

Curse of the Werewoman

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John Henderson was a normal guy, married to a loving and understanding woman for the last eight months, with a successful career in Real Estate... or at least he *seemed* to be. When a chance encounter with the supernatural comes into his life, he may find he's not only bitten off more than he can chew, but some things he'd forgotten about himself along the way.

Set in Ontario, Oregon in the Fall of 2012, *Curse of the Werewoman* is a comedic short story showing that getting what we sometimes want in life means learning to like it, even if it's not exactly what it was billed to be.

This story is dedicated to my wife, Rachel.
It's all HER fault! The whole thing was HER idea!
She MADE me write it! Don't blame ME!

27,752 words

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Chapter 1 - Scratch One Guy

Looking up from his newspaper, John smiled at the woman approaching his desk. She was fairly attractive and in her late twenties, brown hair cascading around her shoulders that bounced as she moved. Quickly glancing over her, he couldn't help but sigh.

"May I help you, Miss?" he intoned evenly, keeping his emotions tightly controlled.

"Yes, maybe you *can*." she stated nervously as she sat in the seat on the far side of his workspace. "I... I'm looking for a new house. Well, it doesn't have to be *new*, just new to *me*, I mean... um... know what I mean?"

Nodding slowly, he tried to put her at ease. "Well, we do have a number of houses available for sale, Miss..."

"Um... *Mrs.*, actually." she corrected him as she fidgeted in her seat. "Mrs. Brookes. *Janice*." she added her first name on, almost in afterthought.

With a hand extending to her cordially, he shook hers briefly before sitting back down and clearing his throat. "Nice to meet you! Do you prefer Mrs. Brookes or Janice?"

"Janice, please." she answered, only slightly more at ease.

"Very well, Janice!" he settled into his usual spiel. "What exactly is it that you're looking for in a home? Lots of rooms? Storage space? Location?"

"Storage space... I *guess*." she almost stammered. "I don't really care *where* it is. I... it needs to have a basement... or a wine cellar... or something."

While a few places in his listings sprang to mind right away, his curiosity was piqued. "Alright, we have a number of homes that could fit that bill!

May I ask what it is you need below-ground storage for? I ask because an actual wine cellar is different from a basement, so if you intend it for storing actual *wine* bottles..."

"Oh!" Janice interrupted him. "No, no! Nothing like *that*! I just... I need a secure storage space for some... um... *valuables*. I just need to make sure that no one can get out... I mean *in*... easily!"

Pursing his lips a moment, John thought briefly about her slip of the tongue and nervousness and wondered if he should go forward with his usual sales pitch or excuse himself and call the police to report a possible kidnapping. Figuring that *no one* would be *that* obvious, he chalked it up to the typical homeowner's worry about spending so much money on a place to live.

"Here! Why don't you take a look at these property listings..." he offered as he printed out a short list of homes that had basements and cellars in the area. "...meanwhile can I get you something to drink? Water? Tea?" *with a Valium dissolved in it?* he concluded to himself.

"Water is fine!" she half laughed, taking the papers with a shaking hand.

Going off to the refrigerator, John shook his head and ran a hand through the short dark hair on his head. *That lady's almost a basket case!* he mused. *Wonder what her deal is?* Deciding that he didn't care so long as she had a good credit score and a down payment, he grabbed a water and checked himself quickly in the mirror on the front of the fridge door. Picking a tiny speck of sleep out of his soft brown eyes that he'd missed that morning, he nodded curtly at the image before turning to head back to his desk and the strangely nervous woman. Sitting down across from her again, John waited for her to finish going through the papers as he placed the bottle of water in front of her.

Handing the papers back, Janice shook her head. "I... I'm sorry. I realized that the basement needs to have a bathroom as well. These won't work."

Checking his computer and running a few filters, John shook his head and frowned. "I'm sorry, Janice. It doesn't look like any properties in this area have what you're looking for." Thinking a moment he began to smile a little. "Of course, if you'd be willing to *remodel*, I have one property that *could* fit your bill!" Printing out the listing that was for a home that hadn't sold for two years, he mentally crossed his fingers as he handed it to the woman.

Glancing over the listing, Janice's nervous frown very nearly smiled for a moment. "Um... yes! I... I think that might work! It's a little *cheap* for so much square footage, though. Why is that?"

"Because it's so far out of town." he sighed, expecting the usual decline at this point in the offer of the seemingly cursed property. "Six miles out of town. The nearest neighbor is a quarter mile away, and it's on the highway." He was astonished when the usually bad news brought a genuine smile to her face.

"*Really!*" she almost sang. "It sounds *perfect!* My husband won't disturb *anyone* out... um..." Her smile began to falter briefly before she recovered. "That... that is, he does... um... *shop*... things... that are sometimes noisy. No close neighbors means no complaints!" she recovered quickly.

Shrugging, John stood up. "Well, I see in your application that you already own a home in town, one valued at *twice* the price of the old Foster place. With your equity and good credit, even in this depressed housing market, I think we can make a good deal on it quickly and leave you enough financing for a ten thousand dollar cash-out of your current equity, which would let you do the remodeling you're after!" Smiling at her softly, he turned on the charm. "When would you and your husband like to go see it?"

"No!" she nearly shouted. "That is, my husband is too *busy* for that! I... I can look at it myself and just take pictures for he... *him* to look at later!"

"O... kay." John sighed. "When would *you* like to see the property, then?"

"Is *today* too soon?" she inquired hopefully.

Grabbing his jacket and keys, John shook his head. "Not at all! You can follow me over and see if it's your new dream home!"

Opening the door to his own home that evening, John closed it behind him quietly. Nearly an hour late from work, he could smell the pasta and bread cooking. "Honey! I'm *home*!"

"*Finally!*" Diane shouted from the kitchen.

"I'm *sorry*, honey!" he apologized as he dropped his keys and wallet on the table near the door. "I had to run out to the *Foster* place this afternoon!"

"That place way out on the highway out of town?" she scoffed. "Who wanted to look at *that* place!"

Making his way into the kitchen, he smiled at the sight greeting him. Diane was already out of her nurse's scrubs and had changed into a nice blouse and skirt. Still in the 'honeymoon' phase of their eight-month-old marriage, he sighed at the lovely sight of the gracious curves of her body. Slipping up behind her, he wrapped his arms around her waist and nuzzled her honey-blond natural curly hair gently out of the way and kissed her neck lovingly.

"Thanks for making dinner tonight, honey." he almost whispered. "I know it was *my* night. I was actually looking *forward* to pampering *you* tonight, not the other way around!"

"Yeah, likely story!" she dismissed his apology humorously. "Why don't you go get cleaned up for dinner? You're a little ripe and need a *shave*!"

"Mmm!" John held her a little more tightly. "Feeling *good* tonight?"

Shrugging off his obvious advances with a laugh, Diane pushed him away playfully. "I'm *serious*, John! Go get *clean*! Fun *later*!"

"Anything you say, love!" he bowed deeply toward her. "Back in a few!"

Running quickly through a shower to get the sweat of the day off and hastily dressing in a nice polo and slacks, John managed to return to the main room in time to see his loving wife setting the table for two, complete with candles. Noticing the squishy feeling in his belly at the romantic gesture, he quickly shook it off and headed into the dimly lit room with a jaunty strut.

"Let me help you with that!" he offered, taking the shrimp pasta out of her hands.

"Don't think that gets you out of making dinner *tomorrow*!" Diane joked as she watched him delicately place the bowl between the two place settings. "We'll switch up the meals so it's something you don't *burn*, but after tonight you owe me *two* nights of cooking!"

Turning back to face her with a smile, John nodded. "Of *course*, honey! I wouldn't try and weasel out of our deal! Equal partners with an equal split of the housework! You *know* I love taking care of you when you get home after a hard day!"

"I know." she answered skeptically. "Makes me wonder if you're *human*!"

Wrapping his arms around her waist again, this time face-to-face, he put a gentle and quick kiss on her lips. "Very funny! Shall we sit and eat or just take pot-shots at each other all night while your *delicious* food gets cold?"

Sitting together and after a brief time of quiet while they dug into the meal, Diane broke the silence. "So... the old *Foster* house, huh?"

With a bite still in his mouth, John nodded and chewed quickly to answer after taking a drink. "Mmm Hmm! Couldn't *believe* it! She almost *jumped* at it after barely looking around for *five minutes*! Took a few pics with her phone for her husband to look at, and said she'd take it! Just need to finalize the paperwork, get them both down to the office to sign, and it's a done deal! The company stands to make *twice* what that place is worth when we sell her old house!"

Taking it all in, Diane knew a little about real estate from what John had told her. "So no credit problems? I mean, what's the *downside*?"

"*None*, as far as I can tell." he answered with a shrug. "Apparently he does a lot of things in a shop, probably woodworking or something, and I guess their old neighbors were complaining about the noise, so moving a bit out of town is what they needed. It's win-win! Should close before the end of the month! After that, I'll need to run out there again and do the whole agent bit... turning over the keys and all that. This sale should net me a good bonus next month!"

"Good enough to make a down payment on our *own* house?" Diane asked, glancing around their tiny apartment.

"Maybe!" he answered coyly. "Remember that place down the street from your parent's house? Just off Eighteenth Street?"

"The Jackson's house?" she clarified. "The white one with the lavender trim and *beautiful* huge yard?"

"I have a surprise!" he smirked. "The Jacksons are *moving* next month to Portland so they can be closer to little Davie now that he's in college! I've put a clamp on their listing with Barbara! All I need is your OK and I'll pull a thousand from our savings for earnest money to hold it and next month's bonus check plus our savings will get the down at less than four percent!"

Stunned into disbelief, Diane stopped chewing her bite and just stared at him. Swallowing hard, she took a deep breath. "*Really? So soon?* I mean we have a year lease here that isn't up until *January!* That's four *months* from now! How can we *afford* it if we break the lease?"

"I have some money squirreled away." he blushed as he picked up his wine-glass and swirled it around slowly. "Just a little bit from each bonus check I made, but it added up to enough... if you *want* the Jackson house, that is."

"*John!*" Diane dropped her fork with a clatter. "Are you *serious?* You *know* I've wanted that house since I was *ten!*" Getting up quickly, she rounded the small table quickly and kissed him fiercely. "Yes! Oh, John! You're *wonderful!*"

Enjoying his moment, John smiled as he looked up into his wife's eyes. "No, *you're* wonderful! I just want you to be *happy*, honey! You're not mad that I was holding back on some of my bonuses? I... I just wanted this to be a surprise!"

Pulling him to his feet, Diane's expression turned from joyful to seductive. "Oh, I'm surprised, alright! Now, how about *I* surprise *you!*" Leaning in, she kissed him passionately for several minutes, getting both of them quite in the mood.

Just as she started to pull him toward their bedroom, John leaned over and blew out the candles.

Three weeks later, the sale was closed on the Foster home, ensuring John's September bonus. It was a warm and sunny afternoon the following Monday when he called Janice to give her the good news.

"*Janice!* This is John Henderson at Blue Moon Realty! Great *news!* We're ready for you and your husband to come down and sign the final papers! And what do you know, last night was a *Blue Moon!*" he added cornily.

Sighing in relief, Janice glanced over at her husband who had called in sick that morning, as he had more and more often lately. "That's *great*, John. Listen... can... can we make it for later this afternoon, Frank isn't feeling... so good, today."

"Nothing *serious* is it?" John asked concernedly.

"No!" she replied quickly. "Nothing *catching*, anyway. Just one of those stomach things, you know?"

Laughing lightly, John nodded. "That's fine! I've had my shots! We close at seven, so I'll need you to be here by six-thirty to sign everything. Then we can go out to the house and finish up there!"

Glancing at the time, Janice tried to figure out how quickly they could get down to sign the papers so as to not be so close to sunset when they would be finished. "Um... we'll try to be down there by three... four at the latest."

"That's *fine*!" John sighed with a smile. "It'll only take about half an hour, then the drive out to the house to go over a last few things, turn over the keys and she's all yours! You'll have until the end of October to move out of your old house, so that gives you *plenty* of time to get things..."

"Yeah, OK." she interrupted impatiently. "We'll see you then! Bye!" Closing the call quickly, Janice stared at her husband Frank, holding his stomach and rocking gently back and forth as beads of sweat ran down his brow. "Frank? We got the Foster place!"

"*Great!*" he moaned through gritted teeth. "*Perfect* timing!"

"It'll be *fine*, Frank!" Janice chided him. "Once we're out of town and have the room set up, we'll have somewhere to be that'll keep us *safe* each time! No more breaking out to cause *chaos* and end up a *laughing stock!*"

"Sounds *perfect!*" he grunted through another spasm of pain. "A nice little *cage* to lock the bitch *up!*"

"You know, this would have been *easier* on you if you'd only have..."

"*Never!*" he barked at her. "I can tough out *anything!* Even *this!*" Groaning as another spasm rocked his belly, he fell to the floor in the fetal position.

"Don't be such a *baby*, Frank!" Janice chastised him. "We need you to get up, get looking *presentable*, and go down with me to sign! I can't sign for *both* of us! You need to man-up and *do* it!"

Gathering his ebbing strength, Frank pushed past the pain, crawling up onto his knees before taking a moment to rest. Inhaling, he held his breath and planted a foot firmly on the floor and pushing himself upright while his hands still held his aching belly.

"*Right.*" he mumbled. "Time ta' *man-up!*"

When John looked up at the clock and saw that it was a quarter after six, he nervously looked down at his watch, and then at the time displayed on the computer's clock. Each agreed with the other, making *his* stomach tie into nervous knots. Checking the paperwork again, he made sure everything was perfect and ready for the initials and signatures that would make his love's childhood dream come true. *If they don't sign today, the deal's gonna fall through, I'll miss my bonus goal, we won't be able to make the down, and we lose the earnest money!*

Just as he was about to pick up the phone and call the Brookes residence again, he heard the distinctive chime of the front door opening. Snapping his head up, John sighed in relief as he saw Janice walking in with a man, presumably the mysterious *mister* Brookes. Standing quickly, he smoothed his hair back unconsciously and straightened his shirt and tie.

"Mr. and Mrs. Brookes!" he exhaled in greeting. "Glad you made it! We have *plenty* of time to go over the papers and..."

Frank dropped into the chair opposite the real estate agent like a sack of wet wheat. "Just show me where to *sign!*" he grumbled while holding his stomach and sweating bullets.

Shaking John's outstretched hand briefly, Janice gracefully sat in the seat next to her husband. "Sorry about that, John. Frank's just... not *well*. You might not want to shake his hand. It's not *catching*... right *now*... but no taking *chances*, right?"

With a heavy gulp, John sat back down. "Alright. We'll just get right to it then! I'll go over each section, you'll initial that you understand it, and we'll get through them as quickly as possible to get you signed and done!"

At a few minutes to seven, Frank Brookes scrawled his name onto the final line, followed closely by Janice signing hers. Taking the papers and giving them a quick review, John smiled.

"All *done!* Congratulations, Mr. and Mrs. Brookes! You have your new home!" Affixing his own signature to the documents, he tore out the copies for the homeowners and filed the originals for processing. Grabbing his coat and keys, John nodded toward the door. "Shall we get going?"

Looking toward the front door nervously, Janice looked back at the agent. "Can't... can't I take care of the rest *tomorrow*? I'd like to get Frank *home!* Right away!"

Seeing the man obviously in severe distress, John nodded. "OK, if that's what you'd *prefer*. We *usually* do this at the new home, but..." Holding out the keys to the house and other locks, John smiled. "Welcome to your new home for a hundred Blue Moons together, Mr. and Mrs. Brookes!"

Snatching the keys away violently, Frank barely missed nicking John's hand with the doubled-over man's longish fingernails that their real estate agent was sure only a moment earlier had been neatly trimmed. "Thanks! Let's *get*, Janice!" he growled with a slight hiss as he hobbled toward the door.

Escorting the two all the way, John saw them get in their car and waited until Janice drove them away. Turning back inside, he glanced at his watch, turned the sign around on the door to say 'closed', locked it, and headed for his desk to collect his things.

"John!" Barbara Moon caught his attention before he passed her desk. "What was going on there?"

"Those were the *Brookes*," he explained briefly. "The ones that bought the *Foster* house! They just signed! Deal's *closed*!"

Furrowing her brow, she glanced out the door before turning back to face him. "John, you *know* company policy! Keys are to be turned over, and the gift basket presented, *at the new home*! They didn't even take the *basket*!" she snapped, waving a hand at the stack of plastic-wrapped crackers, cheeses, meats, and bottles of moderately priced champagne.

"Mr. Brookes is *ill*, Barb!" he tried to explain. "They *insisted* on taking the keys *here* and not waiting to go out to the house! They didn't even give me a *chance* to give them their basket!"

Shaking her head, Barbara sighed. "Policy is *policy*, John! No gift basket at their *door*, no *bonus*! It states that *clearly* in the bonus structure! *All* company policies *must* be followed for each sale during the month or *all* bonuses are *forfeit*! So either hustle up and get a gift basket over to their house *pronto* or you aren't getting a *check* for September!"

His shoulders slumping in resignation, John nodded. "Yes, Mrs. Moon."

Handing him a basket with a smile, Barbara seemed content. "*Thank you, John! You're always so cooperative! None of that macho posturing! Off you go then!*"

Taking a breath, he shook his head and went out the door after gathering his things. Putting the basket in his passenger seat, John started his car and waited a moment for it to warm up a little. After a minute, he put the vehicle in gear and headed toward the highway out of town.

It was seven thirty when he finally made it to the Foster house, having been caught in traffic. With the sun beyond the horizon and the full moon rising, John was happy to see the Brookes' car parked in the driveway. *Good! I don't have to just leave it on the porch!* Pulling up behind their car, he killed the motor and grabbed the basket before opening the car door and walking up to the entryway.

Knocking on the door as there was no bell, John rocked on his heels and put a smile on his face. When the door opened though, it was neither Frank nor Janice Brookes who greeted him. Instead what he saw was a woman in her late-thirties, her wild and unkempt hair sticking out every which way like the snakes of Medusa, a crazed expression on her face, and wearing a man's flannel.

