

# Mountain Drive

---

By Nikki Thong

THE SNOW FELL ON THE OTHER SIDE of the window in large white flakes as the dusk rapidly gave way to a New England winter evening. The fluffy white crystals were already gathering on the shrubberies in the front of the ranch style house covering the multi-colored LED Christmas lights that decorated them. He stared mesmerized by the twinkling red, green, blue and white lights glowing through the soft white blanket of snow covering the bushes in splashes of color. It made the large round bushes look like they were on some alien world in a sci-fi movie.

Nick Wright always liked the effect, it was one of the reasons he loved to cover the bushes in colorful LED lights and prayed for a good snowfall during the holidays, he was getting his wish. He was starting to regret that wish now though. His son always loved the lights under the snow too...his son. Nick exhaled heavily with an audible sigh the warmth of his breath fogging the glass.

“Still coming down out there honey, I guess it’s going to be a really white Christmas this year?” His wife Cynthia said close behind him.

“Yeah, it’s really piling up fast; it’s going to get worse according to the Weather Web. Hell there’s already ten inches on the ground might get another ten by midnight if this keeps up.” He stated dryly. “Spent two hours digging out and uncovering the bushes last week, my back can’t take much more of this.” He half chuckled stretching his back out.

“Well just think what it would feel like if you had to use shovels like your father did, besides you love it, and it’s so pretty on Christmas it’s just not the same for the kids without it.” Cynthia said sneaking up behind him and rapping her arms around his waist and nuzzling her head against his middle back.

“Yeah, no word huh?” Nick asked grasping her hands in his.

“Not since this afternoon you know how the cell reception is in the mountains?” She said squeezing him affectionately.

She was playing it cool forcing an air of calm assurance but he knew his wife of twenty years she was more worried than he was. Twenty plus years as a military spouse had taught her to put on that brave courageous face when inside she was racked with worry and fear. Fear that every time he flew off to some other God forsaken part of the world he might never come home. But she was an Air Force spouse, a pilot’s wife she couldn’t fall apart in front of the children let alone the other spouses.

“You don’t think he tried to drive the Trail in this? He knows how bad it gets when it snows like this these days.” He asked feeling her hands slip quickly from him as she pulled away leaving his back feeling as cold as the stare she gave him when he turned around.

“SHE is as stubborn as HER father and you should remember that about your daughter? How many times do we have to go over this Nicholas?” She asked sternly despite the fact that she wasn’t yelling her use of his full name through his ears like an air raid siren.

“I know, I’m sorry sweetheart...I just...forget sometimes.” He answered sheepishly. Dozens of combat missions in the most advanced jet fighters the world has ever known and he’d rather fly through anti-aircraft fire in a hang glider than hear her use his full name in that tone. Despite her beauty in her middle age that icy stare could make a hardened Drill Sergeant cower in fear.

“Well get it straight in your head mister before she gets here you don’t want to hurt her feelings, not on Christmas. No arguments, no criticism and no suggestions especially in front of her younger brother and sister, please?” She said firmly as she leaned in closer to look up into his eyes. She slid her palms up his muscled chest and smiled her face softening taking a more tender tact.

“This is the first Christmas we’ve all been together for in two years honey; I just want it to be nice, calm and cheerful like when the kids were young OK?” She said smiling brightly he couldn’t resist that look and she knew it so he just sighed deeply relenting.

“Got it ma’am, greeting card Merry Christmas, not dysfunctional sit-com. Your right I want that too sweetheart believe me I do. It’s just been a while. Heck I haven’t seen hi...her in almost a year, between the last deployment before I decided to retire and Nick, uh, Nikki away at college. I just haven’t adjusted to it yet like you have.” He tried to explain his wife patted his chest and turned to adjust an ornament on the tree.

It was true to; he hadn’t had the time to adjust to it all he was on another desert deployment after the Israeli’s and Egyptians started going at it again. Then the Saudi’s wanted protection from Iran who was threatening to use a nuke on the oil fields which they did or tried to. Luckily for all concerned it went off course and exploded in the Persian Gulf blowing up one of Iran’s own oil platforms.

