

THE MUMMY'S CURSE

By Olivia Evans



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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“THE MUMMY’S CURSE”

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CHAPTER ONE: DISCOVERIES

“Have you seen the latest acquisition to the Egyptology section Diana?” The shapely blonde research assistant asked her co-worker and best friend from their high school days.

“You know that I haven't had the time, Alison. That bald headed old goat, Peterson has buried me in a ton of translation work again. I'm so busy that when I go home at night I fall right into bed. Even poor Eric is starting to complain. Between his flight schedules with the company and my work, we hardly ever see each other. I just wish that Harry would let up a little.”

“I know exactly what you mean. He's done the same thing to me. I don't care if he is Mister Harry Peterson, the Museum's Egyptology Department Director. Those mummies have been collecting dust a long time, a few more days won't matter.” Alison replied, angrily stubbing her cigarette in her coffee cup saucer. “Thank God it's Friday. Two whole days to rest up.”

“You know you should cut down on those. They aren't good for a girl in your condition.” Diana said, looking at the half dozen cigarette butts in the saucer.

She sighed. “I know, I know. It's just that every time I think about all this I get madder and madder.”

“Would you like to talk about it?” Diana asked, softly, concerned about her friend's mental health.

Alison was about to answer when their boss, Harry Peterson walked into the break room. He smiled at Diana and looked distantly at Alison.

“Time to go back to work, girls,” he announced walking over to the coffee machine and pouring a cup of coffee for himself. He missed the glaring look that Alison gave him behind his back.

When he turned around both young women had left the room. He smiled to himself as he ran his hand over his slightly balding head. *‘You've got to be on top of those two all the time,’* he thought to himself.

He smiled as he thought about the last time he had literally been on top of Alison. She had been a little disappointing, a little too passive, but still not a bad lay at all. It was too bad that she was pregnant, but that was her problem, not his.

He wondered if her friend Diana was better in bed than Alison had been. He would soon find out, all that he needed to do was threaten to fire her if she didn't cooperate as he had done with all the other girls except Alison. The fact that Diana was engaged to be married made it even more exciting. Her boy friend Eric wouldn't be a problem, he was hardly ever home anyway.

He stroked his full neatly trimmed beard thoughtfully as he returned to his office.

Diana was worried about her coworker, Alison. Alison was a little over three months along in her pregnancy, just barely starting to show. Ordinarily a pregnancy would have been a cause for a celebration, except Alison wasn't married and her mysterious boy friend of nearly a year had dumped her when he had found out about the baby.

Alison, who normally confided with Diana about everything in her personal life, was tightlipped about who the boy friend and father of her baby was.

'Whoever he was, the man was obviously an ass hole who wouldn't accept the responsibility of the pregnancy. He was probably married and had children by his wife,' Diana thought.

She would stop by Alison's apartment later after dinner and try to cheer her up. She wasn't too optimistic about her chances of success.

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Alison's small, two bedroom, town house style, condominium was dark when Diana arrived at just after seven that evening. Thinking that it was a little unusual, since Alison had said she would be home, Diana tried the front door.

As she expected it was locked.

Diana went around to the small attached garage and tried the side door. Diana was surprised to find that it was unlocked and Alison's small car parked inside.

The car was parked almost flush against the side of the garage, forcing Diana to squeeze between it and the wall until she could reach the door leading into the apartment. It too was unlocked.

"Alison? Are you home?" Diana called out. She was becoming worried. Her friend normally didn't leave doors unlocked, especially when she was home alone.

Diana stepped inside, and turned on the lights in the kitchen. Everything seemed to be in order. Just to be on the safe side, she picked up a rolling pin that had been laying on the counter. If there was someone else in the condo besides Alison, he would be in for a big surprise.

She cautiously went through each of the rooms, sensing that something was wrong, but not knowing what to expect. The door to the last room, Alison's bedroom, was closed.

Diana pressed her ear against the door and listened. Hearing nothing, she slowly opened the door and peeked in.

