

SUBSTITUTE DAUGHTER

By Audrey Taylor



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

A 'SPECTRUM' NOVEL

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SUBSTITUTE DAUGHTER

By Audrey Taylor

Prologue

“Please listen to her,” she was barely whispering. “Mom knows what's best for you...” Her eyes closed, but her words continued to echo in my mind. I sat rigid, watching the life force drain from her body, with an awful emptiness in the pit of my belly.

Stephanie was gone.

Her mother was always foremost in Stephanie's mind, during our entire marriage and even at the end of her life. I had been making the supreme effort to get along with Mrs. Colder all this time.

Nothing about our love or our intimacy. Nothing about our lost life together. No, she always focused on her mother.

I felt anger festering inside, a terrible need to scream, 'What about me?' It remained bottled up until it slowly dissolved into grief.

Ever since the discovery of Stephanie's illness I'd gone out of my way, made a superhuman effort, to honor and respect her Mom and avoid all conflicts. It was no easy task. Hadn't she noticed any of this?

Wasn't I right in her face with all the changes?

Let me tell you, it hadn't been easy. I think you'll agree as you read my story.

It had taken huge amounts of patience to appease her mother's never-ending suggestions without running away from the house in total outrage. All her many ideas that could only be classified as eccentric. Why couldn't Stephanie see that and intercede on my behalf?

Why had I always taken a back seat to her mother's wants? Didn't I count for anything?

She was gone. I couldn't believe I would never again be able to share my thoughts with her. Only in my mind. Our world as I knew it had come to end, and I was about to embark in a strange new direction that I wasn't at all sure about.

Did I have a choice?

That was the major question facing me, but it too slowly ebbed away as I sat there in gathering numbness.



As my anguish slowly subsided I stood beside my wife. My head was tilted in weariness.

Even though her death had been expected, it was still a significant moment. I struggled to come to grips with the idea that my sweetheart was no longer here. Only 23 years old, and she had succumbed to a miserable blood disorder, some rare form of anemia that had no cure. She had hardly begun to live.

Now I was left to deal with her mother on my own.

I felt an instant desire to be there for her mother as she suffered through the loss of her only daughter. My internal feelings were quite intense. I knew that all my sacrifices were about to be put to the test.

I could feel the debt owed her mother for all she had given us over the years and especially these last several months.

Then I began to wonder about obligations and whether there would be an end to them? Like when a person died, didn't the debt automatically disappear? I guess there was always a person's estate, which certainly didn't amount to a hill of beans in our situation.

Of course I was still around and could feel the subtle transfer to my shoulders of the full obligation. As if by magic, it came to rest right between my shoulder blades. I could feel my neck tighten under the load.

I stared at Stephanie's serene face. It was so peaceful and calm, even in her wasted state.

I sensed the strong resemblance between us, as my mind traveled back to the beginning when Stephanie's illness was initially discovered. Our intimacy was lost forever, leading inevitably to my present dilemma.

I could see Stephanie as if it was only yesterday, how her normally sunny face was decidedly cloudy as she came through the front door, quickly blurting out her earth-shattering news.

The Bad News

"My God... It's your fault," she said as she glared at me.

My fault? Stephanie had announced she had some incurable blood disorder, and it was my fault? What kind of logic was that, I wondered

Was it because we were married? Did she think I had somehow infected her with this horrible disease?

Her mother was always accusing me and placing me on the defensive. My annoyance with her knew no bounds, as I struggled to absorb the awful news.

I watched her grab Stephanie in a tight bear hug, the two of them crying freely as they rocked slowly together. Tears came to my eyes.

“There has to be something we can do,” I said. I just couldn't give up without a fight.

“It's a rare form of anemia,” Stephanie stammered from her mother's shoulder. “They barely understand it. The doctor said...” She sobbed another moment. “That several specialists will want to study me. I'll be lucky,” she choked up again, “to last six months...” She was lost in deep sobbing.

My beautiful soul-mate was telling me of her approaching death, and I had to wait in line to comfort her. It held a strange reality for me.

Total devastation. I could feel my heart breaking as I tried to absorb the finality of her situation.

Maybe we would check with other specialists. There had to be a remedy somewhere on this earth. We'll do a lot of digging, I promised myself. I was prepared to spend day and night to find a solution. Whatever it took.