Nick’s mind drifted to recent history and the mess it turned into; so much for covert intelligence and Iran’s promises they weren’t building nuclear weapons. The Israeli’s put a dent in that program for the foreseeable future though after they launched three of their own and laid waste to the Iranian’s entire weapons development area. Then Hamas tried to smuggle a dirty bomb into Jerusalem which the Moussad, Israel’s secret service, knew about and coalition forces took out inside southern Lebanon with an F-35 air strike which he flew lead on. The dirty bomb poisoned a bunch of olive trees and some desert with radiation for about a hundred years, which Lebanon wasn’t too happy about but they were warned about playing both sides.

Some people just can’t get along no matter what you try to do. Oddly, after all that horror the Middle East has been a little quieter lately.

So being involved on the front lines of all that turmoil he had missed the fact that his own son was fighting a battle of his own, within himself, Lt. Colonel Nick Wright III. felt he had earned a little slack. It wasn't like he had avoided it on purpose or shut his son out; he had staying alive to worry about.

He talked to Nick IV, a couple of times a month all the times he was gone, he never once tried to explain anything to him or tell his father what he was going through. Guess there won't ever be a Nick the fifth now, not important just an old tradition he thought to himself, can't go on forever.

Of course Cynthia said she knew all along, had suspicions about it since Nikki was small but never said anything. Dads are usually the last to know the base shrink told him when he went to talk about it to someone. Hell, he figured his son was just a typical teenager, growing his hair in the latest fade, piercing his ears and wearing wild clothes, a good kid but a little rebellious at times. He wasn't much different himself as a teenage boy drove his father and mother crazy till he settled down. He had faith his son would find his way, he was a good kid, smart did pretty good in school didn't get in trouble; he was proud of and loved him.

This had totally caught him by surprise though; he knew that was a cop out though. In reality he felt guilty, guilty for not being home more. If he was maybe he would have seen it. At least could have been there to help his son somehow, not to try and change his mind or anything like that. God knows that became abundantly clear to him when he came home on leave and they met with his son's therapist shortly after he had turned seventeen. Thinking back it still bothered him how he spent most of the time just staring at his son in shock listening to them. At first he kept thinking it was all a joke they were playing on him, it didn't take too long for him to realize this was no laughing matter.

Gender Identity Misalignment was what the therapist had called it and it was very strong in Nikki for both physical and mental reasons his doctor explained. If transitioning to the gender he felt he should be was what would make his son happy with his life than all they could do was help anyway they could. His wife, Cynthia was right about one thing his new daughter was as stubborn and pigheaded as her old man, which he had to admit he was proud of her for that too. Nikki didn't back down from anything. After Nikki turned eighteen there was little his parents could do anyway except support their child and love him or her which Nick didn't have a problem with.

So while he was in the desert flying combat sorties his son was shopping for a new wardrobe, no longer hiding but showing the rest of the world who he really was; a girl and a darned pretty one at that from the pictures and video he had seen in recent months. The important thing was she seemed so much happier from what he could tell from their recent video calls, he knew that was what really mattered after all.

Nikki or Nichole as she called herself at times now was tall and slender at five nine, with a soft featured narrow face, jet black hair and pale skin like her mother. It was those piercing brilliant green eyes surrounded by thick long black lashes that really set him or her apart though; even from the rest of the family who all had brown eyes. Despite any inside family jokes they all knew whose side of the family his son got those green eyes from, his grandfather.

The part that had really bothered the elder Nick the most was that since Nikki was sixteen Cynthia had known and given permission for his son to start taking certain drugs to block his normal male puberty from kicking in. They had done this without even consulting him in the least which made him feel cheated a little and left out. Cynthia reasoned that if Nikki changed his mind later then it wouldn't really do much harm according to the specialists they had seen.

It was pretty standard in cases like his these days he was told after. If his puberty was allowed to continue normally it would be worse in the long run. Besides, they explained after, that his body wasn't making nearly the amount of testosterone a normal male makes anyway which did explain a lot. Despite his long absences he knew his son very well; Nikki would not change his mind.

His son told him a year ago in a tearful video call that he was sorry for not talking to his Father but had to do it; he couldn't stand the thought of growing weird body hair or having to shave and other changes he feared his body might go through. He begged his father not to blame his mother that she didn't really have a choice. As if the constant separation wasn't hard enough on a marriage they had this to deal with too. It wasn't fair they should have at least trusted him, water under the bridge now, so he let it go. He couldn't hold it against his eldest child, not after that call.