“Alison?” Diana called out as she saw Alison, dressed in a night gown, lying motionless on top of her king sized bed. Diana became alarmed when Alison didn't respond.

Diana noted the slow rise and fall of Alison's breasts as she breathed, and frowned. Alison, normally a light sleeper who should have awakened to Diana's calls, appeared to be in a deep sleep.

As she moved to shake her friend, Diana bumped against the night stand next to Alison's bed. A prescription bottle that had been sitting on the night stand fell soundlessly to the floor.

Catching the slight movement out of the corner of her eye, Diana picked up the bottle. She read with growing fear that the prescription had been for thirty sleeping pills, a month's supply.

Filled only two days earlier, the brown plastic bottle was now empty!

Alison was trying to commit suicide!

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“Your friend was lucky that you found her when you did,” the doctor explained to Diana. “Another ten minutes and it would have been too late.”

“Will she be all right, Doctor?” Diana asked with deep concern. She felt relief when he nodded. “What about her baby? She was three months pregnant you know.”

The doctor looked down at his hands. They were slim, with long narrow fingers, exactly what a surgeon's hands should look like. He had always hated them when he was forced to do things like he had just done. “No, we had remove it.” He said softly. “She was in pretty bad shape when the Emergency Medical Technicians brought her in. I made the decision to give Alison a better chance. I'm sorry, but it was necessary. She isn't married is she?”

Diana shook her head.

“I didn't think so. Can you tell me who the father was? He should be notified.”

“Alison's boy friend dumped her just after she became pregnant. She won't tell even me who he is,” Diana replied, shaking her head again and wiping a mascara colored tear from her eyes.

The Doctor nodded. “I thought as much. I'm going to keep her here for another twenty four hours, just to make sure she's all right.”

“I'll let our boss know.” She had no intentions of letting anyone know that Alison had tried to commit suicide, not even Harry. Her “illness” would be the result of an unfortunate accident at home.

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“I don't care what happened to her. The Egyptian exhibit must be ready by next Friday,” Mr. Peterson said angrily to Diana. “You'll just have to take over for her until she returns.” He drew himself up to his full 5 foot 9 inch height. “That will be in addition to your own work, of course.”

“But Mr. Peters...” Diana began to protest the unreasonable demand.

“No buts! If you want to keep your job here, Ms. Johnson, you'll do as I say.” He threatened as he turned and left the office.

Diana was shaking with anger as she watched him walk down the hallway and disappear into his office.

‘He really is a 24 karat bastard,’ she thought. She kicked the wastepaper basket noisily against the side of her workbench.

Diana admonished herself as she picked up the wastepaper basket and the scattered trash, she wasn't thinking rationally. After all, despite the fact that he was an ass hole, it wasn't Harry's fault that Alison was in the mess that she was in.

Diana returned to the mummy that Alison had been working on before her suicide attempt and began to study Alison's notes on a partial translation of first of three pieces of papyrus Alison had found with the mummy.

Diana had translated three more lines before she sat upright with a startled look on her face, and began rereading what Alison had translated. She compared the partial translations against a sheet of X-ray film.

Without realizing it, Alison had uncovered a real mystery.

The three sheets of papyrus that had been wedged in between the mummy's wrapping said that the mummy had been a male with a wife and the reported father of 6 children.

One of the children, the youngest, was even supposedly the result of an affair with a temple slave girl.

There was really nothing odd about that, except that the X-rays that had been routinely taken of the mummy showed the skeletal remains of a woman inside.

Diana wondered if a mistake had been made, either after the mummy had been exhumed or thousands of years earlier when it had been prepared for burial.

Intrigued, Diana started work on completing the rest of Alison's translations.

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Alison looked pale and worn out in her hospital gown. The attractive woman had just had a close call with death and it showed. Diana tried to be cheerful when she put the flowers in the vase on the night stand.

“How are you feeling?” Diana asked.

