

“Once More With Feelings”

A new story by Night Hawk

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Chapter 21: The Truth and Nothing But

“*Now?*” I squeaked nervously. “Don’t you think we better talk about this first?”

“No,” he said firmly. “Peppermint, these are our friends, and they have to know. Besides, we should tell them before we screw up really bad.” He looked at me. “How many times have you almost said something you shouldn’t?”

I frowned. “More often than I’d like.”

“Right. That’s why they really have to know.” He saw my anxious glance toward Wendy, and gently said, “You won’t lose her. She loves you.”

He directed Wendy to sit beside Linda and Julie on the couch, while we sat in chairs facing them.

“What we’re going to tell you might weird you out,” he began, and then saw the puzzled looks on their faces. He turned to me saying, “See how easy it is to slip up, Peppermint?” He grinned, a trifle nervously I thought, and then turned back to the others. “Anyhoo, we don’t want to overwhelm you, so after the basics, we’ll just sit here so you can ask questions, if you want.”

“And I’ll start by introducing myself.” Einstein said. “I was born on June 21st, 1958, and I died on August 31st, 2003.” He looked into their shocked faces, and continued, “My name, when I was born, was Patricia Ann Johnson.”

Their mouths literally dropped open while Wendy’s hand flew to her mouth, their collective gaze switching to me.

I was surprised. In all our conversations, birth dates had never come up, not that we had had many chances for long or deep conversations, but damn! I guess I had figured that the reason we could switch was because we had both been in the same hospital at the same time in 1974 and we had both died on the same day in 2003. I knew we were the same age now, but had never thought to ask Einstein when his birthday was!

This solved one part of the puzzle that had bothered me since discovering that Einstein and I had switched bodies. I died early Monday morning, September 1st. Einstein had died late Sunday night, August 31st. Now I knew why. I had been born **June 22nd** 1958!

This was no cosmic fluke. The hand of the Goddess was clear in this!

“And I,” I said after shaking the cobwebs loose, “I was born June 22nd in 1958, and died September 1st in 2003. My name at the time of my death was Patrick Charles O’Donnell.”

And Wendy fainted. *Oh God, what will she think of me?!*

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Julie fetched a damp washcloth while Linda held her legs elevated on her lap. Oh *God that should be me holding her!* Julie then gently bathed her face. Einstein watched until he saw her stirring, then got cans of soda for us all. I just sat nervously on the edge of my seat; *I didn’t mean to hurt you!* Feeling tears well. I wanted to go to her, to hold her, but I didn’t dare (dared not!) until I knew if I still held her affection.

When Wendy was sitting up holding a can of soda, Einstein went on. “Well, now you know who we are...”

“Or used to be,” I interrupted.

“...Do you have any questions? Peppermint and I haven’t figured out all the consequences yet, so we’re sort of making it up as we go along.”

“You two,” whispered Wendy, “used to be each other?”

We looked at each other for a moment, and I saw the shake of his head almost before it started.

“No,” I said turning back to them. “Not exactly. I’m still me, it’s just that I used to wear that body.” My lips stretched in the ghost of a smile. “And it was pretty much worn out when I had it!”

Einstein laughed. “Well, mine wasn’t much better!”

**“That’s why!”**

We all looked at Wendy.

“That’s why you know so much about each other!” she said.

“That’s right, Sweetheart. But really, we only know about each other’s past. That guy there,” I said, indicating with my thumb, “I really don’t know him. He’s kind and smart and giving, and the guy I used to see in the mirror was none of those things. He’ll really do something with his life.”

“You’re not doing too bad yourself, Peppermint,” he grinned.

“So, are you a boy or a girl,” Wendy asked Einstein.

“Oh, a boy, definitely! Right, Julie?” he kidded.

Julie went bright red, and then chuckled. “No wonder you knew where everything was,” and giggled again.

“Yeah, well let me tell you, everything feels different from this side!”

“That was really your first time with a woman?”

“For real. I may have been curious a couple times, but the right time never happened.”