"*Mine!*" she screamed with a voice so shrill it threatened to shatter the glass of his car windshield. Snatching for the basket, it was withdrawn at the last moment by the shocked real estate agent.

"*Woah, lady!*" John shouted. "*Where's the Brookes'? This is for them!*"

Infuriated, the wild-eyed women leapt at him, scrabbling for the basket like a wild badger defending its burrow. "*Mine!*" she screamed again as her long and sharp fingernails dug into his flesh straight through the shirt he wore, snatching the basket away when he recoiled from the pain.

Just as the wild woman made for the interior of the house, basket in hand and cackling like mad, John saw Janice Brookes move into the doorway, just missing catching the crazed lady's arm to stop her.

"*Francine!*" she shouted. "*Stop* that! Get *back* here with that!" Hearing yet another shrill '*Mine!*' from the basement steps, she turned back to see who she needed to apologize to. "*Oh!* Mr. Henderson! Wh... what are *you* doing here?" she stammered in surprise.

Holding his right hand over the gouges in his left arm, John looked at her, then past her into the blackness beyond, then back to her. "Um... I... I forgot to give you your *gift* basket, Mrs. Brookes! Who *was* that lady?"

Thinking quickly, Janice bit her lower lip. "Um... Frank's *sister*, Francine. *Twin* sister! She... um... she came to stay with us. She's leaving *Wednesday*."

Calming down, John realized that he was in the clear as far as his boss was concerned. "Well, I just wanted to make sure you got your basket. Unless you need anything else, I... I'll be *seeing* you, Mrs. Brookes!" he stammered as he backed away from the door.

Hearing a raucous cry from the basement and the sound of shattering glass, Janice just shook her head and slammed the door, not even noticing the man's injury before racing off to find out what new disaster awaited her.

Making his way back to his car, John examined his wound briefly before determining that it could wait until he got home and Diane could help with antibiotic cream. Pressing the bleeding area against his stomach to keep it from getting all over the car, he returned home driving one-handed.

"John!" Diane cried as she came up the front steps just as he was unlocking the door. "What *happened* to you! Were you bitten by a *dog*?"

"No!" he grouched as he opened the house and dropped his things at the door, making a beeline to the bathroom. "Crazy lady staying with the *Brookes*! She clawed my *arm* up taking their *gift basket* away from me!"

Following him into the tiny bathroom, Diane clucked her tongue. "Awe! Poor *baby*! Here, let *me* see." Examining it briefly, she scowled. "Sweetie? How long ago did this *happen*?"

With a shrug, John glanced at his watch. "Um... about half an hour ago, maybe? Just about seven thirty. Why?"

Shaking her head, Diane picked up the antibiotic cream. "Funny. It's red and splotchy, and a bit of a scab is forming... like it happened *yesterday*. You sure this was *today*?"

Laughing at her suggestion that he could have lost a day on his way home, John winced when she started rubbing the cream on. "Ouch! Yeah! It was today! Yesterday was *Sunday*! I spent all day with *you*!"

Finishing applying the cream like the professional she was, she opened up some gauze pads and lay them carefully over the long cuts before wrapping them loosely in an elastic bandage. "Yes, you *did*. Funny. We should have Doctor Kelly look at this if it's still looking like that *tomorrow*."

"It's just a *scratch*!" John insisted, pulling his arm free. "*Besides*, you missed the *bigger* news in all the hubbub!"

Pausing a moment, Diane ran the events of her homecoming back in her head until a smile began to creep across her face. "You closed the *Foster* house?"

"I closed the Foster house!" he beamed. "You get the house in ten days!"

Screaming in delight, Diane completely forgot John's injury and wrapped her arms around him tightly.

"Hey! Hey! Hey! Watch it, Diane!" he complained as her arm crushed his covered wound. "My arm!"

"Oh!" she sprang back as though he were a rattlesnake. "Sorry, sweetie!" Carefully this time, she wound her arms around his chest and hugged him tightly. "*Thank* you, sweetie! You're the *best* man and husband in the *world!*"

"Remember that when you're nine months pregnant someday and *hating* me for what *I* did to you!" he sparred.

Foregoing lovemaking that night as John's arm was still aching, the two lay in bed next to one another falling asleep peacefully.

It would be the last full moon in a while that *either* of them would have any peace.

Chapter 2 - Unpacking the Baggage

With a heave, John shoved the last empty cardboard box into the trash bin. Satisfied and weary, his usual get-up-and-go had got-up-and-went. Not any weakling, the man had kept in shape and, at only twenty-seven, was usually in better shape than most men a decade younger.

The day he and Diane had finished unpacking the last of their moving boxes however, he just felt flabby, out of sorts, and irritable. Having worked most of the day, snapping at Barbara twice and having to apologize, then coming home to more work, he bit his tongue and chipped in the same as Diane had, ignoring his odd condition.

Coming back in the house, John flopped on the sofa with a crash. Exhausted and glad the day was done, he closed his eyes. When he opened them again, his body felt strange all over and his arm where the strange woman had scratched him almost four weeks earlier ached like the day it had happened, just as the last light of the sun disappeared over the horizon.

Sitting up slowly, John felt dizzy and his stomach ached almost as bad as his arm. "Diane?" he called out, his voice squeaking half an octave too high as though he were talking in falsetto. "D... *Diane!*"

Coming from the kitchen where she'd started dinner, it being her night, his wife was mildly irritated at the interruption after such a hard day. "What *is* it, John! I'm right in the middle of... *Ahhh!*"

Seeing her stop in front of him with her hand over her mouth and her eyes wide as saucers, John knew there was something terribly wrong with him. "Am... am I habbing a *stoke?*" he tried to ask, but his lips didn't seem to want to cooperate, having swollen slightly.

Watching in horror, Diane saw her husband's face squish down from the chiseled features she recognized to a rounder and softer proportion. Even

as it did so, the hair on his head seemed to grow in time-lapse, going from his normal half inch to over eighteen inches in seconds.

Looking at his hands, John saw them shrink from the size he'd been used to since high school to thin frail twigs, even as his fingernails grew an inch as though to make up for their smaller size. Feeling a pain in his chest, he looked down to see his pecks swelling under his shirt until it burst the top two buttons and exposed the newly grown breasts.

Looking at his wife for any kind of help, it was then that he noticed that his rear seemed rounder and he *wasn't* feeling something between his legs that he'd grown used to his whole life. "*Ahh! Mine!*" he screeched, instantly recognizing the sound as the same as he'd heard that night at the Brookes' new home. "*No!*" he squealed, trying to hold on to his sanity. "*Help me!*"

At a loss for what to do, Diane could only watch while the transformation completed. When the wedding band fell off her husband's shrunken finger, she fell to her knees and began to sob. "*No! John!*"

At last done changing, he first noticed that he couldn't feel the pain in his arm anymore, but that was only because the pain in his belly made him forget everything else. Worse than any case of food poisoning he'd ever had, he doubled over and rolled into a ball on the couch. "*Diane! Help me! It hurts so bad!*"

Finally gathering the shattered remains of her brain back together, his wife stood up and stopped crying. "*I... I'm here... um... John. You... you're a... a w... woman!*"

"*It hurts!*" he repeated his plea in his now screechingly high voice. "*God, Diane! It hurts a lot!*"

"*O... OK.*" she stammered, stepping closer. "*Show me where.*"

Looking up at her as he held his belly, rage and fury overtook him. "In my f-ing *stomach*, stupid! Where does it *look* like?" Instantly remorseful of his harsh words, he began to cry like he hadn't since he was eleven. "Oh, Diane! I'm *so* sorry! I... I don't know what came *over* me! I... I just got so *mad* that you'd even had to *ask*! It... it's my *stomach*! It aches like someone just *kicked* it wearing *cleats*!"

Diane turned clinical and knelt next to him. "Move your *hands*. Let me *look*." When he didn't comply, she used her nurse's authoritative voice as she took his arms by the wrists and pried them away. "John Henderson! Move your *hands*! I can't *help* if you don't *cooperate*!"

Hearing her voice and knowing he needed help, John slowly relaxed and let his wife look him over. Wincing when she pressed on his belly, he was relieved when it didn't hurt worse, but actually felt *better*. "Oh!"

"Does that hurt?" Diane asked calmly.

"Y...yes." he answered in his suddenly screechy voice. "Not as bad when you pressed on it, though."

Satisfied that he was in no immediate medical danger, she began examining him more thoroughly. It was then that she noticed the stain on John's pants. "John? I need to you come with me, OK? Do you think you can walk?"

Nodding in reply, he didn't want to speak and hear the awful voice he had. Getting up slowly the pain increased, but he bore through it and followed his wife's guidance to the bathroom. When she began to strip off his clothes though, he started to panic. "*No!*" he screeched, gripping them to himself tightly.

"John, I *have* to examine you!" Diane insisted. "Now, don't *panic*, but you're *bleeding* somewhere and I need to find out *where*, OK?"

Slowly relenting, he nodded and let her strip him down to his underwear. Unable to handle the complex emotions raging through his mind, John closed his eyes and tried to think of anything other than his current predicament.

When she had him down to his last garment, Diane finally realized where the blood was coming from. Swallowing hard, she guided her husband to the bathtub; his eyes squeezed tightly shut. "Step into the tub, sweetie." she soothed him calmly. After he complied, she removed his underwear and drew in a sharp breath.

"*What!?*" he shrieked as he sat in the empty tub to keep from falling down.

"You... you're *definitely* a woman now, John." she stammered as she helped lower him down to sit in the tub. "And I know why you hurt. You... you're *menstruating*, sweetie. You're having your first *period*."

His eyes popping open at that revelation, John looked down his body for the first time and saw the slow trickle of blood seeping from underneath his seated rump. He also saw the C-cup breasts that hung freely from his chest. Slowly, he moved his hands up and cupped the fatty tissue. The aching pain touching them caused made him immediately pull his hands away and suck in a breath through his teeth.

Seeing his reaction, Diane nodded. "Do they hurt a little to touch?" When he nodded, she smiled a little. "That's actually *normal*, sweetie." Sitting on the toilet next to him, she wondered what to do next. "I... I don't understand what's *happening*, John! Why is this *happening* to you?"

Looking up at her concerned face, he had an inkling of an idea. "I... I think it's the Brookes'." his throat squealed. Clearing it, he tried harder to control his speaking. "I... I think Francine Brookes did this to me!"

Hearing his voice sound more normally feminine, Diane almost didn't pay attention to the words he'd said. "What? *How?*"

"I don't *know!*" he shrieked again. "I *sound* like her, though!" Feeling the ache in his belly overwhelm him, he clutched his stomach and moaned.

"Bad cramps?" Diane winced in empathy. Seeing him nod, she slowly reached out and petted his long dark hair to try and sooth him.

"Don't *touch* me!" he snapped, instantly regretting it as he began to sob. "I... I'm *sorry*, Diane! I... I don't know what came *over* me!"

After several minutes, he started to regain his composure and looked up at her again. "So... *now* what?"

Biting her lip, Diane thought for a moment. "Well, you should *start* by getting cleaned up a bit." she suggested. "A shower or at *least* cleaning up your... um... your *mess*." she put delicately. "After that... um... I'll... I'll think of something!"

Nodding in agreement, John slowly started to get up, the pain in his stomach getting worse when he did and sending him straight back down to sit again. "Oh!" he moaned, unwilling to do anything that made the cramps worse.

Diane struck on an idea. Getting up, she opened the medicine cabinet and took out her bottle of Midol. Grabbing the plastic cup from the side of the sink, she filled it with water and took it and the pills to the tub. "Take this." she ordered simply, handing him two tablets and the cup.

Doing as instructed, John swallowed the pills and washed it down. Handing the cup back, he winced as a cramp overwhelmed him again.

"You're just going to have to put up with it until the pills kick in." Diane chastised him gently. "Every... *woman*... does." she barely managed to say.

"You *hate* me!" John croaked. "I'm *disgusting!*"

"No!" she replied sympathetically. "Of *course* I don't hate you, John! This isn't *your* fault! It just... *happened!*"

Nearly overwhelmed with the desire to snap at her, John barely managed to bite his tongue and say nothing.

An hour later, after a shower and a bit of his self-control re-asserting itself, John opened the curtain to see Diane waiting for him with a towel. Helping him dry off, she began to explain her thinking.

"I don't pretend to know what you're *going* through, sweetie. I just know we have to *deal* with it the way things *are*." she began. "To start with, you can't just *ignore* it and hope it goes away. You're a *woman* and you have *practical* concerns that trump any other consideration." At that, she handed out a pair of her cotton briefs and a sanitary pad.

John reacted viscerally to the suggestion. "*No!*" he screeched.

"John! You can't just stay in the tub for the rest of your life!" she pointed out. "You *have* to face it!"

Breaking into a sob, he stared at the briefs and shook in fear. "No! I... I *can't*, Diane! I *promised!*"

Taken aback, Diane wasn't expecting this reaction. "What? Promised *who*? When? What're you *talking* about, John?"

"Mom!" he sobbed. "I *promised* her I'd never wear girl things again!"

Stunned, Diane actually took a step back. "When was *this*? What do you mean *again*?"

Sitting in the tub, John cried openly. The cramps were manageable, thanks to the miracles of modern medicine, but the emotional trauma was too much to bear. "I... um... I used to try and wear Vicky's clothes when I was little!" he recounted an all but forgotten time of his life.

Furrowing her brow, Diane stepped closer again. "Your *sister*?" Seeing him nod, she pressed for more. "Why were you wearing Vicky's *things*, John?"

With an absent shrug, he turned away from her. "I... I used to think I was a *girl*... when I was five or so. I didn't *want* to be a boy like my brother Dave. I... I wanted to be a girl like *Vicky*."

"Why didn't you *tell* me?" Diane gasped.

"I *forgot* about it!" he snapped with a shriek that made him wince. "Sorry." he stated more softly. "OK, I didn't so much as *forget* about it as much as I just *ignored* it. I mean, I'm a *guy*!" Looking down at the bulges in the towel on his chest, he sighed. "Well... I *used* to be one, anyway."

Sighing in sympathy, Diane shook her head. "Alright. We'll deal with this one thing at a time. First is the practical, though. *Agreed*?" Seeing him nod, she once more held out the underwear and pad.

"Fine!" he snapped, snatching the items away from her. Swallowing hard, he reached down into himself and drew up the inner strength that he'd drawn on the last quarter century to push his feelings aside and become the stoic boy and man he'd been since Kindergarten. "I apologize, honey." he said evenly. "You're just trying to *help*."

Waiting for him to partially dress, Diane helped teach him how to place the pad and make certain that it was fully seated to stay clean. Handing him her terrycloth robe, she helped him out of the tub and back to the living room. Once seated back on the couch, she returned to the kitchen and put away the dinner she hadn't yet started making when all hell had broken loose.

Sitting next to the morose man, Diane took his tiny hand. "John? We have to talk about what we're going to do *now*."

"You're *dumping* me!" he wailed as he pulled away from her. "I'm a *woman* now and fat and ugly so you're just going to *leave* me!"

"*John!*" she snapped. "Stop it! I'm not *leaving* you, OK? I *love* you!"

"You're just *saying* that because you think you *have* to!"

Controlling her temper, Diane closed her eyes and counted to ten silently. Looking at her husband again, she drew her mouth into a line. "John, I am *not* leaving you. You are *not* fat *or* ugly! In fact, you're quite *attractive*, if you could be *objective* about it! I *do* love you, but I soon *won't* if you don't start behaving like the... *person*... I fell in *love* with!"

Regaining his composure, he sat up and wiped a sleeve across his damp eyes. "S... sorry. I... I don't understand why I'm flying off the handle like this so much! I don't *want* to, but I can't seem to *stop* it! Then the next thing I know, words are coming out that I'm actively trying *not* to say! *Why?*"

"Hormones." Diane sighed with a weak smile. "Welcome to the wonderful world of being a hormonal woman, John! It takes a long time for us to learn to cope with the overwhelming feelings pushing us around all the time!" she giggled lightly. "I'm *not* making light of this, sweetie! *Honest!* It's just... well, I guess *every* woman has thought a time or two, 'I wish he knew how hard it is to not rip his *balls* off right now!' when we get those feelings! It gets easier with *time*. Does knowing that *help?*"

"A little." he admitted grudgingly. "So what happens with *us*? I mean..." His voice trailed off as a dozen problems came to mind and he wasn't sure which one to deal with first.

Seeing the fear in his eyes, Diane smiled and put a hand on his knee. "Let's start with the *easy* one, OK? I'm not going *anywhere*! I promised to love you and stay with you in sickness or health! If this is some sort of illness or curse or *whatever*, I'm not bailing out at the first sign of trouble!"

"Thanks!" John sighed. "I... I guess that was my *biggest* worry!" His brow furrowed when another popped in its place. "Um... what about *kids*? I mean, if I'm like this from now on..."

"We'll deal with that *later*." she interrupted. "Right now we have other more immediate concerns. We have the weekend, but on Monday you're supposed to go back to *work*. We need a *plan*, sweetie."

"Work!" he threw up his arms. "There goes my whole *career*! All that work building up good connections gone to *waste*!"

"Stop thinking so *negatively*!" Diane scolded him. "You're still *you*, right? OK, so you can't keep your old connections! You can make *new* ones! And saleswomen have an *advantage* over salesmen! We have *sex appeal*!"

Scoffing, John turned away from her. "I'm not *flirting* with *guys* just to get a *sale*! Besides, in real estate, most of the biggest decision-makers are the *women*! *They* decide if a house *feels* right to them and are willing to buy!"

"Who says you can't use sex appeal on *women*?" she countered. "I see it all the *time*! Oh, I don't mean *flagrantly*, but *subtly*. Anytime I'm buying a new outfit, the saleslady will make some comment about how *beautiful* it looks on me! It's not *blatant* flirting, but it's still *there*!"