“Like death warmed over.” Alison replied, smiling weakly. “How did Harry take it? About the loss of the baby, I mean.”

Harry? Could Harry be the mysterious boy friend and father? Diana wondered to herself.

“Uh, I didn't tell him exactly what happened. I just said that you'd had an accident at home and wouldn't be in for a while. He just added your work load to mine.”

“Oh,” Alison said looking away, tears beginning to form in the corner of her eyes.

Diana looked down at her friend laying in the bed. It had been Harry! The bastard had gotten Alison knocked up and then had dumped her. Probably under threat of firing Alison if she didn't cooperate.

She wondered how many other girls he had done that to. She knew that there was a high turn over of young college women archeology interns in the department, maybe that was the reason.

Alison was tired and Diana didn't stay long.

On the way home she thought about seeking revenge against Harry. Short of cutting off his balls and making him eat them one at a time, she couldn't think of a suitable punishment. Although that idea had a lot of merit, she laughed bitterly to herself.

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It was three days of careful reconstruction of the papyrus strips before Diana thought she had solved the mystery. According to the hieroglyphics on the document, the woman in the crude linen wrappings HAD been a man. He had been born and lived most of his life as a male, even marrying and fathering a number of children.

Around about the time of the birth of his sixth child, however, he had done something that got either his wife, or one of the high priests mad at him.

The account wasn't clear as to what the offense was or who had become mad. Diana suspected that it was because of who the mother of his last child was, a temple slave girl.

While the "why" wasn't entirely clear, what happened next was.

His wife tricked him into drinking a tasteless liquid that had been prepared by the high priest. One lunar cycle, or thirty days later, the man had been transformed into a young woman and quickly became pregnant, presumably by the normal means.

Within a year after the change, he... she gave birth to the first of seven babies. Each had been fathered by a different person.

Diana smiled. *'It was an amusing story, too bad it wasn't true. It would be a fitting punishment for that ass hole Harry.'* She studied the third and final sheet of the astounding document. She translated just enough to realize that it was a formula, and a list of ingredients.

She hadn't noticed Harry sneak in behind her, but she did when he bent over and kissed her neck.

He laughed when she shrieked.

"Just what the hell was that for?" she demanded, wiping the spot with her hand distastefully.

"I thought that since your boy friend is still out of town, you might like to have some male company tonight. Maybe a little dinner and a lot of fun afterwards." He leered at her.

"Forget it! I wouldn't go out with you if you were the last man on earth!" she snarled back at him. She surprised both herself and Harry with the intensity of her reply.

“Hum, not even if I was the last man on Earth, huh? How about if I was your last boss?”

“Last boss?” Diana asked slightly bewildered

“Yes, the last boss you had before you went on unemployment and looked for another job.” He smiled greasily as he completed his threat. He watched her face become red with suppressed anger and smiled. “Why don't you just think about it, honey. Tomorrow would be better anyway. That will give us the whole weekend to play.”

Diana was furious. She knew now without a shadow of a doubt that Harry had been the one that had gotten Alison pregnant. And now he wanted to take her to bed too!

She had to delay for time to think up a way to avenge Alison and get herself out of her own predicament.

“Uh, I see. If that's the way it is, maybe we should wait until next weekend, Eric will be leaving on another overseas company flight Thursday.” Diana forced a smile. “Besides, I just started my period and ...”

Harry held up his hand, barely containing his satisfaction. “Say no more, next weekend it is. I can hardly wait.”

“I can.” Diana said under her breath as Harry walked out of the room. Diana waited until he had gone into his office before she kicked her wastepaper basket again.

This time she didn't pick up the scattered papers.

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Diana sadly watched Eric, looking very trim and handsome in his corporate pilot's uniform, climb into the small jet airplane. He would be gone for a week, leaving her to fend for herself with the problem of Harry. She hadn't told Eric what Harry was trying to do, believing correctly that her boy friend would probably try to kill him.