Between the never ending deployments, absences in his children's lives, especially Nikki, he made the decision to shorten his military career and retire at twenty years. Might as well get out before the next crisis and he was still healthy enough to enjoy his family.

"Mommy, has Nikki called yet?" Jenny the youngest daughter asked.

"No sweetie, she's probably in that part of the mountains that gets bad cell service I'm sure we'll hear from her in a couple of hours. She has to drive slowly in the snow too." Cynthia answered her eight year old daughter with practiced reassurance.

"Nikki, drive slow? Yeah right, she drives as crazy as Dad." Her older brother added with a chuckle.

Nick stared at his 12 year old son who followed his younger sister into the room, taking note that he as well as his sister had seemed to have already adapted to their sibling's changes. Kids accepted change quicker than adults they weren't as hard wired yet to resist or fight it like thickheaded adults. In a way he envied them.

"Is that so and what do you know about it?" He asked his son ruffling the mop of unruly dark hair on his head with an easy chuckle.

"Don't you remember how we used to drive around in that old Talon pretending we were in a jet fighter zipping between slower cars shooting them with our fake missiles Dad? Till she slid on that patch of ice and bashed in the side of the car on a tree, boy were you pissed." He said laughing loudly and making missile shooting sounds his sister giggling beside him jumping up and down in a circle copying him in a pitch so high he thought glass would break.

“Alright you two settle down please I don’t want someone falling into the tree before your sister gets here.” Cynthia warned them but couldn’t help snickering.

“Yeah I remember, we can laugh now but it wasn’t funny then. You two could have been hurt Wes. I’m just glad you’re around to laugh about it now.” Their father said and turned to look out the window sighing quickly his smile faded as he saw the snow falling harder and the darkness growing. Please call or something, he prayed to himself then added God, please watch over my daughter on this holiest of nights.

+++++

Nikki squinted through the front windshield trying to see between the gigantic snowflakes that bombarded the glass coating it like splats of white paint from a paintball gun. She adjusted the wiper blade control for the twentieth time cursing aloud to herself and was startled by two high pitched pings.

“Sorry, no artist or song named piece of shit found in music archive...web search not available.” The soft feminine voice of the car’s onboard computer informed her in its formal British accent. She had forgotten she had activated the music search function and giggled hearing the car curse.

“Disregard Maggie, call home again please?” She asked it for the tenth time in an hour.

“Unable to connect, no signal available at this time.” It told her again.

“Damn it I can hardly see these wipers are useless the snows coming down too hard. These flakes are as big as Maple leaves. Why didn’t I leave this morning like Mom suggested?” She said aloud Maggie; the name she had chosen for the car’s onboard personal computer pinged twice again and asked her to repeat the request.

“Never mind Maggie just play something, how about an old Rush song? I know 2112 its kinda fitting for this, and turn up the defroster maybe it will melt the snow as soon as it hits the window.” Nikki giggled softly as the song started. “Nothing like good old rock and roll when driving in a snow storm, huh Daddy?”

She thought of her Dad listening to this album when she was younger playing air guitar and bobbing his head like a teenager. It was something even her grandfather did listening to the old classics and she loved them both for that love of music that she shared with them. It was why she took up guitar and loved to sing all the time and was even in the choral group at Boston College where she was studying Bio-engineering with a minor in music for fun.

She was terrified going to school at first being away from home wasn’t the real reason for her fear, it was more complicated than that. It was going to school as a transgendered person in a strange city without her family around to support her when she was feeling lost and out of place. She had only been living full time as a girl for a few months when she went away to Boston; she had a right to be nervous she knew. It was a big school in a big city but it was much more than that she was afraid people would shun her; to her delight she found the opposite completely.

She loved it at school and was thriving. She had friends and was lucky enough to get a roommate who she went to school with during her senior year of high school. Her name was Molly she was fun and cool and they were the same size and could share clothes, and Nikki loved pretty, feminine clothes. What girly girl doesn't?

She had dropped off her roommate Molly, at her folk's house in Greenville and headed over the Mohawk Trail towards her parents' house. Her roomie tried to get her to spend the night and wait it out fearing the storm was going to be worse than first thought. But no she had to be brave and too positive thinking she could beat it. Can't beat Mother Nature, the snow was falling with a vengeance once she was headed through the Mohawk Forest.