"OK, I see your point." he grumbled. "Still, I want to find a way *out* of this, not just roll over and *accept* it! If I can be turned into a woman, I can be turned back into a *man*!"

"In the *mean* time, you need something more than a robe to wear."

Looking down at the cream terrycloth covering, he felt the vague sense of longing he'd so long ago suppressed. "I don't think that's a good idea, Diane. What if I go back to *normal*? You'd never look at me the same way *again*!"

"Let *me* worry about that!" she half laughed. "We'll order some take-out tonight, get you dressed, and try and figure out a solution to this. OK?"

Taking her hand, John wanted to cry at the sweet and understanding way his wife was taking all of it. "I love you, Diane! I don't *deserve* you!"

"No, you *don't*!" she quipped. "But then, *I* don't deserve *you*!" Leaning over close, she hesitated only a moment before she kissed his cheek gently. "After all, you got me *my* dream come true, let me see if I can return the *favor*!"

After calling the local pizza place, Diane led John into their bedroom and had him sit on the bed while she opened her side of the closet. Picking and discarding things in her head and without a word, she eventually settled on an idea. Opening the drawer in the huge closet that included a full dresser, she pulled out a set of stretchy sweats in gray. It was the closest thing she had to something gender neutral.

When his wife offered over the outfit that he'd seen her wear a dozen times, his first instinct was to scream at her and run away. Swallowing that feeling and pushing it aside, John took a breath and nodded. "Th... thanks."

Setting it next to him, Diane took a breath before opening her bra drawer. Biting her lower lip, she knew it would be necessary and took the plunge. Grabbing the plainest bra she owned, a white sports bra, she closed the drawer and turned to face her husband. "You... you'll need this." she added.

"Are you *serious*?" John scoffed, his voice close to cracking into the horrid screech he hated hearing from his own mouth.

"Yes!" Diane insisted. "You have *breasts*, John! At least a C or maybe a D, by my guess. You'll need something for support and to keep my top from rubbing you *raw*. You *have* to, sweetie! *Trust* me, OK?"

About to snatch it away from her on instinct, he hesitated before taking it graciously. "Alright, honey." he acquiesced softly, for the first time hearing his new voice and not despising it.

Helping him into the support garment, Diane aided in getting it properly in place, eliciting a few gasps and shocked looks from John in the process that only made her smirk in knowing sympathy. "Every time *I* start, my breasts are super sensitive too, sweetie!" she offered in consolation. "I understand!"

"I'm never gonna complain about you wanting me to leave you alone at this time of the month ever again!" he promised. "How can you *stand* it? I wanna crawl out of my own *skin*!"

"You get used to it." she stated simply as he helped him on with the top that was slightly baggy on her, but fit more nicely on her husband. Having him stand, she helped him into the sweatpants and took a moment to look him over. "You could use a styling in your hair, but other than that, you look... um... *nice*, John!"

Rolling his eyes, he shook his head. "Gee... *thanks*!" he squealed, biting back his tongue before taking a breath and looking at his wife sadly. "Sorry! It... it just keeps coming *out*!"

"I get it!" she laughed, leading the two of them back out to the living room. "One other thing. I... I can't keep calling you *John* looking like that! Do... or I guess... *did* you ever have a girl's name? When you were *young*, I mean."

Shyly glancing away, John nodded. "Um... *Joan*. Joan Anne."

"...instead of John Abel." she nodded. "OK, *Joan*. Where did you get it?"

"Vicky gave it to me." he admitted as he sat gingerly on the couch again. "She was seven and thought I needed a girl's name when we'd play dolls and things."

"You played dolls with Vicky?" Diane asked rhetorically. "Um... how seriously did you think you were a *girl*, sweetie?"

"It was pretty serious to me at the *time*." he confessed. "After... um... *Mom* straightened me out though, I just sorta pushed those feelings away. This was back in nineteen ninety or so. Back then no one ever heard of things like 'transgender' or anything... not in *this* neck of the woods, for sure!"

About to ask more, Diane was interrupted by a knock at the door. "That'll be the pizza." she commented as she grabbed her purse and went to get their food. Opening the door, she smiled when she recognized the young man. "Hi, Dennis!"

Smiling in return, the eighteen-year-old handed her the stack of food she'd ordered. "*Hiya*, Mrs. H!" Looking over her shoulder, he spotted the strange woman sitting on the couch. "Where's *Mr.* H? Out while you have company over?"

Glancing back toward her husband who looked stricken, she turned back to him and handed him the cash. "Um... *yes*. John's... *out*... now. Keep the change, Dennis!"

With a nod and a smile he backed away from the door, taking one last glance at the woman behind her. "Have a good evening, Mrs. H! Same for your lady-friend!"

Closing the door, she took their food to the kitchen, got out paper plates, and served it up before bringing two plates into the living room. "*Sorry*, Joan! I didn't know he'd see you from the door!"

"It's *fine*, I guess." he muttered. "Cute turn of phrase, though! 'He's *out* now'? I guess I *am* as far as you're concerned!" he giggled, surprising himself and suddenly covering his mouth with a shocked expression.

Looking at him a moment, Diane couldn't help it as she cracked a smile and giggled back, which made him join in after a moment. Soon the two were cackling like a couple of happy hens before starting to stuff their faces with pepperoni and cheese.

When at last they were fed and calmer, the two sat together and hashed out a vague plan for the weekend.

"You're *going* to need your own clothes, Joan." Diane pointed out as she held her husband when he cradled his back against her front. "My bra barely fits you, and other than those sweats, nothing *else* I have will fit you. You're a little... *fuller*... than I am."

"You mean *fat*." he squawked, rubbing the dull ache in his belly.

"I mean more *curvy*, sweetheart!" she corrected him. "Your figure is actually *very* nice! I'm a little *jealous*, to be honest! Dennis was practically *ignoring* me to look over my shoulder at *you*!"

"Blech!" John stuck his tongue out. "Men are so *crude*!" Realizing what he was saying, he stiffened. "Um... I mean... *other* men... *besides* me."

Petting his hair, Diane smiled and shook her head. "Yes, sweetie. *Other* men."

After getting a working plan for the next day, which included measuring Joan for 'her' own clothes, the two headed for their bedroom. When Diane started to change out of her clothes, John sat on the bed nervously.

"Um... honey? Can't I just sleep in *these*? I mean... they're *sweats*, they're *comfortable*, and... um..."

"Not too *feminine*?" his wife finished for him. Seeing him nod shyly, she shook her head. "And what do you wear *tomorrow*? Like I said before, those are the only things in the house that'll *fit* you right now. Well... that and my *pink* sweats."

"What about *my* clothes?" he grasped. "I mean, I was wearing some of my clothes when this *happened*! It can't be *that* much of a difference in size!"

"Size, *yes*. Shape, *no*." Diane explained as she pulled out a nightgown to wear. "You popped the buttons on your shirt, sweetie. You may be able to wear your old pants, but even *they* were straining against those *hips* you have now!"

Looking down at his rump, he couldn't stop himself from asking, "Is my butt too big?"

With a stunned look, Diane stopped dressing for bed and just stared at him a moment. "Wow! I never thought I'd be caught on the other side of *that* trapped question!"

Blushing and turning away as she resumed getting ready, John shrugged. "I don't even know why I *care*! I just want to get started on figuring a way *out* of this mess!" Feeling a pang in his tummy, he groaned a little.

"Cramps getting worse?" she asked. Checking the time, she went into the bathroom and got out two more pills and some water. Returning with it, she handed them over. "Here. This should help you get through the night."

Taking them and washing them down, John tried to relax. "Thanks, honey. You've been *so* understanding through all this mess!"

Turning around after retrieving something from her dresser, Diane pointed to the bathroom. "Now it's *your* turn to be understanding. You need to change your pad, get clean, and get dressed for bed. We *need* those clothes for *tomorrow*." At that she handed him her least feminine nightgown.

Taking the article, he nodded and went to the bathroom to do as instructed. Coming out after brushing his teeth and getting dressed, he stood nervously by the bathroom door. "H... how do I look, honey?"

Seeing him wearing the cream satin nightshirt that he'd bought her a year earlier but was always just a tad roomy on her, Diane felt a small twinge of arousal. Knowing that this woman was hers, her mind couldn't help but flash through the many times they'd made love together, but after a moment shook herself back into clear thinking.

"You... um... you look very *nice*, sweetie! Very... um... *lovely*."

Blushing again, John made his way to his side of their shared bed. "You sure it's OK for me to sleep next to you still? I mean, I wouldn't want to weird you *out* or anything."

"You're my... *spouse*." she stopped herself from saying 'husband'. "I *love* you and you've been through quite *enough* for one night! I won't have you feeling *rejected* on top of all that! Come to bed, sweetheart! *Please*?"

Climbing in as asked, John scooted into his usual position, but found it too uncomfortable to sleep on his left side as he normally did. Rolling over so that his back was to Diane, he sighed as he tried to just relax. All that flew out the window when he felt his wife roll over and spoon against his back.

"Goodnight, Joan." she sighed as she relaxed and held him gently.

"Goodnight, honey." he murmured as his body reacted to her touch, making sleep impossible for the next several hours.

Chapter 3 - I'm A *What?*

John awoke slowly at first, disturbed by his wife's movement in bed next to him. Not quite remembering the night before, he only knew that he felt something he'd never felt before as she snuggled up next to him and wrapped her arm around him once more.

He felt beautiful.

The closest he'd ever come to that degree of contentment was when he was five and his sister Vicky had dressed him in one of her old dresses so they could have a tea party. That was feeling *pretty*, though. John felt *beautiful* as his mind slowly began to work again.

Suddenly his eyes snapped open as the previous night's festivities came back to him in a jumble of disjointed thoughts and memories, some of which he wasn't sure were real or not, until he felt the newly familiar ache in his belly. Groaning a little, he moved to try and lie on his back, hoping it would lessen the throbbing. When he felt Diane move to lie on top of him as she did so often, he felt the slick satin of the nightgown he wore on his chest along with his wife's sleeping head.

What he *didn't* feel were the breasts that had been there the night before.

Sitting up suddenly, forcing Diane awake and to move off of him, John looked down and saw he was wearing the nightgown, but his arms and hands looked like their normal self. "Diane!" he shouted. "I'm *me* again!"

Woken too quickly for her mind to be working well, his wife looked at him bleary-eyed and confused. "*John?* Why're you wearing the nightgown you gave me?"

Quickly running his fingers through his hair, he found it once more the half-inch length he was used to. Moving to his face, instead of the rounded

shape of the night before it was the familiar angular lines he'd been used to for most of the last decade. Moving his hands down to his chest, the breasts were gone, but the sensitivity remained, making him wince and his belly to ache even more than it had been since waking up.

"Don't you remember last night?" he asked her. "I... um... I turned into... a..."

"A *woman*." Diane finished for him. "I... I thought that was a *dream*."

"If it *was*, we were having the same *one*." he mumbled. "In your dream, did I tell you about Vicky and me when I was *five*?"

Nodding, Diane tried to focus better. "Um... *yeah*. You played *girl* games with her."

"Then it wasn't a dream." he admitted. "I... I never told you that before. I barely *remembered* it! I don't remember *much* from back then and nothing before Kindergarten."

Looking at her restored husband, Diane sighed in relief. "Thank *God* it's over, sweetie! I was so *scared* for you!" Wrapping her arms around his neck, she pulled him into a tight embrace. After a moment she felt him tense up and pulled back. "What's *wrong*?"

Wincing again, John got a pained expression. "I... I don't know that it *is* over, honey! I... I'm still having *cramps*! As bad as last night!"

"OK." she thought a moment. "Maybe it's just some sort of residual effect of whatever happened to you. I'll get you some pills to help for now and you can just wait until they fade away." Getting up, she did as she suggested and returned with two pills and water.

Taking them quickly, John sighed in relief. "I sure hope you're *right*, honey! I don't have the *equipment* for cramps anymore!"

"It's probably just a buildup of prostaglandin in your system." she guessed. "That's the chemical that causes cramps in women. In men it causes gastric upset, so it's likely just an upset stomach!"

"It doesn't *feel* like gas!" he complained. "It feels like it did last night, only *worse!*"

"Just give the pills a *chance.*" she rubbed his back to help soothe him.

Feeling her rubbing the satin against his skin gave him mixed emotions. On one hand it felt *very* relaxing, but on the other it reminded him that he was *still* wearing his wife's nightgown for no good reason. "Um... I guess I can lose your nightgown, honey."

Suddenly very conscious of the fact that he was still wearing it, and seeing him blush heavily at mentioning it, Diane stopped rubbing his back. "Oh. I guess it's a little *upsetting* that you..."

"...that I'm wearing your nightgown and underwear? Yeah!" he concluded her thought. Getting up, John made his way to the bathroom. Removing the gown, he noticed blood stains on it. "Oh *crap!*" he whined.

"What's *wrong?*" his wife asked concernedly as she followed him in.

"I got blood all over your nightgown!" he nearly cried. "It... it's *ruined!* This won't *ever* come out!"

Giggling at his highly emotional outburst, she wiped the smile off her face when she saw him turn to her with an upset expression. "Sorry! It's just... well... after last night, I think losing a *nightgown* rates pretty low on the things to be worried about! You can try and clean it!"

"Good point." he sighed, tossing the gown in the hamper. "I'll *try*, anyway."

After changing out of her underwear and disposing of the soaked pad, John found he needed a shower to clean blood that had gotten all over his privates. By the time he was done the pills had taken effect and he almost felt normal, other than the fact the he could tell they were still *there*, just that the pain was masked.

Just before lunch, when he excused himself to use the bathroom, he secretly took two more pills as the cramps were starting to return. Pushing through the pain until they kicked in, John was trying to pretend that everything was back to normal as they resumed settling into their new home. As they ate their mid-day meal together, Diane wanted to talk.

"John? About last night."

Sighing and trying to hide his pain, he put down his sandwich. "What *about* it?" he asked irritably. "Can't we just forget it ever *happened*?"

"Well, we have to deal with *one* part of it." his wife pressed. "*Vicky*."

"Oh." he looked down embarrassedly. "We... we don't ever have to bring that up again, honey."

"That's going to be hard for me to *do*, sweetie!" she admitted. "I mean, we're supposed to see your sister at the Halloween Party! I'm going to have a hard time looking her in the eye and *not* be thinking about it!"

"It just one of those stupid things kids do!" he snapped. Biting his tongue, he winced at another cramp and sighed. "I'm *sorry*, Diane! I... I guess maybe we *do* need to talk about it."

Pushing her plate aside, she reached out and took his hand. "It's OK, sweetie. Just... just *tell* me about it. Was it something you two did a *lot*? Just once in a *while*? Was it ever *your* idea or was it only ever *hers*?"

Shrugging as the pain began to lessen, John looked away shyly. "Um... I think it was *my* idea most of the time. Like I said, I don't remember back that far too well. I don't think it was *very* often, at least I don't *remember* it being all that often. It made me sad when it would be a long..." Stopping, he swallowed nervously. "Um... what I *mean* is... um... it... um..."

Squeezing his hand and smiling, Diane tried to reassure him. "It's *OK*, John! I'm not *mad*, OK? Just... just finish what you were going to say."

Nodding and pursing his lips, he took a breath. "Um... I think it made me sad when she wouldn't want to play girl games with me for a while. I... I remember one time right before Mom caught us that it'd been a *long* time since the last time and... um... I... I kinda almost *begged* her to play... um... to play... uh... *dollhouse*."

Giggling lightly, Diane stopped when she noticed it made him blush. "Oh, *John*! I think it's *cute*!"

"It's also *embarrassing* for me now!" he retorted. "I don't want you to think I *still* feel that way! You married a *man*!"

"I married *you*." she corrected him. "If that's a man or a woman, I don't *care*! I fell for you after the first time we *talked*, not the first time I *saw* you!"

Smirking at the sentiment, he took a tiny bite. "It's fine. It's all over now and we can just forget the whole thing!"

By five-thirty that afternoon, John was lying on the couch and sweating as though it were a hundred degrees in the house instead of the cool seventy-two that it was. Curled up in a ball, his moans were nearly constant.

Diane checked his temperature again, just to be sure. "It still says you only have half a degree of temperature! How bad are the pains now?"

"Worse than *ever!*" he almost cried. Feeling another sharpness in his belly, he withdrew his hand and stared at it with eyes wide. "*Diane!* Look!"

As the two watched, John's nails began to grow visibly. Over the next several minutes as the sun finished setting, the two once more saw John revert to Joan. When it was almost finished, a large stain appeared in his pants; much more than would be normal for the woman he was once again.

"*John!*" Diane gasped. "*Bathroom! Now!*" Taking his thin feminine arm, she almost carried him to the tub and stripped his clothes off, unleashing a minor torrent of blood once clear of obstruction. "This is too *much!*" she nearly panicked. "You're bleeding as much as a woman does during a whole *day!*"

Grabbing the shower wand, she washed the collected blood away and shut off the water to see if the bleeding continued. When it didn't, she breathed a sigh of relief. "It... it's *OK*, John! You... you've *stopped* for now!" she panted as she began to calm down.

Sitting up in the tub, John held his stomach. "The... the pain is a lot better now." he panted in his once more feminine voice. "It still *hurts*, but not *nearly* as bad as before." Wincing slightly, he regretted saying anything about the pain.

Going through the motions once more, an hour later the two ended up on the couch cuddling with one another with John wearing the gray sweats and sports bra again.

Running her fingers through John's long hair as it seemed to help soothe him, Diane shook her head. "OK, let's think this out *logically.*"

Turning to face her, John's feminine features showed incredulous disbelief. "*Logically?* Diane... I'm a *woman* again! What's logical about *that?*"

"Just hear me out!" she stated calmly, making him turn and lay against her once more. When he was relaxed again, she resumed her line of thought. "OK... so a month ago, this Francine lady scratched your arm. It healed very quickly, *too* quickly really, but then yesterday you turned into a woman."

"Last *evening*, you mean." he pointed out calmly and softly.