Wendy turned to me, saying, “I *know* you’re a girl,” then blushed cutely. “What did it feel like, being a man?”

I stopped to think for a moment. “You know, that’s a funny question. I remember what it’s like being a man, but I’m forgetting what being a man *felt* like.”

“God,” said Julie. “How old were you, Patti? When you died, I mean,” and then shook her head trying to decide which one of us she should be asking.

Einstein took a sip from his soda, and then slowly answered. “I was 45 when I died, though I don’t remember dying. I was under anesthesia for surgery and a wicked storm was brewing. I remember the nurses talking about it before I went under. Then I woke up in a different place, in a different time and in a very different body.”

Julie looked at me.

“Heart attack, I think. I was just getting the needle, same storm and the last thing I heard was ‘He’s crashing.’”

“And you didn’t freak when you woke up as Patricia?” Linda asked.

“Hell no!” I laughed. “What woke me up was this dufus,” I pointed at Einstein, “screaming ‘Who took my body!’ I figured that the way he was being treated, I better keep my mouth shut.”

“I remember that,” said Linda. “The nurses in recovery were talking about it before he got sent to Peeds.”

“I didn’t take it very well,” said Einstein. “If Peppermint hadn’t found me and slapped some sense into me, I’d probably be in the psych ward today.”

“The only thing that we know for sure,” I said, “was that, while we didn’t meet the first time around, we were both in the same hospital, same wing, in September 1974. I don’t remember nurses or anything like that, but I do remember what happened afterwards and the way my life went. I’m really glad that because of what ever it was that happened, that life will never exist.”

“That goes for me, too,” said Einstein. “Peppermint has done more with my... her life in three months than I did with the rest of mine.”

“And Einstein has done more as a real human being, than I did in the next 30 some odd years,” I said.

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Einstein and me spent the next hour fielding the questions you would expect after delivering a bombshell like we had.

How did it feel to be a male, female and such. Did our physical abilities return with us or were we normal teenagers?

We laughed at a lot of the questions, not because they were dumb questions, but mostly because we were still discovering a lot about ourselves.

“Look,” said Einstein, “I have absolutely no idea of what it’s like growing up as a boy. At this age, I was fairly competent in the kitchen as a girl. I can tell you what it was like growing up as a little girl, but I don’t have a clue about what a normal, hormone driven male feels or is supposed to feel at this age.”

Julie laughed. “Well, you certainly performed well as a male earlier. I thought you were very well educated in how to please a woman, but now I see that it’s because you know what turns a woman on.”

“Actually,” said Einstein, “I wasn’t sure that I did.” He had a sad look on his face so I put my arm around him. There was no need to tell everybody about the path her life had taken the first time.

“That’s why I knew that Einstein would be a good donor,” I said. “At this point, I know his medical history better than he does. And, I understand more about his needing someone to teach him how to make love. I was lucky. After the hospital, I met Wendy, and I fell in love with her.” Wendy flashed me a smile.

“I was still pretty much thinking like a man and I latched onto the idea that I could only love women. The thought of having a man touch me really repulsed me at first, but then my body started taking over. I really didn’t have much of a clue as to how to make love to Wendy either, cause the truth is, as a man, I wasn’t a good or considerate

lover. But things have been changing. I love Wendy to pieces, but I'm also willing to just give a man a try, just to see how it would feel, though I am far from the point where I'm ready."

Much of the rest they could fill in themselves. Wendy recounted my experience with my first period and how now she could laugh at it. Julie said it must have been scary for me, and I said it was horrible. Einstein laughed at this point and said he was glad that he didn't have to worry about menstruation this time around.

"I still can't figure out why you two came back as each other instead of yourselves," said Linda.

"That's why I believe that God is responsible," I said. "Einstein and me were both pretty poor excuses for people and neither of us got on well with the opposite gender. Hell, I didn't like other people much at all. But now, it never happened, and we're not going to let it happen again."