“That's enough,” her mother said with a growl in my direction, like my unspoken thoughts were troubling Stephanie. Always attacking me she was. “Can't you see she's under a terrible strain?” she said like I was comatose. “We'll talk later. She needs to rest now.” She walked with her slowly to our bedroom.

That was the beginning.

The utter destruction of my most important relationship in the whole wide world. A horrid blood infection was eating away at my loved one's circulatory system.

It also marked the beginning of a new commitment I would make to my wife that would turn my life topsy-turvy. I tried to soothe a mother's broken heart at the impending loss of her daughter.

Environmental Adjustments

Mrs. Colder took immediate and total charge of her daughter's care, assigning me straightway to a spare bedroom so she could maintain a sterile environment around her.

Since we were living in Stephanie's mother's house, this meant I had to occupy Stephanie's old room. It hardly caused a wrinkle when I brought it up. So I went with the flow and settled in, trying to make the best of a terrible situation.

With time, I came to appreciate the lighter feminine decor that held a cherished place in my sweetheart's mind, having spent her earlier years up through adolescence within these four walls. It helped me to deal with our physical separation, acting almost like a surrogate mother to our missing intimacy.

I found myself identifying more with her as I slept in the four poster bed and studied my complexion in her vanity mirror, surrounded by her clothes and the lingering

smells from the closets and dresser drawers that still held many of her clothes. She seemed to surround me; I stared at the pictures on the walls and the scrapbooks discovered on the top shelf of the closet. I spent many hours perusing them, absorbing the many articles and notes she had collected over the years. It made me feel even closer to her, which was something I desperately needed.



Mrs. Colder, being a registered nurse, was well aware of Stephanie's needs. She insisted we adhere strictly to the doctor's orders to assure her daughter's remaining time be as peaceful as possible.

Stephanie for her part grew even more devoted to her mother, if that were possible. She knew the terrible hardship she was placing on her mother and wished there were some magical way to avoid it. She took my banishment without a solitary complaint; as if being close to me would intensify her symptoms, which really put me off when I thought about it. I tried not to think about it too much.

Right from the start, her mother insisted I wear full whites whenever I was around Stephanie. She even made me wear a face protector in her presence. Of course, it became a major interference to our intimacy, but that hardly concerned her mother.

I still felt her mother's open hostility towards me like a gaping wound. Somehow her daughter's condition was my fault. I had no idea how to correct this misconception, so I simply avoided the subject entirely. I never said a word about the face protector, even though I hated wearing it around Stephanie.

The uniform she loaned me fit fairly well, but it was geared to more feminine proportions, which made it tight in the waist and baggy in the chest and hips. I might have noticed her intentions at that stage if I hadn't been so distraught.

As you might imagine, my performance at work fell off sharply. Still, it was a shock when my boss called me into his office late one Friday afternoon and handed me an envelope with my severance notice. "Sorry, David, you're just not cutting it," was his full explanation after nearly two years. Not a single word of appreciation for the fine job I had done or words of sympathy for my difficulties at home.

His total lack of compassion was truly amazing. I trudged home, hating to add more bad news to the fire. I couldn't believe I had thought there was a future for me at the company. Boy, was I ever wrong about that.

There was no way I would share this problem with Stephanie, which left me wallowing in my rejection all by myself. There was no way I would get any sympathy from Mrs. Colder, of course.

All my friends had pretty much disappeared after we got married. They were replaced by Stephanie's friends, who paid me little heed whenever they visited. It was more like I was a piece of furniture, once the initial greetings were over. I simply blended into the room's decor without a murmur.

Now, with more time to consider her friends, I realized my not being a woman was the cause of my exclusion. While they went off whispering and giggling amongst them-

selves in the kitchen, I was left to veg out in front of the TV. They acted like teenagers more suited to high school. I never really minded, since Stephanie enjoyed their company so much and was always playful after they left.

Her mother showed only minor annoyance at my being fired. She was quick to note my availability for the many household chores that needed doing. She instantly established a routine, which put me in charge of the household laundry while she was at work. This, of course, included the drying and folding process, as well as any ironing that was required. All of a sudden, I was knee deep in all sorts of ladies undergarments and a variety of outerwear I had little knowledge of.

Now I was learning about delicate wash cycles and what needed hanging and the finer points of ironing blouses, skirts, and what have you. Who did all this before me?

