

The Operation (Man to Woman TG)

By FoxFaceStories

A Commission for AI

After being diagnosed with a rare and fatal illness, Jacob chooses to undergo a radical procedure to save his life, but will leave him totally female as a side effect. As Jacob begins to change and then recover, the transforming male slowly rekindles a relationship with his childhood friend-turned-nurse.

The Operation

Part 1: The Radical Treatment

“I’m so very sorry Jacob.”

Jacob’s shoulders sagged. Just two months ago, he’d been an ordinary twenty two year old man, his whole life ahead of him. He dreamed of becoming a writer, of putting something creative out into the world. He had planned to travel to different continents, to see nature in all its beauty. He wanted to drink from the cup of life, and gulp down greedily at that. And then he had begun to feel weak and fatigued, plagued by headaches and waves of nausea. He normally appeared like a somewhat handsome guy with short black hair and bright blue eyes - the latter were what got him some luck with women from time to time. But now his skin had started to look a little sallow, and his eyes bloodshot no matter how much he slept. He didn’t have much money, being fresh out of college, but he scraped enough together to see his GP, who organised a number of tests. Those tests had confounded his doctor, who gave him a referral to a specialist, who gave another referral to a subspecialist, and then to the subspecialist’s colleague, until finally Jacob was sat here, now, before Dr Harper, a surprisingly youthful looking woman given her sheer expertise. She looked down at him from the vantage point of her plush office chair and took off her glasses as he processed the news.

“I’m going to die?” he said in a tinny voice.

“It’s a fatal condition, yes. And a very rare one. Newly discovered.”

“Newmann’s Disease,” he repeated to himself. “Was he the patient or the doctor who discovered it?”

“The doctor,” she said. “The patient’s name was Harry Targidan.”

Jacob swallowed. God, he felt weak and fatigued. And hopeless. The shellshock of that simple phrase 'it's terminal' was hovering around his brain, ricocheting painfully off the edges of his skull.

"And - and how long did he last?"

Dr Harper tapped a few keys on her computer. "From diagnosis? Six months."

Six months. The words were like bullets. Or mallets. Or nuclear bombs. He had to steady himself in his chair so as not to fall out of it. So as not to give up, pull into the fetal position, and try to die right there, no matter how shameful such an act would be.

"Is that how long I've got?"

She gave him a look of sympathy that failed to help. "Mr Spritt, I can't say for certain until we run further tests. Newmann's Disease is a highly degenerative condition. It will weaken your muscular system significantly, and bouts of extreme fatigue will only hasten the disease's progress. In the latter stages, it will come for your organs, and there will be only so much your compromised immune system can do."

The thought of his body simply wasting away, feasting upon itself like the ouroboros snake, was a deeply terrifying one. Jacob shivered. In that moment, even his skin didn't feel like his own.

"That doesn't tell me how long I've got."

"I'm trying to tell you that it's impossible to tell. It depends on how well your body fights it, how far along you already are - we haven't detected any major organ defects yet, at least - and what palliative care you attempt. You could last up to a year, potentially."

"A year!?" Jacob said, voice rising higher than expected. "That's it? But - but I have so much to live for. What the hell can I get done in a freaking *year*? Oh God, this is it, isn't it? I'm really going to fucking die. Fuck. FUCK."

Dr Harper was patient with him, not even flinching as he slammed his hands down. Instead, she waited for him to calm his breathing, then spoke with a calm and measured voice.

"I am very sorry, Jacob. Truly, I am. But there are treatments that can at least reduce your discomfort as your condition furthers. And because the condition is new, and with considerable fear over the disease, there is still much being discovered about it. I never want to give false hope, but I promise to keep you updated on any new discoveries that are made about it." She smiled warmly. "It's my specialty, after all."

Jacob nodded, struggling to lift his head. It wasn't the muscular exhaustion though, simply the horrid knowledge that, unless there was some hail Mary on the way, he was slated to die.

“Thanks, Doc,” he said, though he didn’t really mean it. All he could think about was the rapid beating of his heart, as if it was about to explode right then and there. Jacob Spritt was going to die. His entire future was crumbling before him.

The five stages of grief followed, or least the first few steps of them. Jacob shopped around, exhausting other savings in pursuit of any doctor who would give a different opinion. This was, of course, the first stage: Denial. Even as his exhaustion continued, as he battled migraines on and off and found himself puking into his toilet even after a healthy meal, he tried to find some sort of proof that Dr Harper had made a mistake. She was young, right? Perhaps she wasn’t experienced enough! Perhaps another professional . . .

But she was *the* professional, and every other doctor told him the same: his blood work did not lie, nor did the already-existing degeneration of his muscles and parts of his cardio-vascular system. Which left Jacob to the next stage, which was Anger. The young man had, against all advice of his friends and family, taken a university course in English Writing as well as Creative Arts. He had planned to show them one day, to write a great novel or begin selling watercolour artwork. How could he possibly do that now that he had, at most, a year to live!? How could he leave behind anything worthwhile!? How could he even afford the damn treatment!?

His parents were the first to feel the lash of his tongue, followed by his friends, including his best friend Damian.

“Dude, I’m just suggesting things you can still go before . . . you know.”

“No, you were making a fucking bucket list just to make yourself feel good!”

Damian sighed, running his hands through his blonde hair. “Dude, I know this is hard, but I’ve got your best interests at heart here.”

“I’m not a fucking invalid, Damian. You know what? Just get out. I can’t deal with this shit now. I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Look, Jacob, I just wanna-”

“Get out.”

But he couldn’t keep up the rage forever. It took effort and energy, and both of those were waning in his crumbling body. When his mother and father visited him again at his apartment, wanted to have a cup of tea and talk things over, he let loose one final time.

“Go away. You didn’t believe in what I wanted before, so why the hell should you care about how I go?”

The words were cruel, and it felt *good* to be cruel, at least until afterwards, when he asked them to visit again and apologised. That was the point where he collapsed into tears, begging for something to change.

“Why me, Mom?” he asked his parent. “Why me? Why can’t it be someone else? Isn’t there some way to make this right with God or something? Can’t I just live a good life and m-make better decisions and then maybe I can dig myself out of this fucking disease!?”

His mother simply held him, shedding tears herself, while his father placed a hand on his shoulder. He was still angry at his situation, still furious at the whole life that was being snatched from him. But stage two was giving way to stage three: Bargaining. And my, did he bargain. Jacob had never been a particularly religious man, having fallen from the faith pretty early on in life despite the devoutness of his mother and at least exterior-religious facade of his father. But now that he dreamed of hourglasses dripping the sands of his life away and of lonely beds in which he had to be fed and cleaned, appeals to some higher power became more frequent. Jacob sent prayers to the God or Gods of just about every major religion on Earth, plus some minor ones, and then pagan deities that most people had likely never heard of. The good thing about an education in the humanities, he supposed, was simply knowing that there was a Tengri to even worship.

And still it did nothing. Neither did the art projects he began, all of which had far too much black paint and depression, almost inauthentic in their bleakness. His canvas fell into disuse, and so did his writing pad. The document he had penned to possibly be his magnum opus was titled *Hope’s End*, and it was to be an account of a man dying of a degenerative disease and finding hope again in the connections he made from his hospital bed. But it felt insipid after a time, both too melodramatic and too mawkish and too sad all at the same time. And, of course, far too autobiographical, where once he had imagined penning novels and novellas that were far more exotic and boundary pushing.

This was, of course, the final-to-last stage, right on schedule. Just three months after the initial diagnosis - and many confirmations of Newmann’s Disease since - Jacob’s mood had become a black cloud. A fog that he could not escape. Depression had come, and with it the horrible, heavy burden of knowledge that he was not going to live. He wasn’t even likely to make it a full year. Already he had moved back in with his parents, and to his utter humiliation at first, he was increasingly relying on his mother to aid him in ordinary tasks. A glass pitcher would be too heavy. A door knob too fiddly to use when his hands got the shakes. The fine coordination of doing his hair couldn’t be achieved, and even going to the toilet required deep concentration and patience. He began to use a walker to get around due to the weakness of his muscles and bones, and he slept far too often. He had little doubt that part of the sleep was driven more by depression than anything else. Fatigue and exhaustion was not the same as sleepiness, but it was so much easier to just close one’s eyes and try

to dream away the sorrow. In those dreams he could retreat to happier memories, times when he'd simply enjoyed catching up with Damian rather than existing as an object of pity for him, or even earlier when he'd lived in a different town before his parents moved.

One figure in particular emerged during those dreams, and it was one he hadn't thought about in some time. She had chestnut brown hair and a vivid smile that was almost *too* big, and delightfully so. Kids made fun of her for her big teeth and glasses, but Jacob had just thought she was really pretty, even from a young age. Clara Jessup had been Jacob's neighbour; *literally* the girl next door growing up. They'd been fast friends, always getting up to no good together, making strange art in their backyards together and going on all sorts of make-believe adventures together. She'd been an adventurous girl who'd gotten him out of his comfort zone, and as they grew into teenagehood he'd even started to look at her another way. Jacob had actually stood up and defended her when a group of bullies kept calling her 'horseface', and despite the fact that he took a punch to the face he considered it totally worthwhile for the kiss she planted on his cheek. And yet no relationship had come. Jacob was too nervous to ask her out, and continually second-guessed any signs that she may have been interested. In the end, he had moved with his parents at the age of fifteen, promised to stay in contact, and slowly that promise had faded, as such things often do.

Jacob hadn't thought much about her in years, except in moments of quiet longing when a relationship didn't pan out. But now that his life was ending so prematurely, the memory of Clara took on a singular regret. Somehow, that entire image of an ideal childhood seemed so far away and simultaneously such a powerful retreat. His mother managed to find a heap of photographs and mementos from an old cardboard box up in the attic, and he poured over the pictures of him and Clara together, smiling and tearing up at some of these memories. And perhaps it was the fulfilment in remembering that better time, more than anything, that allowed him to progress to the final stage.

Acceptance.

"I think I'm at peace with it," he told his crying mother one morning, as she helped him into a comfortable sofa chair and took his painkiller medication with some water. "I think I'm going to be okay."

His mother hugged him, causing a little pain, but it was true. He *was* okay with it.

That was, until he received an unexpected call from Dr Harper, with a very, *very* important message.

"Jacob? Do you have a moment to talk? There might be a treatment available to help you. But I'll warn you, it's radical."

“I’m so very sorry Jacob.”

Jacob blinked. He was back in Dr Harper’s office, though this time with his mother waiting beside him, and here he was being told another piece of bad news. And also a potentially very good one.

“I - I don’t quite understand,” he said. “You’re saying that this treatment might actually save me?”

Dr Harper nodded, her tone serious. “Yes, it may well do. In fact, I believe it’s the *only* method of saving you.”

Jacob mentally chewed on this information. “But . . . it will turn me into a woman.”

His mother gasped, and not for the first time. In fact, this was the third. Dr Harper ignored her. “Yes, that is likely to be a side effect of the treatment.”

Jacob exhaled, almost disbelieving this conversation was happening. He felt so damn weak and tired, and his head was pounding again, but somehow *this* bit of information was enough to penetrate through that mental fog.

“But . . . why?”

“Yes!” his mother exclaimed. “That’s what I’d like to know, too! How can you possibly sit there and claim that turning my son into a woman with some freak science experiment could possibly help him!”

“Mrs Jessup-

“Call me Elaine.”

“Mrs Elaine, Jacob, you need to understand this: Newmann’s Disease *only* affects men. We in the medical research community thought that it might be a sheer coincidence that the small grouping of subjects have only been male so far, or that it was just a numbers game. For instance, men can technically develop breast cancer, it’s just much less common than for a woman to do so. But there are *no* female Newmann’s Disease sufferers. None. And now we know why. The disease can *only* affect individuals with the XY chromosomal configuration, and it is this configuration that allows it to spread.”

“So . . . you’re turning me into a woman through this ‘radical gene change procedure’ to rid me of the disease?”

The doctor smiled. “Effectively, yes. Though, if we are to get technical, becoming a woman is only a byproduct. We are effectively flushing the Y chromosome out of your system by providing you with an XX configuration, thus ending the disease and allowing your body to redevelop its health. Naturally, this means becoming female, but it is not the direct purpose of the therapy, strictly speaking.”

Jacob sat in silence for several long moments, mulling this over. His poor mother was aghast.

“But - but he’s my baby boy!”

“Mom . . .”

“I understand, Mrs - Elaine, but this could be the only way to save him.”

Jacob looked at his mother. The thought of becoming a woman terrified him as much as it embarrassed him. But then again, his mother was a strong woman. And while his big sister was abroad on her usual business, he had always looked up to her as well.

“It wouldn’t be temporary, would it?” he asked Dr Harper.

She shook her head. “I’m afraid not. This radical procedure is only being trialled for you in order to test it, really. The amount of forms you’ll need to sign will be incredible. And it will be years and years away from final approval. You just provide the perfect test subject; it’s not like ethical concerns come into it much when your only other option is death, if you’ll pardon my saying.”

Death. That word brought with it such a sharp clarity that it nearly jolted the exhausted man. He caught a reflection of himself in the mirrored glass of a nearby cabinet, and for just a moment he almost seemed the harbinger of the final death himself. Jacob’s face was gaunt, thin, skeletal. His features were pale, his hair beginning to become patchy, and his eyes were sunken. Hollow. It was a foreshadowing of what was to come, unless radical steps were taken. He placed a hand on his mother’s thigh gently as she tried to communicate her concerns. She silenced herself instantly and met her son’s gaze.

“Okay,” she said. “If you’re sure.”

“I want to live, Mom.”

She swallowed, tears bubbling up in her eyes and spilling down her cheeks. “I want that too, Jacob. God, I want that too. I just . . . yes. I want that more than anything.”

He turned to face Dr Harper.

“I want the treatment. As soon as possible.”

The doctor stood immediately. “I’ll make some calls. Stay here. Like I said, there’s going to be a *lot* of paperwork, but the sooner we do it, the sooner we can start the therapy. And then we try and save your life, Jacob.”

Jacob said back in his chair and closed his eyes. His mother clenched his shoulder, but his mind was elsewhere. Become a woman? Absurd. Ridiculous. Embarrassing as all hell. But to live? That was a desire that was all too easy. He’d change into a hamster if it were necessary to keep on going.

The five stages of acceptance were in full reverse. Jacob was ready to deny Death all over again. And this time he was going to win.

Even if it meant becoming Jacqueline.