"But what about the loved ones you left behind?" asked Julie. "Didn't either of you have a family? Aren't you bothered by how they must feel now that you're gone?"

I saw a momentary sadness pass across Einstein's face, then he said calmly, "Neither of us had anybody who mattered anymore, Julie. Anyway, it's a moot point - you're forgetting that we *died* in that other future."

"Isn't the future constant?" asked Linda. "I mean, aren't things going to happen anyway that you two already know about?"

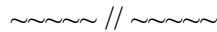
"On the large scale," I said, "I suppose that most things will happen as they did before, but just by being here, we've already changed some things that hadn't happened at this time."

"Like what, Pete?" asked Wendy.

I laughed and told them that St. Ursula's didn't get a real sports program running until it went co-ed some time in the 80's. I wasn't sure exactly when, because as a male, I hadn't been very interested in school athletics and by the time the school went co-ed, it was just trivial news. "And I certainly would have noticed, 'cause I watched the Saturday cartoons all the time. Patti never went to St. Ursula's, never joined up for any team sports, and certainly didn't teach the Saints volleyball moves from the 2000 Olympics. I was just being selfish, Wendy. I wanted you alone and naked in the showers, and the best way to do that was to keep you in the gym. I'm sorry, Baby, I hope you don't mind."

Wendy laughed. "**Mind?** Are you kidding? I used to be that fat little Wendy Miller the Mennonite bookworm, and now I'm Wendy Miller the athlete!" She came to clasp me to her bosom. "Honey, if you were being selfish, it's going to be fun if you set

out to help someone! And I would have showered with you anyway, Pete,” she said with a blush.



The hardest part to explain was how Einstein and me were changing into the genders we had been given, especially as we didn't understand it ourselves. As every day went by, he became more masculine in his mannerisms and attitudes while still keeping a feminine side in his brain, and I was turning into a full-fledged girl, complete with the emotions and feelings that belonged to the body.

Linda and Julie were curious about the future, naturally, but as we explained to them, with the exception of some sporting events such as who won the World Series or the Stanley Cup, we had only been 14 ourselves the first time around, and as such we had only paid attention to those things that concerned us. We really had been typical teenagers. “The only thing I can tell you for sure, right now, that will help you in a few years is to start buying silver dollars,” I said. “Silver bars would probably be easier, but it would also draw suspicion.”

“What do you mean?” asked Linda.

“In 1974, you can still buy silver dollars from the bank,” I said. “Not the collector ones, but regular silver dollars. There's not that many in circulation, but enough that you should be able to buy 20 or 30 each every week. Between the two of you, that's at least \$50. Put it aside. Invest some money in a fireproof box with a good lock on it and keep collecting. In a year, you should have \$2500 stashed away and more if you can afford it. Make friends at different banks and get them to hold any silver dollars that come in. Most people don't want coins that big, so it should be no problem.”

I laughed and looked at Einstein. “Wait till they meet the Loonie!”

“And two Loonies make?” he laughed with me. Some things we just couldn't explain yet. Shouldn't explain yet.

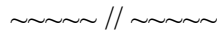
“And how long do we do this?” asked Julie.

“About three to four years,” said Einstein, as the light went on for him.

“That's nearly ten thousand dollars not collecting interest,” said Linda. “That's a lot of money!”

“Trust us, Linda,” I said. “It will be worth a lot more in a few years.” The silver monopoly scandal of the late 1970's was a part of history both Einstein and me remembered.

“Oh. Yeah. I guess there are some things that won't change after all,” she said.



Of course they all wanted to hear more, but I insisted that Einstein and I had to discuss this a bit more. I told them we had told them the truth, and nothing but the truth, but knowing too much about the future might not be such a good thing.

“How can that be?” asked Wendy

“That’s easy,” said Einstein. “See how easily Peppermint got caught tonight when she asked how it felt for me to be with another woman, when I was supposed to be a virgin? It just slips out when you least expect it.”