"So much for global warming, maybe I'll transfer to Florida State next semester." She snickered aloud thinking about heated discussions in one of her science classes about whose fault the recent cooling trend was this time.

She enjoyed arguing the facts and evidence and validating her hypothesis in class and had garnered a reputation among her peers and the University faculty as an impassioned, knowledgeable debater. However, recently she had let her passion get the better of her while arguing that there was no real evidence that man alone was responsible for the recent cold weather trend and that weather was just weather and changes for a variety of reasons, mostly because of the huge solar activity in 2013. The young man arguing that it was all man's fault and citing faulty science and the long debunked carbon emissions theory, had called Nikki a "know it all want-a-twat".

Nikki was so enraged she flung her book at the pigheaded jock hitting him in the head. Lucky for her, her professor and a few others stuck up for her and the reviewing council dismissed the incident with apologies from both parties. The really funny thing about that whole incident was that a couple of weeks later she actually started dating that very same name calling jock. For a short time she thought it could turn into something serious but it cooled when she wouldn't give it up quick enough. It was Nikki's first sort of relationship as a pre-op female short lived as it was it gave her a glimpse of what the future might hold for her as a girl.

She didn't walk around school with a sign around her neck, but people that knew her knew what she was. She didn't hide it and with the support of others around her she became more open and confident and happy in her changing skin. Things had changed big time in the last few years. There was a female Senator that was Transsexual and two transgendered people in Congress. Laws had been changed and definitions with them, even Gender Identity Misalignment were no longer listed as only a mental health issue but a physiological one too. People's entire outlook on the matter had changed too along with the healthcare issues.

Thanks to those brave pioneers she was reaping the benefits, not to say it was still a cake walk there would always be people who feared, disliked even hated anything that screwed with their idea of normal. Those that had suffered so much before her she thanked in her prayers every night and vowed to do her part to help others too. It was why she made the choice to study bio-engineering in school. It was where, along with medical science, that huge advancements in the field of genetic gender manipulation and cellular tissue growth had been made.

Big changes were made in the third revision of the affordable healthcare act, after the failures of the previous versions. One of the first major improvements made was in stem cell use and organ growth which took advantage of incredible advancements in the past twenty years.

Nikki thought about how much had changed since her grandfather was Nikki's age. Her grandfather was in his sixties now but still a vital, warm, funny man with a quirky sense of humor. He loved rock and roll especially metal and still sang like the front man of a heavy metal band though his back caused him a lot of pain when he tried to head bang. Nikki loved him dearly; they had a very special bond, and shared a very special secret.

She was the only one in the family who knew the truth about her grandfather, sadly she wouldn't get to see him this Christmas she hoped she could soon. He lived in the middle of the country too far to visit this holiday. But she hoped she could see him soon so they could talk and he could see how happy she was now that her secret was long gone.

The secret they shared was that like her he too had long struggled with his gender and feelings of not being right inside and out. She was twelve years old when she was visiting one summer back then grandma was still alive, and he asked her if she ever felt different. Very carefully he explained what he meant and prodded her about her feelings.

How could he know, was she that transparent? At first Nikki tried to deny it afraid to admit how she felt still to herself never mind her namesake. When she saw the pain in his bright green eyes that were older mirrors of her own; she knew the truth right away...he was just like her.

They talked and cried for hours that first day as each one bore their souls and they laughed too; especially when he took her shopping at the mall and bought Nikki her first sundress. It was a lovely light lilac with straps over her slender shoulders a princess bodice and gathered skirt that floated around Nikki's slender legs about mid-thigh. The dress had the prettiest floral embroidery around the round neckline in dark purple and green.

He helped Nikki find a pair of cute little wedge sandals and she picked out her first set of matching panties and a padded training bra in a pretty light pink made of a soft, silky material. Until that day everything else she ever wore had been "borrowed" from a friend's sister or her mom, which didn't fit right but still made Nikki feel special and happy.

She shook like a leaf trying the outfit on in the dressing room and she started to cry when she saw his eyes reddened with tears looking at her when she came out to show him. He hugged her tightly and told her how beautiful she was, it was the first time Nikki ever heard those words and the first time she felt real.