Stopping suddenly, Diane realized she'd failed to notice the time. "Joan? Um... what *time* did all this start? *Yesterday*, I mean."

"You were just starting dinner, so about five-thirty." he answered. "Why?"

Sitting him up, Diane turned him to face her. "That's the same time it started *tonight*, Joan! Right..."

"...at *sundown*!" they chorused.

Following her gut, Diane grabbed her smartphone and did a quick search. Getting her result quickly, her eyes widened. "*No!* That's... that's *impossible!*"

"What the *hell*, Diane!" he screeched. "What *happened* to me? What *am* I?"

Swallowing hard, Diane's eyes were wide. "Um... Joan? Remember all the myths and stuff about *werewolves*?" Seeing the confused look on his face, she pressed on. "Sweetie... the day you were scratched was the third night of the full moon... and last night was two nights from the full moon!"

"So *what!*" he shrieked again.

"Don't you *see*?" she pleaded. "What *exactly* did Mrs. Brookes say to you about *Francine*, sweetie!? *Exactly!* It's *important!*"

Calming himself down, John thought back. "I... I'm not *sure*." he whined.

"*Think, sweetie!*" she insisted. "You've *got* to remember!"

Closing his eyes, John took a breath and pushed all his feelings aside. "OK. After Francine grabbed the gift basket and ran, Janice came to the door. She said something like, 'Oh! What are *you* doing here?' and I said I was there to deliver the basket. Then she said something about Francine being Frank's twin sister and that she was only staying until *Wednesday*."

Looking at her phone she nodded and put it down, now sure she was right. "Sweetie? I... I don't think there *is* a Francine! I think that was *Frank!*"

His complexion paled as he began to absorb the idea. "W... whaddya *mean*, that was *Frank*? You mean... he's like *me*?"

"More like you're like *him* now, sweetie!" she slightly corrected him. "You were scratched during the full moon by Frank's 'twin sister'." she emphasized with air quotes. "A sister that was going away two days *later*. Then two days before the first night of the full moon, *you* turn into a woman! The full moon lasts three days! Don't you *see* it, John!"

"No!" he squealed.

"Two days *before* and *after* the *three* days of the full *moon!* That's *seven* days every *month*, John! What happens to *me* for seven days out of every month!?"

Slowly the thought processed in his clouded mind. His eyes widened and he shook his head fearfully. "*No!*" he whispered. "That... that's *impossible!*"

Nodding her head, Diane made him listen. "It's *true*, sweetie! It starts as the *moon* rises and the *sun* sets... then the next morning you're *normal* again... only for it to start again after the next sunset! John... it's *true!* You're a... a... a *werewoman!*" she almost whispered in fear.

"I'm a *what*?" he furrowed his brow in confusion.

"A *werewoman*!" she repeated herself more emphatically. "Like a werewolf, only instead of a snarling *beast*, you're a..."

"...snarling *bitch*!" he interrupted her harshly.

"*Joan*!" Diane whined. "That's not *funny*! I'm *serious*!"

"The *hell* it isn't funny!" he retorted. "It's a *joke*! This whole *thing* is a joke! A *werewoman*, Diane? *Really*?"

"It's the only thing that *fits*!" she insisted.

Taking a breath, John closed his eyes and centered himself. Breathing slowly and deeply a few times, he considered all the facts. Finally opening his eyes slowly, he looked at his wife. "OK. You're *right*. It *does* fit and it *is* serious. What do we *do*? The werewolf stories say that the only way to end the curse is to get shot by a silver bullet! That would *kill* me!"

"I don't think it's *exactly* the same, Joan!" she answered snidely. "Maybe there's *another* way to end this curse! We should go see the Brookes'!"

"Why *them*?" he snapped more shrilly than he'd intended. "I mean, if they knew *how* to cure it, wouldn't they have *done* it already?"

"Maybe they just hadn't done it *yet* last month!" Diane offered hopefully. "I mean, you haven't talked to them since closing have you?"

Shaking his head slowly, John gave in. "No, I haven't... and you're *right*. They're the only ones who could *possibly* believe us and *might* know the answer. It's a place to *start*, anyway." he sighed.

Getting up, Diane helped John up as well. "Come on, sweetie! We're going to the old Foster home! Put some shoes on."

"What, *now*?" John squeaked. "I can't leave the *house* looking like *this*!"

"You look *fine*!" she tried to reassure him. "We need to *fix* this, John! You bled *so much* tonight! I'm afraid it might *kill* you!"

Realizing her fear was well founded, John nodded. "Alright. We'll *go*. I'll need my *jacket*, though."

"It's not *that* cold out tonight, Joan!" Diane scoffed as she grabbed her purse and slipped into her flats.

"Not for the *weather*, honey!" he explained as he pulled the jacket on and grabbed a baseball cap. Twisting his long hair until he could coil it on top of his head, he covered it with the cap and slipped into his oversized shoes. "We can't let anyone see *Joan* leave the house, Diane! People'll start asking who she is and I'm not ready to *face* that kind of scrutiny!"

Conceding the point, she led him to the door. "OK. You look *reasonably* like your old self. Let's go!"

Creeping out the door, John pulled the jacket in close around his shoulders. When he tried to walk like a man however, the wide gait of his hips made it almost impossible. Immediately he doubled over in severe pain, falling to the sidewalk and nearly passing out before Diane caught his arm.

"*John*!" she whispered loudly. "What're you *doing*!" Grabbing his arms tightly, she held him and made him look her in the eyes. "John!"

The pain ebbing as he felt the comfort of his wife, he slowly regained control and decreased his rapid breathing. "Sorry!" he whispered. "I... I don't know what just *happened*! I was just trying to walk like my normal self, but I... I

couldn't and then the cramps hit *really* hard!" he began to sob. "The pills didn't even *touch* it!"

"It's *OK*, sweetie!" Diane calmed him as she wrapped her arms around him, pressing them together tightly. "Shhh! It's *alright*! I've *got* you!" After she saw he was calm and himself again, she released her grip and slipped his arm into hers, linking their fingers together and helping him to stand once more. "Come on! We can *do* this!"

Making it to her car, she opened the passenger door and guided him into the seat carefully. Closing it, she ran around to the driver's seat and hopped in, starting the car. Once belted and ready, she pulled out and turned down the road, heading for the highway that exited the north side of town.

Pulling up to the darkened building, Diane slowed to a stop. "Doesn't look like anyone's *here*, sweetheart."

"They're *here*." he said barely above a whisper. "I... I can *feel* her near! Her heart hammering away! I... I can feel her *anger*! Her *rage*! Why is she so *angry*?"

"I... I don't *know*, sweetie." she took his hand. "Let's see if we can find out."

Getting out carefully, Diane raced around the car to take John's hand again, terrified that if he ran off this far out of town, she might not find him before morning. Walking up to the door, the two could hear thumping from deep inside the house; rhythmic and steady, nearly matching the footfalls of their slow approach. The chill in the air and overcast skies cast an ominous feel.

Stopping at the door, the two looked at one another a moment before Diane gathered her courage and knocked gently, feeling John's hand practically vibrating with fear.

"She's *trapped*!" he whispered in terror. "That's why she's *angry*!"

"It's *OK*, sweetie." she soothed him and squeezed his hand reassuringly.
"I'm right *here*!"

Hearing footsteps approaching, the two waited a moment before the porch light came on.

"Who *is* it?" came a woman's voice from the inside.

"My name's Diane!" she said with a slightly raised voice. "Diane *Henderson*! We need to *talk* to you, Mrs. Brookes! It's *urgent*! *Please* open up!"

The door cracked open slightly as Janice Brookes looked at the two women at her door. "Did you say *Henderson*? Are you related to *John* Henderson?"

"I'm his *wife*, Mrs. Brookes!" Diane cried. "*Please* let us in! We need to *talk*! Something *terrible* has happened to John!"

Opening the door fully, she looked carefully at the woman standing next to her real estate agent's wife, eyeing John carefully. "Who's *she*? Does *she* know what's going on, *too*?"

"Of *course* she does!" Diane answered without thinking. "I mean... *he* does!"

"She your *daughter* or something? I didn't think you were *old* enough..."

"*Janice*?" the shivering man pleaded. "It... it's *me*! *John*!"

Her eyes growing wide, she immediately tried to shut the door. "*No*! Get her *away*! She's *crazy*!"

Stopping the door with her foot, Diane pushed her way in with John in tow.
"Mrs. Brookes! We need your *help*!"

Backing away from John in terror, she was startled when the beating on the basement door became frantic, making her turn away from the intruders a moment before turning back to face them once more. "G... go *away!* We can't help you! John's too *early!* He's still *crazy!*"

Closing the door behind him, John pulled the cap and jacket off, letting his true appearance show. "*Janice!* I'm not *crazy!* I'm *scared,* yes! *Terrified* really, but not *crazy!* I need your *help,* Janice! *We* need your help!"

Swallowing hard, Janice looked in his eyes carefully. "You... you have full *control?* So *fast?* How's that *possible?* You must have gotten infected last *month!* This should only be your second night! How can you have control *already?*"

"*Please!*" John begged. "What's *happening* to me! *Why* is it happening?" Hearing the pounding grow louder and more furious, he couldn't help but turn to the locked door as it shook and threatened to fly apart.

Shaking her head, Janice rushed up to the two. "*Please!* You *have* to go! I'll explain *tomorrow,* alright? You can't *stay* though or she'll *kill* him trying to get free... to get to *you!*" she cried, finishing by looking at John.

Taking John's hand, Diane nodded in understanding. "We... we'll be back tomorrow! Come on, Joan!" she ordered, pulling the terrified man out the door and back to their car. Once both were back in and she was about to start the engine, they heard the pounding slow to a stop. Pulling back onto the highway, she took a breath and let it out slowly.

"That was... *intense!*" she stated obviously.

Unable to hold back the emotions anymore, John cried heavily. "He... she was a *monster!* That's what's going to happen to *me!* You have to *leave* me, Diane! *Run!* Just... drop me off *here,* drive *away,* and never come *back!*"

"*Stop it!*" she shouted. "*Damn it, Joan! I'm never leaving you! Get that through your head! You can't make me go! There's a way out of this and we're gonna find it together! You hear me?*"

Sniffing back the tears, John nodded. "O... OK. I... I just... I saw the look in Janice's eyes! She was so... *scared!* Not for *herself*, but for *Frank!* I couldn't *stand* to see you like that!"

Driving in silence a moment, Diane shook her head. "...for as long as we both shall live, Joan! No backing out! I'll be *damned* if some stupid curse is gonna ruin the life we want! You're just going to have to tough it out until we find the way to *break* it!"

Returning home, the two settled in once more, this time Diane insisting that John wear her long cotton nightie.

"*Diane!*" he whined. "*I shouldn't!* I can just sleep in the sweats! We know I'll be back to normal by morning!"

"...and leaking all over everything, and *ruining* my *sweatpants!*" she pointed out. "At least *this* can be *bleached!* We'll put a towel on the bed under you, too... just in *case.*"

Giving in, John grabbed the nightie and trudged off to the bathroom to get clean once more, change, and take his final pills. Returning fifteen minutes later, he saw her lying in bed and looking at him as he came out. "*What?*"

Sighing as she turned over to watch him go over to his side of the bed, Diane smiled weakly. "Just remembering our first night here, love."

Scoffing, John shook his head. "Yeah... before I became a *freak!*"

"That's not what I meant!" she raised her voice. "And don't call yourself a *freak!* That *my husband* you're insulting!"

Pausing before climbing into bed, John took a breath and calmed himself. "I know. I'm *sorry*, honey. I... I'll try to be *better*." Getting into their shared bed, he once more found it impossible to get comfortable on his left side. "I miss *holding* you at night." he choked up.

With a gentle pull, Diane rolled him onto his back before laying her head on his cushioned chest carefully. Settling in as he wrapped a thin arm around her back, she nuzzled his neck. "I miss you holding me, too."

Lying in silence a moment, John pushed away the desire to get her away from touching his skin; the sensation making his skin crawl. Enduring it a bit, he tried to think of something, *anything* else. "Honey? Why were you thinking of our first night here?"

Smiling happily, his wife hummed. "Mmm!"

"Oh!" he began to understand. "I... I just wanted our first night here to be... um... *memorable*." his soft voice lilted almost happily.

"It *was*!" she cooed.

When at last he started to feel sleep begin to claim him, his eyes drifting closed heavily, his last thought was of Diane and how wonderful it felt that first night in her dream home to make her so happy and fulfilled.

That's what love's all about. he thought. *Making her happy!*

Chapter 4 - The Curse of the Werewoman

Pulling up in the same driveway they'd been in the night before, John turned off the motor and sighed. "OK, so lets go find out what the hell we can do about this mess!"

Both climbed out of John's car and walked up to the door together. The morning was still cold from the near frost of the night before and the early morning fog had only just lifted before getting in the car to drive to the Brookes' new home.

Knocking on the door while Dianne shivered and kept her arms wrapped around herself, John wrapped an arm around her and waited.

Opening the door quickly, Janice waved them in. "Come in! Come in! It's *freezing* out there!"

Entering and relishing the warmth of the room, Diane took her heavy coat off. "Thanks!" she stated through chattering teeth.

Stamping his feet to get warm, John likewise took his coat off and hung it on the hook before taking his wife's and doing the same.

"Cup of coffee to get warm?" Janice offered as she headed for the kitchen.

"*Please!*" Diane begged. "Anything to wrap my hands around something *warm!*"

Sitting at the kitchen table, the two waited while Janice prepared her guests' drinks. As she did so, there was a harsh knock on the basement door.

"Janice! Lemme *out!*"

Moving quickly, she unlatched the bolt that was keeping the wooden bar in place. "*Sorry, Frank!*" Lifting it free, she unlocked the knob and threw the deadbolt open before stepping back quickly.

"Well it's about fu..." Frank began before seeing that they had guests and stopping cold.

"*Frank?*" Janice tried to calm him down. "You remember John Henderson, right? The man that sold us this *house*?"

Stepping into the room and slamming the basement door closed, he grabbed a kitchen chair and turned it around to straddle it backwards. "So what's the *beef*? We forget to *sign* somthin'?"

Diane took the initiative to try and thaw the man's icy mood, sticking her hand out toward him. "I'm Diane Henderson! I'm glad to know you, *Frank!*"

Looking at her hand suspiciously, Frank slowly took it and gave it a single shake. "Mrs. Henderson." he said curtly. "This some kinda 'welcome to the neighborhood' social call, then?" Seeing his wife put down two cups of coffee for their guests, he nodded toward the kitchen. "There more o' that?"

Looking at him sternly, Janice narrowed her eyes. "Yes, and you know where the *cups* are!" she snapped, taking a seat of her own.

Holding up his hands in mock surrender, Frank stood up and headed for the kitchen in silence. Making his own cup, he glanced over at the two intruders. "So then... why're ya' *here*?"

Standing up, John stepped closer to the man. "The day you closed on the house, I forgot to give you your complimentary gift basket. My boss insisted I deliver it, *personally*, so I drove out here and arrived... just after *sunset*."

Snorting, the man poured sugar in his cup. "So you met *Francine*, I take it."

"More than *met* her, I'm afraid." John sighed. "She... um... *you* scratched my *arm*... pretty *badly*." he hinted, rubbing the long-healed wound that might never really heal.

His innuendo brought Frank's head up with an almost audible snap. "I... I mean, *she* scratched ya'?" Seeing John nod, he pursed his lips and walked back to the table with his cup. "Let's see... that was 'bout a *month* ago, so... welcome to the *suckage* club, Johnny!" Taking his backward seat once more, he sipped the beverage calmly. "I hope ya' weren't comin' here to figure out how ta' get *out* of this mess, 'cause it's *impossible*. You *can't*."

"That's not *true*, Frank!" Janice barked. "Just because *you* couldn't break the curse doesn't mean..."

"*No* man can do it!" he snapped back. "It's *impossible*! That stupid witch *knew* that when she *did* it! It's *unbreakable*!"

"*Wait* a moment!" Diane interrupted their argument. "*What* witch? *What* curse? I mean, what's actually going *on*? Why is John turning into a *woman* every night? I thought it was something like a *werewolf*, but as a *woman*!"

"She calls it a *werewoman*." John quipped as he sat back down with the other three.

Snorting his coffee, Frank sputtered for a moment before grabbing a napkin and wiping his face. As he did so, Janice started to giggle with Diane shortly behind her. John just smiled weakly.

Throwing the napkin down, Frank huffed. "*Fine*! Make fun a' the *cursed* guys! OK, *yeah*! She *is* like a freakin' werewolf, only *worse*! At least a wolf serves a *purpose*! This bitch is jus' a shriekin' *harpy*! *Right*, John?"

Their laughter dying, John furrowed his brow. "I... I saw *you* that way."

Shaking his head, Frank scoffed. "Hate ta' tell ya' buddy, but you did the *exact same thing* last night! Don't feel bad, I didn't remember at first *either*. Now I'm *glad* I don't!"

"Frank?" Janice interjected. "Um... John was *here* last night... in *control*!"

Looking shocked, he turned to the man sitting to his left. "How the hell ya' manage *that*!? Took me four *months* ta' get control, for all the *good* it did! I'm *glad* I lose control now! At least outta control, I don't *remember* nothin' and all I 'member is bein' a *guy* all the time!"

"What about *Janice*, though?" Diane wondered. "She was so *terrified* for you last night!"

"Better *that* than the *alternative*!" he muttered.

"*What* alternative?" John wondered.

"Being a *chick*!" he shouted. "*Worse*, being a chick on the *rag* every time! The PMS is bad *enough*!"

"You get *PMS*?" Diane asked clinically. "I mean, how is that *possible*?"

"That's just what Frank calls the bleeding when he's in guy form during the days that's he's Francine at night." Janice explained. "It's not *really* PMS."

"How can Frank bleed during the *day*?" she pressed. "I'm a *nurse*. I know enough to know that's not *possible*."