I was too engrossed with Stephanie and caught up with her obligation to her mother to mount any objections. Besides, with all the time on my hands, I felt a real need to make some kind of contribution, even if it meant doing household chores. Especially with Mrs. Colder being the sole breadwinner in the household.

I checked the daily want ads but had little energy, not to mention self-esteem after last job rejection, to pursue the occasional opening that was usually a stretch for my background anyway. I remained in a deepening funk that seemed to have no bottom.

“You mustn't fight with her,” Stephanie would remind me whenever we were alone, especially when I might raise a question about a new request from her mother. The most recent one was to remove all hair from my arms and legs.

“She's under a terrible stress,” she repeated for the fiftieth time. “And you know how crazy she is about germs. I only hope she doesn't have a nervous breakdown.”

This caused me, of course, to consider my objections. I'm not sure where we would be without her mother's job and home. Probably in some care facility with all that that implied. “What's a few body hairs compared to that?” Her weak smile almost made me melt.

My complaint died before I could speak it. Even so, my mind continued to wonder about the strain I was under and when someone would worry about me.

And so I was forced to accept the loss of my body hair without further comment. There was no way to avoid it and remain a member of that household.

With my preparing most of Stephanie's meals, Mrs. Colder felt it imperative to maintain a contamination-free environment throughout the cooking process.

She felt that body hair was an infection waiting to happen and only allowed for head hair because of society's mores; still, she demanded it be covered with a full hairnet whenever I prepared food. It was a kind of French pez, which she brought home for me from a brief trip to the mall. All hair from my arms and underarms, my face and legs, and everywhere else were to become a distant memory.

To my brief objection about including my legs, she offered me a blank stare. Then she stiffly reminded me that pants legs could easily lift up and expose the lower leg.

Thoughts of my sock coverage stayed in my head, as her stern expression dared me to say more.

Stephanie's eyes were boring into me as I shrugged, "Whatever." Why did Mrs. Colder have to bring this subject up in front of her? I felt terrible discussing it in front of her and annoyed that Mrs. Colder couldn't wait till later when we were alone. I only wanted it to be over as quickly as possible and save some embarrassment for me as well as Stephanie.

She brought home a special depilatory cream the very next day, which at least made the task fairly easy. She expected me to use it once a week, "on my honor". At least I didn't have to contend with nasty nicks from using a straight razor. She did lend a hand with my back, which forced us into intimate contact for the first time.

I remember her strange comment as she rubbed in the cream: "Your back has such a nice curvature to it." No one had ever mentioned my back, either positively or negatively, and I felt her fingers linger a bit longer than necessary. I didn't have the nerve to say anything.

Meanwhile, most of the chores around the house were my bailiwick. I even made the trips to the stores for food needs and tapes that Stephanie enjoys. We did manage to spend some peaceful afternoons together watching light comedies or dramas, with me perched close by in a side chair so we could hold hands.

Without realizing it, I was pretty much always in Mrs. Colder's' whites, even when I went to the store. It was a lot simpler to throw a coat over them and not worry about changing. My mind was so lost on other things that I never even considered the image I was presenting. It did hit me as odd when one of the store clerks referred to me as Miss, but I quickly wrote it off to faulty hearing, returning my focus to the latest magazines in search of ones that Stephanie enjoyed.

Being left with so much free time, even with doing most of the care around Stephanie, her mother soon added the vacuuming and dusting chores as well as cleaning the basement, which hadn't been done in years. That took me over two weeks to accomplish. She had me bring up boxes of old clothes she had stored away and had me launder them in between my other chores, finding room in my closets to hang them when I was done. They were mostly skirts and blouses that no longer fit her but were still in good shape. I was certainly becoming proficient at ironing.

Now, when she would get home, she could pay full attention to Stephanie without worrying about the household duties. She actually made a positive comment about how nice the house looked, and I almost collapsed on the spot. Stephanie's smile was pure joy. Can you imagine, her mother paying me a compliment? Wonder of wonders. She must have been delirious.

After the initial shock passed, I felt this cuddly warmth inside my tummy sensing I was actually making a contribution. With all the energy I was expending, it certainly felt good.

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Stephanie had been eating like a bird the past few weeks, picking at her food no matter how I prepared it. I went to great pains to get it just how she liked it to no avail. Her weight loss was the cause of new concern for her mother and me.