Later they walked around the mall a bit more then they went for an ice cream cone and fed the ducks at a lovely park. Nikki's hair was not very boyish looking wearing it in one of those short bob's that a lot of the EMO type kids wore then and being so young and slender no one gave her a second glance. She even went on the swings and made friends with a couple of girls her age playing on the playground while her grandfather watched.

Afterwards on the way home they stopped at a convenience store to change in the bathroom back into his shorts and become a boy again he couldn't believe how sad he felt, even though he still

had the panties on. Nikki's grandfather asked him how he felt and if it was just the pretty clothes or something more that made him feel happier before. Nikki thought silently for several miles looking out the window when she finally turned to her grandfather her cheeks covered in tears he had his answer.

When they got home grandpa helped her sneak the clothes into her suitcase in the spare room she slept in so grandma wouldn't find out. She would not understand he told Nikki. A year later, at thirteen, he thought Nikki was old enough to understand more of his very private life. He told her how his wife, had found out by accident only a little about his secret and hated and resented him for it for most of their marriage. That he was not the man she married but some kind of cross-dressing freak, they never spoke about it again but never loved the same again either.

They just existed for the sake of their children in a very sad, loveless, monogamous but platonic marriage Hell. He never had the courage to tell her the real truth, how he had lived a lie his entire life crying alone in heartache sharing his secret with a few friends like himself on the internet.

But never the woman that he had once loved dearly and bore his two children, he never thought he had the right to burden her with his sad truth. He had made his bed when he was younger in the dark ages of the sexual and gender revolution; because of his ignorance and fear and worse the ignorance of those around him then.

Strange though all those years later he finally told his mother before she died and she told him she always suspected why he was so sad. Had found his hidden clothes many times but the one time she chose to ask him he said it was just a phase and he was fine and she never asked again.

Her grandfather was far from fine, but his mother told him he should have at least told her she would have done anything she could have to make him feel happy about himself. She would have accepted him as her daughter and so would his father, something he always suspected but was too afraid, confused or ashamed to speak of. Those were such lonely ignorant times for so many.

Nikki didn't fully understand the real meaning of the deep hearted torturous existence her grandfather had lived for so many years. Watching the world change around him and pass him by losing his youth and feminine beauty year after year, because he could have been a pretty, happy girl she knew that from the few pictures he had. Seeing the internet come and miss his chance again realizing there were others like him and what he was but still he just existed in despair and pain. Watching pretty younger transgendered people having what he missed what he could have had and being happy, seeing medical science change and people's views, laws and hearts.

He so envied them, yet was joyously happy for them too and spent a lot of time writing stories and blogs and chatting in support groups about his story and listening hoping to help anyone else. But the envy and regret ate away at him every day like a cancer as he watched the calendar change year after year like his once handsome face.

Then when Nikki was seventeen and she and Mom had come for grandma's funeral alone because her father was deployed at a secret location and could not get back home. Nikki had been on the hormones and stuff for almost a year and living as a girl for the past few months. She



showed up at her grandparents' house with mom at her side wearing a stylish short sleeve baby doll dress in black Rayon with a flora and sheer lace overlay, black open toed pumps, stockings, and a black headband with a silver bow on top of her thick shiny long black hair. Nikki's makeup was simple yet perfect, it was the first trip as her true self and with her mother and she was happy despite the reason they were there.

When her grandfather first saw Nikki standing on the porch his eyes lit up as bright as the sun in instant recognition and without pause wrapped her up in his arms hugging her tightly.

"Finally I know why I had to suffer all these years. It was all for you my lovely granddaughter...all for you." He sobbed knowing the truth at last and Nikki joined him crying tears of joy and acceptance. "I am so happy for you my darling Nikki, so very happy and proud to meet you granddaughter."

Nikki's Mom was crying too, she knew she made the right decision it couldn't be any clearer if lightning had struck her in the head. That week Cynthia became the second person to know grandpa's secret and that she wasn't the first to learn of Nikki's after all. She was perfectly fine with that too when she learned the full truth she was so happy that her husband's father could finally have the answer to the lifelong question he had been asking God since he was a child. Why?