Looking at her blankly, Janice furrowed her brow. "Didn't John have the pain before the change last night? Followed by a lot of blood?"

"*Yes*!" Diane answered. "*Way* more than menstrual bleeding!"

"Not if you can't get *rid* of it all day!" Frank grumbled. "That's why it all comes out at *once* when ya' change on the second day... and the *third... fourth... fifth... sixth... and seventh* days! By the time the change gets *close*, it feels like yer *belly's 'bout* to burst!"

Finally understanding what happened the evening before, Diane nodded. "I *see*! Yes! That makes *sense*! Except where's the blood *coming* from during the day? Men don't have an endometrium to *shed*!"

"*We* do." Frank grouched. "Even in *guy* form that week, we got all the internal plumbing! Just no way in or *out*! It goes away after the week's over and we get three whole weeks ta' just be normal *guys*!"

"How do you *know* this?" John asked in awe.

Blushing, Janice looked away. "We... um... we stole a sonogram machine last year, when we were still trying to end the curse!"

"Not *too* hard to figure out how ta' use if you have the time..." Frank pointed out. "...and the *motivation*!"

"Plus there's the *book*." Janice offered.

"*Janice*!" Frank yelled. "Now don't go gettin' their *hopes* up with that stupid *book* nonsense! It didn't work for *me*!" Grabbing his belly, he groaned.

"Bad *already*?" Janice winced in sympathy for him.

Nodding silently, her husband settled his nerves and was able to relax. "One of the *worst* parts! The more ya' *fight* it, the worse it *gets*!"

Getting up, Janice headed into the living room briefly to return with an old leather-bound tomb. "We found this in the library in town."

"*Supposedly*, it was *brought* here by the rat bastard that brought the *curse* with him! Then made sure ta' spread it *around* a little!"

"How did *you* get the curse?" John wondered.

"*Pft!*" he half-heartedly laughed. "I was working late at the shop one night and this crazy bitch starts bangin' on the door. Thought maybe she was in trouble, like bein' chased by a *rapist* or somethin', so stupid me goes and opens the door! Then she *bit* me and ran off!"

"So you have no idea who it was?" Diane queried.

"Not a friggin' *clue!*" he spat bitterly. "If I *knew*, I'd of beat his fool *head* in by now!"

Taking the book carefully, Diane opened it to a dog-eared section. "The Curse of Maggie Greendale." she read aloud.

"That's the bitch that started the whole thing!" Frank hissed.

"Maggie Greendale lived in East Lyme, Connecticut in the mid to late sixteen hundreds." she continued. "She was accused of witchcraft in sixteen-eighty and was said to have cursed her accusers, specifically the men of the village, with an unending torment that she claimed no man could escape."

"They ain't *kiddin'*, neither!" Frank continued to complain. "There's no *way* any man could ever do what *she* demanded!"

"The next page has the actual text of the curse." Janice offered. "That's the only *important* part."

Turning the crackling paper, Diane started reading.

"Swift curse shall doom yer' childless men,
taken by the moon and then,
stricken by the blood they'll be,
sev'n days, the same as we!

No man can face the lunacy!
His mind would break and rage she'll see!
With ev'ry push to fight his fate,
the ire shall take him from his mate!

Only way to fight this curse,
to bend on knee will quench its thirst!
A year plus one she will abide,
and her face he must not hide!

'Er by that day she must control,
by night she lives, the day's his role.
What more, he must accept his place,
abiding hap'ly with her face!

One last task, to end this way
his wife must give her heart away
to she alone, else face the rage!
Their hearts entwined shall be assuaged!

By day the man, by night the she
which one to chose, his choice must be!
Guess the hidden hope of wife
and locked he'll be that way for life!

But guess he wrong and break her heart
then ne'er shall go his counterpart!
For only death shall stop their blood
each lunar time, her frenzied flood!"

Silence filled the room as the four pondered the words a moment.

Janice cleared her throat before continuing. "According to some experts on the occult, if *anyone* could ever meet the conditions of the curse and break it, it would free *everyone* afflicted! Something about the way she worded the second-to-last line."

"*Hogwash!*" Frank spewed. "We did *everything* there and it didn't *work!*"

Looking at her husband, Janice shook her head. "You never *really* embraced being Francine, *Frank!* You couldn't just *pretend* to! I *told* you that!"

"What's this?" John asked curiously.

"It's a reference to the fourth stanza." Janice explained coolly. "See? '*What more, he must accept his place, abiding hap'ly with her face!*' It means that a man with the curse has to learn to *embrace* being his female half."

"Fat chance of *that!*" Frank scoffed. "Hard to *embrace* it when it's nothing but bleeding, bloated, *misery!* I ain't heard *you* ever 'embrace' being a woman when it's *your* time bleedin'! You complain nearly as much as *me!*"

Closing the book carefully, Diane put her hands on it protectively. "May... may we take this *with* us? I'd like to study it more."

"Take it and good *riddance!*" Frank waved at the book dismissively. "It's just a bunch of *hooey!* Some nonsense some *geek* wrote down about local folklore that prob'ly ain't got nothin' ta' do with *this* bloody curse! It's like *you* said! It's like *werewolves!* Only way out is ta' eat a silver bullet!"

"*Frank!*" Janice whined. "You *know* it's true! It all fits together too well!"

Dismissing her insistence with a wave, he got up and walked away.

Hearing the bedroom door slam, Janice winced. "He's always a little cranky after a night... um..."

"We understand." Diane smiled sympathetically. "We should *go*. You've told us pretty much all there is to know and you've got your *own* problems to deal with! Can we have your number if we have any other questions?"

Giving Diane her cell phone number, the two got ready to leave before Frank re-emerged. As they walked out the door, Janice smiled weakly at Diane. "I heard you call him *Joan* last night. It's *nice*! Maybe Joan can *do* it... break the curse, I mean. It... it's all the hope I have left. Frank used to be so sweet and nice before all this. Now he's frustrated and angry all the time."

"We'll *try*." Diane offered, giving the woman a quick hug before departing.

Driving them back home, John started thinking. "Honey? About *tomorrow*. How'm I gonna work it? The office doesn't close until *seven*, which is an hour and a half after sunset! Same for all this *week*!"

Thinking hard, she smiled. "Remember when you started at the agency, sweetie? Remember what Mrs. Moon said to me?"

"Um... something about if you ever needed anything, she'd be glad to help?"

"She said that if I ever needed you home *earlier* she'd arrange it so you'd be home when I *needed* you to be! She *knew* we were newlyweds and was probably thinking of how people *usually* are when they're just starting out! You know, can't keep their *hands* off each other?"

"Most newlyweds haven't been *dating* six years first." he pointed out. "Not much around *here*, anyway! You get two kinds... the ones that get married right away so they're not 'sinning out of wedlock' and the ones that *never* get married and just *shack-up* the rest of their lives!"

"I thought you'd *never* say yes!" Diane beamed.

"Yeah, well I had to quit shaming the family!" he quipped before chuckling lightly. Regretting it almost immediately, John grabbed his stomach. "Ooo! *That* one hurt!"

"Don't they *all*?"

Nodding sideways, he conceded the point. "True enough. That one tried to reach out and *grab* me though."

Lost in thought a while, the rest of the trip home was quiet. When they at last were back inside, Diane put the book down and opened it to the curse. "John? I was thinking about your cramps and the curse. Listen to *this* part. '*No man can face the lunacy. His mind would break and rage she'll see.*' I think there's something *to* that."

"So that's why I keep feeling those drives to be angry like Francine?" he wondered as he sat on the couch.

"I don't think 'rage' means anger in this case." she supposed. "Look, in the other passages, anger is written as 'ire' or 'frenzy'. Rage appears twice, *here* and *here*." she pointed at the text.

Nodding, he accepted her point. "OK, so what does rage *mean* then?"

"I think it might be some old-world way of saying *cramps*, John! *Think* about it! When are your cramps the *worst*?"

"Right before *sunset*." he shuddered.

"I mean just the *cramps*, not the pressure because you can't release until you change. Isn't there a *difference* between the two?"

Thinking hard, he nodded. "Come to *think* of it, yes. There *is* a difference. The cramps are more... *spasmy*... like a Charley Horse in my belly. The ones before sunset are more like when you're badly *constipated*. It just *hurts*."

"I think we can reduce the cramps, John!"

"*How?*" he asked her seriously.

"Um... you won't *like* it." she warned him.

"Just *tell* me, honey!" John almost begged.

Taking a breath, Diane put her idea forward. "I think Maggie was saying that when you fight the curse, it brings the 'rage'... the cramps. See the word *lunacy* there? As in *Luna*? The Moon?"

"So that's what ties the change to the phase of the moon?" he asked.

"No, that's the line, '*taken by the moon*'. What I think *this* line means refers to when people used to think that the Moon caused *madness*. That's why they called it *lunacy*. Another word for crazy back then was *hysterical*, from the Latin word *hystericus*, meaning 'of the womb'. Tie the two *together* and..."

"...you get '*No man can face the womb*'." he filled in her blank. "OK, so if he *can't* face it, then his '*mind would break*'. He... um... he goes *crazy*?"

"I don't *think* so. I think 'break' there is more like *rebell*ing... like *breaking free*? So the line then reads, '*No man can face the idea of being a woman, he'll rebel against it and get cramps*'!"

Looking at her, John thought a moment before his eyes went wide. "Like that first night we went to the Brookes' and I tried to walk like myself... like a man... and I got that bad cramp!"

"*Exactly!*" Diane smiled.

John's enthusiasm died as he followed the thought to its ultimate conclusion. "That means to make this *bearable*, I have to stop trying to act like *myself!*"

"...and stop *fighting* it." she added. "That line, '*Only way to fight this curse, to bend on knee will quench its thirst*'? To 'bend on knee' means to submit to what someone or *something* else wants, and not what *you* want."

Taking it all in, John nodded. "So in order to reduce the cramps and hope to end the curse, I have to *be* a woman seven nights a month... *willingly*... and eventually learn to *like* it, in *spite* of the fact that that the only time I *am* one I'm *menstruating*?"

"I think you can *do* it, John!" his wife took his hand and squeezed it. "Of all the men that have ever gotten this, how many of them wanted to be a *girl* when they were little? You just have to reach back and embrace that little girl inside you and let her loose!"

"There's more *to* it, though." he scowled. "It says, '*A year plus one*'. I have to keep it up for a year and a day, I'm guessing, and I can't hide away like she's not *there*."

"So Joan has to become part of our household." Diane accepted. "We have to treat Joan when you're her like it's *normal* and not keep it hidden away, the way Frank locks himself up when he's Francine." Reading on, she bit her lower lip. "This part's interesting. '*his wife must give her heart away to she alone, else face the rage*.' Does that mean what I *think* it means?"

Nodding, John looked away embarrassedly. "I... I think *so*. It... it means you have to fall in love with *Joan*. So that's *it*, then! I'm *doomed!* That's not even *fair!* That's not anything I can do anything about!"

"Yes it is!" she insisted. "Sweetie, it means you have to *want* me to love Joan! If *you* don't, *I* can't... but if you *do*..."

Looking in her eyes, John smiled shyly. "*Their hearts entwined shall be assuaged.*"

"It's the way *out*!" Diane smiled back. "We just go on with life as though you being Joan is *normal*. You accept it and just *enjoy* being a woman without *fighting* it or trying to 'man-up', we continue *loving* each other as though this is a *good* thing, and then..." She paused as she looked at the last stanzas and furrowed her brow. "This part I'm not *sure* about. Can *you* make sense of it?"

Nodding, he turned away. "I'm pretty sure it's saying that at the end of the year and a day I have to pick if I want to live the rest of my life as a man or as a woman. Even *more*, I have to pick what *you* want me to be without you *telling* me. See that part, '*Guess the hidden hope of wife*'? So after a year of living and loving together as both *man* and wife and *woman* and wife, I have to *guess* which one you love *more*."

"That's *easy*!" she purred, wrapping an arm around his shoulders. "I'll want whatever *you* want!"

"I don't think it's that *simple*." he grimaced. "I think the curse *knows* what we hide even from *ourselves* and that after a year, you *will* want one over the other... even if you don't *know* it! That's the 'hidden hope' part. I guess I'm supposed to know you well enough to be able to *tell*, even if you *can't*."

Hugging him one-armed, Diane still smiled. "Why don't we cross that bridge when we *get* to it! In the *mean* time, we know Joan is here to stay for a week out of each month. Back to *practical* concerns."

"The one I can't get out of my head is what the hell I'm supposed to do about the Halloween party Wednesday!" John whined. "I mean, Vicky's *expecting* me and I won't be *done* this month until Friday morning!"

Smirking, Diane couldn't help herself. "Well, you could always go as *Joan*! I mean, there *is* a resemblance!"

"Ha, *ha*!" he sneered. "I don't look anything *like* John as Joan!"

Raising an eyebrow, his wife looked at her carefully. "Referring to yourself in the third person now? Or is John someone *else* now?"

Scowling and biting his lower lip, John tried to explain. "I almost *have* to think of Joan as a different person. I need to just go with the *flow* here and not *fight* what comes *naturally* to me. Getting back to Halloween though, I don't think Joan could pass as John in drag!"

Thinking about how Joan looked critically, Diane shook her head. "No... I think you could pull it off! Your face is *generally* the same... a little *rounder*, but your eyes, nose, and general facial structure is still there. If I unfocus my eyes and ignore the hair, it's hard to tell the difference. Add a lot of makeup and people could fall for it! Besides, I don't think you have any *choice*! You don't show and your sister will *kill* you!"

"I *know*!" he sighed. "I wish I could remember being Joan when I was little *better*, though. It might *help*."

"Maybe you should ask *Vicky*. She was older, so maybe she remembers more than you do. Going to the party as Joan should help break the ice!"

"You still plan on going as 'the naughty nurse'?"

"No." Diane sighed. "Given that you won't be going as Dr. Feelgood, it just seems *trashy*! I need something that matches with *you*! I can't pull off a *guy* costume, though!" Thinking a moment, she got a devilish look on her face. "Sweetie? What would you think if we went as *hookers*?"

Looking at Diane as though she'd gone 'round the bend, John slowly shook his head. "Are you *serious*? I'm just getting *used* to the idea and you want me to go out in public dressed like a *tramp*? With guys *ogling* me?"

"You didn't seem to mind the idea of guys being able to ogle *me* as your naughty nurse!" she countered. "Turnabout's fair *play*, sweetie!"

Blushing heavily, John looked away. "You're *right*. It *is* fair. The difference is that you've had *years* to get used to the idea of being stared at! I've had like two *days*!"

"Trial by fire, sweetie!" Diane chuckled. "*Every* girl has had a first time out wearing something a little less than 'proper', and did it without *practice*! So welcome to the club, sweetie!"

Smiling slightly at feeling included, John thought about it a moment. "Um... a... alright. If it's what *you* want to do, honey."

Leaning over, Diane kissed his cheek gently. "*Trust* me, love! You'll have a *blast*! Now about *work*..."

Spending an hour looking at online lunar calendars, sunrise and sunset times, and when Joan's 'time of the month' was due to start and end for the next several months, the two managed to hash out a workable schedule.

Grabbing her phone, Diane looked through her contacts and pressed a button. Putting the phone to her ear, she only had to wait a moment. "Hello, *Barb*? It's Diane!"

"*Diane*!" Barbara Moon smiled. "Good to *hear* from you! How's John?"

"Oh, John's *fine*!" she replied absently. "Listen, remember when John started and you offered to let him work a different schedule if I needed him to? Well,

I *need* him to! He can't work past five for a while. I'll need him home by five-ten at the latest for the foreseeable future!"

"Scheduling problems at the hospital?" Barbara asked curiously.

"You know how it is!" she didn't really answer. "They think nurses are just machines! Wind us up and we can go for *days*, right?"

Laughing, Barbara nodded. "Yes! My *mother* was a nurse, so I understand! That's why I *offered*! I *knew* it was just a matter of time before you needed his schedule to be flexible! Looks like *he'll* be doing most of the cooking and cleaning around the house for a bit while *you* wear the pants in the family!"

"You have no *idea*, Barb!" she quipped lightly. "I just need some extra help for a bit while we get our schedules sorted out. Probably just over the winter. After that he should be able to go back to the later schedule."

"That's fine with *me*!" Barbara beamed. "We usually have shorter hours in the winter *anyway* because so few people *move* that time of the year, these last few *especially*! We'll just move to the winter schedule a little *early*!"

"Sounds like it'll work out good for *everyone* then!" Diane pointed out. "So John will be in a little earlier tomorrow, then. Sound good?"

"Sounds *fine*, Diane! Tell him I'll see him at eight-thirty and he can leave at five! Since you live so close, he should be able to get there in time to cook dinner for you every night!" she giggled.

"*Thanks*, Barb! See you later! *Bye*!" Hanging up, she smiled at John. "*There!* You're working eight-thirty to five from now on, so work is solved!"

"That still leaves Christmas Night and New Years Eve as problems, though. I can't exactly have dinner at Vicky's house as *Joan*!" he complained. "Dad would have a *conniption* and think of her *kids*!"

"That's a problem for two months from now." Diane calmed him. "As for *New Year's*, you won't be up for going out that night *anyway* since the first few days are always the *worst*."

"But it's our first New Year's Eve!" John fussed. "I wanted it to be *special*!"

"We'll have *other* New Year's Eves together!" she comforted. "Besides, it's not like we haven't spent the last *six* together!"

"But this was the first one together as a married *couple*!"

"We'll just have to beg off party invites and say we want to spend it *alone*! People will understand!"

Nodding in reluctant acceptance, John looked at their rough schedule. "I guess those are all the *major* problems for now."

"Nope!" Diane continued. "There's one *more*. We'll need to set aside this evening to go shopping for clothes for Joan. We can't go with you as John because you'll need to try things on, so we'll have to wait until sundown. You'll get dressed and we'll go out and get you the things you'll need. Just the basics... bras, underwear, some simple tops and pants... Oh! and a really sexy outfit for Halloween!"