“Or,” I said, “you’ll want to change something, and you just can’t do it without either being locked up or accused of something. Let us talk it over first and just clue you in on things to come as they come close or if we think it will have some special meaning to your lives.”

“I understand,” said Julie. “It’s like what you said about Elvis, isn’t it?”

Einstein looked at me. “You told them?”

“It came up,” I said, and shrugged.

“And it’s a perfect example,” he said.

“So, now fess up,” I said to him. “How did you enjoy your first lesson?”

Julie blushed, but Linda was obviously very interested as was Wendy. I laughed.

Julie started by telling us that she had expected Einstein to be clawing and groping like the boys she had dated when she was younger and was pleasantly surprised with his gentle manner and slow approach. “Of course I didn’t know at the time that he had some of the same experiences,” she said.

“Julie was trying to be very educational about it,” said Einstein, picking up the story. “She undressed and asked if I had ever seen a woman naked before. I told her that I had, but that it was a long time ago, which is the truth. I thought that it really wouldn’t affect me, but this dick stood right at attention,” he said. “It got so uncomfortably hard that I had to get my own pants off just to ease the pain.”

“When he slipped his pants off,” said Julie, “I was surprised to see how hard he was! He could have chopped down a tree with that tool! I told him to join me on the bed and we would begin with the basics. I just wanted to see what he knew, and what he needed to know.” Julie blushed again. “I wanted him to understand the need for a woman to be lubricated and aroused, but he already had his hand on my pussy, stroking it

ever so lightly. I was getting turned on and I wasn't talking anymore. Then he kissed me! And Linda... This boy really knows how to kiss!"

"Well, you weren't bad either," chuckled Einstein. "We just laid on the bed for about 10 minutes kissing while I stroked her pussy and she slid her hand down and grabbed hold of my cock. I told her to be careful cause I had been hard as a rock from the minute she had taken her clothes off. Julie thought that was funny and squeezed my cock and slowly stroked it a few times and I blew a load right across her stomach!"

Julie was laughing now. "I didn't know that he was that close," she said. "If the quality of his sperm is anything like his quantity, Linda, you might end up with triplets!"

It was good fun to watch as Einstein blushed, stealing a glance at Wendy.

"So," continued Julie, "it felt good just kissing but I wanted to wipe up and I swear to god it took five tissues before I got it all! As I was wiping him off he got hard all over again! I was amazed at how fast he was ready to go again. He was still stroking my pussy and then he put his lips to my nipple. You know how much I like that, Linda, and I could feel myself getting wet. I thought for sure that I would need to use some lubricant before I could get a man inside me again, but he was really turning me on. Now of course I understand why, but at the time I didn't and I started to tell him how to position himself and not to put all his weight on me, and the next thing you know, I'm guiding his cock in."

"It felt really weird," said Einstein. "I've been on the receiving end before, but never on the other. When Julie slipped me into the folds of her pussy, the sensations were amazing! I never realized just how sensitive the cock head is to little things like pubic hair. I thought I was never going to last long enough to get inside, but when I did, and Julie was really wet at this point, it just felt like I had put my cock into a really soft glove. I could feel her vagina squeezing my dick, and I didn't want to blow another load right then and there, so I started to take really long strokes in and out of her. It felt so fucking great! Took my mind off of the sensation of coming again because there were so many new experiences for me to feel. Then Julie started to squirm under me, and I remembered how I used to like to feel a cock in me, so I shifted my position a bit so that I could slide my cock across her clit on every stroke. Then I kissed her again and she climaxed. That felt so great, knowing I could make her cum that I let myself feel the clenching of her muscles and I had another climax myself."

"All that in half an hour?" I asked.

"Yeah," said Einstein, "I think Julie was surprised that she had climaxed, and remember, we started off rather technical like so she was naked right away. There was no real foreplay this time."

"What do you mean 'this time'?" I asked.

“Well,” he said. “We kind of figured that it would be best for me to practice a bit more on some of the other things. I know that Julie loves Linda, but think about this, Peppermint. If I can make both of them happy, and it’s a diversion for them for a while, then by the time you and Wendy are ready to try, I should be a really good lover.”