+++++

Nikki glanced at the speedometer then the clock as she carefully urged her small car to stay in the middle of the single lane snow covered road. At this pace she wouldn't get to her folks house till New Year's never mind Christmas day. This drive normally took about four hours she had been driving more than five already and still had the worse part to go. She had to be patient though and maintain a constant speed, guiding her car through the snow covered road, no sudden turns or stops eyes on the road. So far on the road she hadn't seen any ice just unending falling snow in her headlights, no big drifts yet either luckily. But as she trudged through the mountainous road she also had not seen a single car in hours, she was alone.

She didn't mind the empty road at least no one would hit her if she drifted in the lane, she could take up the whole road plowing through deeper and deeper snow. What she really didn't like was how this compact car handled in the snow a few miles back she hit a small drift and the car veered to the left suddenly as the wheels caught. Nikki frantically fought powering through it and regained control quickly her heart pounding, she knew a heavier car or SUV would never have done that. These cars weren't built for these conditions, too light, too flimsy.

The worse thing was she wished she had someone to talk to; the snow illuminated by her headlights falling and swirling sometimes came straight at her causing a tunnel effect that was mesmerizing. Her Daddy had warned her many times to stay alert and not get hypnotized by the effect and fall asleep or drive off the road. He called it target fixation a term all fighter pilots knew well and had claimed many heroic aviators in the early days of flying.

She was climbing a steeper grade taking her higher nearing the top of the mountain now soon she would be on the decent side heading towards Lanesboro. At least she thought she was. The snow was falling heavier and blowing sideways past her car across the road as she drove between

small pine trees. Somehow she had missed Route Eight and was driving through the Greylock Mountain State Reservation. Between the visibility and the snow masking everything she was afraid of trying to turn around on the narrow road fearing getting stuck, so she trudged on.

In better weather this was her favorite part, she liked to stop and look out over the countryside below especially in fall when the leaves were turning colors. It was the most beautiful place to see fall foliage in the world. People came from all over to see it in the right spot when the sun hit it just right the brightly colored leaves made it look like the mountain was on fire. But she had never driven it in conditions like this.

She would not be stopping tonight. She hit a small drift again her car protested briefly sliding to the right a little. Nikki tapped the accelerator and held the wheel correcting easily and continued on rounding a slight bend cresting the mountain. She was on the downhill side finally. Her fingers ached as she realized she had the wheel in a death grip and relaxed a little shaking her right hand out and flexing it.

“Relax girl, it’s gonna be fine just keep driving, only another thirty miles or so, almost home.” She said giving herself a little pep talk. “Maggie, call home please.”

“Unable to comply, no signal available.” Maggie informed her again.

“Damn snow or ice probably knocked out a tower.” Nikki guessed.

She rounded another turn sloping downwards then curved back up again following the contours of the mountain taller trees lining the road for a short distance. The large snow covered branches arched over the road like a tunnel of brilliant white crystal looking like a fantasy movie in the cars white halide lights.

“Looks pretty sorta like the ice planet Hoth from Star Wars, Dad would love this. Hmmm snows pretty thick on the branches too, looks cold out there at least it’s nice and warm in here.” She noted looking up through the glass. “Seems like it might be letting up Maggie.”

“Repeat request please?” Maggie answered Nikki shock her head smiling at the stupid car.

“What’s the use of a talking car that doesn’t really talk back to you?” She giggled. “Not only that but I suddenly need to pee, great huh, any suggestions?”

“No? Figures. Maggie nearest public rest room?” She asked the car but not expecting a reply.

“Closest possible match to your request, Johansson Christmas Tree Farm and Gift Shop five point seven miles ahead from your current location.” The computer informed her.

“What, a Christmas Tree farm? No way, how strange I never noticed a Christmas tree farm up here before. Hmmm, I doubt they are open on Christmas Eve.” Nikki guessed Maggie as usual did not compute.

Nikki drove on tapping her foot and squeezing her thighs together trying to ignore the growing urge to tinkle. She was not pulling over in the snow and peeing on the side of the road she had never done it in her life and she was not about to now, she could hold it like a lady.

A popular top forty song was playing on the entertainment system Nikki liked and she was singing along with the female vocalist imitating her voice perfectly. She rounded a deep curve through a grove of heavy trees then the road opened into a clearing diving downward steeply. Ahead the wind whipped the snow across the road whitening out ahead of her catching Nikki by surprise, she couldn't see a thing. She sat bolt upright alert for any possible dangers as the snow swirled around her little car.