Part 2: Clara

Dr Harper hadn't been lying about the paperwork. There were reams and reams of it. *Mountains* of it, plural. And that was just the start: Jacob's parents were required to sign forms, and one was even sent off to his sister for some reason. The dying man also had to go through numerous interviews, all of them testing his intellectual awareness and psychological preparedness. A number of the questions were embarrassing, and it had something almost like the Ludivico Technique from *A Clockwork Orange*, sans the forcible eye-openers. In it, he had to watch numerous clips of femininity - women at the mall, at the beach in bikinis, trying on makeup, naked female bodies, the works - and his responses were tested. Dr Harper explained later that they were looking for disgust, revulsion, or intense discomfort, all of which would have disqualified him from getting the treatment, for fear of massive psychological harm.

"I mean, I did feel embarrassment," Jacob wheezed, his lungs starting to get painful several days on from that fateful meeting with the doctor.

"Oh, that's fine," she explained, chuckling a little.

"What's so funny?"

"Just that I imagine almost anyone would be a little embarrassed in your situation, and I imagine they know that too. But don't worry, embarrassment we can deal with."

"Just so long as I don't have to wear those bikinis or dresses in the flick."

"Don't worry, Jacob, you'll be able to keep your fashion however you want it as a woman. The most important thing is saving your life. And now, finally, we can get to doing that part."

Jacob was more than happy to get to that part. His body was failing faster and faster, and he was starting to suspect - as Dr Harper was - that all this commotion getting him ready for the gene therapy treatment was only making his Newmann's disease accelerate. His parents - especially his mother - were starting to get fraught, and while it was a shock that their baby boy might soon become a woman, his Dad was just about ready to sock some lawyers in the jaw if they didn't get damn well out of the way and let his son be put into the hospital already.

Which, on April the 7th, on a warm morning with small pale clouds hovering in the sky, was finally what happened. Jacob was taken to the surgical ward of the hospital and wheeled in. There, a nurse belonging to the general staff helped him change, then got him onto a ward bed where he was wheeled further into the facility. His mother held his hand, and his father put a hand on his leg as he was wheeled forward, but soon they had to stay behind. His mother clutched on as long as she could.

"Take care of my boy!" she cried, as Jacob's father held her.

“Don’t worry, Mom!” Jacob said. “What’s the worst that can happen, right?”

His words probably failed to make her chuckle, but he’d always had a slightly offbeat sense of humour, and it had been trending darker recently. He coughed a couple of times as he was wheeled to a room that had been cleared for use. He’d expected his therapy to be in a lab, but evidently this rather fancy private hospital had its own facilities for specialist care and experimental treatment. Dr Harper was already waiting, as were a number of other attendants, nurses, and physicians.

“Welcome, Jacob. How are you feeling?”

“Like death,” he said, his voice sounding like it too. “I feel like shit. When can we begin?”

“Very soon. You’ll be unconscious for most of this. I warn you, there’ll be lots of needles-”

“And blood tests, and a full head shave, and weird little bags of hormone drip, and a plug that goes under my arm, and the works. I know doctor, I consented to all of it. It’s going to make one hell of a story when I get to write it semi-autobiographically one day, and who knows? Maybe it’ll be inspiration for some good watercolour art. But I can’t do that if I’m wasting away right now, so please . . . knock me out.”

“I’d say he’s ready,” an assistant joked. The others laughed, and moments later he was wheeled fully inside. He was transferred to an operational bed, one with a lot more doodads and screens and monitors and cords than any he’d seen before. From there a mask was placed upon him, and a needle poked into his wrist to provide fluids. Jacob didn’t care about the pain: pain was a constant of his life by that point. He was exhausted, and once more he wanted to sleep.

“Just breathe easy, Jacob,” Dr Harper said through her mask. “We’re turning on the gas now, and soon you’ll be out. We’ll update you then.”

He put up his thumb, or at least tried to. She must have got the message, because she and the others, including the anaesthetist, started to talk all technical, while Jacob simply focused on breathing. This was it, his first step towards salvation. Not the salvation he would have chosen, but beggars could hardly be choosers. As nearly a minute passed, he began to wonder when they were going to hurry up and knock him out already.

And then suddenly he was sleeping, entering a dreamless state.

Jacob woke along in the hospital bed. He had no idea how long he’d been out, but his body was still exhausted. His stomach rumbled with hunger, and he decided that the thing he

cared about most, even more than hearing about the success or failure of the procedure, was simply getting a damn egg sandwich.

“Where’s that button?”

His voice sounded a bit different to him, but knowing he was likely to become a woman if all went ‘well’ was likely just prejudicing him. He was just raspy and needed water too. He pressed the buzzer once he found it and waited for a nurse to come, laying back in the meanwhile.

“Please let this have worked,” Jacob murmured to himself, still feeling utterly exhausted all over. “Please, please, please. Ugh, perhaps I’m in the bargaining stage again.”

It certainly felt like it. Jacob wished he had his laptop nearby, or just some paper, a clipboard, and some sketch pencils. Something to get his feelings down in a creative manner, or at least to distract from his hungry stomach.

“Okay then, how can I help you?”

Jacob opened his eyes to see a nurse pulling back the curtain and then closing it again as she entered. Something was intensely familiar about her, though she was half concealing her face as she checked the clipboard.

“Just some food, thanks,” Jacob said, starting to close his eyes again. “And water. I’m really famished and thirsty.”

“Of course, darling. I’ll see to it straight - wait.”

He opened his eyes. The woman was examining the clipboard that had been sitting at the end of the bed, and her own eyes were wide with recognition. She looked at him, jaw dropped. His own fell too.

“Jacob?”

“Clara!?”

“Oh my God, it *is* you!” she said, coming over to his side. “It’s been, what, six years?”

“Seven,” he answered, a little too quickly.

“Wowie! That’s - that’s crazy! How have you been? Oh, I’m so sorry, I shouldn’t ask that. I saw on your file that you’re being treated for something degenerative.”

“Yeah,” he replied. “Fatal, actually.”

She flung a hand to her mouth. She still had that same longer face, and still wore a similar pair of glasses. Her chestnut hair was back in a smart ponytail, but while the kids had mocked her back in the door for having a somewhat horse-like face, she had rather grown into it now, or at least that was his view. She still had bigger teeth and a prominent jaw, but they gave her character, particularly when she smiled. Unfortunately, she wasn’t smiling now.

“Oh God, I’m so sorry. You don’t . . . look good.”

He chuckled, barely able to believe he was finally seeing Clara again, and like *this*.

"I don't feel too good either. I was only diagnosed about four months ago. I came in on April 7th. What's the date now?"

"Um, it's the 9th."

He chuckled. "Figures I was out for a while."

"This isn't the palliative care ward," she said, curious. "What are you doing here?"

"The docs - led by a woman called Dr Harper - have cooked up a radical new treatment that might save me. I signed onto it. It's got a ton of side effects but it might reverse the condition and save me."

This time she beamed, and it made him beam in turn. Despite the exhaustion, the anxiety, and the fear that this might not work, it warmed his heart to be in the presence of his childhood friend and first crush again.

"That's so wonderful to hear!" she exclaimed. "It's crazy, I was just thinking about you the other day, Jacob. How are your parents?"

"Good as they can be. Worried."

"And your sister?"

"Overseas. She works as a high-powered lawyer, believe it or not."

She laughed, and it was a loud laugh, as it always had been. Boisterous, even. "I don't believe it, but I'll have to take your word for it! I'm so sorry you're going through this, but I'm glad you're getting some form of treatment. This is so crazy seeing you again, especially like this."

He agreed. *It was crazy.*

"Wait, are you my nurse, then?"

"For the rest of my shift, you're stuck with me."

Jacob couldn't help but take a little notice of her body: she was slim, almost bird-like with her thin limbs and features. She had always been a bit gangly, and while she had grown into herself far more, he couldn't help but feel some part of her wild child self was still present. He liked it.

"It's really good to see you too, Clara. You . . . you look real good."

"You too," she said, before the two of them laughed again. "Sorry, it's just an automatic response!"

"I had no idea you'd even moved here!" he replied. "Why didn't you reach out?"

She just shrugged. "Why didn't you?"

And that was enough to make the heavy silence fall between them, like the past had been opened for just a moment, only for the curtain to cover it once more.

"I guess I just . . . drifted out of your orbit. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, I'm sorry too. I'm sorry we're re-meeting under this particular circumstance."

Jacob sighed. "Me too. At least I might get better, right? Then I can buy you a coffee and talk about old times?"

"Nothing stopping us now, is there?"

His stomach rumbled, and Clara's cheeks turned pink.

"Except that! I'll get you your food! No allergies, right?"

"Just a little lactose intolerant!"

"I remember!" she said, even as she exited. Jacob watched her go with some nostalgia. She wasn't the most beautiful woman, not by far, but she still had the same energy, and that counted for so much more.

"Still so damn pretty," he whispered to himself.

Clara brought back the food not long after, and he practically *inhaled* the sandwiches, though he needed some help with getting them out due to his hands getting the shakes again, much to his embarrassment. Clara was excellent about it though, making sure not to make any comments or even joke about it. They had time for a small chat about old times, such as when they'd almost been eaten by the guard pitbull in the back neighbour's yard when they'd lost a baseball over there, or when they'd snuck out to go fishing in the creek by the nearby woods despite having no idea how to set a line or fish at all. The pair of them laughed, her a little too loud as always, which only charmed him further.

"I had nearly forgotten that," she said. "You got a hook in your eyebrow."

"Still bear the scar," Jacob faux-bragged, scratching above his right eye. "It's not a particularly impressive one, is it?"

"I don't know, it looks a bit sexy."

He raised an eyebrow. "Oh really?"

She smirked, but quickly changed the subject. "So this treatment, can I ask what it is?"

"It's real science fiction stuff. Full on gene replacement therapy. DNA tinkering."

"That *does* sound sci-fi. Pretty cool, I guess. Expensive?"

"Free. I'm the test subject."

"Just don't turn into one of those gross alien monsters you used to always draw."

He laughed. "I mainly draw flowers now. But no, the aim is to bring me back to health as a . . . human. Big side effects, though. Um, yeah."

Clara did that pout he remembered her always doing, cocking her head like an owl as her curiosity was inflamed. "What kind of side effects, if you don't mind me asking?"

His cheeks turned red. He could feel the blush coming over him.

“Big ones,” he said evasively.

Thankfully, he was saved by the timely arrival of Dr Harper and several attendants, most of whom he recognised from the initial operating room. Clara excused herself after giving a brief update to Dr Harper, and so Jacob could breathe just a little easier knowing he didn't have to reveal that he was likely going to be a damn *woman* if the therapy worked well.

“So,” he said, looking nervously at the crowd of doctors around him. “How'd it go? Did it succeed?”

He knew already from Harper's smile that it had, and it came as a wave of relief and - perhaps just a little - anxiousness over his future.

“We believe it did, as far as we can tell,” the doctor said. “There's still be more treatments. Think of it like chemo; we need to continue undertaking treatments that won't feel very good, but will hopefully purge the disease from your system. But, like any such treatment, it will affect your body.”

“By making me female. Um, has that started.”

Dr Harper pulled up a chart and handed him a copy. It was all nonsense and jargon to him, but one part he did latch on to:

Subject shows presentation of XX pair clusters and continual growth of more.

“Technically, clusters is the wrong word,” the doctor said, “but this report is written to also be understood by the general public when it hits the news.”:

Jacob swallowed. He'd forgotten that was one of the many scraps of legal paper he'd signed; the right to have his story told as part of this grand experiment. The first man to ever be transitioned to a woman on a fully biological level. Not exactly what he wanted to be famous for, but anonymity was sadly out of the question. He would, at least, have until the operation was fully finished until it was released to the public.

“Yeah, I can't get out of that, can I?”

She shook her head. “Sadly not, Jacob. But we can talk about that later. For now, have you noticed any differences already?”

He frowned. “I haven't really had time. I sort of woke up like this not long ago, and Clara brought me food.”

“Clara?”

“She's an old friend of mine from childhood. She just happens to be my nurse.”

“Ah, well. Perhaps now is time for an examination then? Would you mind if we wheeled you to a more proper examination room?”

Jacob consented, and soon he was on his way. He looked back briefly, hoping to spy Clara, but she wasn't there.

Jacob still didn't have much strength, so he had to be helped out of his hospital gown. He held onto the walking frame as he was presented before a mirror. A camera recorded him, something he tried to ignore as he looked at himself. He was still quite skeletal, sickly, and generally sorry to look at, but beyond that there were definitely some changes that he began to notice.

"My nipples," he said. "Do they look . . . ?"

"Bigger?" a doctor who was doing the examination said. "Yes, indeed they do. Mark that down." He said that to one of the several assistants as he poked and prodded Jacob's body. His skin felt more sensitive than usual, which weirded him out, and his nipples were no exception. Quite the opposite, in fact.

"Ow!" he yelped as a metal device brushed over it. "That's cold as hell!"

To his embarrassment, his nipple stiffened, becoming somewhat 'erect.'

"Development of female areolas and nipple configuration seems to be occurring," the doctor said into his recording device. "Some slight redistribution of subcutaneous fat around the lower stomach and thighs. Slight softening of facial features. This is all we can detect. No outward changes to the penis or testes."

"Thank fuck," Jacob breathed. "I'll keep that change at bay as long as possible."

The doctor turned off the recording device and smirked. "Don't blame you there one bit, son. You're right to get your gown back on. The other tests just require internal scans, and you don't have to be naked for those."

Nothing major was revealed, though there was speculation that his body was beginning to create far more estrogen given his blood samples. Only time would tell, but it was a promising - and terrifying - sign.

"What happens next?" Jacob asked as he was wheeled back to his room.

"Now?" Dr Harper said. "Now we get you rested, and ready for the next few rounds."

Part 3: The Next Rounds

Jacob's stay at St Ives' continued, as did his treatment. The complexity of the gene therapy was well and truly beyond his understanding, but its effects were not, at least as they presented themselves on his body and were explained by Dr Harper. His chromosomes were indeed altering, changing over time into an XX configuration and eliminating the Y. It would take several months for this change to go all the way, but the doctor assured Jacob that the tiring treatments and exhausting recovery would not go over the same period; at

some indefinable date there would be an observable 'tipping point' where his body would continue the change all the way to womanhood, even without further gene treatments. In fact, that was the point; his body needed to adjust to its new configuration on its own.

It didn't make the present situation any easier though. Every few days he was wheeled on his bed back up to the Experimental Room, as he liked to think of it, and he was placed into unconsciousness as various changes were administered to his base DNA. It was scary stuff, and it was hard to feel like one was recovering when one was left utterly without energy after such a treatment. Still, some changes for the good were observable: his muscle pain had changed. It now felt like his muscles were over flexed rather than being attacked and chewed up. He also no longer got the shakes in his hands and feet. Walking unassisted was still too difficult, but his hand-eye coordination was an improvement, as was his vision.