“Hey, is it just me, or is this just a way for him to get laid on a regular basis?” I laughed.

Linda laughed. “You can’t be jealous, Patti? You have Wendy!”

“I know, but he’s a boy!” I stopped, my thoughts whirling. “I’m so confused,” I wailed. “He’s got two really hot chicks to teach him how to make love, and I’ve got Wendy and I love her and I have no idea what I’m talking about!” I had tears in my eyes and Wendy held me close as I tried to still my spinning head.

I felt another hand stroking my short hair. “You’re a little envious, maybe?” asked Julie. “Like, ‘that could have been me’ kind of envious?”

“Yeah,” I said, my voice muffled in Wendy’s jumper. I lifted my face to look at Julie. “And the stupid thing is I’m really happy for him. He won’t have to put up with the little cock-teasers at school, ‘cause he’ll know what it’s like to make love to a real woman.”

“And you know it wouldn’t have happened this way if what you told us about yourself was true.”

“I know,” I replied in a small voice. “But I look at him and he’s everything I wasn’t. And I’m really glad I didn’t come back as him, ‘cause I know I would have screwed it up all over again.”

Einstein moved to put his arm around me. “Me too, Peppermint. You’ve done things that I never would have done. The Patti I was would never have been able to stare down that bully, even if she did go to St. Ursula’s. Or save her lover,” he added, looking at Wendy.

Wendy squeezed me tight. I squeezed her back, and taking the tissues Linda offered me, wiped my eyes. “Thank you all,” I smiled a little weakly.

“That’s okay, honey,” replied Julie. “We understand now why you couldn’t tell your parents, and we’ll keep your secret forever. You couldn’t even tell them about the silver dollars, could you?”

“No, but all our parents seem to be much happier now, and that’s worth the world to me.”

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Linda and Julie had driven us all home Monday night after we had a cup of tea and a chance to review our new relationships. Wendy said it best when she said that Linda and Julie would be like older sisters to us, and we would just share Patrick as the need or desire came up. Everybody thought that was pretty good, especially Einstein. We made a pledge though that we would work extra hard at doing something good with our lives. Something that would make life for other people better, because we knew that was the most important thing in life.

Wendy and I made love that night. Soft, gentle and hopefully quiet love. I guess I still needed some reassurance that I wasn't going to lose Wendy.

On Tuesday, before going back to the school to practice, we met up with Annette and Mandy at the Wellington Square Mall. We had lunch at the Eaton's restaurant and then prowled the stores, shopping like only girls can.

Maher Shoes had a special on Earth shoes and Annette was thinking of getting a pair. These were a fad that lasted for about three years before people started to complain of backaches, though the logic was reasonable. If you walked barefoot on the beach, your heel always dug in deeper than the ball of your foot, but I asked Annette how far she enjoyed walking on beach sand before she got tired. I could have kept my mouth shut, but I really liked these girls, and I didn't want to see them damage their legs on something that only looked good in theory.

Annette gave it some serious thought, then said thanks and bought a pair of wedge heel casuals with crepe soles.

It was a fun afternoon, and though we couldn't hold hands with our respective lovers, it must have been perfectly obvious that we were two couples out for the day. With Annette's and my short hair, we must have looked like a couple of butches, while Mandy's and Wendy's hair was longer. We didn't care. We knew why our hair was short, and it was done for a good cause.

Mandy was still waiting for her hair to grow long enough to have it cut and donated, and Wendy was still a bit ticked that it was only after she had ten inches cut off that I had suggested donating it or she would have gone for a cut similar to mine.

Annette mentioned a new lingerie store at the White Oaks Mall, and since we had the afternoon to ourselves we boarded the bus that would take us to the outskirts of London. Wellington Road looked so different in 1974 than what I remembered that I was fascinated by my own personal history lesson. Fanshaw had looked pretty much the same when we had gone for our picnic, and with Julie and Linda with us; I hadn't paid much attention to the roads.