She couldn't stand the thought of him locked up over something that would have been applauded by half the women in the museum complex.

His departure created somewhat of a dilemma, though. Harry knew that she would be home alone and would try to take advantage of the fact.

Diana outsmarted him however, by moving in with Alison while she recuperated from her “accident”.

“Thank you for your concern, Diana. But you really didn't need to do this. I'll be all right, really,” Alison protested weakly as Diana tucked her into the king sized bed.

“What are friends for?” Diana smiled. I couldn't just let you stay by yourself after all this. Besides, Eric left on a flight this morning and I don't like being home by myself while he's gone. It will be lots of fun, almost like the pajama parties we use to have when we were teenagers.”

“Ah, ha! Now, the truth comes out!” Alison laughed. “You just want someone to talk to and warm your bed while Eric's gone.” She giggled. “Imagine a pajama party at our age.”

“What do you mean ‘our age’?” Diana demanded with mock indignity. “Twenty five is not old. Just ask anyone over thirty!”

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“So the bastard finally hit on you. I wondered how long it would take.” Alison exclaimed, as she carefully brushed the bright pink finger nail polish on her long nails.

She and Diana were sitting at Alison's kitchen table wearing their nightgowns and robes, doing their nails and chatting, just like they had done years earlier as teenagers.

“I think that I can handle him.” Diana replied grimly as she pulled some folded sheets of paper out of her purse. “Especially now that I have finally translated this.”

Alison, not wanting to smudge her nails, waved her hands around and motioned to Diana to set the photo copies on the table in front of her.

Alison glanced at the photographic reproduction of the last page of the papyrus and read Diana's translation.

“What is it, a recipe for a poisoned cake or something?” Alison asked, looking up at the attractive woman sitting across from her.

“Better than that.” Diana giggled. “Alison. you wouldn't believe what this says.”

Diana showed her the translation of the first two pages. Diana watched her friend as she carefully read the photocopies.

Alison looked up from the translated narration and stared at her friend opened-mouthed. “Do you think this actually works?”

“Well, as I see it, there's only one sure way to find out. We've got the entire weekend to mix the formula. If all goes well, Monday I can give it to him. What do you think?”

Alison looked into Diana's eyes wondering if her friend was serious about the idea. She was, she decided.

Alison giggled to herself when she thought of Harry suddenly finding himself in the position of being something he thought so lightly of, a woman. Getting knocked up by a hot date would serve him right, she thought.

Nodding to herself, Alison grinned to Diana. “I think that we need to get busy. We're going to have a lot of work ahead of us this weekend!”

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Diana took the small bottle out of her purse and looked at it for the fifth time since she poured the liquid into it. It hadn't been easy to make the stuff, she remembered.

Both girls had searched nearly all Saturday just to find the materials to make the ingredients. They had labored over the identification of an acid which was one of the main ingredients for hours before Diana realized that the modern version of the acid was sitting right in her medicine chest. The ingredient had been a crude herbal form of common aspirin!

Finally after hours of cooking, mashing and distilling, a small quantity of a clear broth like liquid remained.

“Diana! What are you doing?” Alison asked alarmed as Diana brought a spoonful of the liquid up to her lips.

“Shush! I just want to see if it is tasteless.” Diana carefully started to taste it.

“But what it works both ways and changes you into a man?” Alison said hurriedly.

Who knew what that stuff would do. It certainly wasn't poisonous, not with the ingredients they had used. At most, who ever drank it would have a mild case of indigestion, nothing more. But still, it paid to be careful with things like that.

Diana stopped, considering. She carefully poured the liquid back into the bottle. “You may be right. Besides, there wasn't any instruction as to how much the dosage should be. I might need it all.”

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The next day, Diana made it a point to get to work before Harry did. She quickly brewed a pot of coffee, poured some coffee into two cups and dumped the rest of the pot out. She poured one cup back in the pot and added the contents of the bottle.