"I didn't even realise my eyesight had gotten so bad," he remarked to another physician, a man going by Dr Ackles.

"Trust me, brother," he said, pointing at his own glasses. "You only really know when you get fixed."

Newmann's Disease was still progressing in some areas, however. This was only to be expected: only when the XY chromosomal configuration was fully addressed could it be said that the disease was fully gone from his body. His breathing was sometimes erratic, and his mind became clouded with headaches at times. But on the phone to his sister Elizabeth, he was able to give the good news that it was receding slowly on the whole.

'So you're going to live? Jakey, that's great!'

She always called him Jakey. It was annoying, but he also liked it.

"So it seems. Don't know what I'll look like at the end of it, though."

'Well, you know I always wanted a younger sister, even when you and I were little.'

"Ugh, don't remind me."

'I'm totally taking you dress shopping when I'm back in the States.'

"Never happening."

'I just hope you don't end up better looking than me. Can you imagine?'

"That would be the ultimate revenge, I suppose."

She laughed on the other end of the phone. *'Still, it would be totally worth it for you to end up looking like a total snack. After all the times you made fun of me for getting dressed up for dates or to go clubbing.'*

Jacob sighed. "I am so going to regret all that, aren't I?"

'Yes.' She paused. *'Are you scared?'*

"Yeah. It's a lot to process. Didn't really plan on becoming a woman in my lifetime. And knowing it's permanent . . ."

'I'm sorry, Jakey, I mean it. If it helps, being a woman is still pretty similar to being a man, on the whole. I mean, I'm a crazy good lawyer, if you don't mind me saying. Not like you're in the fifties and you'll be forced to be some stay-at-home wife or whatnot.'

"I'd have to get me a husband first," he remarked, only to instantly regret it. He didn't even want to *think* about whether his sexuality would 'flip', so to speak. Thankfully, Elizabeth ignored it and moved on.

'Have you had any changes yet? I mean, in that direction? If you don't mind me asking.'

Jacob bit his tongue a little, trying to figure out what even he was comfortable and not comfortable with talking about. He looked down at his form, thankfully obscured by the gown, but two bits in particular were starting to be a bit harder to hide.

"Well, um," he said, "let's just say that I might need a training bra soon."

'Oh. Well, I guess if you're on hormones.'

"Yeah, pretty much. Apparently they might get . . . bigger."

'No luck in being a flat-chested gal?'

He chuckled. "Here's hoping."

'Mind you, Mom's genes are strong.'

"Please, no more! Let's change the subject! How are you going in France?"

'Oh, it's lovely, but I'm feeling homesick a lot lately . . .'

The conversation continued on from there, but the cat was out of the bag, he supposed, especially since the following day his mother visited him and made vocal notice of that fact that he was starting to "develop a slight chest."

"Elaine," his father had coughed. "Jacob doesn't want to talk about that now."

Peter Spritt had always been quite a stoic, perhaps even distant man. He wasn't one to feel emotions deeply, or at least to express them. It just didn't come naturally to him. But in that moment Jacob could have hugged him deeply for days. His father may not have been the most emotionally connected man, but he had immediately understood that no man wanted to discuss his forthcoming emasculation as a topic of light discussion, least of all with his mother.

"Thanks Dad," he said as he departed.

Peter just smirked. "Keep it together kid. Proud of you."

Somehow those words meant more than any speech. They kept Jacob going over the next few days, especially as further feminine changes made themselves known. He was growing breasts - that much was obvious - though they were still barely perceptible at this point. His nipples, on the other hand, were much more present, having grown larger, a bit pinker, and with a kind of strawberry shape to them when they stiffened. After a private discussion with Dr Harper, he'd been given some tape to cover them. It was embarrassing to

use, but less embarrassing than wearing a training bra (or perhaps an A-cup bra, which might actually have been the case for his chest) or simply letting his nipples display themselves prominently.

Other changes were manifesting further too. His body hair was no longer growing, and as it shed it was starting to thin as a result. Jacob had never been one for a goatee or moustache, but he always had a bit of manly scruff. Now it was going away, hair by hair. By contrast, Dr Harper and her specialist team were recording new follicles breaking through his scalp in surprising numbers. He was being kept shaved bald for now for the nodes they attached to his head, but when his hair grew back, it was apparently going to be quite thick. "Lush" was the word that Dr Harper used.

"It's a good thing," she said. "It shows that the replacement treatments are working, and that it is rejuvenating your cells as well. Hair growth stimulation as a byproduct of the treatment also has many possibilities."

"At least going bald - you know, when I'm no longer bald by other means - will be off the table for a while," Jacob had said. "Just don't expect me to grow it out long."

"Well, that's the thing; it's already *trying* to grow out long. Faster. We'll keep on top of it."

Jacob sighed. Perhaps he would only end up with a mullet when it was all done. There were worse fates. Though did any woman actually look good with a mullet? Did *anyone*, really?

The changes to his facial hair was mimicked in the rest of his body. Everywhere his body hair was thinning, and he noticed it most upon his chest and legs. The hairs were coming loose, practically shedding, and more than that was what was happening to his skin; it was softening. Becoming smooth. More sensitive. In effect, it was becoming the skin one would associate with a woman, and a healthy one at that. Various blemishes, marks, and - remarkably - even scars that Jacob had accumulated over the years were disappearing, with only a few small moles and freckles remaining in place. His rough knees no longer had so many creases upon them, and even the calluses on his fingers from long days of climbing rocks as a kid were starting to go, and the same for his feet. Jacob had never particularly taken great care of the little details of his body. So long as he was relatively fit and not bad looking he didn't care too much. But now he had fingernails that looked freshly manicured, and feet that were slim and well taken care of. His eyelashes were growing longer, and his nose - which had quite a few obvious pores on it - looked like he'd had work done all of a sudden. And this was to say nothing of the slow weight distribution he was experiencing. The nurses were bringing him plenty of food as his body demanded it, all on a high-carb and high-energy diet to aid his body's transition. A lot of energy was being burned to form this transition, but it also meant that he was finally putting weight back on, instead of losing it.

Only it was becoming increasingly obvious that the weight was going to different places: his chest, of course, as had been noted many times by him, but also his hips and rear and lower stomach.

“All areas of subcutaneous fat,” his dietician explained. Her name was Dr Felicia Hardt, and she was a kindly plump-faced woman, ironically enough given her profession. “This accords with my colleague Dr Harper’s prediction. Your body is putting on the weight it needs to continue the chromosomal ‘switch’, as it were, but the weight gain is also going to places that are more in the norm for biological femininity; namely the hips, the buttocks, the breasts, and the thighs. We’ll see more of that develop as you go, but just be aware that your centre of gravity might slowly shift downwards, as is the case for many women. Our X-rays of your bones indicate further growth stimulated there as well: we hope that this is the beginning of changes to make your pelvis more in line with that of a female’s. Of course, that’s outside my specialty, but the weight gain factor is no concern to me as your dietician. In fact, I’m recommending some more high-carb and high-energy consumption. I don’t think you’ll complain about more fruit juice and black bean rice, will you?”

Jacob didn’t, and couldn’t. The good food - an anomaly for a hospital - was one of the few joys about this whole process. It didn’t make him feel better about his body literally changing shape, however. It seemed to be happening too slowly, and yet far too quickly at the same time. Jacob had never been the most attached to his manhood, never been one of the guys who obsessed over muscle cars and never showing emotion and picking up lots of chicks. He was secure in who he was, and his masculinity flowed from there. But to have that well dry up and evaporate around him, that made him finally realise just how presence his sense of being a man had truly been. It had defined him in ways he hadn’t even realised, right down to his interactions with his father versus that of his mother, to the kind of things he painted or wrote about, how he saw himself in relation to women and other men, with friends and relations, with his very social circle. Hell, he and Damian had discussed women more than once, and when his friend came and visited him, knowing the truth of what he would become, there was a distinct absence, an empty space that they both talked around. Oh, sure, Damian mocked him playfully for “getting a girl the only way you can, Jacob!” and for “finally getting a pair of tits you can play with whenever you want, am I right?”, but there was an awkwardness to these comments, a sense that the change in gender would, in fact, change the very foundation of their friendship. Even if Jacob’s personality remained exactly the same, the sheer knowledge that he would soon be a woman would also make some topics of discussion out of bounds as well, or at least a little uncomfortable.

Which made the one other person Jacob wanted to interact with quite the minefield.

Clara smiled - no, *beamed*, her enormous grin practically infectious - as she came to see Jacob. She looked good as ever in her nurse's outfit, and her confidence and buoyancy was clear as day.

"Morning, sunshine!" she announced. "Miss me?"

"I actually did," Jacob said, accepting the food she passed to him. "I was starting to get worried I was only going to have other nurses assigned to me."

"You didn't like Gertrude?"

Jacob raised an eyebrow. Gertrude had been an old battleaxe of a nurse, a German-sounding woman who had shushed him quite passionately when he'd made too much noise about his discomfort. Suffice to say, he really wanted to paint an exaggerated portrait of her . . . preferably from memory.

"She left an impression, I'll leave it at that."

Clara giggled. "Well, I'll be back far more often from now on. I've managed to swing it with the chief nurse so that I can attend to you more often . . . if that's what you want. None of the embarrassing stuff, don't worry. We have a pair system, so that won't be an issue."

"It's okay. I can actually walk to the toilet now. All by myself. How impressive is that?"

It was meant to be sarcastic, but her genuine smile made him feel just as genuinely proud. It was a damn improvement, he decided.

"That's so great to hear, Jacob." She checked his drip and his bed, as well as making sure the monitor was all properly connected and up to date. "I'm so proud of you. I really am. You look better too, I think. Sad they had to shave you though; I rather enjoyed the five o'clock shadow you were rocking. It suited you."

"The struggling artist look?" he replied.

"Well, you've got the struggling part down, at least," she said, quick as wit itself.

He nearly coughed up his coffee, trying not to laugh too much.

"Shit, you got me!" he said, chuckling. "You always knew how to make me spit up my drink."

"Well, you should show me your art sometime."

Jacob shrugged. "I would, but I haven't got materials here. I asked Mom to pick me up some stuff, but as awesome as she is, she doesn't know which paintbrush to hold."

Clara just shrugged, tore off a piece of paper she had from a notepad, and passed it over with a pen. "Write down what you need. I'll pick it up when my shift ends."

"Clara, I can't ask-"

"Hey, we're friends, right? I missed you. And I feel shitty that neither of us reconnected until now. Plus, a ward bed is boring even with a fully charged phone."

"I'll pay you."

She rolled eyes. “Yeah, obviously. I’m not letting you off that easy. I’m just glad you’re better. You look different from last week.”

Jacob went a bit rosy-cheeked. “How so?”

“Um, well, no offence, but you definitely look softer. But in a healthy way!”

The blush turned what had to be a dark crimson, at least it felt that way to Jacob.

“Yeah, I know I look it. It’s not . . . my preferred look.”

But she just shrugged in the carefree manner he’d always remembered her for. “Well, I think it suits you. And hey, at least you’re getting better right? Can’t claim to know much about Newmann’s Disease, but from what I can tell by Googling it’s a pretty vicious one. If there’s anything extra I can do as your nurse, you tell me, okay?”

“I will. I feel like getting painting supplies is more than enough.”

“Hey, what are recently-reunited friends at a hospital for, right?”

She flashed that brilliant smile once more, took the note with the supplies he’d written on it, and left. Jacob lay there, cursing himself privately. Why couldn’t he just tell her? Why was it Clara, of all people, that he found impossible to explain the bizarre circumstances of his ‘recovery’? His mother and father knew, his sister knew, his best friend Damian knew, and his personal medical staff knew and were keeping, thankfully, quite quiet on it while they filmed and took notes. And while he wasn’t exactly comfortable with all of them knowing due to the embarrassment of it all, he still had told them, or allowed them to know.

But not Clara.

“She’s my bloody nurse. She’s going to find out,” he said to himself. He raised his hand to grab a fork to eat the scrambled eggs and sausage slices she’d brought him, and took notice of his hand.

“Jesus, even my hands are getting all dainty and slim.”

At least they weren’t skeletal.

Jacob couldn’t keep the secret forever, though. Clara dropped off the paints and supplies, including a little mini-easel that was apparently purpose-built for people to use in bed. It worked, and he soon found himself painting once more. The first item on the list was Getrude, naturally, but he also decided on painting some backgrounds and nature strips from memory; places he’d rather be that didn’t remind him of the smell of cleaning fluid and hand sanitiser everywhere. It gave him a new sense of life, even as the treatment continued. His voice was starting to be affected, what with his Adam’s apple and testes shrinking slowly in size. The last part in particular was quite the blow to his still-male ego, especially since his member was also slowly reducing. He could still get his ‘needs’ from it, however. A few trips

to the hospital bathroom late at night had taken care of some urges, but it wasn't as responsive as usual.

The voice, though, that was far more noticeable, and it made his throat itch when he tried to lower it artificially.

"Dude, you definitely sound more girly."

"Wow, thank you Damian. What a great friend you are."

His friend shrugged, taking a sip from his soft drink while Jacob painted on the little board Clara had gotten him.

"Hey, I'm just calling it as I see it. You do hear it, right?"

Jacob sighed, voice going up a little higher as he gave up trying to keep his voice low. "How about now then?"

Damian's eyebrows shot to the roof. "Woah, are you putting that on?"

"No, I was putting the *other* voice on. *This* is how I sound now. I'm not even joking."

His friend gave an expression that said 'I'm trying to figure out how to treat this nicely.' "Well, at least you know the cure is working, right? And your voice was always going to be girly, too, on account of you . . . you know . . ."

"Becoming a girl?" Jacob said, unable to prevent a small smirk at his friend's awkwardness.

"Exactly!"

"Well, knowing something is going to happen is different from *having* it happen, believe me. I haven't even told Clara yet."

"Really? Dude, I completely forgot about her! She's your childhood friend from way back, right?"

"Yeah. Oh, this is her now! Shit. Don't tell her anything!"

Damian scoffed. "Yeah, because you growing tits won't become obvious soon, especially if they end up being big ones."

"Ugh, I can't believe I told you about that nightmare. You were the worst one to tell. Now shut up. I don't want her to know."

"Because you like her?"

"Shut up."

Clara approached cautiously. As always, Jacob smiled at her approach.