Groaning, John leaned on his hands. "You're really *serious* about that, *aren't* you? You *seriously* wanna see me dressed all *slutty*?"

Wrapping her arms around him, Diane kissed him deeply. "Sweetie? I can't *wait* to see it!"

Chapter 5 - Holiday Surprises

The shopping trip Sunday evening wasn't nearly as bad as John thought it would be. He'd had difficulty at first, thinking at any minute people would start pointing and laughing at him, shouting 'dude looks like a lady' or things like that, but his transformation was flawless once he'd stopped fighting it and just went with the flow.

By the time they'd reached Mauricio's, a local women's clothing store, after having gotten more to wear than sweats at the local Penny's and changing at a gas station, Joan was starting to come into her own.

The next morning Joan was still there when the alarm went off.

"Sweetie! Time for you to get up!" Diane groaned as she shook the woman's shoulder. "*Joan!* Come on! Wake up!"

Her eyes cracking open slowly, Joan looked at her wife bleary-eyed. "Huh? What is it?"

"You need to get ready for work." Diane yawned as she reset the alarm for her own wakeup two hours later.

Dragging herself into the bathroom, Joan stopped and looked at herself in the mirror. Her mind only slowly returning to reality, she gasped in panic a moment before remembering that the moon wasn't supposed to set and the sun rise until nearly eight-twenty, the time when she would revert back to John and leave to get to work on time.

Showering and drying off quickly, she took a few minutes to dry and style her hair, even knowing it would soon be gone. Dressing in her women's underwear and a pad, just in case, she put on John's pants and shirt, waiting to button them up after she changed back. Grabbing a bite to eat, she waited patiently as the sky brightened and she felt her body begin to change.

With an almost melancholy sadness, she watched her breasts vanish into her body and felt her hair withdraw into her scalp. Buttoning up her top and pants, she grabbed her wallet and keys, giving Diane a quick kiss before running out the door to another day of work.

All day Joan felt different. Her cramps were minimal, her attitude was more relaxed, and she even engaged in a little 'girl talk' with Barbara when on a break. By the time five o'clock approached, she could barely notice the feeling in her belly, like she'd held going to the bathroom too long instead of feeling like she was about to explode.

"Can you lock up on the way out, John?" Barbara asked, grabbing her purse.

"Sure thing!" Joan chirped. "I'll be leaving right at five! Just finishing up a few things before I close out! Have a good night, Barb!"

Pausing to look at her most dedicated employee, Barbara had noticed Joan's change in behavior all day, but couldn't figure out just what was different. Shrugging it off, she smiled back. "Alright, John! You *better* get on home! Diane *needs* you! See you tomorrow! Oh! One more thing! Wednesday I'll expect you to be in *costume*! We're having a long Halloween lunch and all the girls in the office will be dressing up, so I expect *you* to as well!"

Pausing a moment, he nodded briefly. "O... OK, Mrs. Moon. I'll try not to disappoint!"

Driving home after locking up, Joan could feel the change coming. The ache in her arm was noticeable since the one in her belly wasn't as much. When she pulled into her driveway, she glanced up to see the last rays of the sun wink away. Looking over her shoulder, she saw the full moon rising and felt the pressure on her chest. Racing quickly, she barely managed to get inside and to the bathroom before her privates shifted and released a full day of menstruation at one go into the toilet.

Sighing in relief, she stripped John's shirt, tie, shoes, and pants off. Running a hand through her hair, she smiled at the feeling as she got re-dressed in her own slacks and top. Looking at the pants and the way they hung on her hips, she thought, *I wonder if I could just wear these slacks to work? I think they'd fit John all right with a belt to keep them up. I should try that tomorrow!*

Smiling as she began getting dinner ready, she found herself humming a tune from her childhood and thinking how happy Diane would be to come home to a nice meal, clean house, and attentive wife. Pausing on that last thought a moment, she dismissed her concerns and resumed her happy homemaking.

Diane came in the door tired and irritable. Expecting that she'd have to start dinner as it was her night, she was surprised by the smell of something she loved. "I'm *home!*" she shouted toward the kitchen, rewarded by the sight of Joan almost skipping over to the front door to greet her.

"Welcome *home*, honey!" Joan sang, taking the woman's purse and jacket to hang them up. "Dinner should be ready in about fifteen, so if you want a shower first, you have time... or you could just relax and I'll bring dinner to you when it's done! How was your day?"

Stunned at the cheery and almost bubbly attitude on display in front of her, Diane shook her head to try and clear it. "Um... no. I'd *love* a shower! I stink of hand sanitizer! I thought it was *my* night to cook?"

"Oh! Well, I was *home*, I had nothing *better* to do after straightening up a little, so I thought I'd save you the trouble and pamper you! Did you have a hard day, honey? You look tired!" Wrapping her arms around Diane, Joan put a quick kiss on her wife's lips without even thinking.

The stunned feeling she felt flew into overdrive as the woman her husband had become kissed her as though it was all a perfectly normal and everyday occurrence, ignoring the fact that it was the first time she'd ever been kissed

by a woman in her life. Unsure how to react and not wanting to hurt Joan's feelings, she tried to address the issue delicately.

"What the actual *hell*, Joan?" she asked calmly. "Um... you just *kissed* me."

Furrowing her brow, Joan shook her head in confusion. "I don't understand. I kiss you all the *time*!" she finished with a loving smile.

Taking Joan's hand, Diane led her to the couch to sit next to her. "Joan, I've never actually been kissed by a... a *woman*... before. I thought we'd sort of work *up* to that... *eventually*."

Her eyes widening as realization dawned on her just how easily she'd slipped into the life of Joan without a thought, she felt guilty that she'd abandoned her masculine traits, followed immediately by a severe cramp that doubled her over. "Oh! I... I'm so *sorry*, Diane! I... I wasn't *thinking* about it! I... I just did what felt *normal*! I'm sorry!" she winced through another cramp.

Seeing the instant change in her spouse and the wracking pain she was now in trying to not be feminine, Diane felt her heart drop. "*No*, sweetie! It... it's *my* fault! You were doing *exactly* what we talked about, and I just messed it all up because... well... you sort of blew my mind back there! *Please* don't think you need to be *manly* for me to *love* you, OK?"

Relaxing as her wife back-peddled on her reaction to Joan's behavior, she closed her eyes, took a deep breath, and did what felt right. Opening them again, she smiled widely as the cramps faded. "It's OK, honey! I understand! I didn't *mean* to rush things! We'll go at *your* pace, alright?" Getting up, she helped Diane to stand as well. "Let me go finish dinner, *you* go relax and get clean, we'll eat, talk, and see what we want to do after I do the dishes!"

Watching Joan trot off to the kitchen, Diane bit her tongue and went off to take her shower and think.

While they ate, Joan couldn't help but watch Diane eat; a dreamy expression on her face the whole time and nearly forgetting to eat herself. Nibbling at her salad, Joan began humming the tune again, lost in the moment.

For her part, Diane was nervous. Joan's behavior was bordering on bazaar. Finishing a bite of spaghetti, she put her fork down. "Joan? Why'd you offer to do the dishes after cooking and cleaning? You know our rule! Whoever cooks, the other one cleans up!"

"I'm just trying to do what comes *naturally*, honey." she explained simply. "It's *funny*... but I think Maggie put that thing about the cramps in to act as some kind of *guide*. I... I think she actually just wanted men to *understand* women! If they would have just *used* the cramps the way Maggie *intended*, they would have *ended* this curse long ago!"

"What're you *talking* about?" Diane puzzled. "Using cramps as a *guide*?"

"Yeah!" Joan sang. "See, anytime I think about what I should be doing or how I should be acting, I think about them and feel for a reaction. If I start to feel a cramp coming on, I know it's the wrong thing! If I *don't* feel one, I know it's OK! See? And it *works*! I've hardly had any cramps all *day*!"

Seeing the logic of it, Diane shrugged and took another bite. "Still, you don't have to become some *stepford* wife! I can still do my share!"

"I... I don't know that you *can*." Joan lightly objected. "Remember, Maggie lived in the seventeenth century. Back then, women were expected to be domestic and subservient. If Maggie tied the curse to those ideals, then I'll have to comport myself to those ideals if I want to avoid the cramps."

"Surely that doesn't mean I can't be an equal *partner* in the housework!" Diane rejected the idea. "Look, after dinner, *I'll* do the dishes and you can relax! You worked all day, *too*!"

"Speaking of work," Joan segued, "Barb told me that Wednesday I have to wear a costume. She doesn't want the other girls in the office to think I'm trying to make them *look* bad if I don't wear one too."

"Well, you still have that Doctor's costume." she pointed out, deciding to not even touch Joan's use of 'other girls'. "At least it won't go to waste! By the way... how *did* work go?"

"It was *fine*!" Joan chirped happily. "*Getting* there on time was tricky. I didn't change back until it was almost time to leave, so I had a bit of five-o'clock shadow when I got there. I'll have to try and shave before I change tomorrow to see if I'm still fresh-shaven the next morning. Not enough *time* to squeeze it in! Oh! I was also going to try and just wear *my* slacks to work instead of *John's* slacks, so I can be ready quicker! What do you think?"

Pausing to consider the question, she nodded and took another bite. "Slacks are slacks." she talked around her food. "I doubt anyone would even *notice* the difference. If it *helps* you, I'll support you!"

Giddily smiling, Joan took another bite of salad and resumed her starry-eyed observation of Diane enjoying her meal. When her wife began doing the dishes however, the cramps returned with a vengeance.

"Honey?" Joan moaned. "I... I think I need to do that!" she held her belly.

Turning the water off, Diane moved over next to her and held her. "Oh, *Joan*! This just isn't *fair*! You work all day, then come home and have to do all the housework and cooking! Maybe I should talk to Barb about cutting back your hours?"

"No!" Joan whined. "We *need* my job, honey! If we ever want kids, we need to plan ahead and save! You make more hourly than I do, but my bonuses are our *future*! I can't earn them as a part-time agent! Only *full-time* agents get sales bonuses!"

"*Alright!*" she threw up her hands in surrender as she watched Joan put the apron on and begin doing the dishes; the pained look on her face dissolving into one of relief as she started cleaning. Shaking her head, she wandered off to the living room to pick a movie for them to watch together, as was their usual habit.

That night as they lay in bed together, Joan chewed her lip as Diane began snuggling in close. "Um... Diane? You... you haven't given me a goodnight kiss since this all started."

Stiffening at the suggestion that she didn't love Joan, she pulled away. "I... I *know*. I... it's *hard* for me, OK? I *love* you, but... um..."

"You aren't *attracted* to me." Joan sighed. "It's OK. I... I'll learn to live with it. I'm sorry I brought it up. Goodnight, Diane. I love you."

Feeling Joan roll over so that her back was to her, Diane felt terrible. *Here I am, with Joan stuck having to follow some seventeenth-century witch's idea of showing a man what it's like to be a woman, and I can't even give her a little encouragement or hope!* Resolving to fix it right away, she pulled on Joan's shoulder until she lying on her back again. Without a word, Diane slowly closed in close to Joan's sad face. Remembering just who the woman in bed with her was, she closed her eyes and pressed her lips against Joan's.

Melting into the kiss, Joan's body exploded in desire. Wrapping her arms around Diane, she pulled her close and returned the kiss with fervor. When at last it ended, Joan panted with a hunger she'd never known as a man.

"Wow!" she sighed. "Is *that* what I do to you when I kiss you?"

"What's *that*?" Diane asked playfully through a smile.

"You melted my *brain!*" Joan laughed.

Smiling down at her, Diane brushed the woman's bangs aside slowly and gently. "Something like that, yeah!" Caressing Joan's face, she sighed. "Feel *better*, now?"

"I'd have been happy with just a peck on the lips!" Joan confessed. "That went *way* beyond happy!"

"Good" she replied as she moved down to snuggle with Joan. "Then go to *sleep!* We have early mornings from now on!"

The next day was fairly uneventful. Joan got up, dressed in a clean pair of women's slacks, put on her bra and a camisole, then put one of John's shirts on over it with the buttons waiting for her breasts to vanish again. As she sat waiting, the feeling of loss was palpable as she felt the change coming. When at last it was done and she was John again, she buttoned down the shirt, straightened her tie, and headed off to work.

When she left work promptly at five that evening, she hurried home and managed to change to a nice blouse and shave before the change filled her with a warm sense of fulfillment. Making her way through the house, she picked up and cleaned happily, content to just follow her heart and make their home nice for Diane's return. Starting dinner just as the night before, she made sure to use as few dishes as possible so as to not make her wife feel bad when she cleaned them later.

After dinner, the two ladies played at trying their 'costumes' on, Joan getting her first lesson in makeup by being shown what *not* to do; making her look overdone and cheap on *purpose*. Laughing together, they cleaned up and got to bed early, Diane making sure to kiss Joan goodnight with more than a little passion.

Getting up to the alarm on Halloween morning, Joan again went through her routine, waiting for the sun to rise and drive the woman she'd become

back under her skin to hide behind John. Breathing slowly, she tried not to cry as the sun began to peak over the eastern horizon.

Staring at the bright rays, she sighed and began to button John's shirt, only to find that her breasts were still there. Looking at the time, she saw it was getting close to eight-thirty, the sun was well up, and she was *still* Joan. In a panic, she ran to the bedroom and shook her wife desperately.

"*Diane!*" she screeched. "Diane, I'm in *trouble!* Wake up!"

Rousing and looking at Joan, Diane furrowed her brow. "What's *wrong?* Waiting for the sun to come up still?"

"It *is* up, Diane!" she cried. "It's been up for five minutes and I'm still *Joan!* I have to be at work in like three minutes! What am I going to *do?*"

Suddenly wide-awake, her wife tried to calm her down. "Alright! Don't *panic!* Let me *think!*" Processing their options, Diane grabbed her phone. "I'm calling Janice! Maybe *she* knows what's going on!" Looking up her number, she dialed it and waited.

Answering the phone exhaustedly, Janice Brookes didn't even look to see who it was that was calling. "Hello?"

"Janice? It's Diane! Joan didn't change back into John this morning! Why?"

"Oh." she dismissed the concern. "It's All Hallows Eve. Didn't I *tell* you that she'd stay a woman all day and night today?"

"*No,* Janice." she answered sardonically. "No, I'd have remembered that."

"Sorry." she sighed. "Frank was in *such* a bad mood that morning, it kinda threw me off. He's still locked up and has to *stay* that way until tomorrow morning. His boss knows that Frank *never* works Halloween anymore."

"Well, at least we know what's going *on*. *Thank* you, Janice! *Honestly!* I don't know what we'd *do* without your help! I gotta go, though! We need to figure something out!"

"It's *fine*, Diane. Call me later and tell me. Bye."

"Bye!" she replied before hanging up. Turning to a nearly hysterical Joan, she sighed. "It's All Hallows Eve. You'll be Joan until tomorrow morning."

"Oh, *God!*" Joan sank to her knees. "I'm *ruined!* Barb will think I'm *ditching* work so I don't have to wear a costume! What are we gonna *do?*"

"Now don't *panic!*" she repeated. Thinking fast, she smiled. "OK. Let me call Barb and straighten this out! I can *fix* this, but you have to *trust* me and do *exactly* as I tell you, OK?"

Nodding as tears began to run down her cheeks, Joan took a breath to try and calm down. "A... alright, love. I *trust* you. Just tell me what to *do.*"

Joan took a breath and held it as she walked to the front door of her work. The sound of her shoes on the sidewalk as she approached nearly an hour late was unnerving, but she kept her head held high, smiled, and tried to breathe normally as she opened the door to hear the familiar chime.

Barbara Moon looked up from her desk and smiled as usual. "Welcome to Blue Moon Real Estate! I'm Barbara Moon, how can I help you?"

Looking at her boss, Joan took a breath. "Morning, Barb! Sorry I'm late! I had trouble getting ready this morning and Diane had to help!" she stated in a voice low enough to be passably masculine *trying* to be feminine.

As Joan spoke, the entire room fell silent. Barbara shook her head as she tried to reconcile the sight before her with the employee she'd known the

last year. Looking the woman up and down slowly, she took in the sight and finally began to smile.

"John *Henderson*!" she nearly laughed. "My *God*! You look... *perfect*!"

"Actually, the name is *Joan* Henderson today, Mrs. Moon!" she lilted as she strutted to her desk. "If you *need* me, I'll be going through the last quarter's property tax filings! Don't want to slip and *miss* one!"

Going through the day as though nothing had changed, Joan relaxed into her role of the woman pretending to be a man pretending to be a woman shortly before the lunch party. Laughing along with the other nine ladies who she worked with, Joan felt a true sense of freedom and belonging for the first time in her life.

When the end of the day finally came around, staying an extra hour to make up for her lateness, she approached Barbara cautiously. "I... I hope you didn't *mind* this all day, Mrs. Moon. It was *Diane's* idea! I promise I'll be back to being John tomorrow morning!"

Shaking her head, Barbara smiled. "It's fine, *Joan*!" she laughed. "You were *fabulous* and showed real team spirit, trying to fit in with all us ladies here! I know it can be hard for a man to work in an office dominated by so much *estrogen*, but you don't let it get to you and showed just what you're made of today, John! I'll look forward to seeing you tomorrow! Goodnight!"

"Goodnight, Barb!" she sighed in relief before she walked back to her car, the sound of her heels clicking on the pavement making her smile. Getting home, she relaxed a bit until she needed to get ready for the party. Unlike the outfit she'd worn to work, a powder-blue woman's business jacket and skirt, the outfit for her sister's Halloween party was much more *risqué*.

Pulling both her and Diane's outfits out of the closet and unwrapping them from their plastic coverings, Joan took a breath before stripping down and

showering, wanting to be fresh and clean for whatever the evening held in store for her. She was just toweling off when she heard the front door close.

"I'm in the bathroom, honey!" she shouted as she dried her hair and wrapped it the way Diane had taught her. Stepping into the bedroom, she watched Diane collapse on the bed from near exhaustion. "You OK, love?"