I went to get money out of my purse, (yes, I had started to carry around a little purse), Annette looked at me strangely. We were wearing our new "Saints" jackets and

this was her father's bus line. Wear your school colors with pride, she said. If nothing else, you rode free on any bus in town.

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In the middle of the week, and our school being the only one out for a semester break, there were very few young people at the mall. The mall was nowhere near the size it would grow to in another decade, but it was still a good size with a huge Sears store. We found the new lingerie store easily enough, and it was a good thing that Annette and Mandy were over 16 as the clerk gave Wendy and me a funny look. Hell, was buying sexy underwear age restricted?

"Look at these," said Mandy, holding up a pair of frilly red panties.

"Too blatant," said Annette. "I prefer you in something soft and feminine with a bit of lace."

Mandy turned back to the racks. Wendy and I were both at a loss as to what to do. Annette saw this and took Wendy by the arm. "Get fitted with a nice bra, Wendy," she said "One that looks good and more importantly feels good. It's my treat. Pick something sexy."

Wendy blushed but asked the sales clerk for help.

"Thanks Annette," I said. "You didn't have to do that. I've got money."

"Patti," she said, "allow me the pleasure of buying something for my new friends. I'm not trying to buy friends, just spending some of my ridiculously oversized allowance with friends. You know what they say," she added in a quiet voice. "Birds of a feather flock together."

I smiled at her. Annette really had a big heart and I could see us forming a lasting friendship with them.

"Come on," she said. "You and I need bras like honey needs sugar. Let's check out the camisoles."

Oh! I hadn't thought of that!

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An hour later and we were eating again. Salads this time, from an upscale eatery in the food court. Since it was past five, other teens were arriving at the mall. We drew many curious glances and some envious ones because of our jackets. The reputation of "the Saints" was growing!

Mandy had shown us the extra soft cotton panties she had chosen, and I must admit that for cotton, these were extremely sexy. Little hearts and flowers and, as Annette had requested, lace trimmed. Annette and I had picked up three camisoles each. Two in a soft brushed cotton, white so that we could wear it under our school uniforms and we had exchanged wicked glances as we added a slippery satin one to the pile. Hers in a baby blue, nearly transparent, and mine in a lace-trimmed burgundy complete with a little heart in the center of a bow on the bodice.

Wendy had picked out a beautiful lace bra that was meant for taking off! It showed the tops of her breasts and gave them a lift that would not become common until 20 years later. The sales clerk had helped her adjust the straps and made sure she was fitted properly, and she was wearing it now, underneath her blouse.

We were just finishing off a delicious, to hell with the calories, triple thick chocolate fudge shake from the Baskin Robbins stand when a group of boys from Wheable Secondary School entered the food court. They spotted us right away. I shook my head. I knew this kind of trouble, feeling bad because once I *was* this kind of trouble. “Hey, we better get moving.”

“But I’m not finished yet,” said Mandy.

Annette nodded at me. She knew what I was thinking.

Wendy said, “I’m not finished either. Why can’t we relax for a while? We don’t have to be at the school for another hour yet.”

Wendy and Mandy were sitting with their backs to the entrance and hadn’t seen trouble approaching. Annette sighed.

“Well, if it isn’t the dyke patrol,” said the tallest and ugliest. His friends just laughed with him. I couldn’t count all the zits on his face, but I made sure to give it a try.

“Piss off,” said Annette.

“See that, guys, they can talk when they don’t have their heads buried in each others cunts,” he continued.

I promised myself I would be a lady. I was out with my friends, so I politely asked him to leave us alone. He moved from Annette to me, his friends circling our table. Wendy seemed oblivious to all this as she happily continued to suck on her milkshake. Mandy was starting to clench her hands.

**Damn.**

Zit face was tall, and it was clear he wasn’t going to give up his role of antagonist.

“My friend asked you to piss off,” I said, letting a bit of hostility come through my words. “Why don’t you go look for your marbles?”

