miss Knowles frowned, perhaps thinking things were getting out of her control, then Sister Elizabeth chimed in, "Oh, Miss Knowles, you haven't met everybody, have you?" She quickly introduced everybody, concluding with "and this is Jim Blake, of the London Free Press, here as an interested observer this afternoon."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Knowles," Jim said, as he stood from his chair in the corner, "and I have an apology, too. Brett Faison said he was sorry he couldn't be here, as he had to prepare for this evening's bulletin. Though he did say he was looking forward to catching up with us this evening."

Miss Knowles was starting to look as if she wanted to be anywhere but here. "Brett Faison? The sports reporter on TV?"

"Yes," Jim smiled. "That's right."

She seemed to make a mighty effort to gather herself, turning to Wendy with a neutral smile. "Wendy, Sister Elizabeth told me your parents said they want to take you out of school. Is that right?"

"Yes, Miss," Wendy replied, her eyes on the floor in front of her.

"And did they say why, Wendy?"

"Yes, Miss, to get married."

"Did they give you a name, Wendy?"

Wendy looked at the Children's Aid woman. "Miss?"

"Did they tell you who you're supposed to marry?"

"Oh, yes Miss. Aaron Blentner."

"And is he a nice boy, Wendy?"

"No, Miss."

"No?"

"Aaron Blentner's not a boy, Miss. He's twenty-nine. And he is gifting my father ten acres of land for me."

Miss Knowles turned pale, and if Joseph Miller had been in front of me that minute, I would have ripped out his throat.

Father Ed broke the silence. "But, but, he's so much older than you!"

"Father," Wendy said, turning to look at him, "You have met my parents. How old do you think they are?"

The question caught him unprepared. "Well, I would say they were both in their mid-fifties?"

She regarded him steadily. "My father is sixty. My mother is forty-five and my oldest brother is thirty. She has had seven children, two of whom died, and the one before me almost killed her. That's why I was lucky enough to be born in the hospital."

"Oh, God!" Miss Knowles scrubbed her face with her hands. "Look, the CAS tries not to get involved in religious, er, disputes..."

Einstein stood up. "So because *you* don't want to get involved, you'll let them ruin this girl's life? Do you have *any* idea what it's like to be fourteen and pregnant? She is a brilliant student, and you're about to condemn her to a life of servitude and a possible early grave." Einstein's voice was rising, memories of her former life and misfortune flooding his words with boiling emotion. He ignored Rita's warning hand on his arm, going on. "***Do you???***"

"**NO!**" she shouted suddenly as she turned to face him, "NO!"

Everybody in the room was shocked into silence, their eyes fixed on her.

"No," she said more quietly, "I don't know what it's like to be pregnant at fourteen or fifteen. I have never been pregnant. I have never had a father or a boyfriend or even a mother beat on me and put me in the hospital. I have never been thrown out of my home because my parents simply didn't want me around. I have never been raped and beaten, too scared to go to the police because I was threatened with death if I did." She took a deep, shuddering breath. "But I have seen all these things."

She stopped, looking around the room. "There are three Children's Services officers in this city and one only works part-time because she had a breakdown last year. This was to be my first full weekend off in over a month, but," she smiled bitterly, "the odds are I would have been called in anyway." She sighed, looking exhausted. "So, a simple case of an arranged marriage hardly rates, especially as we probably wouldn't have heard of it until well after it happened, if at all. Much too late."

She smiled a little sadly. "The reason I'm here now is because you seem to have friends in high places, something others don't have. Most have no friends at all."

There was an awkward silence until she turned to Wendy.



“Wendy, I think you may have a case for a temporary restraining order preventing your parents from removing you from school. I would like to talk with you and see what I can put together for the Judge. Sister Elizabeth, is there somewhere Wendy and I can talk?”

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Wendy and Miss Knowles left for Sister Elizabeth’s office with Mr. McKay hard on their heels, leaving the rest of us to stew for almost three-quarters of an hour. The adults sat in one group while Julie and Linda sat with us teens, Einstein beside me.

“Patti, thanks for being understanding, ah, before,” Annette said quietly.

Julie looked at us curiously.

“I, um, arrived unexpectedly at their room earlier,” I explained.

“Oh!” she smiled understandingly, looking at Annette and Mandy.

“I hate having to hide,” said Mandy, looking at Annette wistfully.

“It’s easier in college, but after that you’ll have to keep a pretty low profile,” said Julie while Linda nodded in agreement.

“It’ll get easier,” said Einstein, though how he had picked up the thought was beyond me. “In a few more years, the public will become a lot more aware and there will be a lot of changes. Most people will be reluctant, but there will be changes and tolerance and acceptance in the larger cities.”

Annette looked at him curiously. “Do you have any idea of what we’re talking about?”

Einstein smiled at her. “Let’s just say that we *all* have our little differences,” he said, “and we aren’t talking about religious tolerance.”

Before Annette could challenge him, Linda said, “he’s right, girls, and he knows what we were trying not to say out loud.”

“So you know about Patti and Wendy?” asked Mandy. “We didn’t even know!”