Mrs. Colder was constantly on the lookout for ways to cheer up Stephanie and always on the alert for possible avenues of germ infestation.

Several weeks after my job loss, she decided to add weekly inoculations to my regimen, since I was around the patient so much of the time. She was determined to maintain a sterile environment. The medication came from the hospital. She insisted the added step was a precautionary measure well worth any side effects I might encounter. I was long past arguing with her when she set her mind to something. It certainly couldn't hurt to have further assistance with warding off germs, could it?

Although for the life of me, I couldn't imagine how a stray germ could do any more harm.

Not that I wasn't ready to suffer to help Stephanie.

When I started complaining of nausea the very next day, Mrs. Colder was quick to console me, explaining that these types of symptoms were expected and would pass in no time. She was right; the harsh cramps did subside in a few days, but a vague tenderness still remained in my abdomen and back. Those inoculations were sure strong. Both areas were sensitive, but I hesitated to complain in the face of Stephanie's worsening condition.

Her continued weight loss chased all my troubles to a remote place that hardly mattered.



One day Mrs. Colder thought more color in my uniforms would help. Brighter colors would gain a more favorable response from Stephanie and help lift her spirits.

Stephanie certainly did notice the colors at first, smiling affably at my agreeable demeanor. She was pleased I was accepting her mother's ideas, while secretly admiring my evolving femininity.

She was already picturing me as her replacement in her mother's eyes.

All the while, I attributed her glowing expression to my colorful uniform, a simple positive reaction to cheery colors. Mrs. Colder was right. I'd have to wear them more often.

I might have touched on this earlier, but there's something that needs clarification about now.

Mrs. Colder and I, for the most part, had been antagonistic since the first moment Stephanie and I met. Yet, as the two of us were joining together to assure Stephanie's well being, a strange bond was developing between us that was turning everything topsy-turvy for me.

It seemed like our previous existence had lost all meaning, and only the present held any value.



Meanwhile, my job search had been temporarily set aside pursuant to all the things to be done around the house. Mrs. Colder didn't complain; she simply paid the bills without uttering a disparaging word. I figured there would be plenty of time to find a job when this was over. It afforded me precious time with my precious wife, which I would otherwise not have had. It wouldn't last much longer, I thought.

It was in this atmosphere that I continued to follow Mrs. Colder's suggestions with my attire. Like when she offered me support hose and special shoes that looked so much like the ones she wore at the hospital. She said they were on sale, and that my feet would be thankful with my being on them so much of the day.

My annoyance faded instantly when Stephanie casually remarked about my resembling her mother. I wondered whether it was her smile or her saying I looked so feminine that made me all warm inside. Not just any female, but her mother! It had to be our uniforms. I couldn't imagine that we really looked alike.

Why wasn't this bothering me?

The hose did keep my legs warm, since my hairless condition made me more susceptible to sudden drafts that would sneak up my legs without warning. Being committed to their smoothness really left them vulnerable.

I would probably have appreciated her suggesting it earlier.

The shoes had a small lift to them, a slightly elevated platform heel that forced me to lean back ever so slightly in pursuit of balance. It also shortened my stride, which Stephanie was quick to notice without comment. Only a smile and a compliment about my new shoes, which brought out a matching smile from me.

### **A Giant Step**

Then I graduated to a whole new level. One I would never have imagined in my wildest dream: a nurse's full dress uniform. You know, the ones that go over the head and button up the front, or zip up the side where the skirt usually ends just below the knee, in conservative fashion.

Obviously, her mother felt I was ready for the step. I never would have believed it.

For some reason, we were out of pants, even though I usually kept up with the laundry fairly regularly. On this particular morning, her mother had a day off and just happened to walk in on me standing in my support hose and a pair of shoes with a covering robe. I asked about the missing pants, and she grabbed my arm to guide me to her closet so we could select one of her uniforms.

"Try this," she said. My mouth fell agape as she lifted it over my outstretched arms so it could slide down my body. With the support hose and shoes, it was hard to tell I wasn't a woman, at least from the neck down.

Of course I wasn't one of your delectable nurses, but with the dress and the ponytail that Mrs. Colder tied off with a pink ribbon my masculinity was hardly noticeable.