“Eww... I’m scared now,” he said.

“Hey, Eddie,” said the one who had moved close to Wendy. “Why don’t you take the butch and teach her some manners while I show this one how good a man can be?”

“Yeah, that’s an idea, Johnny,” said Eddie and then he ran his fingers through my short hair.

**Fuck!**

Annette and I started to move at about the same time when all of a sudden, there was a high-pitched scream and Johnny was on the ground moaning, holding his nuts. Wendy turned back to suck on her milkshake.

“What the fuck?” said Eddie, but I didn’t give him a chance to find out as I leaned back and kicked with all my power at the back of his exposed knee. He went down like a sack of potatoes.

Johnny’s scream had brought security running up to find him still writhing on the floor in pain. The other jerks hesitated, not sure what to do now their ringleader was on the ground. By the time they figured out that they should probably be someplace else, security had them.

The security officer in charge asked what had happened and Annette said these boys had started to harass us and then the two on the ground had assaulted Wendy and me. Now, I never saw Johnny even touch Wendy, but who was I to argue with Annette’s story?

“What exactly did they do, ladies?” he asked.

“The tall one grabbed Patti by the hair,” said Mandy, “and the other cry baby tried to touch Wendy’s breast.”

***They did?***

The other boys started saying that that wasn’t true, but the security officer looked at the four of us, then at the boys, and with a shake of his head he told one of the officers to take the upright ones to the office and to call for an ambulance for the other two.

“I’m sorry if these boys hurt either one of you ladies,” he said. “Would you like to press charges?”

Annette and I looked at each other. I swear I could see the smile in her eyes. “I don’t think so, Sir,” she said. “If it got out, then maybe my dad wouldn’t allow me to come shopping at White Oaks with my friends any more.”

“Okay, Miss,” he said. “I see your point. Why should you be prevented from coming to the mall because of a few bad apples? Though I will ban them from coming back to White Oaks for a year, and their parents will receive letters confirming that. What they should be charged with is stupidity.”

“Why is that, Officer?” asked Mandy.

“They didn’t recognize one third of the Saints Volleyball team!” he said. “I watch you girls play every Saturday.”

“Thank you,” said Annette with a big smile. We left before the ambulance arrived, and took the bus back to downtown where we transferred on to another that would drop us off at the school.

We sat in the back seat of the bus, howling with laughter.

“What did you do to that turd, Wendy?” Annette asked. “I didn’t even see you move!”

Wendy laughed, and said, “I spiked his balls! My hand was just at the right height when he got close to me. When that other guy touched Pete, I just swung around at him.”

“What about you, Patti? Did you break that Eddie’s knee?” asked Mandy.

“No,” I said. “I kicked him behind his knee when he turned to see why his buddy was on the ground. It’ll hurt, but he’ll be okay in a couple of days.”

“I didn’t know what to do,” said Mandy. “I’ve never been in a situation like that before.”

“Just remember that you’re at least as strong as they are,” I said. “And promise yourself that no man is ever going to hurt you without him wearing your mark forever.”

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Our practices continued to go well and Thursday’s game was a good win. We played hard, and even though our ranks were a bit thinner due to the absence of our teammates who had gone to homes too far away to come back, we were well trained and fit and our three new players worked in well. The celebration party after the game was as delightful as ever, even though there were few students present. I guess that the victory party was more for the Alumnae than it was for us. They seemed to be reliving their past

vicariously through our efforts. We were happy for them and happy to be able to provide the thrill.

Sister Elizabeth summoned us to her office a little later, where she sat us down then handed Wendy a letter. When she scanned the contents she went pale, looking at me quickly when I made to move toward her.

“It’s okay, Pete, really.” She finished the letter then handed it to me, staring sightlessly at the floor.

It was a formal declaration from the Mennonite community stating that since she had turned her back on their teachings and customs, she was officially shunned.

“I’m sorry to bring this sad news to you, Wendy,” said Sister Elizabeth.