"I can come back around if you wish?" she asked, noticing Damian. "I'm just here to check that everything's alright and take a little blood - sorry for that last one."

"No, please, stay," Jacob said. "This is my friend, Damian."

"Nice to meet you, Damian. You have to put up with Jacob here?"

"Sadly, I do. Even if he can be such a girl sometimes." He gave an amused smirk in Jacob's direction. The changing man threw a paint brush lightly at him.

"I don't know, I always thought Jacob had a sort of soulful manliness about him," she said, checking over the instruments.

"Oh, he's a man in the *soul*, alright, just not so much in the-"

"Okay, Damian, time for you to leave! And pronto!"

Damian leapt to his feet with a cheeky smile. "Sure thing, Jackie. I'll see you round. Lovely to meet you Clara. Glad you guys got back in touch. Jacob is totally single by the way. Just spitting out random facts that have no bearing on anything, I'm sure! Toodles!"

As he practically skipped off, he turned, walked backwards for a moment, then threw up both hands with thumbs up.

'*She's kinda hot!*' he mouthed, quite obviously, before nearly colliding into a passing doctor. The fact that Clara turned and obviously saw him with his thumbs up before he ducked off again only made it more equal parts hilarious, embarrassing, and utterly hilarious.

"Well, that was a fascinating and very strange moment," Clara said, raising an eyebrow. "I think your friend is trying to set us up together."

Jacob managed to hide the blush much better this time. "Yeah, Damian has never been subtle. Or a lot of things, really. Self-aware, he is not."

"I like him. Is he single?"

"No! I mean, he definitely has a girlfriend."

Clara gave what had to be the most mischievous grin in the world. "You're very adamant on this point, mister."

She lowered her face close to his. At that moment, Jacob was very, *very* aware that her arm was rising to close the curtain, shutting them off from the outside world. Her eyes *sparkled*, gazing into his with the same enchantment as he remembered years ago. How could he not have told her his feelings for her before? How could he have let contact slip away like it did?

"Well, I think it's very important you know that he's single and I'm . . ."

"Nervous? Is that why you've got a case of the high voice today, hmm?"

He gulped. Her face, her lips, hovered close to him. All his exhaustion and tiredness fell away in that moment, his entire being concentrated on this woman who had been his closest friend and very first crush. An unrequited crush, or so he thought until now.

And then he said the stupidest thing he could possibly have ever said.

"I'm . . . I'm becoming a woman."

Clara paused, eyes going wide. Her head cocked in that familiar owl-like fashion.

"Um, what did you just say?"

Jacob panicked. "Nothing! It was just, uh, a sentence I was writing!"

"You were writing a sentence about becoming a woman?"

"Yeah, it's . . . a lot of people are into it! It's a niche interest but . . . shit."

Clara pulled back and folded her arms. It was then that Jacob remembered she could stare down with the best of them. She had always been a little taller too, and while that was no longer true, it certainly was from the perspective of a man bedbound in a hospital bed with a scary nurse looking down over him.

“Jacob, what aren’t you telling me?”

A cold sweat ran down his forehead. “It’s a private medical issue. If you haven’t been told as my nurse, then . . . then you don’t deserve to know!”

“D-deserve?”

“Don’t need to know, I mean. I’m trying to say it’s none of your business to stick your beak into. Shit, not like that!”

She took a deep breath, blinked twice. “Okay, fine, you’re right. I’m sorry. As your nurse I need to be more professional. If there’s something private I don’t have any right to know. I’m sorry, sir. I shouldn’t have been presumptive. Is there anything I can get you?”

“No, it’s not like that-”

“Then press the buzzer if you need me. I’ll arrange for another nurse to take care of you so we don’t have this . . . weird conflict of interest. I’m sorry, Jacob. I was being unprofessional.”

She walked off, and not without clear emotions warring on her face: anger and embarrassment most of all, though whether it was directed at herself or him he couldn’t be sure. Jacob was left lying on the bed, his hands over his face.

“You fucked that up, Jacob,” he told himself.

Part 4: The Truth Comes Out

Jacob had been at St Ives for practically a month, and the changes were getting increasingly hard to hide. Every day brought new revelations about his changing body, confronting him with not just his disappearing manhood, but his emerging womanhood as well. He was putting weight back on, but as before it was going first to those subcutaneous areas that provided him with an increasingly feminine shape. Jacob had seen the X-ray scans that revealed the widening of his pelvis into a female configuration, as well as the shrinking of his ribcage and shortening of his bones.

And that was just the thing: Jacob was putting the lost pounds back on, but his actual *size* was diminishing faster each day. He’d never been enormously tall, but he’d certainly been just shy of six feet. Now he was five foot eight, a result of his compressing spine and decreasing limb length. It was embarrassing to hear the physicians in charge of him talk

about this excitedly. He knew that women were shorter on average than men, but he'd harboured hidden hopes that he could remain the exception. It seemed instead he was destined to be more diminutive. This also had the effect of exaggerating his increasing curves all the more: easier to spot wider hips, a shrinking waist, and a more prominent rear when there was less height to distribute it. Jacob experienced a growing desire to forestall these changes by eating less - food was fuel for his changes, after all - but the fact was that his appetite had returned with a vengeance, and his nurses were often amused by how he wolfed down his various regulated meals with wild abandon, before returning to his painting and writing. The former allowed him to visualise a space beyond the hospital, and the latter was his journal, a way for him to express how it felt to cross the divide from maleness to femaleness. He didn't have any notion of ever publishing it, and yet he found himself indulging deeply in his creative spirit, charting the depths of his own soul as it, too, seemed on the cusp of change.

Other parts of his slow transformation manifested in more outwardly obvious ways. His lower curves could be hidden away when he wasn't having his naked body photographed for the scientific study, but his boobs were getting larger, and nothing could clearly hide them anymore. Jacob found himself quite discomforted by how sore and achy they often were, and when he expressed these concerns to Dr Harper, her response only made him more concerned.

"Oh, that's nothing to be too worried about, Jacob. We're monitoring your breast growth carefully, and from what we've been able to determine, the soreness is simply an expression of tissue growth."

"You mean . . . they're still getting bigger. I'm going to get bigger than an A-cup."

She gave him a sympathetic smile. "I'm sorry, Jacob, I know this is less than ideal for you, since you would like your body to not stray too far from your original template. But this is a new science and the final configuration your body takes can't be predicted. It is certain you will experience more growth to your breasts, but how much I cannot say."

"They're not going to end up really big though, right?"

He thought of his sister. Elizabeth had a C-cup, something he'd discovered once while putting out the washed laundry on the line. She had teased him over the phone about possibly ending up bigger than her in that department, but it was a real fear for him.

"Again, I cannot say," Dr Harper said. "We can't use hormone blockers, I'm afraid. In fact, this is kind of the opposite: the equivalent of large dumps of estrogen into your body. I'll organise with someone to help you with bras if they continue to grow. Trust me, as a woman and not just a doctor, they'll be a real necessity. A girl needs her support."

It was meant to be comforting, but Jacob wasn't a girl, or at least didn't feel like one yet. But Dr Harper had been right: further expansion of his boobs was on the table, and soon

they were coming out of 'hiding.' At night the transforming man found himself rubbing them, trying to ease their soreness but also marvelling at how weird it was to have breasts at all. They were more obvious too now that his ribcage was shrinking and his shoulders too, taking on a greater prominence upon his chest. Just a few days after Dr Harper's talk, Jacob woke to find a heavier weight upon his chest. Getting up and moving to the bathroom carefully - his legs were still quite weak - he was shocked to find that seemingly overnight he had developed a bosom. No longer was he flat-chested with just a tiny bit of fat to give the impression of breasts. Now he had actual *boobs*. They were, at his humble estimation, B-cups. Not particularly large, but very much present, and just as Dr Harper had warned, they now had a definable weight and a jiggle. They shifted with his movements, wobbling a little.

"God, they're even perky. Ugh. And sensitive too."

It was like having a second puberty, really. The soreness, the changes, the discomfort and embarrassment. The body going through a strange time. Several of his physicians had made the same comment.

"At least I don't have acne," he remarked. "But I sure sound like I'm in puberty. High voice and all. And my face is definitely changing . . ."

His nose was smaller, perhaps a little more button-shaped. His jaw was also confirmed to be reshaping itself slowly. He'd always had a bit of a square jaw, now it was a bit rounder. His ears, interestingly, now had detached lobes like his mother's instead of attached like his father's. His Mom would approve of that. His cheekbones were a bit more prominent, and his cheeks a little more full. Not in an overweight way, but in a cute fashion, he supposed. Perfect cheeks for smiling.

"Great, I'm becoming cute," he said.

It made him curious how he'd look with hair, when it was grown back. If he did let it grow longer, would that complete the effect and make him appear more female than male. Given that his eyebrows were a little thicker and yet simultaneously defined, he had little doubt that might be the case.

"How do I hide these frickin' tits?"

The answer, of course, was using a chestwrap. Despite the recommendations of Dr Harper to get used to wearing a bra for his B-cups, it was easier for Jacob's psyche to hide them away. The compression wrap could be a bit uncomfortable, given that it was effectively squishing his new breasts, but at least it stopped them from being so 'active' while also hiding them largely from view. He hadn't interacted much with Clara after he'd accidentally insulted her and pushed her away, but on the days she did have him in her care (apparently unavoidable despite her swapping some schedules), things were a bit tense and awkward, especially since he had to angle himself in such a way as to conceal his changes.

“How are you going today, Jacob?” she asked him a couple of days after his boobs reached that healthy B-cup size. The compression bandage was a real nuisance by that point, and he was constantly scratching his chest.

“As good as I can be,” he replied. “I mean, I still feel sick and tired, but I’m getting better, apparently.”

He cringed at how squeaky his voice was. It sounded even worse when he *tried* to make it sound lower.

“That’s so great to hear. Look, I just wanted to say sorry for the other day. I know you’re in a vulnerable spot and I was being unprofessional. I took your words to heart too much. I guess I just never expected you to say something like that, but as a nurse I know that patients go through all sorts of stuff. I should have understood that.”

Jacob bit his lip. He’d really been hoping to have this conversation when he *wasn’t* experiencing the biggest damn ache and itch in his new tits. He resisted the urge to scratch his chest.

“That’s okay, Clara. Look, I was an ass. As you say, I’m going through stuff. And you’ve been so good to me. You brought me painting supplies. You didn’t have to do that.”

“And I wanted to do that. I guess I was just so excited to reunite with my friend that I let some professional barriers slip and everything. As a nurse, I have certain responsibilities, and-”

The itch got worse, the compression was just as bad. God, were they getting even bigger? He prayed he wasn’t getting a C-cup like his sister.

“Th-that’s okay, Clara. It’s all good. I didn’t mind.”

She wasn’t even looking at him now. This was clearly a prepared speech she’d been thinking. “I know, but I think that makes it worse. You know me, I always throw myself into things and get so excited and then someone else has to shake sense into me. Like when we jumped across that river in the woodlands out behind the Oatlands place. I could have drowned and you and your Dad had to help me out of the root tangle. God, that was scary. Remember that?”

“I - I do, but maybe now isn’t the best-”

“I’ll go soon. I just had to say that I’m sorry. If you want me back as your proper nurse I’ll do it, but I guess I just had so many feelings stirring around in me, remembering how things use to be, and I guess what *could* have been, y’know? Anyway-”

Jacob was becoming maddened, not by her - this was everything he wanted to talk about - but by the pressure that was expanding in his chest with every seeming second.

“Oh G-God, I can’t do this now! I’m sorry, Clara, could you just go?”

She halted, looking at him, and her cheeks went red immediately. “Oh shit, this is just what I’m talking about! Are you in pain? Shall I get your doctor?”

“N-no! I just - ahh - just need some time alone. It’s not you, I swear!”

“Of course! Shoot, I’m so sorry!”

She ducked out, closed the curtain, and within the space of what felt like half a second Jacob had already flung off his top and removed the compression bandage. He breathed a sigh of relief as his boobs were freed from their confinement, wobbling up and down a little, the patterns of the bandage marked across his skin. He cupped his breasts, feeling them, massaging as much of the soreness away as possible and scratching their undersides to relieve the itchiness.

“Mhmmm,” he moaned in a quite feminine tone. “Ahhhh . . . oh God, why is this the best damn feeling in the world?”

His nipples were large and hard, but not from arousal so much as a base female pleasure, the one that came from unburdening one’s chest and scratching away any discomfort. He held them together, producing a line of cleavage he was never meant to have, and despite himself, he actually *smiled*.

“Not too shabby, ha,” he said to himself, still holding his breasts.

Which was exactly the moment when Clara walked back in, parting the curtain for her entrance, and reaching for the mobile phone she’d left behind.

“I’m so sorry, Jacob, I sat my phone here and - oh my God!”

Jacob immediately tried to cover himself, but Clara had already seen everything. Besides, palming his boobs with his hands only emphasised his cleavage and that he had something to hide at all. His hairless body and hourglass figure was also much more obvious from how he was sitting with his legs off the side of the bed. He froze, not knowing what to even say. Clara froze, clearly in the same predicament. Slowly, she reached out and grabbed her mobile phone, eyes still locked upon his obvious breasts.

“I’m . . . I’m very sorry, once again,” she said. “None of this is my business. I’m . . . I’m going to go now.”

She turned on the spot, almost like something out of a comedy routine, and made to go. Jacob exhaled, heart beating like a jackhammer. Part of the truth was out, so why not the rest at this point?

“Clara,” he said, letting his new feminised voice come through. “Wait. Please.”

She turned, and then lowered the curtain.

“Please,” he said, “just let me explain.”

“You don’t need to explain,” she said. “I had no idea you were getting sexual reassignment surgery. I didn’t realise it was even allowed while having a degenerative disease. But that’s totally fine, Jacob, really. I just shouldn’t have barged in: I just - I never expected this!”

She smiled awkwardly, clearly confronted by what she had seen and was still seeing. She was more surprised still when Jacob didn't just laugh, but actively *cackled*.

"What? What is it?"

He wiped away an unexpected stray tear. "Oh, I *wish* I was trans, Clara. This would make this whole thing so, so much easier. Then becoming a woman would not be the second-most terrifying experience of my life, next to nearly dying. But this is something else, something I can't control. And something that's happening regardless of what I want."

Clara drew closer, examining his features, including his bare breasts.

"So . . . what's going on?"

"How much time do you have?"

"I have a couple more visits to make, and then I'm on break. I can come over then and hear you out?"

"Please," he said. "And bring food. This whole process has me starving. That will make sense too."

She left, looking back at him with uncertainty. Jacob then looked down at his breasts and cupped them. Yeah, definitely heavier.