Even with my plain, yet softening face (from the creams she has me use every night) I looked like your ordinary, underdeveloped, matronly nurse.

“That uniform looks great on you.” It was heartening to hear Stephanie’s praise. She made everything okay. “It’s one of mom’s, isn’t it? Fits you rather well, except for what’s missing in front,” she laughingly poked at the loose material in the bust.

She didn’t care a hoot where my pants had gone to, when I mentioned their strange disappearance. I blushed at her unexpected compliments and her pleasure at my getting along so well with her mother, even as I struggled with a need to escape her scrutiny. My manhood was suffering big-time. This crazy situation was getting out of hand.

I just didn’t know how to fight it just yet. Not with Stephanie fighting for her life and my needing to make these last days as pleasant as possible. My masculinity could go on sabbatical for a while. I certainly wasn’t going to argue with her mother, which invariably ended up causing Stephanie discomfort. If I rebelled and wore my own clothes, I’m sure Mrs. Colder would make it impossible for me to be around Stephanie.

It was a whole lot easier just to sit there and take in Stephanie’s compliments and voice my appreciation. We could sort this out afterwards when it no longer mattered.

What I wore had little import when I was with her.

After a few days I no longer thought about my changing image. There wasn’t much pleasure I could bring Stephanie; and if this drew attention away from her illness, then I was all for it. I would dress like this and be thankful.

Her mother's dress uniforms showed up in my closet the following morning, and I accepted them without further comment. She expected me to make use of them daily. The pants still remained a mystery.

Over the weekend, a supply of ladies undergarments found their way into my drawers. I inquired of Mrs. Colder what their purpose might be, having a vague notion of what she had in mind.

“We can't have your boxers peaking out and betraying you,” she idly handled my query. Betray me? With the long skirts I have trouble not tripping over? She must be kidding.

Did she really expect me to wear brassieres? There was a colorful selection sitting right next to a slew of panty girdles in the middle drawer. I knew my chest had been bothering me lately, but there certainly wasn’t a need for them.

At least it’s understandable when the store clerk refers to me as Miss Colder. One blonde cashier, his nameplate said Steve, even flirted with me, which only caused me to chuckle inside. He should only know. I was too much in a daze to give much significance to his smiling face and the way he holds my hand a moment longer than necessary when he gives me the change. I was kind of glad Mrs. Colder made me pay attention to my hands and nails, that they’re neat and kind of feminine so they wouldn’t give me away.

The shoes were definitely more comfortable once I got used to the heel. Being on my feet so much of the day, they were a definite help, along with the support hose that relieved some of the strain in my calves. Mrs. Colder actually mentioned once about get-

ting a pair with a higher heel when she saw I seemed to have adjusted. She felt that being 5'4" leaves me at a disadvantage and wanted to alleviate the handicap. I wasn't really sure what height has to do with performing a nursing function, or for that matter all the numerous household tasks.

Mrs. Colder actually giggled (a first in my presence) when we were sitting around with Stephanie, and she was recounting her day, mentioning to Stephanie how closely I resembled one of the new nurses on the floor. Her name was Margaret, and she laughingly added that, had I gone through nursing school, I would probably be starting on her floor in place of Margaret.

"Oh, mom, you always wanted me to be a nurse," Stephanie chuckled. "Now you're working on David, aren't you?" My body couldn't contain the shudder passing through it.

Her mother was quick to mention the high pay and shortage of qualified personnel. And went on to praise the excellent benefit package and job security that came with a full-time position.

That was the first time a possible nursing career was mentioned in front of me, and it didn't die there. She brought it up with increasing frequency and probed into my interest, while instilling the benefits of the position. Of course, she would remind me of my past position and what a disappointment that had been, not that I needed reminding.

At the time, I hardly gave it much thought, hoping to avoid any confrontations in front of Stephanie. I was not really sure where I was going when this was over. It was hard to picture myself without her.

Several times Stephanie told me the story of her mother's desire for her follow in the nursing field. She had even enrolled Stephanie in nursing school after high school, but her daughter's summer job in the florist shop had proven the undoing of all her plans. Stephanie discovered her love for botany and pursued that field of study with joy.

Her fascination with all things growing from the ground was unwavering; she joined a large nursery in the area to make a strong contribution till the appearance of her illness. She missed her plants terribly, but her mother strictly forbid her even to water the ones around the house.