“What I know,” said Einstein, “is that Peppermint and Wendy care for each other a great deal. I recognize love when I see it, and I saw it at the Beal game when Annette was hurt.”

Mandy and Annette both started to blush, but Einstein went on. "I also see that there are a lot of people in this room who love Wendy enough to stand up for her. If we all loved each other a bit more, then wouldn't this world be a great place to live?"

The ambiguity of his last comment removed any further embarrassment and we speculated on Wendy's fate some more.

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Miss Knowles came back into the common room followed by Wendy and Mr. McKay, still looking tired but with an air of quiet satisfaction.

She looked around the room and without any preliminaries said "I have spoken to Judge Jenkins and he has agreed that a restraining order be issued on Joseph and Agnes Miller and their kin preventing them from removing Wendy Miller from this school, subject to investigation and possible further charges."

There were murmurs of agreement around the room, and little claps.

"I will now go back to the office and type up that and a temporary custody order, and Judge Jenkins has arranged for a bailiff to pick them up for his signature." She looked at her watch and continued, "Wendy has told us where her parents are staying, and they should be served sometime between seven and eight pm this evening. If he misses them there, they will be stopped at the gates of the school tomorrow."

"Based on what Wendy has told me and what I know about Mennonites, it is my opinion that they will simply disown her and erase her from their family records. If not, we will pursue the matter further. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson?"

"Yes?" Mike said, his arm around Ann.

"Mr. McKay has informed me that you are willing to act as guardians to Wendy?" Both nodded.

"I should like to see you both on Monday so we can get the application started. Until Wendy has a legal guardian, she will be a Ward of the State, but I have the authority to release her to the care of people I deem suitable, which I now do."

"And now," she sighed, "I have to go do paperwork."

"Miss Knowles?" Einstein approached her.

"Yes?"

"Miss Knowles, I'd like to apologize for my attitude before. I had no idea just how difficult your job is. I'd like to help but I don't know what I could do."

She looked at him a moment. “There’s really not much you could do, young man, but thank you anyway.”

“Maybe I can do more.” That quiet statement came from Jim Blake.

She looked at him. “Very well, Mr. Blake, what *can* you do?”

“Do you have a ride?” he asked.

“No, I caught a cab here.”

“May I give you a ride? I’d like to talk with you some more.”

She paused for a moment. “Thank you, Mr. Blake, I would appreciate that. Sister, I will arrange for the bailiff to be here tomorrow morning, and here is my card. It has both my office and private numbers. And now I really must go. Mr. Blake?”

Wendy touched her on the shoulder. “Miss Knowles? Thank you!” and impulsively hugged her. Miss Knowles flushed a little, awkwardly patting Wendy’s back with her free hand and I found my eyes drawn to that ring. She saw where I was looking and as I caught her eye, she quickly withdrew her hand and turned to leave.

When the door closed, it seemed everyone started talking at once, all trying to congratulate Wendy and speculate about what her parents would do when they got the restraining order. She turned to Mr. McKay and hugged him, thanking him for his support. He smiled, “Miss Miller, it was my pleasure to be of assistance.”

While Wendy went to each person in the room, thanking them for being there to show their support, Ann came over and put her arms around me. “That was a very brave thing you did, Honey,” she said as she hugged me.

All of a sudden, the tension of the last few hours collapsed on me, and I buried my face in her shoulder, sobbing. She just held me, soothing me with her touch and whispering, “It’s okay darling, it’s over now, it’s okay.”

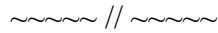
“Oh, Mommy, I was so scared! I thought, I thought...”

“I know, honey, it’s okay... You can cry now, we have you safe now...”

I felt another arm around me and wrapped my arm around Wendy, pulling her to me fiercely, and then Mike’s strong arms enveloped us all.

“Thank you, my knightess in shining armor,” Wendy whispered.

I giggled, hiccupping through my tears. “Oh Wendy, I was so angry, I was so scared I’d lose you...” and I dissolved in tears again as the three of them held me, safe and loved.



Saturday morning we woke excited although a bit tired. We had stayed up late the previous night, making long, slow love by the light of a single candle, then talked, sharing our feelings of the day. Wendy told me how she had felt used, unloved, a powerless tool in her parents’ plans. I told her of my anger that she would be taken from me, how it scared me that I would lose her and we comforted each other until we fell asleep sometime after the candle guttered out.

Today was the official last day of the fall semester, and this afternoon we would all attend the ceremony where awards would be presented and we would say goodbye for the two-week break.

We freshened up with a shower – together of course – then went to breakfast where we met up with the rest of the team. I noticed that Wendy and I were the subject of some sideways glances and whispered conversations as we walked to our table, and with some trepidation I asked Annette what was going on.

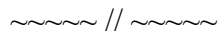
“Oh, boy,” she grinned. “You two are an instant legend! The most popular story is that Wendy was going to be kidnapped, and you foiled the plot! Miss Knowles is a CSIS agent, and Jim Blake is working undercover in the newspaper.”