"Fuck, they're still growing."

Clara had never been a good listener. It could be infuriating, but it didn't come from a place of disinterest, at least. Instead, Clara had always been someone who was *fascinated*, and that meant that instead of absorbing one coherent narrative, she derailed it with a thousand questions that didn't just take it off track, but tore up the tracks themselves and flung them to the far corners of the earth. Jacob recounted his story to her over her lunch break, the two of them eating pasta and sponge cake from the hospital cafeteria she'd purchased. From the second he started his story, she was rapid-fire on the question front, talking about Newmann's Disease, how he coped with knowing he might die, his stages of grief, how his parents were feeling, what getting the call from Dr Harper was like, and so on. It got even more rapid-fire when he began discussing the secretive treatment itself and his slow transition to femalehood.

"How far will you go? All the way?"

"Are you female, you know, down there, if you don't mind me asking?"

"What's it like to have boobs? Are they done growing?"

"Are you getting more emotional? I know that's a total stereotype but I'd be very interested in the answer. I bet your hormones are all over the place."

It took Jacob a lot of effort not to die of embarrassment from it all, and yet now that the truth was out, he felt far more comfortable going ahead and sharing it, and sharing far more of it, than he had with anyone else. Clara's questions continued to come, but over time he was happy to answer them all, until they reached the present state of his situation.

"Wow," she said. "I had no idea. Jacob, I'm such an idiot."

"No, you're not."

"A complete moron!"

"Clara, it's okay!"

"An utter nincompoop!"

"Who even uses the word 'nincompoop' anyway?"

She giggled. "Okay, maybe I'm being hyperbolic. But I *am* sorry, and I hope you'll forgive me. I guess I just got so wrapped up in seeing you again and all that . . . plus I definitely should have alerted you before pulling the curtain aside."

Jacob smirked. "Yeah, warn a girl next time while she's flashing her boobs."

That just made Clara laugh again. "Well, if you don't mind me saying, you do like quite 'healthy' in that respect. They looked like C-cups when you were bearing them, maybe?"

Jacob shrugged, intimately aware of how his breasts wobbled a little beneath his outfit. He didn't have the bandage on at the moment, and it was a damn relief.

"Yeah, I think they may have grown a little more. They have these growth spurts."

"Well, speaking as a member of the itty bitty titty committee, can I say I'm a little jealous? I'm only a B-cup myself."

"That's not small, Clara."

"Well, you'll understand a bit more when you're a full girl I guess, but we're in quite the boob obsessed culture right now. And mine just don't stand out."

"For what it's worth," Jacob said, feeling that tension continue to release. "I always thought you looked perfect."

"Please, I look like an origami crane. Even my Mom once described me as being 'made of elbows and joints.'"

But he just looked at her, his gaze level and sincere. "No, I mean it. Trust me, as someone who is undergoing a lot of unexpected bodily changes right now and questions how he'll end up by the end of it every day, I've always loved how much you suited yourself."

"What do you mean by that?"

Jacob gestured to his body, the various ways in which it had changed, right down to his smaller nose and daintier face, to his broadened hips and blossoming bustline.

"Look at me, Clara. I'm barely myself anymore. It scares me. It scares the shit out of, man. And you were right with your question earlier; I *do* get way more emotional about it,

and sometimes I don't know how to handle it. Drawing and sketching and painting has helped, and I've been doing writing to cope, but seeing you has probably been the best part of it, other than the obvious not-dying-anymore thing. And part of why I was so happy to see you was how little you've changed."

"I've changed plenty, Jacob. In a lot of ways you don't know. Bad relationships, moving out, finding my own place, my profession."

He nodded. "Okay, you're not wrong there. But I guess what I mean to say is that you still have that same confidence, that lack of fear I always admired when we were kids. Mom always said you were a 'wild child,' and I thought that was the coolest thing. You just . . . inhabit yourself, I guess. I always thought that was really beautiful. That . . . you were really beautiful. I don't know, maybe I'm rambling but it's the truth. And I still think that."

Clara's bright eyes were wide and round as dinner plates. She had to adjust her glasses several times just to collect herself, and Jacob was reminded again of what a cute manner she had when something finally flustered her. Though then again, that had happened a lot lately, given how their lives had begun to orbit one another again.

"Wow, that's . . . wow, Jacob. No one's ever really talked about me like that before."

"Oh, they totally have."

"No, they haven't. At least not to my face. That's . . . that's the nicest damn thing anyone's ever said about me."

She managed to regain herself, however, because then she smirked somewhat mischievously. "Hang on, is this just you trying to flirt with your nurse so she brings you an extra tub of chocolate mousse yoghurt with your dinner tonight?"

"Guilty as charged!" Jacob said, grinning.

"I knew it! You absolute scoundre!! I should have suspected it was all nonsense when you started talking about-"

"It wasn't nonsense, Clara," he said, cutting the humour short again. "Sorry, I don't want to end the fun banter, but I just want you to know that. I thought I was going to die up until recently, and now I'm changing into a woman. It's been a wild rollercoaster, and I don't know when it will end. I spent way too long afraid to tell you what was happening to me, and I don't want to make that mistake again, not after the experiences I've had, and am still having. I just want you to know that."

Slowly, Clara passed her hand into his and held it tight. Her hand was so soft despite the grip, and yet it had its own toughness as well.

"I know it now," she said, voice trembling just a little. "I do. Thank you, Jacob."

In for a penny, in for a pound. "I had the biggest crush on you as a teenager, you know."

"What? Really!?"

He scratched the back of his bald head. "Yeah . . . it's kind of one of those things I wish I'd acted on, back in the day. Sorry, I've made you a captive audience here."

"Yeah, you asshole."

He laughed.

"You know what I mean. You're my friend, and my nurse, and now I'm piling all this shit on you. I was trying to say how much I appreciate you, and how beautiful you are, and—"

"I had a crush on you too."

Jacob blinked. Then he blinked again. After the third blink Clara had to boop him on the nose just to 'reset' him, something he remembered her doing to him as a kid as well.

"You - you had a crush on *me*?"

Clara snorted. "Don't act so surprised, ya goofball. I was knew in town, and we'd just moved next door to this lovely family. And here was this kid my age who was kind of cute and shy and funny and had this *wild* imagination that just drove me nuts! In a good way, I mean. And we went on all sorts of adventures, and he drew and painted and wrote silly little poems that he poured so much meaning into. He was the only one that didn't make fun of me for being a total tomboy, and by the time I was hitting puberty and feeling like a weird bag of skin with bones sticking out all over the place, while all the other girls were getting curves and boobs and everything in the right order, you still looked at me like I was just as cool - if not cooler - than anyone else around us. Even as I was trekking through the forest in the middle of a rainstorm or skinning my knees climbing mountains just for the hell of it. And God, that made me feel cool too. Just like how you made me feel good about myself now. So yeah, I had a crush on you."

Jacob's heart had momentarily stopped, or at least it felt like it had to him.

"Why didn't you say anything?"

She just shrugged. "Why didn't you?"

"I feel like this is a repeat of the conversation we had a few weeks ago about why we didn't stay in touch."

"Maybe we're just really sucky at communicating, huh?"

Jacob sighed, half amused and half ashamed at his inaction, at the many what-could-have-beens that floated in watercolour illustrations around his head. "Yeah, I guess we are."

"Sooo . . . while I'm being just a *little* unprofessional in my responsibilities as a nurse, how about a date sometime? Lunch?"

"What?"

"C'mon, Jacob, you don't have a hearing issue now as well, do you? I'm asking if you want to go out and get lunch together sometime, not inviting you to my bedroom."

If Jacob had never known what blushing was before, he knew so now. “Um, when you say ‘date’, do you mean-”

She rubbed his arm softly. “I mean we catch up outside of this little hospital room when you’re well enough to come down to the cafeteria, or perhaps even to the shops just around the corner from here. We can talk about old times at greater length, have some laughs, enjoy some good food and better company, and just enjoy ourselves.”

Jacob was almost about to say no. There were many reasons to, after all. He could conceive that it would be unprofessional, that he needed to focus on his recovery, that he didn’t want to ruin the recently reconstituted friendship he shared with Clara. But knowing that she once had a crush on him was the bee sting that made him leap into action. He couldn’t pass up a chance to at least know a little more, even if his bodily change would render any actual relationship impossible with her.

“That’d be incredible,” he said.

Part 5: Dating and Changing

It took another week for Jacob to get the okay from Dr Harper to leave the hospital on small visits. It was a damn breath of fresh air for the experience-starved artist, and just seeing the world in brighter hues outside, getting to see his parents’ home and eat brunch with them, it was something else. He had changed further by this point, of course. Just as Dr Harper had indicated, his transformation into a biological female was accelerating as his XY chromosomes were starting to become outnumbered by his XX ones. He was still bald, but there was no imagining that he was male unless one was assuming he’d really gone down the David Bowie route of gender ambiguity. His lips had started to become fuller, and his jaw was now rounded in a feminine curve. He was oddly proud of his eyebrows, which were thick and dark yet perfectly arched; Clara had commented on them positively, and that made him quite chuffed, really. His voice was also now feminine, with an underlying rasp to it. Most people mistook him to be a woman who’d just had an operation or had a sore throat.

And that was just the changes to his face and head (his ears were also daintier). The ones to his body were much more drastic. For one, he definitely had C-cup boobs now, and their soreness indicated that their impressive fullness was no sign of slowing growth.

“My word!” his mother said. “You’re going to end up more full in the chest than Elizabeth! What will your sister say?”

Jacob looked down at his chest after hugging his Mom. Walking was still a struggle at times, and exhaustion a major factor, but it was good to be able to step into his parents’ house and greet them. That was, until his tits were pointed out. And they were *tits* now, big

enough to wobble and jiggle and present themselves fairly well no matter what he wore. The bandage could only do so much, and Dr Harper was increasingly recommending that he get himself a bra.

“Gee, I don’t know, Mom,” Jacob said in his contralto feminine voice. “Maybe something like ‘holy shit, my brother has bigger boobs than me. I’m so jealous!’”

“I imagine she will. Has she called you again?”

“Yes. A video call. She . . . pointed out my voice.”

“I didn’t want to say anything, but you do sound like I’ve got a daughter now. And you look it, too.”

Jacob again looked down at himself. It was one of the few times he got to dress normally. He was wearing a pair of cargo shorts and a loose blue shirt, but despite picking these articles to obscure his body, it didn’t do well to hide the fact that he now had an increasingly hourglass figure. His legs were bare and soft, his arms slender too. His breasts stuck out against the shirt enough to make a clear impression, though at least his bigger nipples were covered by the bandage.

“Yeah, I guess I do.”

“Do you have any idea when you’ll be, well, full girl?”

A sigh came from the other room. “Elaine, leave him be. Even if he’s fully changed, he gets to decide if he’s full girl or full boy or whatever he wants to be.”

Jacob beamed. His father, so normally laconic, had been hard to predict through this whole situation. Instead, he seemed to understand what Jacob was going through, or at least understand his son’s desire not to talk about it just yet.”

His mother obeyed, and they got down to the business of brunch, and for a time Jacob just got to feel normal. Sure, he accidentally spilled some crumbs from the bacon and egg sandwich down into his cleavage, something his mother reminded him he had to be careful of, and sure, he had to go sit down on the toilet to pee afterwards because his penis was so shrunken and ineffectual at making a full stream, but he was out of hospital for a bit.

It gave him confidence for his time with Clara.

Confidence, and more than a little nervousness.

“You ready to go, handsome?” Clara asked as she pulled aside the curtain.

Jacob was in a similar get up once more, though this time he wore full jeans instead of shorts, to hide the embarrassment of his very ladylike legs.

“Sure am,” he said. “Just finished fitting my compression bandage.”

She folded her arms. "Why are you even wearing that thing? Your boobs are big enough that a bra would be way more comfortable."

Jacob sighed. "I don't want to. It's . . . too girly."

She gestured to herself.

"Hey, you never called me girly before, and I wear a bra everyday. The girls need them, and your girls are bigger than mine."

She had a point. Clara was dressed up for a casual outing, with a white tee and casual blue skirt that spoke to him of summer. Her hair was loose and a little frizzy, and her makeup a little more present also. It was a really good look, and once more he was reminded of how her confidence, self-assured attitude enhanced her attractiveness.

"Well, maybe I'll cross that bridge one day. Just . . . not yet. It's hard. Everyone thinks I'm a girl already, but I don't think of myself that way."

"Well, it's not about being a girl, it's just about what's practical. Hey, do you trust me?"

"Of course."

"Are you super hungry yet?"

"Not massively."

"Then let's wheel you out of here and get you to my car. We're going to make a stop before our little food outing."

Clara wasn't on shift today; they had planned it this way, just as she had once more switched out her duties so that she wasn't his attending nurse any more. It didn't stop her routinely visiting him throughout the day regardless, nor bringing him new supplies for his art. He'd finished a drawing of the lilypond at the back of his parent's place the day before, and she'd loved it.

"This 'little outing' better not be what I think it is."

"Oh, it so it not," Clara teased, helping him into the wheelchair. He didn't strictly need it, but his body was often exhausted, so energy saved now was energy he could spend in conversation and good company later.

Of course, it turned out it was *exactly* what Jacob had thought it would be, and Clara knew that. It was an ironic joke on Jacob that he was finally invited into Clara's room back at her apartment, only instead of it occurring in a romantic fashion, it was to dress him up more appropriately as a woman.

"Now, these were gifts from my Aunt Kaye," she said, tossing him several bras. "She had . . . let's just say, overestimated my cup size. But I think she was perhaps just predicting the future, given she's a bit of a mystic, because I think they should fit you perfectly."

"A bra," Jacob said flatly. "A *pink* bra."

"Not my colour, but who knows? You're going to be a new woman, so you get to decide what your colour is!"

"It's definitely not pink."

"Lilac it is then. Come on, just try it, Jacob. I'll help you. Trust me, you'll feel so much better."

"I'm not embracing some girly side to myself."

"You've always been a sensitive guy, I'd say you already have. But this is just pragmatism. Do you really want your chest to always be bound up and painful, or bouncing around, nipples sticking out?"

A sigh followed. "Okay, fine. Can you . . . can you at least teach me how to put this on?"

Clara grinned. "I would be honoured. Besides, I want to see those knockers again."

"God help me!"

"He can't. You're in *my* domain now."

What followed was a lesson in Jacob's nascent womanhood. The transforming man stripped down, and Clara couldn't help herself; she gave a wolf whistle when she saw his chest.

"Mhm, dem titties."