Which left me to follow diligently her precise instructions, lest I cause one of her darlings to wilt in front of her.

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I remember how we first met, when I was shopping for a Valentine's bouquet for my mother. She was immediately impressed that a son would be buying a bouquet of flowers for his mother. Most young men had only thoughts for their sweethearts. We started up a friendly conversation and I knew right away that we shared something special.

It wasn't long before we were dating and she learned about my mother's diabetes and how she wasn't doing very well. Our relationship blossomed even as my mother's condition seemed to worsen by the day.

Now that I think back on it, I'm quite convinced that Mom was holding out all that time till she knew there was someone to care for me. Then and only then did she allow her chronic illness to take hold, feeling a sense of peace for my well-being.

It is very much similar to Stephanie wanting me to be there for her mom. How was I to know the reverse was also true, that her mother was assuming an important role in my life as well?

I remembered how Stephanie and I grew ever closer, even though her mother was put off by my lack of credentials, being a college dropout with limited potential. Mrs. Colder saw me as the typical ruffian who would never properly provide for her daughter.

When Mom died, Stephanie was right there beside me as all Mom's friends hugged me and commiserated amongst themselves. It was a terrible loss, and I don't know what I would have done without Stephanie.

It was during this time that our devotion seemed to clarify, and we started making plans for our marriage, intent on saving for a wedding party. Mom's small life insurance policy covered the funeral expenses with some left over. We put it immediately towards the wedding.

Her mother stood stoically by, somehow keeping a clamp on her staunch misgivings. To this day, I remember the scowl on her face when I caught her staring at me during the ceremony.

She seemed to be over that. With Stephanie's illness, she was a lot more accepting of me, even as she continued to increase my responsibilities while playing havoc with my image.

I didn't even think twice about running to the store when we needed something.

She had me adding light rouge to my cheeks in the morning and trimming my scraggly eyebrows over the weekend, saying they looked so unruly. She wanted me to avoid any trouble and thought I should modify my overall appearance to fit the dress uniform. With the feminine underwear she insisted I change every day, I was starting to feel more like a lady with each passing day. It was hard not to, when every household mirror reflected this increasingly attractive young lady when I passed. How would I keep this creature from gaining control?

I didn't know what happened to my old boxers and undershirts, or for that matter the earlier white tops and pants I used to wear. They seemed to have vanished from the earth.

She'd been so thoughtful of late, shoring up my sluggish mood whenever the Stephanie scene started to get to me. And when I asked about the soreness in my breasts and my aching tummy, she sat there holding my hand and listened quietly to each complaint before commiserating with me. "We females must remain strong through our agonies," she said. The gruff old attitude was long gone. It was almost like

talking to my own mom. I didn't have the heart to contradict her calling me a female and felt a distinct warmth at being included in the group. She touched me softly and rubbed my neck soothingly; it sharply different from the past.

I could almost taste my need for membership into her group.

She continued with my weekly inoculations and brought home a balm from the hospital one day. I rubbed into my chest twice a day. It was a soothing cream she initially applied to my sensitive mounds to demonstrate the correct method. They felt somewhat better after her application. I don't know why I wasn't more embarrassed about her seeing me like that. They'd become kind of full and hung right out there, well beyond just pudginess. I looked almost like a normal woman, which I was decidedly not. The nipples seemed huge and came erect at the slightest contact, even when I washed them in the shower. I never realized they could get so swollen. They looked like thimbles, so different from before.

She showed no concern, which kind of carried over to my attitude. It allowed the issue to fade away without too much concern. The balm was rubbed gently into each mound every morning and before dinnertime, until it was fully absorbed.

The sensitivity was greatly diminished and left me to deal with a new arousal that had been close to overwhelming me. It sort of generated right below the nipple and then traveled throughout the breast. It was driving me insane. It was much too embarrassing to mention to Mrs. Colder, however.

As the creaming process became an erotic ritual that threatened to engulf me, it made me think of Stephanie's wonderful breasts and how I loved to worship them.

There was a growing need to share these feelings with Mrs. Colder, even as I feared she'll laugh out-loud at my tale of woe. I kept telling myself she was a nurse and knew about these things. Besides, she was a woman and had been dealing with breasts most of her life. Being a man didn't make this any easier.