Wendy looked up at her. “Oh, it’s okay, Sister. This is what I expected, but it’s still a shock.”

“I’ll leave you to reflect for a moment, Wendy. Why don’t you join us when you feel able.”

I made no move to accompany her, asking instead “Sister? Would you tell my Mom and Dad, and where we are?”

She paused a moment, then said “Certainly, Patti,” as she quietly closed the door behind her.

Wendy moved to sit on my lap, melting into my arms and we sat quietly for a few minutes until we heard the door. I looked to see Ann and Mike come in, and Ann immediately enfolded Wendy in her embrace.

“I’m so sorry to hear the news, Wendy, but you know you’ll always have a home with us.”

“Oh, thank you, Mom!” she cried, and then looked at Ann in consternation.

“It’s okay honey, I’ll be your Mom. I always wanted another daughter!” she added, kissing Wendy on the forehead.

Then we went home.

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Out of habit, Wendy and I went to confession on Saturday. It felt a bit weird knowing we weren't going to be confessing to any sins, but I think we liked the reassurance from Father Ed.

After Mass on Sunday, we waited for Father Ed to finish up and Mike drove us all to Einstein's house. Tom and Rita had a larger house than Mike and Ann, and a beautiful backyard with an old oak tree that blocked the wind and provided shade. Linda and Julie drove over after services and had promised to bring Father Ed back.

It was mid-November, and there was a chill in the air. We got to my old house and it hit me hard how beautiful it was. I certainly hadn't remembered it this way, and pangs of guilt and nostalgia washed over me.

Einstein came out to greet us, probably because he knew how I would be feeling. Julie and Linda went into the house with Father Ed while Einstein took Wendy and me to the back yard.

He had raked the leaves into a big pile next to the garage, and he gently took my hand and led me over to the old oak. My God! There in the trunk of the tree were memories of a happier time in my first life. My name carved into the bark along with the year. 1972. I had been twelve at the time, and Tom had given me my first honest to god Swiss Army knife. I could feel the tears welling up in my eyes.

Both Wendy and Einstein put their arms around me.

"I figured to show this to you first, Peppermint," he said. "Just in case you happened to run into it later on your own and get a reaction like this."

I thanked him for being so considerate. Little things like this could trip us up so easily by catching us off guard. We mucked around outside for a while, doing what was expected of kids our age, when Wendy said, "You guys realize that the only person at this get together who is older than you two is Father Ed?"

I laughed at that but Einstein shook his head. "No, Wendy," he said. "I realize that technically it's true, but in all honesty, I feel like a teenager. I'm even having problems remembering what it was like to be a woman. That's why I had to show the carving to Peppermint. It's something I don't remember doing, because obviously I didn't, but that's what I would have done. When I wake up in the morning, I don't think of myself as anything but a man."

We headed inside to watch Linda put the finishing touches on her own home baked lasagna. I'd never seen her cook before, but realized that probably both of them could, otherwise they'd be eating a lot of take-out. And there wasn't much in the way of fast food in London in 1974!

Julie told us, as we sat in the big comfortable living room, that after being invited for another “Family” get together, Linda had insisted they bring something more substantial than just baked goods or a salad. She had stayed up late last night preparing all the ingredients and all that was left to do was to let it bake for a while. It sure smelled good. Ann and Rita had made up a huge Caesar salad and Julie had bought two fresh loaves of uncut Italian bread that she sliced down the middle and smothered with butter and garlic and cheese. She would put this into the oven as soon as the lasagna was done, and it would be ready in three minutes. She promised!

Father Ed and Mike and Tom got into a discussion over television shows that were popular now, comparing them to the shows they remembered when they were younger. Julie left to help Linda in the kitchen, so Einstein got us a can of soda, and we headed off for his bedroom.

“God,” I said. “I can’t believe that you’re allowed to take girls into your bedroom. I would never have gotten away with that!”

“Yeah, well, you’re not me, Peppermint,” he said, and I realized he was right.

The same way he wasn’t me any more.

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