She knew that Harry wasn't opposed to drinking the last cup and she wanted to make sure he got it all.

She waited for Harry to appear for nearly half an hour slowly sipping the uncontaminated coffee she had poured for herself. She was becoming a little worried, Harry hadn't shown up for work yet and she still had a lot of work to do to get the display ready for exhibit.

Diana knew that she could legitimately use the much larger table in the break room to do part of the display preparation. That way she could continue to keep an eye on the doctored coffee and still get some work done.

But before she could go much further, she needed some supplies from the store-room. She got up, glanced reluctantly at the coffee pot and walked down to the store-room.

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It had taken her longer to find the supplies she needed than she had anticipated. When she returned she was pleasantly surprised to see Eric. He had returned home early and had stopped by to say “hi” before going home to clean up.

“Eric!” she exclaimed, as she walked into the room. She smiled, threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. “What are you doing home so early? I thought that the flight would take a week, it's only been three days.”

“The `VP' got sick on the first day of the trip. We spent the last two days in a hotel room waiting for him to get over the `galloping trots' before coming home. His own fault, I told him not to have any of the local beverages.” Eric grinned.

It was almost an old story with his passengers, no matter what he had suggested to avoid while on the trips they went ahead and did it anyway.

Diana smiled at his story about the `VP' when he had mentioned his name. She had met him once and hadn't been particularly impressed

Her smile turned into a look of horror when she saw Eric set a partially empty cup of coffee on the table. He had been drinking the coffee intended for Harry!

Eric noticed the strange look Diana was giving his coffee cup.

"I helped myself to the last cup of your coffee," he explained cheerfully, lifting it up to his lips and finishing off the dark brown liquid. "I hope you don't mind, I made a new pot for you."

"No, I don't mind," she replied, slowly shaking her head and smiling painfully. She might as well try to salvage something out of this mess she decided. "Uh, I'm trying a new brand, how did it taste to you?"

"A little on the bitter side, but not bad at all." He walked over to the sink and rinsed the cup out. Eric started to leave the room and stopped just before reaching the doorway.

"Oh, I almost forgot. When I asked the receptionist where you were, she asked me to tell you that Mr. Peterson called in sick. She said that his doctor said that he would have to stay out all week. He'll be back next Monday."

Diana nodded numbly and fumbled through the papers she was holding. She tried to hide the fact that her hands were shaking.

"Well, I see that you're busy and I have to get the plane ready in case they want to try the trip again. So I'll see you tonight at the apartment, okay?"

Diana started to nod, then remembered Alison.

"Oh dear, you don't know about Alison do you?" Diana asked trying to sound normal.

"Alison?" Eric noted, shaking his head. "What about her?"

"She tried to commit suicide a few days ago," Diana said in a low voice so no one else could over hear her.

Eric was shocked, he had always considered Alison to be a pretty stable person.

"... so when I found out that she had lost the baby too, I felt that I had better stay with her for a few days."

"Of course you should," Eric agreed. "I'll probably fly out this afternoon anyway. In fact I have to go back the airport and make sure the plane is ready in case I'm called."

"If I don't see you at the house and they haven't scheduled a flight for me, maybe I'll come over to see how Alison's doing." Eric picked up his uniform cap with its captain's "scrambled eggs" on the visor, and tucked it under his arm.

"Thanks for understanding dear," Diana said giving him a small kiss just before he left the room. She waited a few minutes to make sure he had gone before she hurried to the pay-phone in the museum's lobby. She had to tell Alison about Eric taking the potion intended for Harry.

“...and I just about died when I saw him drinking the coffee I doctored for Harry,” Diana explained, still badly shaken. “My God, what if it actually works? How am I going to explain this to him when he starts to change?”

“Relax Diana, that stuff probably doesn't do a thing anyway. It was just a fun little exercise that we went through to work off our frustrations.” Alison giggled a little. “And even if it did, with those pretty blue eyes and blonde hair of his, I think that Eric would make a good looking girl.”