"Just *tired*." she sighed as she lay there. "Long day and I was short on sleep. Not *your* fault, but..." Turning to Joan, she smiled. "How was *your* day?"

"*Wonderful!*" Joan exhaled slowly. "Barb and the rest of the ladies were *so* nice! It felt *really* good feeling so *welcomed* and *accepted!* Like I *belonged!* I... I never got a lot of that growing up." she finished sadly.

Sitting up, Diane reached out a hand. "Help me up, sweetie! Let's get ready so we can go see your sister! Maybe she can answer some questions you've had for a long time!"

Pulling up in front of her sister's home, Joan swallowed hard. "I... I'm not sure I can *do* this, Diane! I mean... at work it was *one* thing! I looked *nice!* But *now?* Dressed like *this?* What... what if Vicky *freaks?*"

"You look *fine!*" her wife reassured her. "*More* than fine... you look *hot!*" Reaching a hand over, she squeezed Joan's hand before pulling the nervous woman closer. "Hey, you have *nothing* to worry about, OK? No one'll say anything *bad* about you! I won't *let* them! And if anyone *does*, they'll have *me* to answer to!" Leaning in quickly, she kissed Joan gently on the lips so as to not muss their matching lipstick. "Come *on!* Let's go have some *fun!*"

Approaching the door, hand in hand, the two ladies stopped as Joan pressed the doorbell. Waiting patiently as they listened to the revelry inside, they were thankful of the warmer fifty-degree weather that night. When at last the door opened, Joan smiled as she saw her sister dressed in a twenties flapper costume.

Vicky Eddington looked at the two women standing at her door and her smile melted. "Um... can I help you ladies? Need directions somewhere?"

Smiling, Diane stepped forward slightly. "Hardly, Vicky! Aren't we invited *in* anymore?"

Recognizing the voice and then the face of her sister-in-law, the nearly thirty-year-old woman's expression brightened. "*Diane!* Where's *John?* Who's your *friend?*"

Once more lowering her voice to be soft and sultry, Joan stepped up. "Hi, Vicky! Like my *costume?*"

Joan's sister was so stunned at the idea that the woman standing at her door was her little brother, she nearly fainted. Composing herself, she stepped back to let them in, still speechless.

As the two entered, Diane leaned in close to Joan and whispered in her ear. "By the way, I just thought of something. Make sure you don't *scratch* any *men* tonight, sweetie!"

Hearing the warning, Joan's expression fell and became just as speechless as her big sister.

Chapter 6 - A Year Plus One

After several moments standing in the entryway and staring at Joan, Vicky finally began to crack a smile. "Oh... my... *God! John?* Is that really *you?*"

Nodding quickly as she swallowed hard, Joan tried to keep her 'fake female voice' even. "I... uh... that is, Diane had an idea for a better costume than the same old boring ones! W... what do you think?" she asked, turning in place to show off her outfit.

Taking in the sight, Vicky couldn't help but notice the lovely curves now seeming to accentuate Joan's natural femininity in her smooth movements. The 'little black dress' she wore left little to the imagination, though it did cover enough to see how her brother could still be hidden in it all behind makeup, padding, and hair.

"You look... *stunning!*" Vicky said at last before moving in to embrace Joan. Hugging her quickly, she stepped over and shook her head as she hugged her sister-in-law. "You *really* out-did yourself this time, Diane! Well come on in, you two! Party's just getting going!"

Half an hour later, lubricated by a Tequila Sunrise with more tequila than sunrise, Joan was feeling much less nervous about being around her sister's friends dressed as she was.

"Take it easy on those, sweetie!" Diane warned her. "Remember, you have to *work* tomorrow!"

"I have to survive *tonight* first!" Joan explained. "Here they come!"

Returning to the last arrivals to her costume party, Vicky wasn't alone. "Diane? *John?* You remember my husband Derek?"

Dressed as a twenties gangster to match his wife's costume, Derek extended a hand to Diane first and then, hesitantly, to Joan. "Sorry I couldn't make the wedding in January! You know how it is... business and all!" Looking Joan up and down, he shook his head. "Last time I saw you John, you were getting your real estate agent's license... and were a *man!*"

"*Stop* it, Derek!" Vicky chastised him. "I *told* you... no making *fun* or else you might as well get a *hotel* for tonight before you go back to Portland!"

"Oh, *that* wasn't making fun!" he scoffed. "*Right*, John? *Women!* They just don't *get* guy humor!" Turning to Vicky, he shrugged. "It's just the way guys *are*, honey! I mean, if John couldn't *take* it, he wouldn't have *dressed* like that! I mean, it's just *begging* to get a ration!"

"Well, you're not doing that to *my* baby brother!" Vicky harrumphed. "Go get a *drink* and talk to Stan and Greg! I wanna talk to my *sister* for a while!"

Looking at Joan one more time, Derek shook his head and turned away. "*Damn!* Some costumes are *too* far!" walking towards the bar as he spoke.

Gesturing to the sofa, Vicky smiled as they sat together. "Pay no attention to him, John! I think you look *great!* So do most of the other ladies! They couldn't *believe* it when I told them who you were! Lisa even asked if you were in *transition!*"

"Speaking of transition, Vic." Joan segued. "I wanted to ask you something. Diane asking me to dress as a woman brought up some... memories."

"Oh! You mean your *girl* thing when you were little?"

"How much of that do you remember, Vic?" Joan probed. "I only remember a little from when I was five, right before Mom put her foot down about it."

"*Five?*" Vicky scoffed. "Honey, you were doing that *way* before five!"

"Really?" Diane inquired. "How long did she have a... um... *girl* thing?"

Thinking a moment, her sister-in-law was quiet. "Um... best I can remember since two at least. I was barely *four* then, but I remember I used to think you were my baby sister until I was at *least* five. You kept talking about being *Joan* until I was seven, though. That's about the time *you* were talking about, John."

Squirring at the use of her male name, Joan cleared her throat. "Um... do you remember what I did that was so unusual? All I remember was wanting to play... um... *dolls* with you. Was there more to it?"

"Oh, John!" Vicky laughed. "That was *years* ago! You were just a *baby* then! Don't let it worry you!"

"I'm not *worried*, per say." she admitted. "More *curious*. Like I said, I only vaguely remember that time."

"OK." Vicky agreed before sipping her gin and tonic. "Well, let's see. You loved to play dolls, like you said. Um... you played House with me as my baby. You seemed to find *any* excuse to wear one of my old dresses! We'd play cat's cradle and jump rope, watch Care Bears and Lady Lovely Locks... on *tape*! Oh, that was such a fun time! I was pretty sad when you stopped being *Joan* and were only ever *John* after that, but I'm still glad to have my baby brother!"

Looking at Joan carefully, Vicky leaned in close enough that she could smell the perfume Joan was wearing. "Say... this *is* just a *costume* isn't it? I mean, Lisa isn't *right* is she?"

Shrugging, Joan looked away embarrassedly. "What if it *was* serious, Vic?"

Floored for a moment, her big sister thought how to reply. "Well I guess I should *first* say that I'd still *love* you. Still, don't you think this is all sort of *sudden* and out of the *blue*? I mean, where's this *coming* from, John? Is this something *Diane* wants or is it just what *you* want?"

"I think I can field that one, Vicky." Diane offered, knowing that Joan was just tipsy enough to spill the beans. "I didn't *ask* Joan to do this. It just sort of... *happened*."

"*Joan*?" she replied. "So this *is* serious! John! Are you *sure* about this? I mean, what about *Dad*? And *Dave*! He'll have a total *coronary* over this! What about *kids*? On top of mine and Dave's, I mean after you two *divorce*, I assume you..."

"I'm not *divorcing* Joan!" Diane interrupted. "I would *never* leave her!"

Looking from one to the other, Vicky shook her head to try and think. "Wait! You two want to stay married? I thought you wanted to become a *woman*?"

"It's not somethin' I *wanna* do, Vic!" Joan tried to explain without explaining. "It's more something I have to *try*. For a *while*, anyway. I'll still be John most of the time, but... I have try and be *Joan* sometimes. I *need* to, OK?"

"OK," her sister said softly. "I think I understand. This is something you need to do for yourself to see if it's what you *need*. I get it! It's a pretty big commitment, so I think it's a good idea to just *try* it a while before making up your mind! I think it's very... *responsible* of you!" Pausing she thought ahead. "Um... what about Thanksgiving? You plan on..."

"I'll come to Thanksgiving dinner as John." she reassured her.

"OK! Thanks, John... er... *Joan*! I just don't think Daddy's ready to *see* this! No *offense*, but you'll need to work it up to him... I mean... *him* up to *it*!"

Biting her lower lip again, Joan glanced at her big sister. "Um... what about *Christmas* dinner? I... um... I think I'll *need* to be Joan that night."

"*Why?*" Vicky whined.

"Because it's Christmas night." was all she could answer.

Folding her arms, the older sibling caved. "*Fine!* I *guess* I understand. What about New Years *Eve*? It's your first as a married *couple!*"

Joan looked at her wife. "*See?*"

"It must be *genetic.*" Diane bantered.

"Did I *miss* something?" her sister wondered aloud.

"Just something Joan said the other day when I suggested staying *in* this New Years." Diane related. "Joan said the same thing *you* did!"

"That's... *spooky!*" Vicky giggled. "You never *were* a manly-man, Joh... *Joan!* *Sorry!* Old habits!"

"It's OK." Joan blushed. "I understand."

"Still, I don't want you thinking that I'm being... um... what's the word?"

"*Rude?*" Diane smirked.

"No, that's not... *hey!*"

"Don't tease the *drunk* lady." Joan tittered. "She's my big sis!"

"I like the sound of that, *little* sis!" Vicky laughed along. "Besides, you're just as far gone as *I* am... and on only one drink! *Lightweight!*"

"Good thing neither of you is driving *home* tonight!" Diane pointed out.

"So *anyway*..." Vicky tried to get the conversation back on track. "You're thinking New Years *in* this year?"

"If not, it'll be *Joan's* first New Years." explained Diane. "One or the other."

Vicky huffed. "No last bash with my little bro?" Seeing Joan shaking her head slowly, she sighed. "Fine, I understand. Wonder what *Derek* is gonna think of all this? He can be a bit of an *asshole* sometimes! A *handy* asshole, but *still*!"

"You don't have to tell him right *away*." Joan offered. "I mean, I'm still coming to Thanksgiving as *John*. It can wait until *after* that."

"Alright. One last *holiday* with little bro... then '*Hello, sis!*' I almost can't *wait* to see Daddy's face when you tell 'em!" she slurred.

Finishing her drink, Joan giggled. "Me too! 'Hi Daddy! You have two girls now!' I wonder if he'll try to *punch* me? 'Cuz if he *does*, I'll just *scratch his eyes out!*' Raising her hand, she clawed the air like a cat and giggled more, her sister joining in. "And *then* he'll see what's *what!*"

Laughing together loudly, with Joan no longer even *trying* to sound like John, the two reminisced and laughed for hours before Diane took Joan home and poured her into bed.

When she awoke the next morning, Joan's head was pounding as the alarm sounded ten times louder than normal. Reaching over Diane's slumbering form, she turned it off and dragged herself to the bathroom, showering, changing, and then waiting for the sun to rise. Feeling its approach and the slight pain in her arm, Joan began to seriously cry, and was still doing so when she was once more in John's body and buttoning his shirt on.

The week passed and Friday night Joan didn't change for the first time since the whole thing had started. What she *hadn't* expected was how much she would miss it.

By the time Thanksgiving came and went, life had almost gotten back to normal and Joan felt more like John again as the yearning faded. Still, when the Sunday after the holiday neared sunset, Joan found herself almost giddy to face the next week. Showering and shaving just before sunset while Diane prepared dinner, she sat in the bathroom in her robe, Joan's clothes on the counter, and waited impatiently.

Feeling the first changes, Joan sighed happily, even as mild cramps spoiled the perfection of the moment. Dressing once done, she took the time to style her hair before emerging to enjoy a dinner at home with her wife.

Christmas night was a disappointment. After a disastrous 'coming out' to her father, brother, and brother-in-law, the couple spent the holiday alone. New Years they just stayed in. When Joan came in to work after the holiday, once more stuck in John's body for the next three weeks, she got a surprise.

"John!" Barbara gasped when she saw her employee in a suit and tie. "I... I thought you would be coming into work as... well... *Joan!*"

Stopping in her tracks, Joan looked at her with a terrified expression. "Um... w... what do you *mean*, Barb?"

Standing quickly and making her way around the desk, Barbara Moon put an arm gently around Joan's shoulder and lowered her voice, escorting the woman back out onto the street. "Your sister Vicky's a good friend of my daughter, Jenny! She told Jenny all *about* Joan, and Jenny told *me*! You don't need to pretend on *my* account, Joan! I *know* and it's *OK!* Why don't you go *home*, take off that silly *disguise*, and come back as *yourself!* The girls in the office will be *so* disappointed if you don't! They got you a *cake!*"

Stunned into near speechlessness, Joan stammered. "M... Mrs. *Moon*, I... I'm not *ready* to live full-time! Can't... can't I just come to work as John like *normal*?"

Dismissing her concerns, Barbara scoffed. "Bah! I *heard* what that idiot *father* of yours said when you came out! John Michael was *always* so narrow-minded, even when we were in school together! No! You go *home* and come back when *Joan* is ready for work!"

When the woman smiled, patted her on the shoulder, and left her standing on the sidewalk as she went back inside, Joan didn't know what to do. Stuck for options, she did as instructed and returned home in silence.

Walking back into her bedroom in a near fugue state, she sat on the bed heavily, waking her wife.

"Sweetie? What're you doing *home*? Is something *wrong*?"

"You could *say* that!" Joan mumbled. "Vic told Barb's daughter about *Joan*, who told Barb, who told *me* to come back as Joan! She... she expects me to come to work that way from now *on*! What'll we *do*, honey? I can't look like *Joan* like this!"

After she sat up and absorbed the new wrinkle in their lives, Diane thought a moment. "OK, if Barbara expects *Joan*, then you'll have to be *Joan*!"

"What about my *hair*, Diane!" she sobbed. "I'd *never* pass as Joan with *this*!" she grabbed her now two-inch-long hair, having not bothered with a haircut since deciding she *liked* it long.

"We'll *solve* it, sweetie!" she sighed, once more having to get up early.

"I have to be John during the *day* or else we can't break the curse!"

Looking at her curiously, Diane shook her head to try and clear out the cobwebs. "What makes you say *that*?"

"The words of the curse!" Joan explained. "It goes, '*by night she lives, the day's his role*'! That means I need to be John during the day or else we can't break the curse! Besides, what happens when we *do* break it and I go back to being John *all* the time!"

"What makes you think you should choose *John* after the year's up?"

Looking at her wife curiously, she swallowed. "You mean, you might want Joan for the rest of our *lives*?"

"I want *you*!" Diane exhaled in exasperation. "If that's *Joan*, then that's what I *want*! I want you to be *happy* and you're happier as *Joan* than you *ever* were as John!"

Thinking about what she was saying, Joan shook her head. "But what if there's a part of you that actually *does* care and wants *John*? You could barely *think* about wanting me as Joan last month!"

"Let's just say I'm starting to appreciate having a wife around!" she smirked. "For the *moment*, let's stick to the *immediate* concerns... namely your *job*!" Calling Barbara, she tried to explain that Joan wasn't ready to come to work as herself yet, buying them until the next week to come up with something. After celebrating their first anniversary, Joan went in to work the next day with a set of hair extensions that closely mimicked the hair she had when the change came each month, as well as a new lady's suit.

Stepping in the front door nervously, Joan was certain the moment she did she was going to be looking for a new job. Diane had reassured her several times that she looked nearly the same as the curse made her appear, but still she feared the rejection the way her family other than Vicky had done.

"Good morning, Barb." Joan stated softly and shyly.

Looking up at her, Barbara smiled broadly. "Nice to see you again... *Joan!* Girls?"

At that, Joan heard her co-workers stand and give her a round of applause, which only made her even more embarrassed and self-conscious. Fast-walking to her desk, she tried to just get through the day, but it seemed that everyone in the office 'needed' to talk to her about something that day.

Months passed and a new routine got established. Joan would get up, get ready for work as herself, get through the day, come home, change back into John's clothes and pull her hair back into a ponytail, taking on the role she was meant to by the curse. Her monthly times being Joan became not much more than a hiccup in much the same way it is for most women.

By the time October rolled around again, the two had all but forgotten about the curse. It wasn't until Joan's 'time of the month' was due to end that month when something happened to disturb their equanimity.

Getting out of bed on the Tuesday after her week, Joan went through her routine in preparation for the moment of sunrise when she would change back into John's body. Once again the sun's rays peaked through the window and she was stunned when she did *not* change.

"Diane!" she whispered, shaking the woman's shoulder gently but firmly. "Wake up! I... I'm still *Joan*, honey! It's over a *week* before Halloween and it's happening *again!*"

Rousing quickly, her wife looked at her a moment. "OK, so... just go to *work*, sweetie. Nothing we can *do* about it, right?"

Seeing her point, Joan nodded and finished getting ready, heading in, and going through her day as usual. No one even noticed the difference.

After three more mornings of remaining Joan, she came home that Friday, going through her routine of cooking and cleaning while it worried her. At last Diane came home and Joan almost raced up to her.

"Welcome home, love!" she said with a quick kiss and helping her off with her coat as the temperature outside plummeted. Once settled and enjoying the dinner she'd prepared, she cleared her throat. "Honey? We need to *talk* about this!"

Looking up from her food, it took a moment for Diane to understand what she was talking about. "*Oh*, you mean you not changing back to *John*?"

"*Yes!*" she whined. "I mean, everything I've read about the curse, and curses in *general*, says that my year and a day aren't up until sundown the day after *tomorrow*, and *that's* when I'll have to try and guess what you really want... John or Joan. I don't even know how that's supposed to *work!* Now *this!*"

Irritated by the discussion, Diane shook her head dismissively. "Can't we talk about this *later*, Joan? I had a rough *day!* I also got that *stomach* bug going around and couldn't keep my *lunch* down! I ended up having to work in *records* all day so I didn't spread it around!"