And yet I hardly realized it: I'd started to identify a lot more closely with her. Between wearing her clothes and now developing female maladies, it was hard not to.

Her suggestion of adding a slip under my uniform was easily accepted. I was glad that the coarse material would no longer meet my sensitized skin. When she added lipstick to my makeup routine, it was immediate apparent that my sallow complexion was no more and was instantly cheered by Stephanie.

We were constantly on the alert for ways to raise her spirits during this trying time. But whose was going to keep up my spirits?

Actually, Mrs. Colder had been more attentive to me of late. I found myself seeking her out with my petty everyday concerns, sharing some of the mundane household problems without hesitation. But not the arousal issue, not yet.

One evening, right after I creamed my breasts and we were relaxing at the kitchen table over a cup of tea, I blurted out my concerns for the erotic sensations coming from my breasts. "This isn't normal for a man," I said. My concern was sharp.

She instantly saw my dilemma and moved closer to put an arm around my shoulder, assuring me that it was natural for a woman and wasn't something to worry

about. Women's breasts naturally respond to stimulation and are indeed a source of enjoyment for every woman. "Didn't Stephanie react like this?" she asked. She had totally disregarded my 'normal for a man' comment.

I felt tight about discussing Stephanie with her, especially her breasts and especially in comparison to my own.

Of course, she was a nurse and was only trying to help. Why breasts were appearing on my manly chest was quickly forgotten.

Hesitantly, I shared my experiences with Stephanie, how I used to play with them and suck them lovingly. I sensed my own nipples erecting even as I spoke. Was this what the future held for me? Why did I feel this way? I had a strange feeling I was acquiring Stephanie's breasts with her permission. I felt a terrible shame and leaned into Mrs. Colder's shoulder for comfort.

"It's okay, darling." She had never referred to me that way before. She sensed my troubled mind and the struggle going on inside me. "Nothing to be upset about," she said in a soothing tone, "and certainly nothing to be ashamed of."

Easy for her to say. I slept pitifully that night.

The next morning she came to my room as I was dressing and reached into my drawer to retrieve a black brassiere. "It's time," she stated flatly. I found no energy to resist, sensing a certain inevitability to the whole process.

When she got the back clasp closed, she helped adjust the cups so 'my breasts' laid more comfortably. She then stepped aside so I could look in the mirror. "Wear this for a week, and you'll be okay. Your breasts need protection and support. Make sure you continue with the cream. You look very nice." My cheeks reddened as I studied my lacy mounds in their new home. It was hard to fathom my new image. I felt flushed as I studied myself carefully, sensing my new femininity taking hold of me. It was such a personal sensation, meant for me alone, that was felt all the way down to my toes.

She helped me into my uniform as I struggled to gain comfort with these new feelings. The dark shadow across my chest were impossible to miss, and I felt instant pride.

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I was on constant vigil that the process would be pain free. The doctors said she couldn't last much longer. It was already seven months, well past their original predictions.

My week in brassieres wasn't so terrible, and I simply wore them whenever I was in uniform. The cups definitely protected my sensitized mounds and certainly aided my womanly appearance, which I found wasn't that big a deal.

Did it really make a difference what I wore under my uniform?

Every time I gazed in the mirror, I had a hard time finding David. Mrs. Colder had me applying light makeup in the morning, on my own. She usually checked me before she left for work, intent on my being independent with "these trivial things," as she put it.

“It’s always important to bring out our best features,” she said. I had been reclassified into her league and was too busy getting the eyeliner straight to notice. “Practice makes perfect,” she said, handing out little ditties like tissues.

During her daily inspection I sensed a growing need for her approval before getting to my household chores and to Stephanie. It evolved quite naturally, and her compliments seemed to aid my self-confidence as each new day began. As I mastered the techniques, her compliments only added to my growing acceptance of Denise.

Stephanie had lost most of her focus and had trouble staying awake through the tapes we watched. Her lucid moments were more sporadic, and I remained ever vigilant to catch her when she was awake. I hoped to add some cheer to her lucid time.

Mrs. Colder continued to tweeze my brows. Always “just a few stragglers”. I tried to keep a handle on my annoyance. I was quite capable of doing it myself, but she kept saying I was far too generous. She’d only be satisfied when every last hair was gone and an eyebrow pencil became a necessity.