“Alison stop that! It isn't funny!” Diana paused for a second, considering her friend's last statement. “Although you could be right, he might make a good looking girl at that. A little big though.”

That was a mild understatement, Eric was a little over six feet and weighed 215 pounds.

Both girls broke into almost uncontrolled giggles for a few minutes.

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Unaware that he was the topic of a rather strange conversation, Eric returned to the small airport where the corporation planes were based. He called the home office and received permission to secure the small business jet for the rest of the day. He wouldn't be needed for several more days.

He had felt a little strange since drinking the coffee in the breakfast room. It was nothing he could put his finger on, it was just something that felt out of place.

He had just finished rolling the plane into it's hanger when he burped up a gas bubble that tasted strangely like stale aspirin. He immediately felt better and went about his business of securing the airplane. A few minutes later the incident was forgotten as he started to prepare the small jet for its next flight.

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Several hours later, Diana stopped off at the apartment that she and Eric shared, to pick up some clean clothing before going over to Alison's. Eric met her at the door and gave her a warm kiss.

“Sure you can't stay home tonight? I've got some dinner on the stove,” he asked.

“No, I think that I should stay with Alison for a few more days. She's still feeling rocky about all that's happened to her,” Diana replied.

Eric nodded his understanding.

She sniffed the delicious aroma that floated out of the kitchen. She smiled, Eric had made one of her favorite meals, fried chicken and gravy. “But I will help you eat dinner before I go.”

Dinner, as it usually was when Eric decided that he wanted to cook, was excellent. He was one of those rare men who could make an ordinary meal seem like a gourmet feast.

Diana leaned back and patted her flat stomach, sighing. “Eric that was great. I'll bet that I've gained 3 pounds.”

Eric looked over the edge of the table at Diana's firm and feminine stomach and nodded. "Yup! Sure looks that way. You can always work it off you know."

Diana looked startled, then laughed coyly. "Work it off? How?"

Eric looked meaningfully over her shoulder. Diana followed his gaze, and laughed again. "By doing the dishes you mean?"

"Well, I did make the dinner." Eric said slightly defensively. "Washing the dishes is the least you can do."

"Okay, but you dry!" Diana got up and began to rinse off the dishes into the sink. "Why don't you put the leftovers in some containers and I can take them to Alison. That is, if you don't mind."

"Already have." Eric said setting the containers on the counter. He watched for a moment as Diana put the dishes in the dishwasher. "That's cheating, you realize."

"What is?" Diana asked.

"Using the dishwasher."

"I'm only doing that so that we'll have more time together." Diana looked at her watch. "If we hurry, we can almost make up for what we lost in the last four days."

Eric drew her close and kissed her. "If that's your plan, then forget the dishes, I'll do them later."

"Sounds like an excellent idea to me," Diana whispered between kisses.

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"You're late," Alison greeted as Diana walked into the living room of the condominium carrying a small paper bag and a suitcase.

"Yeah, sorry. Something unexpected came up," Diana said walking to the kitchen, and placing the paper bag containing the left over chicken in the refrigerator.

Alison noticed the little smile on Diana's face as she followed her from the kitchen to the spare bedroom with her small suitcase.

"Something unexpected came up? Judging from the smile on your face, it wasn't all that unexpected." Alison laughed lightly. "I take it your 'magic' potion didn't change poor Eric into a beautiful sexy girl after all?"

"Not that I could tell," Diana replied with a faraway look in her eyes. In truth, Eric had never acted more masculine than he had just a short time ago.

Alison laughed again. "Looks like another 'mummy's curse' myth shot to hell!"

"Yeah, sure does," Diana sighed contentedly.

Alison giggled and sat down on the bed, watching her friend put her undergarments in an empty dresser drawer. "Then why, if you don't mind me asking you a dumb question, are you here and not home with Eric?"

"I would have been, except Eric got called for a flight to Hong Kong. He dropped me off on the way to the airport." Diana said. "He'll be gone a week. So you're stuck with me until he returns."