"Oh, *honey!*" Joan consoled her, getting up and checking her forehead with her hand. "You *do* feel a little warm! Why don't you go lie down on the couch? I'll get you your favorite blanket, bring you some soup, and..."

"*Joan!*" she shouted frustratedly. "Just... *stop*, OK? I'm *fine!* I just want to have *dinner*, relax to a good *movie* for a bit, and go to *bed*, OK?"

Nodding shyly, Joan went back to her own food. Once done eating, she washed the dishes before joining Diane on the couch for a movie and cuddle.

That Sunday, the same day she was due to decide, Joan woke to the sound of vomiting coming from the bathroom. Checking on Diane, she found her sitting on the toilet seat with a digital thermometer against her temple.

Hearing the beep from the device, Diane checked it and gulped. "I... I don't have a *temperature*, Joan."

"Well then why are you..." She interrupted herself when it dawned on her what *else* could be causing the vomiting. "Honey? Are you..."

"I think I *might* be." she nodded. "Um... remember last month? The weekend before you became Joan? That was six weeks ago." Getting up, she went to the medicine cabinet and got out the home pregnancy test she'd bought when the two had first gotten married. "Well, it's not past the expiration *yet*, so..."

Waiting the five minutes for the results was nerve wracking. When at last the timer went off and Diane picked up the stick, she stared at it in silence.

"*Well?*" Joan begged. "What *is* it? What does it *say*?"

Diane cracked a smile. "It says you're gonna be a *Mommy!*"

Taken aback, she shook her head. "*I'm* gonna be a *Mommy?*"

With a short laugh, she walked up and kissed Joan. "Yes! You can't exactly be a *Daddy*, so you're gonna be a *Mommy!*"

Stunned a moment, she slowly smiled along with her wife. "I'm... I'm going to be a mother!" Squealing in delight, Joan hugged her tightly.

That night when the sun began to set, she finally knew what she should choose. As the last rays of sunlight vanished, she saw a flash of light and fell into blackness.

Looking around, Joan felt lost and confused. She was standing in the middle of a woodland clearing; a rustic cabin a short distance away with smoke curling out of the stone chimney. Drawn to it, she knocked on the door.

"Come in!" snarled a woman from the other side.

Opening the latch, Joan took a moment to let her eyes adjust to the dark interior before entering. The scent of herbs struck her powerfully as she stepped inside, the door slamming shut behind her and making her spin in place, finally seeing the woman staring at her.

"So! You've had a year and a day and you made an honest effort to embrace womanhood! Now comes the time to..." Pausing in her prepared speech, Maggie looked Joan over quickly. "What the hell is *this*? You're a *woman*!"

"I... I know I am." Joan stammered. "You *cursed* me to be one."

"No, you were a woman *before* you were cursed!" she snapped back. "How in blazes did *you* get infected? It can only afflict childless married *men*!"

Thinking a moment, Joan tried to puzzle it out. "I think you may be confused, ma'am. My... my name is *John*... or at least that's what my *parents* named me... John Henderson."

"They may have named you *John*, but I sense your name is *Joan*! Just what goes *on* here? *Mike*! Mike you blasted *devil*! Get y'er lazy butt *out* here!"

Fading into view before her eyes, a handsome young man of about twenty appeared. Wearing faded blue jeans and a polo shirt, he looked anachronistic in the ancient cottage.

"What is it *now*, Maggie!" the man sighed, not appearing to even notice Joan's presence. "I already *told* you that you can't have a TV, computer,

internet access, or a smartphone! You have that *cauldron* and that's all you *get*! No *freebies*!"

"I didn't call you here for *that*!" she grouched. "I called you about *her*!" she pointed a crooked finger at Joan.

Finally turning to look at the third member of the party, the man looked Joan over and smiled. "What *about* her?"

"That curse of mine's gone *sour*!" Maggie moaned. "It cursed a *woman*!"

"No it didn't." he denied with a smile.

"Yes it *did*!" she insisted. "Think I don't know my own *curse*? She's *got* it!"

"Yep. She sure does." he freely admitted.

Staring at him blankly a moment, Maggie stepped up to him with her hands on her hips. "Don't you be smart with *me*, Mike! You just said my curse didn't nab a woman, then admit she's *got* it! Well how did she *get* it then?"

"She's *trans*." he shrugged. "What's the big *whoop*?"

"What in the world is *trans* supposed to be?" she argued shrilly. "Some newfangled kind of *witch*?"

Shaking his head and laughing, Mike looked at the floor. "If you spent more time gazing into that cauldron watching the *world* change instead of watching reruns of *Bewitched* and *Charmed* all day, you might know what's going *on* out there!"

"Don't give me no *lip*, Mike!" she snapped. "That don't explain *nothin*!"

"Yes it does."

"No it *don't!*"

"Excuse me." Joan interrupted their argument. "Um... may I..."

"Hush up!" Maggie barked. "You stay *out* of this!"

"That's no way to talk to a lady." Mike stated calmly.

"I'll talk how I like!" the witch insisted. "This is *my* purgatory!"

"Still no reason to be *rude* to the poor girl!"

Sighing, Maggie saw she was getting nowhere. "Alright. You explain to me how a *woman* is here trying to break my curse, then! How can she even *be* here if she didn't *get* it?"

Looking at Joan, Mike smiled kindly at her. "Come here, Joan. No need to be afraid."

Stepping closer, Joan swallowed hard. "H... how do you know my name?"

With a quick laugh, Mike held out a hand. "It's my *job* to know!" seeing her tentatively take it, he gently led her to stand next to him. "OK, Maggie. What do you see when you look at her?"

"A *woman!*" the witch growled. "That's the *problem!*"

"Would it surprise you to know she was born in a male body?"

Furrowing her brow, Maggie shook her head. "So she was under a *different* witch's curse before *mine* got her?"

"Nope." Mike stated smugly. "Guess again!"

"Well she didn't *chose* to be a woman on a *whim*! She's got no magic!"

"You're *right*!" he agreed. "She was *made* that way from the *beginning*!"

Puzzling that for a moment, she shook her head dismissively. "That don't make no sense! *Why*?"

"There's *lots* of reasons women and men on Earth are born to the wrong bodies." he shrugged. "In *her* case it was to break your curse... among *other* reasons."

"You mean ta tell me that your Almighty shoved a girl in a boys body, just ta' thwart the curse I've had runnin' for three hundred thirty-three years?"

"Not the *only* reason." he admitted. "It was also so she could have a baby with her wife!"

"*Impossible*!" she cried. "My curse won't *affect* a man whose wife has a baby or who ain't *married* yet! That's what made it the perfect *curse*! The only way out was ta' have their wife love 'em after they spent a year actin' like one half the time and *likin'* it! That's what the *rage* was for! Teach 'em to be nice and *subservient*! *No* woman without his baby would love a man like that!"

"See... that's where you're *wrong*, Maggie." Mike smiled. "Times *changed*. Women *can* and are *allowed* to love other women on Earth now. They finally stopped listening to the *letter* of His words and started listening to the *intent* of them! Joan's wife Diane *loves* her... and they conceived their child *after* your curse took her."

"OK, but she *still* has to guess her wife's secret desire, to have the man or the woman!" Maggie pointed out. "She guesses wrong and the curse *stays*!"

Turning to Joan, Mike raised his brows curiously. "She *is* right, Joan. You have to *choose!*"

Remembering the wonderful gift they'd been given earlier that day, Joan was torn. *I... I want to stay a woman... and I think Diane will love me as one no matter what... but it also means we can't have any more kids... so she might want John just for that reason alone.* Considering everything, Joan looked Maggie in her black eyes.

"I choose to remain Joan."

"Spirits of the wild!" the witch cackled happily. "You guessed *wrong!*"

Joan felt the terror of the moment flood her as thunder roared through the simple wooden building. Falling to her knees, she began to weep.

"Forgive me, Diane! I thought I knew you *well* enough! It... it's *my* fault!"

As the wind roared around the building and the storm outside grew, Mike shook his head and smiled.

"No she didn't." he stated smugly.

The storm dying, silence filled the room.

"She didn't *what?*" the witch asked confusedly.

"She didn't guess wrong."

"Yes she did!" Maggie retorted.

"No she didn't." Mike said calmly.

"She did *so!*" the hag insisted. "Why would her wife *want* a woman?"

"Because I *am* a woman and Diane *loves* me and wants me to be *happy!*" Joan answered after standing back up and drying her eyes. Beginning to glow, Joan felt her feet leave the floor as the light suffused her to the marrow, warming her with the light of love and acceptance.

Michael flew up to her and took her hand as his wings sparkled back into view, guiding her through the wall of the building as it crumbled. "Don't look back, Joan." he warned her.

Hearing Maggie's screams of frustration and anguish as her curse collapsed on itself and ended her eternal rule over a small slice of the afterlife, Joan was tempted by curiosity and empathy to look back, but heeded Mike's advice and kept her eyes looking forward.

Racing into the sky, the world exploded in light and she was once more in her living room, only a moment after sunset.

"Diane!" she shouted as she leapt to her feet.

Startling her away from looking at her phone as she booked a visit to her OB/GYN, Diane clutched her chest. "*Joan!* Don't *scare* me like that!"

Running over to her wife, Joan sank to one knee. "It *happened*, Diane!" she cried tears of joy. "I... was told to choose... and I chose to remain *Joan*... and I was *right!* It *is* what you wanted! You *do* love me! Before I only *believed* it! Now I *know* it!" Taking Diane in her arms, Joan kissed her passionately.

Reveling in the moment, her loving wife smiled into the kiss. Breaking off their passionate embrace, she held Joan at arm's length. "Wait a minute! Does that mean you broke the *curse?* You're Joan *forever* now?"

Joan nodded happily. "It's *done!* I'm Joan now and *forever!*" Placing her hand on Diane's belly, she grinned. "And I'm gonna be a *great* Mommy!"

Epilogue

Looking out the window, Joan smiled slightly as the sun slipped below the horizon, the waxing crescent moon barely visible and poised to set in a few hours. It had been barely a year since that final time she'd transformed, the cause of her happiness. Turning away, she continued to set the table.

"Sweetie?" Diane yelled from their bedroom. "Can you give me a hand?"

"Be right there!" the woman shouted back. Checking the table quickly, she turned to help. "What is it?" she asked, entering the room.

"Can you zip me up?" begged Diane.

"You *used* to be able to *reach*!" Joan quipped as she pulled the zipper up her wife's back, slipping her hands down to rest on Diane's hips lovingly.

With a sly smile, the blonde turned around to face her, resting her arms on Joan's shoulders. "I lost some flexibility during bed rest." she excused. "Two months of not much activity made me lose my limber!"

Kissing her gently, Joan shook her head. "We'll have to *fix* that!" Just when Diane was about to ruin both of their painted lips, the shrill cry of a baby broke the mood. "*Your* turn!" Joan sighed, slipping back and away.

Groaning, Diane's arms fell to her sides. "Oh! Can't you take a *second* turn, sweetie?" she whined. "I still need to fix my hair before they *get* here!"

Half smiling, the dark-haired woman shook her head. "OK, but you know the *deal*! You take the *next* two *and* you owe me a favor!"

"Done!" the exhausted woman agreed in haste, running for the bathroom.

"I'll just put it with all the *others* you owe me for all those *foot* rubs I gave you last June!" Joan laughed as she headed towards the baby's room.

Picking up the wailing four-month-old, Joan pouted. "Aw! What's the *matter*, little Mikey? You can't be *hungry*! Mamma just *fed* you! You're not *wet*, so *you* must have a little *bubble* in your tummy!" she cooed. Grabbing a baby blanket, she flung it over her shoulder easily out of long habit, rested her son against her, and began patting his back. "*There! Mamma* will fix it!"

Joan carried the infant into the living room as she gently bounced him and kept patting his back when the bell rang. Sighing, she headed to the door. "*I got it, honey!*" Stopping her baby care a moment, she peaked outside and smiled. "Come on in!" she said just loud enough to be heard outside.

Opening the door, Janice stepped in from the cool outside and smiled at the mother and baby. "*Hi, Joan!*" she almost whispered as she crept up to the two, grinning at the infant. Stopping short, she was pulled back slightly.

"Will ya' let me help ya' with yer *coat* off first, Jan?" Frank almost laughed. Taking the woman's light coat, he removed his own and hung both up by the door. "*Jeez, woman! The baby's not goin' anywhere!*"

Cooing over the baby boy a moment, Janice finally settled down. "I'm sorry, Joan!" she apologized. "He's just so *adorable!*"

With a light rumble from her son, Joan shook her head as Michael released his gas bubble with only a little spit-up on the blanket. "You can have one of your *own*, you know!" she quipped as she lay her son in the crib that took up one corner of the living room after cleaning his mouth.

Looking over her shoulder at Frank, Janice lowered her voice. "I... I think he might be ready to think about that. Maybe next week we can start trying."

"I hope so." Joan sighed as she gave a quick hug hello to her best friend. "You two *deserve* to move on with life!"

"Thanks ta' *you!*" Frank grinned as he waited his turn to hug his savior. "I'll never fer'git *last* Halloween when I didn't change! Jan had Diane on the line quicker'n *anythin'!* *Speakin'* a' who, where's she *at?*" he looked around.

"Right here!" she chirped, coming out. "Good to *see* you two!" Giving each a hug hello, she gestured to the table. "Come on! Dinner's getting cold!"

The four quickly sat and served, saying a quick prayer of thanks that meant more to them than to most families. Enjoying a moment of peace while baby Michael slept, Joan nodded to her guest. "Oh, Frank? The cabinet door works *much* better now! You don't need to keep *doing* those things, you know!"

"I *want* ta'!" the man spoke around a mouthful of food. "*Least* I can do!"

"The crib and changing table were *more* than enough!" she sighed. "You're gonna start making me *feel* bad for accepting your help! I'm just all thumbs when it comes to being *handy*, though."

"Bah!" the man dismissed her concerns. "I have to do *something* with my new basement workshop! Besides, it makes me feel *useful!* "

"You can be *useful* in about ten days, Frank!" Janice insinuated slyly. "We start trying again then!" Grimacing slightly, the woman moved in her seat to try and get more comfortable.

Frank didn't need to ask what was wrong when he saw it. He *knew*. Reaching out a hand, he held it open to her and smiled at her in sympathy when she took it. "I *get* ya', Jan! It'll *pass...* and at least *you* can *get* somthin' out of it!"

Laughing together, the four continued eating and talking; making the most of their unusual friendship and the pains once shared by all.

A Note from the Author

In case you couldn't tell, this was a humor piece. As in *funny*... as in not to be taken at all or in any way seriously. The whole situation itself is sort of ridiculous... a curse where only married men with no children are forced to experience menstrual cramps from hell every full moon for no reason other than they got bit or scratched by one already so cursed and are men?

Come *on!* This could be written as a *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* episode! (in point of fact, I had *Buffy* in mind a bit when I wrote it, which is why there are elements of drama and horror in it, laced around the big pile of ridiculous)

If anyone has their feelings hurt by reading this story, I *am* sorry. I'm sorry that you ignored all the tags, warnings, cautions, silly dedications, and joke copyright limitations that I threw all over the place to ensure that *everyone* knew this was more a joke than serious TG fiction. The title *alone* should have tipped you off! (I mean, *Curse of the Werewoman? REALLY?*)

I honestly *hope* no one was offended or hurt, but in this case I can't feel bad if you were. Not everything in life has to be taken *seriously*, and sometimes we need to learn to laugh at *ourselves* or we'll never be able to actually *enjoy* who we've fought so hard to become. We've come a long way, baby... and that means being able to take a good ribbing... just like everyone else. As I've had to learn recently, offense is in the *intent*... not the *interpretation*.

This story was inspired by my second co-wife, Rachel. She's an avid reader and noted something missing from TG fiction. Most stories *center* on the TG elements instead of being a normal story that just happens to *include* them. Mostly this is due to us TG authors trying to capture our unique feelings in words... or live out fantasy lives they'd wished they'd had. In any case, we can always use a good laugh... and I hope this did the trick! (or treat!)

Roberta Elder

And the moral of this story, dear readers? Go with the *flow!* (get it?)

About the Author

Writer of four novels that study the human condition from a standpoint of Gender Identity, *Lost Faith*, *Every Day Is Your Last*, *For God So Loved the World...*, and *The Road to Hell*, and her novella *The Wisher's Paradox*, *Curse of the Werewoman* is her first attempt at a comedy short story.

Mrs. Elder was born in the summer of 1973 in Carson City, Nevada to a loving family who named her after a Great Uncle who'd recently passed on. Along with her older sister, she started life in a large family of dozens of aunts, uncles, cousins, great aunts, and grandparents.

Meeting and marrying her first wife Tami in 1999, and meeting her second wife Rachel in 2006, she was finally able to transition from male to female in 2008 with the full support of both. All three were married together in a religious ceremony in 2016, and she does her best to maintain a healthy relationship with the two of them without showing favoritism or preference.

Showing an aptitude for math as a pre-teen, she's now a retired Statistical Data Analyst. Enjoying her early retirement, she currently spends her days with the complex calculus of household budgets, grocery shopping, young adult maintenance (raising two children), and the day-to-day cooking and cleaning of being a housewife, all on top of the writing she began in 2019.

Between being 'Wife and Mother', she finds time to spend with her mother, father, sister, brother-in-law, niece, nephews, and friends. In addition to writing, she enjoys old movies, black and white TV shows, dancing to 80's music, playing tabletop role-playing games and older computer games, target shooting, and discussing everything from theoretical physics to politics.

A staunch conservative libertarian, she most values her faith, family, friends, country, personal liberties, and her right to defend herself from oppression from those who would try to define or limit her based on who or what they think she is, who or what she should be, or what she should believe in.