“Kidnapped by who?” I asked curiously.

“The best I heard,” she replied, “is white slavers.”

I blanched, and felt Wendy tremble beside me.

“Damn! That’s... that’s almost right, isn’t it,” Annette said slowly. ‘I never thought of it that way.’ She regarded us for a moment, and then dramatically changed the subject. “So what are you doing over break?”



After breakfast, Wendy and I spent some time walking the track, then shot hoops with some of the other girls for a while. Back in our room, we packed our casual clothes and the perishables from our larder to take with us, then I lovingly painted her toenails, making her giggle as I kissed her feet.

After lunch, I brushed Wendy’s hair until it shone, then she returned the favor by massaging styling cream borrowed from Annette into my hair, brushing it back in a spiky, fem imitation of a boy’s style.

Then I dressed for her. I was doing a reverse strip as I first donned a garter belt bought for the occasion, slowly smoothed stockings up each leg and clipped them into place, following that with my blouse, each button fastened deliberately as I held her eyes, then my skirt as I stepped into it and pulled it up, teasing her as I flashed my pussy at her, finally concealing it as I snapped the waistband closed.

Her face was flushed as she asked, “No bra, or, or, panties?”

I brushed her lips with mine. “I want you to think of me naked under my uniform, just for you!”

She moaned and reached for me, but I stepped back saying “You better get ready, we don’t have much time!”

As we stood in line waiting to enter the auditorium, she poked me in the ribs. “You are so wicked!”

“Yep!” I replied cheerfully. “Isn’t it fun! And,” I chuckled evilly, “tonight I’ll be even more wicked!”

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As we expected, but were still delighted to hear, we both made the School Honor Roll. Wendy won an unexpected award for top in her grade in Math, and I was shocked to hear my name called for a similar award for English. Of course another award awaited the entire Volleyball team as we were presented with letters for our sportsmanship.

Annette won two awards in the grade 13 categories for her achievements and both she and Mandy made the Honor Roll as well. We found out later that Annette had been on the Honor Roll every semester since she had first arrived at St. Ursula’s.

There was a big buffet prepared and after the presentation of the awards and report cards we were left to join our families and friends. Mike should really have been working, but as he said, he was not going to miss this day. His “Girls,” as he called us, had done him and Ann proud. Tom and Rita were there as well with Einstein as were Linda and Julie. It was quite a family reunion.

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Fall had come in gently and the maples had turned a golden brown. Wendy and I took all this in after we had moved into my room and taken a walk around the neighborhood. Leaves rustled on the ground as we leisurely took in the sights. I hadn’t been able to do this the first time I was introduced to my new home as I was still recovering from surgery.

We wore jeans and sweaters and running shoes. Both Wendy and I were braless, and watching her firm mounds moving gently beneath her top as we walked was making me wet! Her nipples were half-erect, I think as much from my lustful gaze as from the friction of her sweater on those sensitive nubbins. It was Sunday afternoon and even though we had left the school just the day before, Mike and Ann had taken us back for Sunday mass earlier in the morning.

Ann had really been cool about us sharing a bed, and Mike didn't question it at all. We did however keep our amorous adventures quiet at night, though we spooned and slept nude.

On Monday we were picked up by Julie who drove us to the apartment she and Linda shared. Einstein arrived right after his classes were done and we had supper with them. After supper, as Wendy and I helped Linda do up the dishes, Julie took Einstein by the hand and led him away. The three of us couldn't help but giggle. We all expected Julie's personal tutoring to benefit us personally!

Linda told us that Julie was going to take it slow and easy with Einstein, going through all of the basic anatomy lessons first before moving on to what brings a woman pleasure.

I had to laugh at that. Einstein would have no problems knowing what a woman liked, but I wondered how he would feel being with a woman.

Almost an hour later, Julie and Einstein came out of the bedroom and Julie had a big smile on her face.

"He's a very quick study," said Julie.

Einstein just blushed.

"Come on, Einstein," I said. "We all know what you were doing, and we're all friends. Fess up. How did it feel being with another woman?"

**Ooops!**

"What do you mean, 'with another woman,'" asked Linda. "I thought he was a virgin?"

"I'm not sure if you guys are ready to hear this or not," I said, looking at Einstein. Suddenly my heart was in my throat. I would have to tell my lover I used to be a man... ***but I wasn't anymore!***

***I'm a girl,*** and I felt like one, and I cried like one, too. I cried when it was good! And I was scared she would see the man in me, and dislike him as much as I now did his memory, for that was all he was now, bad memories fading. But the ***knowledge*** he had

garnered over his shortened lifetime still stood clear in my mind, sharper now perhaps as if shorn from the burden of his feelings.

Einstein moved smoothly to put his arm around me. I was amazed at how quickly we had adapted to our new roles. Einstein was obviously very comfortable in his new body and was taking exceptional care of it. His masculine traits and mannerisms were flawless.

“Peppermint,” he said, “I think it’s time we tell them the whole story. It will explain everything to them, and these are our closest friends. If they can’t handle it now, they never will.”

***To be continued...***