“Glad for the company.” Alison said. She hesitated for a second. “Say, was that some of Eric's fried chicken I smelled when you came in?”

“Sure was. Some leftovers from the dinner he cooked,” Diana agreed, putting a dress on a hanger. “I brought them over for you, if you want some.”

Diana suddenly became aware that she was talking to an empty room. She hung her dress up in the closet and went searching for her friend. She knew just where to look.

“You know, for a man, Eric is the best cook and housekeeper I've ever seen.” Alison sighed, picking up a crumb of fried chicken that had fallen on the table and putting it back into her mouth. Eric's secret recipe for fried chicken was better than any she had ever tasted.

“In a way it's too bad that Egyptian sex change stuff doesn't work. He'd make some lucky guy the perfect wife,” Alison said reaching for another piece of chicken.

Diana chewed thoughtfully on a chicken leg, considering. “I'd bet he'd make a great mother too,” she joked.

A sudden pained look crossed Alison's face as the memory of the baby she had lost flashed through her mind.

“Oh, Alison I'm so sorry.” Diana said taking her friend in her arms to comfort her.

As Diana's arms closed around Alison's shoulders, Alison began to cry great wrenching sobs. Diana held her tighter, knowing that the pain of Alison's loss would be eased by her tears.

They sat there for a long time, the cold left over chicken forgotten.

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“How are you feeling today?” Diana asked as Alison sat up in the king sized bed and stretched luxuriously several days later.

Alison nodded. “Much better, thanks. I guess that what I needed most was a couple of good cries and the company of a good friend for a few days.”

“Yeah, there are some things that are better than chicken soup to cure what ails you.” Diana smiled, referring to Alison's famous ‘chicken soup cure all’ which in it's own way was almost as good as Eric's fried chicken.

“But not many.” Alison agreed. She noticed that Diana was dressed for work. It was Monday already.

“I know this hasn't been easy for you, but...” Diana was interrupted by the ringing of the phone by Alison's side of the bed. Diana slipped on her heels as Alison answered it.

Alison listened for a few seconds and then handed the phone to Diana. “It's for you. It's Eric.”

Diana took the phone from Alison and sat on the bed beside her. “Eric? Is there something wrong?”

“No, just called to say I love you.” Eric's voice sounded ten thousand miles away. “I didn't get a chance to tell you before I left.”

“I think you did quite well, myself.” Diana laughed, thinking of the final love making session after Eric had received the call to return to work.

Eric chuckled faintly on the other end of the phone. “Say, the reason I called, was that I'll be home tomorrow night.”

“You will? That's great.” Diana paused and considered what he had said. “But I thought that the trip was supposed to be a week. Did something happen?”

“Yeah. Remember the ‘VP’ that got sick on my last trip?” Eric asked. He continued without waiting for an answer. “Well, it must not have been the water, because for the last three days, I've been suffering from the ‘galloping trots’ myself.”

“Oh, no.” Diana exclaimed. “Are you all right now?”

“No, not really, I've lost about ten pounds and the doctors here want me to return home. I'll be flying back on a commercial flight. In fact, I'm at the airport now.”

“When will you arrive?” Diana asked grabbing a pencil and piece of paper. She wrote down the information, said good-by and hung up.

“What's the matter?” Alison asked concerned.

“Eric's got some kind of intestinal flu. It sounded serious, he's lost some weight and can't keep anything down. The doctors are sending him home.”

“Oh, that's too bad. Is there anything I can do?” Alison offered. “Can I drive you to the airport?”

“No, I'll take a taxi, we need to pick up Eric's car anyway,” Diana replied distractedly.

She bit her lip thinking.

“Ah, would it be too much to ask if we could stay with you for a while? I can't take off to play ‘nurse maid’ for him, there's too much left to do to prepare the new Egyptian exhibit. I can't stay home with him, and I don't want to leave him home alone.”