Jacob covered them. "Please don't make me regret this, Clara."

"Seriously, they're a nice crop! I mean it! If you're going to become a woman, you might as well have a nice rack. Do they feel a bit weighty?"

Jacob nodded. He shook his shoulders a little, setting them wobbling. "Yeah, as you can see, they're quite active too. They pull a bit on my shoulders and back if I've been upright for a lot of the day."

"That's normal. It's also why bras were invented, ya doofus. Let's try this one on: you sure you don't want to go pink?"

Her smirk was practically a dare, and for once Jacob felt a bit daring himself. Clara had always called his bluffs, now it was his turn.

"Fine," he said, taking it off her hands. Her expression revealed her surprise. "I'll wear the bright pink bra, *if* you get all dressed up and girly for our lunch."

Clara folded her arms, tried to stare him down. But Jacob had stared death in the face, and her face broke into a grin. "Okay, you're on, *gal pal*."

"Jesus, I still feel like I've lost."

"You have, especially since I can now show you the wonders of makeup!"

"Just let me try the bra first before you kill me from embarrassment."

Clara examined Jacob after he was fitted. His breasts were perhaps just a little *too* big for the cups, but Clara wasn't wrong: it *did* give him the support he badly needed. It also had the effect of lifting his new breasts up and pressing them together. Not a full push-up job, but it definitely gave enough lift to emphasise his bustline further. Looking down, Jacob

was presented with a rather lovely line of cleavage. Lovely, that is, except for the fact that it was *his* cleavage.

“Oh God,” he said.

“Yep!” Clara said. “Fantastic, isn’t it?”

“It’s certainly something. They look so much bigger.”

“We’ll, they’re not exactly small, you know. But a good bra will make them more obvious, for sure. I’m not complaining.”

“I am!”

“Yeah, I can imagine it’s a bit confronting. Let’s get you one of my looser shirts to help you.”

Jacob looked up from his rather hypnotic cleavage. “I brought my own shirt.”

“Yeah, a *man’s* shirt. Not exactly appropriate for your new body type.”

“You haven’t changed a bit, have you? Always pushing me outside of my comfort zone.”

Clara just gave her usual devilish giggle, adjusting her glasses. “Of course! You didn’t complain back then, so don’t be a whiner now. Especially since it turns out we were both crushing hard on each other before you took off. Consider this my revenge for you doing that! Which includes, by the way, some additional makeup lessons . . .”

Jacob could only laugh. “Fine, fine! But if anyone recognises me, I am seriously going to claim you kidnapped me.”

Clara got to work, and she was clearly having a ball. Despite his own nervousness, Jacob found her enthusiasm as infectious as he always had. It meant that trying on several of her shirts didn’t make him very red-cheeked, especially since he was already wearing a rather pink bra. Clara had been right after all: the support the bra gave him was incredible, and while his boobs still jiggled a bit, it was nowhere near as bad as it had been, and not painful at all.

By the time they were done, Jacob was unrecognisable. To all outward appearances, he looked like a woman, and a rather attractive one at that. He was wearing a simple grey woman’s t-shirt, and somehow Clara had managed to even get him to try a skirt. It was a long skirt, a lovely purple colour that worked with the smoky grey of his shirt, but it was still a skirt.

“It’s weirdly freeing,” he said.

“See? Not all bad dressing like a gal.”

“Yeah. There’s a nice airflow here, actually.”

“Well, maybe you’ll wear more of them, you know, once you’re fully changed.”

He exhaled. “It’ll be a week or two I reckon.”

“I’m sorry.”

He just shrugged. "I'm coming to accept it. And hey, at least I look pretty good, right?"

"Are you kidding? You look hot as all hell, Jacob. No offence. And with that light little makeup on your face, you're bound to catch some interest."

That made him groan. "Don't even joke about that. I may be turning into a woman, but that doesn't mean I ever, ever plan to date guys."

But she just gave him a funny look. "Who said anything about guys? No come on, let's go get lunch together. You can hold onto me for support when we get there till we get you seated. Think of it as your first trial run learning to be a woman."

Jacob looked at his appearance in the mirror again. He really did look pretty, and a small part of him was oddly proud of that. Who didn't want to be attractive, after all? Not to mention Clara looked dynamite too. She was in a flowery yellow sundress that went down to her ankles, and there was enough of a dip at the front to give a tantalising look at her cleavage. With her cute glasses and curly chestnut brown hair and wide smile, it was hard not to be hypnotised by her. Of course, she was also staring at him.

"What?"

"Just thinking that you'll make a hell of a woman one day."

"Thanks, I think?"

She put an arm around him. It took every effort not to shiver in excitement. She was still, in so many ways, his major crush. He had almost forgotten how much the world came alive when he spent time with her. His mind buzzed with ideas, most of them revolving around painting that smile of hers.

"Just think of it like one of our old adventures into the world of imagination," she said. "Only this time, *you* really are transforming."

"I liked it better when I was becoming a dragon."

"Well, you can always paint that later. For now, I'm getting hungry. Rargh!"

It was damn strange to be seen as a woman. Sure, the hospital staff were already increasingly in the know, and those that weren't just assumed that the patient named 'Jacob' just had an unusual name, thinking of the changing male as a new female patient, but that was an entirely different experience to being out and about in public. Some men even looked Jacob's way, their gazes lingering on his form with clear interest.

"God, this is embarrassing," he muttered under his breath. "They're looking at me."

"They're looking at me too, give me some credit, sheesh!"

"I meant that it's very weird for me."

"Get used to it, *sistah!*"

Jacob placed his hand on his forehead. "You are just revelling in this. You're worse than my sister."

"I'm just considering it a major success. You look good, especially with that beanie hiding your lack of hair. Besides, you forced me to wear this dress, and you know I don't go big on dresses, so all's fair in love and war."

Jacob regarded her curiously, but then they arrived at the lovely little day restaurant which promised all kinds of lovely seafood; his favourite.

"Here we are!" she announced. She called over one of the waitresses. "Hello, booking under the names Clara and Olivia."

The waitress had their booking, and when they were seated - Jacob relying on Clara's strength quite a bit to manoeuvre down - he gave her a funny look.

"Olivia? Who the heck is Olivia?"

"That's you! Your Mom was going to call you Olivia if you were a girl. I remember you told me that once. I thought it would be a cute new name for you to use while 'in disguise,' as it were."

Jacob frowned. "I don't think I'll be taking a female name."

"Up to you," his friend said with a shrug. "You know I'm just having a joke around. I - you don't mind, do you? I'm sorry if I'm going over the top with this. To be honest, I've been really looking forward to this day. Quite a damn lot, actually."

"Me too," he said. "You're right, it's nothing. But don't forget, I know your middle name . . . *Gerty*."

"Oh, so it's mutually assured destruction then!"

"It is indeed."

"Well, we'll just have to learn to enjoy each others' company on this fine day, and enjoy some fine food as well. You really do look fantastic, *Olivia*."

He regarded her, and smiled warmly. "And you do too, *Gerty*. You look beautiful."

She bit her lip, then adjusted her glasses in that cute way she often did. Jacob's heart tightened a bit. He questioned what he was even doing, trying to flirt like this. For one, he had just salvaged this friendship with Clara's aid, and he couldn't be happier about that. For two, he was turning into a damn *woman*. The likelihood of this relationship actually becoming anything more was rapidly approaching nil. Hell, Clara was helping Jacob become one of the 'sisterhood,' teaching how to dress, how to put on bras, even the minimal makeup that he was wearing. She was, in a way, initiating him to become a *girlfriend*, not a girlfriend.

Still, the two talked warmly and happily as they ordered their food. Clara laughed at Jacob's habitual ordering of carbonara pasta, which he had enjoyed ever since he was nine.

"Still not too adventurous?" she said, giggling.

"I leave that to my writing and painting," he replied. "The rest of me is a creature of habit."

"Well, I suppose you're already going on a grand adventure now, right?"

"Exactly. Besides - oh God."

"What?"

He swallowed his food, took a moment to wash it down with some fruit drink, then stared aghast at the meal before him.

"I - I think my taste buds have changed. I don't . . . love this."

"Maybe it's badly made? Lemme try it."

However, Clara rather liked it, and confirmed it was good. Jacob despaired for a moment - even his *taste buds* were changing!? Thankfully, his friend was quick to think of an upside:

"Hey, you can try my seafood pasta. You never did before, but maybe you'll come around now."

She gathered a portion of it on her fork and hovered it near his mouth. Something about the action was intimate. Jacob accepted, and ate what was offered. Not long after, he gave a surprisingly loud and rather feminine moan.

"Mhmmmm . . . oh God! Oh my God that's incredible! Can I have some more?"

"Of course! This plate is huge. Shuffle over!"

She moved and sat next to him, her soft arm brushing against his. She beamed, once more flashing that brilliant smile, and soon the two were sharing a single meal. It was a wonderfully close moment, but it also set Jacob on edge when an older woman walked past and smiled at them.

"You look like such a cute couple," she said.

Clara and Jacob spoke at the same time.

"Thank you."

"Oh, we're not . . ."

But the woman had passed, and Clara continued eating without another word. It left Jacob uncertain as to where things sat, but again he did not pursue it. He was aware of the two fleshy weights upon his chest and the near nonexistent penis between his legs. The former were aching a bit, promising yet *more* growth to his annoyance, and the latter was becoming increasingly numb. His lower stomach was churning occasionally, something Dr Harper claimed was the result of the slow formation of a functioning womb. A goddamn womb! How could he possibly venture anything with his crush amongst all of that?

"You've gone quiet," Clara said.

"I'm just thinking. I'm feeling a bit exhausted actually. I might . . . I might have to get back to the hospital soon."

“Are you sure?” she asked. “I had an idea for what we could do afterwards, if you wanted. It’s super secret, though.”

Jacob was intrigued, but that sense of tiredness was hitting him. He could feel it in his compressing spine, his aching legs, in his foggy mind.

“It’ll have to be later, sorry Clara. This has been . . . just perfect. Thank you. I think I might paint a little cafe restaurant scene, or at least sketch something, when I’m feeling better. You’ve brought so much colour back into my life.”

“Well, I’d like to see more of that colour. I’ve missed yanking you out of your comfort zone. And also, you know, teasing you about everything.”

He laughed. “Well, I’m glad for the yanking, and the teasing.”

“That sounds very dirty, when you put it like that.”

He managed to restrain the blush in his cheeks this time.

“Besides,” Clara said. “I like hearing your perspective on things. I don’t have the kind of mind that takes in all of this.” She gestured to the wider cafe restaurant. “You notice a lot without even realising it, but some things just slide right under your nose too, don’t they?”

Jacob raised an eyebrow quizzically, but at that Clara just stood up.

“I’ll go pay the bill and drive you back. Did you want to ditch the clothing back at my place?”

She said this with a slight falter in her sentence, as if aware of how it sounded yet plunging forward anyway. Jacob shook his head, though.

“No, if it’s okay with you I’ll keep it. I’m becoming a woman, and you’re right. It’s time I learned how to dress like one. Especially the bra; God, I see the point of them now.”

“Right!?”

Jacob grinned sheepishly. “Except . . . if this ache in my boobs is true, I might be needing a bigger cup size to hold me in, soon. Yeah.”

Clara blinked, then gave an enthusiastic double-thumbs up.

“Nice.”

She didn’t even sound jealous.

Part 6: Full Woman

Jacob was wrong. It didn’t take one to two weeks for him to become fully female. It only took five days. Dr Harper’s group worked to take more images, scans, footage, to question him in a series of interviews, and to have him placed before a number of psychologists to prepare

the way for his final transformation. It was clear that even she was surprised at the rapidity of his last changes.

“It appears your XX chromosomes are rapidly overwhelming the XY ones, and your genetic transition to biological femalehood will be finished even quicker than we imagined,” she said after several more photos had been taken and he had dressed again. “So that’s good news, but I imagine it’s rather sudden.”

“Very,” Jacob had replied, noticing that his own voice had gone higher. “It’s a lot to be taken in.”

“How do you feel about it?”

He could only sigh. “Very . . . top heavy.”

That got a chuckle from the doctor. “Well, I imagine quite a few women will be jealous of your figure, if that’s any help. And we have someone we can get to help you accommodate your new figure when it comes to clothing and style.”

“Thank you,” he said, “but . . . I think I might have someone else in mind.”

“Very well. Your new vaginal tunnel should open up into a fully formed vulval entrance in just a day or two, and from there the transformation will settle. You’ll still be exhausted for a bit, but I think your energy levels should return in full shortly thereafter.”

It was, in a way, good news. Sure, things were still awkward: Damian had visited just a day after the ‘date’ with Clara, and he had made some rather choice comments about how ‘hot’ Jacob now looked. He had felt simultaneously insulted, complimented, and awkward about it all, but at least his friend was sticking around and not going silent on him. The two had chatted about movies they wanted to see together, and Damian - never one for visiting museums - had even mentioned an art gallery he’d be willing to see just so they could spend time together.

“Only ‘cause you’re so hot now, by the way,” he’s said, though it was clear he was joking. Not about the hotness, but about the reason.

Because the truth was, as much as Jacob had initially tried to hide it, he was now hot. His boobs had indeed expanded, and he was not just a firm D-cup, but a Double-D cup. They weren’t huge - he was kind of surprised that the popular image of DD’s in fiction were actually more in the E or even F-cup range, but neither were they small either. They were, particularly from his point of view, rather large and rounded and pert, topped with perfect pink nipples. The jiggling was inevitable even with the bras that Clara thoughtfully supplied to him, as was the perpetual line of impressive cleavage. They were also more sensitive, and when Jacob felt the urge come upon him, he retreated to hospital bathroom and played with them, pinching his nipples and rubbing them, imagining Clara topless as well, until finally he came.

“Jesus, just from these tits,” he said, cupping them. “What will it be like when I’ve got a pussy?”

He didn’t need to imagine for long, because the very next morning he awoke to find the vestigial remains of his penis having become a clitoris, and his vulva fully formed, labia and all. To suddenly have not just an emptiness, but an actual *opening* between one’s legs was a startling thing, even after Jacob had been expecting it. He knew he should alert someone, but the truth was this was his moment alone. He retreated to the bathroom and disrobed, checking himself out in the mirror.

“God, I’m a full woman now,” he said. “Still bald, but a woman. God, did my tits grow again?”