Sometimes I got this entrapped feeling, like I was heading down a long tunnel while all the exits were closing up and my hopes of finding daylight fades further and further away.

The more I studied my eyes, the more I appreciated the sharp arch she’d created that initially seemed so severe. I was getting more comfortable with my overall appearance.

It was hard to remember what I used to look like before all this had started. I’d given up trying.

I still used the breast cream every night and the emollient on my face once the makeup was off. I got down to once a month with the depilatory cream. Mrs. Colder still checked my back regularly. I sensed her approval as her hand ran down over my backside with a kind of purring sound. She offered no explanation for my swelling breasts but insisted my facial skin would be thankful for my nightly care. The itchi-ness in my nipples had pretty much dissipated, but the surrounding area remained super sensitive and forced me to avoid even casual contact. They were a constant distraction, making me happy to enclose them into a brassiere for day wear.

One Saturday morning as I tried to get by in a flowery top without a bra, Mrs. Colder’ comment made me pause. “You’ll drive the guys crazy.” I was heading for the front door. Heat hit my cheeks as her meaning sunk in. It took all of two minutes to find my brassiere and cover myself once more. I was in no mood to deal with aroused males unnecessarily. This whole thing was starting to get to the crazy stage. All I wanted to do was make a casual trip to the store, and I now had to wear a brassiere so no one would get turned on to my gyrating chest. It was annoying that I could only leave them free at home. Wearing just a plain pair of jeans and a sweatshirt was no longer acceptable.

I’d started wearing slips since they covered my chest and allowed me to go bra-less, at least at home. That ‘over-the-shoulder boulder holder’ is not one of my favorite contraptions. It leaves all kinds of marks around my chest and irritates the underside of

my breasts and my shoulders. Her mom is sympathetic but insists it becomes less offensive with time.

I've been having some odd feelings about Stephanie's room. Almost a sense that it's my room. Like she's passing it down to me with her mom's consent, especially since she occupies the master bedroom all by her lonesome.

Being around her things and wearing so much of her clothes only adds to this feeling.

Stephanie noticed how soft and pliant my hands have become and loves to hold them while she falls asleep. She says they remind her of mom. I'm only too happy to oblige; oblivious to the classification that puts me in.

Mrs. Colder continues to encourage my use of Stephanie's things. "You can't just wear uniforms all the time. You need something to change off to when you're not caring for her. And it's a shame to see her things going to waste."

I remember when I used to be twenty pounds heavier than Stephanie, yet I know Mrs. Colder's idea is certainly feasible. These past six months my appetite has literally disappeared, probably in sympathy with my wife. The resulting weight loss has left most of my old clothes swimming on me. Even some of Stephanie's things have too much room, which prompted Mrs. Colder's vow to add some meat to my bones. I look almost sickly even with my breasts filling out the front of her dresses and blouses. I remember how I used to run my hands over my wife's waist and hips, enjoying the smoothness and sharp contrast between them. It's amazing how similar my shape is and that everything seems so okay with it. Isn't it remarkable what the mind can accept?

We spent most of a Sunday afternoon trying Stephanie's things on and discarding items we didn't care for. Mrs. Colder and I made a pact to help me gain at least ten pounds, talking about adding starches and carbohydrates to my diet. I helped box up the rejects for the next clothing drive along with much of my masculine things. She felt it was only taking up space and certainly couldn't be worn any longer. Just like that she handled a delicate task without awakening any of my internal doubts.

No sooner did I adjust to wearing Stephanie's clothes around the house than she suggested they were certainly suitable for my store trips as well. People out there must be tired of seeing me in uniform. They were probably wondering if I owned any other attire, or whether I was simply a workaholic. Uniforms were for patient care, not for shopping trips. It did make sense with Stephanie's things just wasting away in the closet. To tell the truth I was getting kind of tired of the uniforms. With everyone taking me as female anyway, it didn't seem to matter either way.

I wore a pair of gray slacks and a cute yellow blouse for my first excursion. My reflection revealed the transparency of the blouse, causing me to blush at the sight of my breasts peaking through. Her mother came in at that moment and quickly found a bra in my drawer. "No way young lady," she admonished as she clasped the back snaps and helped me adjust the cups. She and I had become quite close of late, and she thought nothing of lifting my breasts and moving the bra cups around. "They can no longer go unaided," she insisted, "so get used to the idea and stop fighting it."