“No problem. I'll move into the small bedroom and you two can have this room,” Alison offered, sliding out of bed.

Diana looked at her friend as she stood up and stretched luxuriously again. “That's really sweet of you to offer.” Diana paused and grinned. “But could I ask you to do one other thing for me?”

“Sure what is it?”

“While Eric's here, could you wear something when you go to bed?” Diana eyed Alison's nude body. “You've got too good of a figure, and I don't want Eric being tempted.”

“Sure thing.” Alison laughed. “Uh... would a ‘g’ string and pasties be all right?” She asked innocently.

Diana threw Alison's robe at her and left the room laughing.

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Eric looked terrible as he walked down the loading ramp from the airplane. He had lost weight, so much so that his uniform jacket hung loosely from his shoulders, and he'd had to punch an extra hole in his belt just to hold up his uniform trousers.

"We'd better get you home right away," Diana exclaimed, taking one of Eric's arms to support him.

Neither spoke until they had reached Eric's car parked in the long term parking lot. Eric sat in the passenger seat as Diana threw his luggage in the trunk.

Diana looked at Eric as she started up his car. He looked terrible. "How are you feeling?" she asked sympathetically.

"A lot better than I look," Eric managed with a weak grin. "I really don't feel all that bad, just that every bone in my body seems to ache."

"You poor Dear." Diana eased away from the parking lot's pay booth and on to the busy street. "Alison has offered to let us stay at her place while you're recovering. That way there will always be one of us there to help you."

Eric gave a slight groan.

Concerned, Diana looked sharply at Eric, he sounded as though he was dying. "I've got to find a bathroom fast." He groaned again.

Diana pulled into the parking lot of a gas station and waited while Eric rushed into the men's room. Ten minutes later, he returned to the car, looking even more pale and drawn out.

The rest of the short trip to Alison's condominium was uneventful.

Alison was waiting to greet them as they came to the door.

"I've changed the sheets, and everything is ready," she announced, looking at Eric with concern. "Why don't you take a shower, put on your pajamas and climb into bed?"

"I don't have any pajamas. I went through the two pair I took with me so fast that the hotel cleaners didn't have a chance to return them before I left." Eric



leaned weakly against the door to the bedroom.

“That's no problem, I've got a pair of pajamas with an oversized top that should fit,” Alison offered. “You're more than welcome to them. That is, unless wearing a pair of ladies's pajamas and not having a fly would bother you.”

“No bother, in the last three days, every time I've gone to the bathroom, I've had to pull my pants down anyway.” Eric laughed weakly. “If I keep on going like this, maybe one of your nightgowns would be better. That way I would be ready all the time.”

The two women laughed lightly at his attempt at a joke. Their laughter was more out of politeness than the humor of the comment. Three days of dysentery was no laughing matter, except in the movies.

Diana helped Eric get undressed for his shower as Alison prepared her grandmother's tried and true “cure all”, a bowl of hot chicken soup.

Alison heard the shower start and a few minutes later Diana appeared by her side.

“Alison, I'm worried about Eric. He's sicker than he's letting on,” Diana confided to her friend. “He said he lost ten pounds. When he took off his clothes, it looked like a lot more than that, it's more like twenty five or thirty.”

“Did he tell you what the doctors said?” Alison asked.

Diana shook her head. “Only that they thought it would be over in another few days.” Diana held up a small brown medicine bottle. “He's supposed to take one of these every four hours.”

They heard the shower stop and Eric get out.

“I guess that I'd better go on up and see if he needs any help.” Diana sighed.

“Okay. Tell him not to go to sleep yet. I've got some of my grandmother's chicken soup for him to eat.”

Diana smiled. “I'll tell him,” she promised.

Diana turned and walked up the staircase to the master bedroom. Eric had dried off and was already asleep in the bed. Diana noted with some amusement that he had put on Alison's pajamas after all. He looked almost cute in the pink lace trimmed top that was partially visible under the bed sheets.