Perhaps, though they were still likely in the DD-cup range. Jacob now had a fully hourglass figure, with hips that looked damn good. They sashayed a little with each step - something he’d noticed the other day with Clara - but now it was practically impossible not to put a little sway in his step regardless of his intent. Turning, he could see that his rear had more fat on it, giving it a peach-like shape that he would have loved to see in a woman before. His legs were long and shapely, though overall he was noticeably shorter than he had been before, having lost a final half-inch or so in that last night. He estimated himself to be around five foot five or so. Not too short, but not exactly tall either. Shorter than the average, that was for sure. Shorter, he realised, than his own sister. And Clara.

“What will she think of me?” he said, half-sighing. His voice had become a mezzo-soprano, betraying none of his former masculinity. There was an almost sultry quality to it, though perhaps it was just because the last remains of his male ego were imagining how seductive he would find this woman were he still a man.

“I better still be attracted to women,” he said aloud.

There was only one way to find out. The new woman got out his - or her - phone and perused a number of images of spectacular looking women. Soon, he found himself biting his rather full set of lips, touching his large breasts as he did so, getting aroused by their pictures.

“Okay, woah. Yep, definitely still attracted. And I think my libido is stronger, wow.”

It was accompanied by a new sensation too, one that was as strange as it was alluring; a warmth and wetness that was building in his new feminine passage, getting more moist with each passing second. It made Jacob take heavier breaths, his large chest heaving, nipples throbbing.

“Well, I’m not dealing with this right now!” he said, resisting the urge to touch himself too much down there. He slipped one finger down and pulled it back when he was rewarded with an immediately powerful and pleasurable sensation.

“Yep, that can come later.

He opted to ask for a cold shower not long later, then asked for Dr Harper to come and see him. The woman was ecstatic, of course, and another round of images, photos, videos, questions, and so forth were asked of him. No further treatment was necessary, so it was with relief that Jacob was told he could begin growing out his hair, and was assured it would happen quite quickly due to the large hormone dumps in his body.

“Have you thought about how you wish to identify now?” Dr Harper asked in the aftermath, just the two of them in the gene therapy room.

Jacob considered this question deeply. In truth, he wasn't quite sure, at least not until that very morning. But it wasn't just having a vagina that suddenly made him reconsider his identity, but all the changes he had been through, including Clara's guidance. He thought about the name she had 'given' him that lovely day out, and it felt . . . right, in some impossible way. His gender identity did not switch all at once, though. He realised even as his connection to that new name grew stronger, that this was just the avalanche that followed a great deal of conditions leading up to it. His physical changes, his stages of grief, him regaining a passion for his art, his reconnection to Clara, even the comfort he had begun to feel in women's clothing and being seen as one.

“I think . . . I think I will go as a woman,” Jacob said. “And I think I'll go with a new name, if possible.”

“Of course. You don't have to choose now, of course, so take your time and-”

Jacob shook his - *her* - head. “I think I'll go by Olivia,” the new woman said, and she couldn't help herself; she smiled. “I think it suits me.”

“I'd rather say it does,” Dr Harper said, clearly pleased. “Now, don't worry, you also have plenty of time before this is revealed to the world. I'm sorry to say you'll be a minor celebrity for a short time, but you'll have months before having to deal with that.”

“That's okay. I've started writing my own memoirs on it, to be honest. I think other people will be interested in my story, and it's got my passion for writing back up. Opened whole new worlds of writing, really.”

“I imagine it would! We'll check in every so often for bloodwork and follow ups, but the reality is that you've got your whole life ahead of you, Ja - Olivia.”

A whole new life. It felt like a gift, after all she had been through. A wonderful, wonderful gift.

Her parents were the first to find out, of course. Olivia's Mom wept tears, partly of loss and partly of joy, and her father even got surprisingly emotional, blinking back tears of his own, which Olivia had never seen often at all.

"I hope this doesn't mean things . . . change too much," he muttered, getting control of his emotions again. "I can still take you fishing, right?"

"Dad, I'm a woman now, and I accept that. But I still know which end of the rod to hold."

He chuckled gruffly. "Oh, okay. Good. I just thought . . . good. I'm proud of you, son. Well, daughter. You know what I mean. It's a lot to take in."

"Imagine being me?"

At this point, Elaine burst into a fresh round of tears and laughter. "I told you I was right all those years ago when I was pregnant!" she told her husband. "I was having another daughter! She was just on . . . delay, I suppose!"

Which meant, of course, that Elizabeth gave a video call not long after.

'Of course you end up with bigger boobs than me! Just my luck!'

"You can have them, sis. I've already had one male nurse stare a bit weirdly."

'Ew. Report him. I'm coming over to visit soon, so I'll kick his ass myself. God, I can still tell it's you, though. The lines of your face are still similar, and your eyes haven't changed, apart from the lashes. And I see there's a big pile of watercolours next to your bed.'

"Let's just say I've had a lot to inspire me, lately. I've also got a journal *Don't you worry, your big sister will be there to help you get used to being a woman, clothing and style and all. And how to navigate all the wonderful and frustrating ups and downs of dealing with the world of men. And other women, really. Also hygiene, that'll be important. Never fear, your sister is here.'*

"Actually, Elizabeth, I've already got someone who can help me with those things, though your help will be appreciated too."

'Oh, and who is this interloping upstart?'

"Someone we both know, in fact," Olivia said. "In fact, I think she'll be very happy to see you, though I'm still waiting for her to see me . . ."

Clara Jessup had practically *sprinted* to Olivia's bedside, though she managed to halt, collect herself, and then knocked on the pillar by the curtain to indicate she was present. Olivia could see this all occur through the shadows on the other side, and it made her chuckle.

"Come in!" she called, in that light, pleasant voice she was still getting used to. "I'm all dressed this time, promise."

"I wouldn't mind either way!" Clara said, entering. She was in her nurse's scrubs, her chestnut hair back in a curly ponytail, and her eyes wide as she took in Olivia's form. "Holy shit, Jacob. You look - I had to be away for two days and then *this* happens! I thought you were gone!"

"I've been here the whole time!"

"But you're listed as Olivia now! I thought someone else had your bed until I saw the last name and put two and two obviously together. Holy shit! Does this mean you've fully female now? You look it! You look spectacular, God!"

Olivia giggled - at least, that's how her new laughter sounded to herself.

"Thanks, it's a lot to take in. I certainly didn't expect to look like this when I became a full girl."

"Well, I for one am glad you do, if I can be greedy. Damn, girl! I'm jealous and amazed and interested! You're definitely full girl, then?"

Olivia nodded. "As of yesterday. I've been busy with family. I was actually drafting a text to you when you popped in just now."

"And you're out of your gown, too. Nice dress."

It was a woman's tee and a skirt, but she was teasing as ever.

"I just figured since I'm a woman now, I better go with a woman's style. You taught me that."

"Well, next up is ears pierced, though I never did that I definitely think you'd look great with it. But you're taking a woman's name, too? That's a big step."

Olivia shrugged, then gestured to her form. "Well, I can't exactly hide being a woman now, can I? Especially not with this rack."

"They are a nice pair of hooters, I'll admit. But I'm talking about taking on the identity of a woman. Are you sure you're okay with that?"

Olivia nodded gently. "I know it feels like a sudden decision, but I'm starting to realise it's kind of like the five stages of grief, right? At first I was in denial about having to become a woman, then I was angry as my body changed, then I tried bargaining with myself, telling myself that I'd still really be a man down deep. Then I despaired as others saw me as a woman, and even I found it hard to keep my male pride. And then I accepted it, in the end."

Clara chewed on this thoughtfully. She stepped closer to Olivia, then took one of her hands gingerly, clasping her other on top of it.

"That may be so, Ja - Olivia. But accepting isn't the same as celebrating. It's not the same as being happy with your current self. I just . . . it's important to me that you find happiness in who you are."

Olivia was reminded once more of how emotional her new body could be, because tears formed in the corners of her eyes and she had to wipe them away. "I know," she said.

“Trust me, I know. I’m still grappling with it. But I think I can be happy, Clara, really, I do. I even have a bit of smug pride about my boobs, you know.”

“I don’t blame you! Or that hot figure. You’re a total snack.”

She laughed. “Damian said the same thing.”

“Well, he can get in line.”

“And in the end, I’m still me. Just a female me. The road not taken, one might say. I may be Olivia, instead of Jacob, but they’re just different reflections of the same person, as I see it. And as Dr Harper told me, I’ve got my whole life ahead of me to define as I want to. And I think . . . I think it’s given me a lot to be creative about.”

Clara let go of Olivia’s hand and took in the numerous little sketches and watercolours around the room.

“Wow, you weren’t kidding. That *is* impressive. It’s like a collage of you, changing across the seasons.”

Olivia could have exploded from how chuffed she was. Clara claimed not to have a good eye on such things, but she clearly understood the paintings and their meaning. They displayed numerous features of autumnal and spring change, written in the leaves and flowers and colours, and in each one the negative white space gave an appearance of the human body. Arranged in a row, and one got the sense of transformation: man to woman. Flowering into the spring of femininity.

“It’s just a start,” Olivia said. “Once I’m back in an apartment, I want to create a whole new series of them, on larger canvas. I want them to reflect my journey, and it to be accompanied by quotes from my journal which I kept during this time. I’m still writing in it, and still painting these. I figure some people might be interested, maybe. I don’t know.”

“I would be,” Clara said, putting a hand around her waist. “Seriously, it would be incredible to see in a gallery.”

“Well, I don’t know about a gallery . . .”

“Olivia, you’re about to be sort of kind of famous in a few months. Why not use that as a medium to spread your art?”

“Oh, please don’t talk about other people knowing this about me. I just want to fly under the radar for now.”

“What will you do, then?”

“Well,” the former male said, “first up Mom and Dad are taking me back to theirs to stay. I need to find a place to live, so that’s just a nice stopgap measure by them. I think running an apartment is a little dicey for me now with my energy levels, so I might see if there are places willing to accept me that already have people staying.”

Clara chewed on her lip, then adjusted her glasses. It was the signal that she was about to propose something.

“That’s not a bad idea,” she said. “Actually, it’s a great idea. I know a place that’s open and available right now, in fact. And the rent is pretty good, and the tenant there is damn cool. Seriously, she’d love you to join her.”

Olivia raised her eyebrows. She hadn’t considered that, yes, it would be better to room with another woman, especially looking as obviously attractive as she did now.

“Wow, really? Where is it? Who is she?”

Clara erupted into laughter, confusing Olivia for a moment. “It’s me, ya doofus! I’ve got a two bedroom place with another space you could use for art. You’ve seen that I hardly use it; it’d be perfect for your painting.”

“What, really? You’d let me move in with you?”

“Duh. I’m not letting you run out on my life again so easily, and besides, I want to keep you around so I can make sure you keep yourself looking girly and pretty, just so I can taunt you.”

Olivia giggled with her. “Fine, fine, I think that’s an amazing idea. I can’t believe it. Thanks so much. I’ll . . . I’ll tell my folks when they pick me up, and we can organise it. You’re the best friend I could ask for, Clara.”

“Best friend, or girlfriend?”

“Yeah, I guess so. Part of the sisterhood now, right?”

Clara smirked. “Sure, that’s what I meant.”

Part 7: What She Meant

The apartment was just as Olivia remembered it, only now it had balloons put up hastily and a ‘Welcome, Hot Stuff!’ banner that Clara had created just to tease her. It made the new woman laugh. She couldn’t deny the accusation either: it was a hot day, so she’d actually been quite daring and worn a crop top that exposed part of her perfect midriff and hinted at her impressive cleavage. She was still getting used to the bounce of her breasts, their weight and ‘activeness,’ as well as the way men looked at them now. The last could be quite annoying, especially as they kept staring as she walked away, their gaze now fixated on her peachy rear. It was too hot to cover up her form though, and the truth was that she didn’t want to. She was Olivia now, with a female body, and she didn’t want to be ashamed of it. But it was important that her new home be a safe haven from such things, and to have another woman present at least meant she would be free from lustful looks. At least, that was her assumption.

“Welcome, hot stuff!” Clara exclaimed as Olivia entered. She burst forward, the taller woman wrapping Olivia in an enthusiastic hug that left their breasts mashing against one another. It wasn’t the worst feeling, especially since - try as she might - Olivia still found Clara very attractive.

“Hey there!” Olivia exclaimed. “Thanks again so much for having me over. I’ve got, um, quite a bit of luggage in the car. Dad’s bringing it. He might have thoughts about the sign.”

“That’s okay, it’s for him,” Clara said with a devilish wink. “You relax. I’ve made your favourite tea in the living room. You can check out the space I’ve cleared for you while I help your Dad grab your stuff.”

Olivia did relax, and whenever she tried to help move things in her Dad was utterly insistent that she had not part in it.

“You just sit there, drink your tea, and shout orders for where you want stuff. We’ll take care of the rest, kiddo.”

Kiddo. It was her Dad’s new term for her. A bit easier than ‘daughter’ or ‘honey’ or anything too girly. He had accepted her gender change fairly well in the end, and was supportive as all hell. It made Olivia get a bit teary-eyed just thinking about it, and she wrapped her father in a big hug when he was about to leave. It certainly shocked him.

“We’re a hugging family now, are we?”

“Well, It’s hard to explain date. When you become a girl you just sort of become . . . huggier.”

He chuckled. “I’ll take your word for it then. I’m proud of you, kiddo.”

He hugged back, then waved a friendly goodbye to Clara.

“You know, I’d always hoped you two would get together,” he mumbled. “Not likely now, huh?”

“No, not likely,” Olivia said. “But at least we’re friends again.”

“Sometimes that’s all you need,” he said. “Still, you know, if you did find someone . . . girl or, you know, boy. I’d want you to be happy.”

He was struggling to meet her eye line. It certainly wasn’t what they usually talked about. For her old man, that was a big step.

“Thanks Dad. I think I will be. I *know* I will be.”

“Then that’s all I care about.”

They hugged one last time, and then he got into his car and left. Olivia stepped back into Clara’s apartment - into *their* new apartment, and smirked once more at the banner.

“It’s a good banner, right?” Clara asked, coming out from Olivia’s new room.

“It’s certainly something!”

“Well, it’s true! And you should see your hot new painting room. Come check it out!”

Olivia followed Clara to the spare room, the one she had been barred from seeing until now. When she was finally allowed to peek in, she actually gasped. A full on feminine gasp, hand over her lips and everything.

“Oh my God, Clara. This is . . . this is too much!”

“Nonsense! Come on in, and check it out.”

It was spectacular. What had been a messy storage space for a great deal of junk had been converted into a picturesque painting space, complete with freshly cleaned windows that looked into the backyard of the apartment home and its chaotic yet flower garden. There were two easels of separate size, a desk space that was occupied by numerous paints, brushes, pencils and papers, all of various colours and thicknesses. There were even hooks and frames for the displaying of all her future work.

Olivia wiped away a tear. “Clara, this is way, way too much. I can’t believe this. How did you go to all this effort?”

“Olivia, isn’t it obvious?”

The new woman turned and faced her friend. Clara had her head cocked like an owl’s in her usual bird-like manner. She was looking at her speculatively.

“I . . . no?”

Clara shook her head. “I suppose all the hinting and flirting in the world wouldn’t have worked. Men, even former men turned girls, are still clueless. Olivia, I’m into you. Big time. I should have told you before you moved in. Shit, this is bad timing, really. I just . . . I really like you. I really do. We talked about how we crushed on each other back in the day, and I never really lost that desire for you. And from how you speak and look at me, I don’t think you have either.”

Olivia was floored. “I had - I had no idea.”

“Girl, I was calling you ‘hot stuff’ and complimenting your looks like crazy. I was finding every excuse to be around you. I liked looking at your awesome boobs. I told you that you were sexy, and that I love not just how you look but how you are. Could I make it anymore obvious?”

Olivia blushed. It was obvious, looking back. And yet . . .

“But - but I’m a girl now! You’re right, I *am* into you. But we can’t be together, even if I really like you back Clara, so very much. Seriously, having you there to nurse me back to health made the hospital time all the more bearable, you have no idea. But I still turned into a woman. And while I’m glad I’m still into girls, it’s not like it can work out.”

“And why not?”

“Because . . . you’re not a lesbian? You were into me as a guy?”

Clara stepped forward, struggling not to laugh. She placed her hands around Olivia’s waist, and it was a wonderful feeling.

“You absolute dummy. You do realise that bisexuals exist, right?”

Olivia swallowed. “Oh God, I feel so stupid.”

“Yup.”

“You’re into girls as well.”

“Yup.”

“And I didn’t even think about that possibility.”

“Nope.”

“But you never said-”

“Why would I say what was obvious from how I acted? But fine, let me prove it with you right now, if you’ll let me.”

Even Olivia could catch the obvious tones of what *that* meant, especially as Clara held her more tightly, pulling her into a kiss. It was the moment that Olivia had wanted for so long, had pined over even in those years of separation, and thought impossible . . . until this very moment. They kissed slowly, romantically, and it was clear that Clara was just as impatient in her desire for this moment for many years as well, because she didn’t let her lips up at all. She moaned slightly into Olivia’s mouth, and the sheer sound of it started to make her aroused, eliciting a moan from her as well. Her nipples stiffened slightly, that warmth settling between her thighs and in her lower stomach. She placed her hands around Clara’s petite form, brushing across the skin exposed by the raised hem of her top.

“I’ve wanted this for a long time,” Olivia said.

“Me too, dummy. Think of how many wasted years we’ve had not acting on this.”

They kissed again, and this time the passion rose, as did the heart. Olivia placed her arms over Clara’s shoulders, while Clara encircled her waist in turn. Their chests pressed against one another, leaving Clara to giggle a little.

“You really are quite ample, aren’t you?”

“Sorry, I’m still getting used to it.”

“Don’t apologise, I love that feeling,” she said. “And you might recall half of all my flirting that you kept missing out on was how much I admire your fucking sexy bustline. Seriously.”

“Well, in that case . . . would you like to touch them?”

Clara smirked. She slowly removed her glasses, placing them gently on the desk nearby. “Do you want to take this into the bedroom? I can do a lot more than just *touch them*.”

Olivia’s heart skipped a beat. A brief chill of nervousness ran through her. What was she doing? She was only recently a full woman! She still got tired pretty easily! And this was making out - maybe even sex - as a woman! It was somewhat terrifying to imagine. It was

also exciting as hell. Olivia had made the decision to be a woman, to accept this part of herself, and now she had accepted Clara fully as well. Why not this?

“Just . . . be gentle,” Olivia said. “It’s kinda my first time, as a girl.”

“Well, good thing you’re learning from an expert, then! Come on, hot stuff! Time to let your sexy nurse have some fun with her patient.”

She took Olivia by the hand, leading her to Clara’s bedroom, whereupon her new girlfriend was quick to begin passionately making out with her and helping her out of her clothes. She tore off Olivia’s t-shirt and then removed her own, and then both women got to work removing each other’s bras. Olivia licked her lips at the display of Clara’s bare breasts; they were small but perfect, pert and beautiful and totally suiting her. Clara, on the other hand, had a jaw that was practically on the ground.

“Oh mama,” she said, before adopting her nurse persona. “I’ll have to have a feel around, just to make sure you’re all in good health, okay?”

Olivia chuckled. “Okay, ma’am.”

“That’s nurse to you.’

“Okay, nurse.”

Clara wasted no time, cupping Olivia’s breasts and fondling them, groping them, squeezing them. The sensations were magnificent, but even better when she began to rub Olivia’s nipples.

“Mhmmm! Ohhh, God! S-sensitive!”

“Further examination is needed. Time to lay you on the bed so I can get up close and make a determination.”

“That sounds more like a doctor-”

“Shush! Don’t interrupt! Now, remove your skirt!”

“Only if you do!”

Instead they helped each other out of their clothes, stripping down until they were naked on the bed together, their flesh pressing up against one another as they moaned in arousal. Clara sucked on Olivia’s nipples, and Olivia in turn kissed her lover’s neck and squeezed her breasts too. She had never felt such pleasure or arousal before, and it was only getting stronger as the pulses of bliss coursed through her form.

“You like b-being a woman, huh?”

Olivia nodded, then gasped as Clara lowered her light fingers to brush against the opening of her womanhood. “Y-yes, I do! Oh G-God, Clara, don’t stop! Keep doing that!”

“Only if you do me too, hot stuff. Your nurse needs *your* care sometimes, you know.”

By this point Olivia was so overheated with passion that she would have agreed to everything. They shifted on the bed so that Clara was on top of Olivia, feeling her heavy chest and rubbing her throbbing clit. Olivia returned the favour, using two of her fingers to

play with Clara's opening, letting it become moist with lust. She then placed two fingers inside her.

"OHhhh, f-fuck! Yes! Ohhhhh, I want us to c-cum together. I want you to f-feel this too, Olivia!"

She placed her fingers inside Olivia too, and for a moment the new woman shook, her body quaking, surprised at the alien sense of being penetrated. It was just a momentary sensation, however, because soon her vaginal muscles were clamping down, squeezing her lover's fingers, wanting to taste the pleasure they gave. Clara removed her hand for a moment to lick her fingers, and it was the most erotic thing Olivia had ever experienced, making her nipples even harder, more sensitive.

"Mmhhh - m-make me cum as a w-woman! I want to feel what it's like!"

"Then hold on, sexy. I've been wanting to do this for too long now. Ahh! Mhmm!!"

The two quickly fell into a perfect rhythm, one that felt innately strange and yet utterly natural to the former male. Lying on her back with her legs spread was quite a submissive position, especially with a lustful Clara on top of her, playing with her large breasts and stroking her womanhood, stoking the fires of pleasure. And yet it was wonderful, passionate, arousing, and beautiful.

"I'm s-so close!" she cried.

"Me t-too! We're going to orgasm together, Olivia. I want you to cry out for me, okay? I want to hear you *moan*. I want to hear you - ohhhh! Ahhh! OHHHH!!!"

Olivia held on just a little bit longer as Clara hit her climax. Her lover didn't stop rubbing her clitoris or sliding her fingers into her passage, however, and the joy it produced - along with the other woman's fingers on her left breast - succeeded in finally sending her over the edge.

"It's happening! It's happening! Clara, I'm - I'm - CUMMING! MHMHH!!!!"

She cried out. She practically squealed. It should have been embarrassing, but she was too deliriously happy to care as orgasm after orgasm rolled through her very being. It was so different from a male orgasm. Less potent, and yet it lasted longer, and built to a far more thundering earthquake. When the next rolled through her, she decided it wasn't an earthquake, but a wave. A series of waves sending her back into the primordial deep, leaving her floating in bliss until the next one toppled her. Or perhaps it was a series of mountain tops, each higher than the last. Whatever it was, it left her gasping for air in the best possible way, and even after the pleasure slowly faded, the post coital bliss stayed with her. Clara, by that point, was at her side, idly stroking her lover's breasts and smirking.

"That must have been pretty powerful?" she said, smirking

"It - it was. Wow."

"Inspiration for painting, perhaps?"

“I can’t even feel my toes.”

“I’ll take that as a yes.”

Olivia hugged her girlfriend. Not girl friend, but girlfriend. She pulled her into a romantic kiss, and this time Clara allowed herself to be the more submissive one.

“I love you, Clara,” Olivia said.

The smile that overtook the face of the other woman could have lit up the night sky.

“I love you too,” she said.

Part 8: Five Years Later

Olivia was nervous. She stroked her stomach compulsively as she waited, something she did often anyway but now was much more obsessive in nature. Clara, beside her, simply rolled her eyes in amusement.

“It’s going to be fine, honey,” she said to her wife.

“You don’t know that! It might be a failure.”

“You say that about every gallery.”

“But this is my big one. My entire reflection on change. It’s literally the title of the gallery! It has all of my most personal art pieces and journal fragments!”

Clara locked the pram and leaned over to smooch her wife’s cheek.

“It’ll be fine, seriously. Now stop being so anxious or you’ll wake the baby.”

“I already have! It’s doing serious somersaults inside me already!”

The other woman chuckled. “I was talking about our sleeping toddler, you dummy.”

Olivia blushed, realising the obvious. She turned to look at her sleeping daughter in the pram. Little Jacqueline had been named partly after herself, in a sense, but she looked far more like Clara, really, right down to the curly chestnut hair and enormous grin. A lot of people tended to ask Olivia who had supplied the ‘material’, or who was the ‘real mother.’ Setting aside the ridiculousness of that question - they were both the ‘real mothers’, thank you very much - the actual question was flawed anyway. They really were both the biological mothers. When the two had gotten married and discussed children, Clara had made clear her desire for them as well, but that she wasn’t really one for pregnancy. By that point, Olivia had been a woman for three years, and despite being still young, she realised that in throwing herself fully into womanhood, she had come to appreciate a woman’s desires as well. And that included a growing maternal desire to grow life within her, to birth it. When she consulted Dr Harper, the perfect solution presented itself. They had kept a good amount of Jacob’s sperm frozen from before his transition to Olivia, and all they had to do was harvest

some of Clara's eggs, ensure that the fertilisation was successful, then implant it into Olivia. In effect, a combination of their DNA; the impossible baby for a lesbian couple.

It had been a wild journey, and it had postponed Olivia's plans to open the art gallery that was now open today. She had a whole new chapter of womanhood to go through and prepare for, and to add to her experiences and paintings and writings. It had been a joyous occasion for her mother to learn a grandchild was on the way, and once again her father was slightly awkward but wonderfully encouraging. He was adamant, of course, that she have a son - if not now, then later - so he could at least have one other boy in the family. Of course, little Jacquelinie, so bright and inquisitive, had been born.

But now her old man would get what he wanted, because after much discussion between the loving pair, they had opted to have a second child. Certainly, with Olivia becoming a bit of a celebrity when the news came out about her miraculous gender transition, there was also an accompanying paycheck. Quite a large one, in fact. Enough to support them both, though Clara stayed working as a nurse because she loved it so much. It had been quite a bit to deal with at first. Olivia found it embarrassing, especially when she had to give a ton of interviews, and again when the childhood romance story was found out. The pair accidentally became a pair of LGBT icons without even meaning to, something Clara was happy to lean into. There were also fetishists, people asking for model shoots, and general commentary online about how hot she was. It was all typical 'male stuff' as Clara called it, and soon the new woman saw it the same way. When she became pregnant, there was another flash of interest and more interviews, but by that point Olivia was more mentally prepared, and able to dictate how her medical celebrity status went down, even funnelling interest towards her art and writing.

And now she was pregnant again, the same way as the first. She could barely believe it, but it truly was something special to have life grow within you, to shift around inside your womb, to develop a personal connection before birth even occurred. If she'd gone back in time and told herself years ago that she would end up a pregnant woman, the man she had been would have been horrified. Now, she was already excited at the possibility of having at least one more, maybe two. Clara had said that three would be their maximum, while Olivia dreamed of four little angels. She had decided already that they would meet in the middle and have . . . four. Clara would come around. In the five years Olivia had been a woman, she had discovered many, many ways to seduce and entice her wife, just as Clara found endless ways for them to adventure and have fun, usually gallivanting halfway around the country when she had leave to do so. Yet despite all she had been through, it was this day that made her somehow more nervous than any other, and her wife could see it.

"Love, I said it would be fine. I'm always right, remember?"

Olivia leaned against her wife, taking comfort from her presence. "I hope so."

"It's not your first gallery. Not even your third. What are you so nervous about?"

Olivia sighed. "Because this is my first true chance to define my journey, not have it be defined by others. People still recognise me on the street as 'that guy who had the full sex change therapy.' And it can be empowering; I want others to experience the change I've been through, if they want to live on the other side. But sometimes I can feel like a pawn, and I knew that was going to happen. The media, the medical journals, and so on. But this gallery . . . it's me. Purely me. I can present who I am to the world, and they can see what I have to say. What I feel about myself in my paintings and writings. But if no one is interested, then I guess . . ."

She trailed off. Clara hugged her wife from the side, running a hand over her swollen belly. It gave Olivia a sensation of relief; she loved it when Clara did that.

"Honey, I love you, but you're such a dumbass, sometimes."

"Hey!"

"I'm serious. Maybe I should get my scrubs on and check your head, because there's no way this gallery can fail."

Olivia raised an eyebrow. She took a deep breath as her little son rolled in her womb.

"And how can you possibly know that?"

"Because I believe in you. And also I may have snuck outside while you were in here doing the finishing touches, and seen the freaking line."

"The - the line?"

Clara beamed. "Oh yeah. The big line, the crowd, all the people coming to see your work. Art fans and regular people and I even saw Damian in the crowd there coming to support you, and your family. I didn't even realise your sister was in town."

"Elizabeth is in there?"

"Oh yeah. Sorry to ruin the surprise."

Olivia blinked away some tears. Already, she was settling, and so was her child.

"No, I'm glad you did. I feel . . . I feel so much better."

"So you should, hot stuff. Now come on, are you going to let them in or not? It's nearly time."

Olivia smiled. She placed her hands on her back, mindful of her heavy stomach, and began to waddle away from her exhibit and out to where a crowd was evidently waiting to see her. There was even a camera crew, ready to record for some local magazine or paper or online journal.

"Time to let them know the real woman," she said.

The End