“Warning, warning, collision hazard, collision hazard...” Maggie pinged sharply her mechanical female British accent calling out potential danger.

“What the heck...I can't see a thing...Oh my God!” Nikki suddenly exclaimed as the snow cleared slightly revealing a huge snow coated limb across the road.

The whiteout stretched across the road blinding Nikki to what lie ahead as she followed the snow covered road downward, besides the tree limb what she also couldn't see was that the snow here had drifted two feet deep at an angle half across the road. At the same time as she hit the steep drop the wheels slid on the icy slope of the road the car picking up speed heading for the large limbs and the drift.

Nikki gasped sharply seeing the shadowy limbs jutting out of the white across the road like the tentacles of a great behemoth. She took her foot off the accelerator and lightly tapped the brake; the wheels locked. The little car veered to the right aiming for the angled drift ahead. Nikki pulled the steering wheel trying to slide the car sideways hoping to avoid the limbs and the drift. The car slammed sideways into the drift jarring Nikki her shoulder impacting against the driver's door her head bounced off the window.

The light little car slid along the thick piled snow drift following it down the hill towards the frozen creek bed stunned from hitting her head she screamed for the car to stop and not go in the creek. She got her wish as the car stopped abruptly hitting a metal guard rail hidden inside the snowdrift. Nikki was flung forward her seatbelt locking and holding her in place when suddenly the airbag inflated in a flash.

The rapidly expanding gasses inflated the impact protection system just as it hit her chin, then by a freak event it popped with a sharp report like a gunshot. Nikki had chosen to wear a three inch long beautiful sterling silver Gothic cross her mother had gotten her last Christmas. The horizontal part of the cross had caught between the seatbelt and Nikki's underwire padded Wonderbra pointing the bottom straight at the air bag.

The ornate Gothic Crucifix had a very sharp edge at the bottom and impacted the rapidly deploying airbag which exploded. The edge of the bag slapped Nikki across the face and neck knocking her out; the hot gasses luckily escaped so fast it only pinked her skin a little rather than burning her.

Nikki groggily woke slowly minutes after the impact still stunned looking around the inside of the vehicle. A Christmas song remix was playing by some pop artist while Maggie was constantly reporting that she had been in an accident. The computer was repeating over and over a list of damage and asking Nikki if she required medical assistance but that there was no signal to call anyone.

“Maggie shut up please, stop talking...I’m...I’m alright I think...oh my shoulder hurts a little. At least the engine’s still running, can we drive is the question?” Nikki asked her voice soft and a little hoarse and looked around rubbing her left shoulder then moving it slowly. Her neck and shoulder hurt probably from the seatbelt and airbag she guessed. “It’s just sore. Can...can we drive Maggie?”

“Drive system disabled due to airbag deployment until reset.” She reported.

“Well reset it and let’s go?” Nikki asked pushing the airbag remains out of the way and grasping the steering wheel.

“Unable to comply, reset can only be performed by qualified technician.” Maggie explained.

“Well that’s stupid. What do I do now? Call home?” Nikki requested as usual there was no signal.

“I can’t just sit here not on Christmas Eve, I have to get home. No one’s going to come for ages. Maggie can’t you send out some kind of emergency signal?”

“GPS emergency locator beacon was activated immediately after impact recovery time due to storm unknown.” Maggie informed her.

“Oh this sucks!” She exclaimed frustrated and a little scared of being stuck here for who knew how long.

“Oh no what the...? Great! Just great I wet my panties. Can it get any better?” She groaned in frustration.

Nikki lifted the hem of the dress she was wearing revealing her long shapely legs covered in silky, sheer, sparkling, silver Lurex tights. She felt the crotch of her tights and panties confirming her fears they were definitely wet as was the seat of her dress; she felt her throat tighten and her eyes well with frustrated tears. Nikki slumped back against the seat and closed her eyes breathing slowly to calm herself like her father had taught her trying to think.

“Maggie, how far is that Christmas Tree farm?” She asked after a moment sitting up quickly.

“The Johansson Christmas Tree Farm and Gift Shop are approximately one point five miles from this location on this road on the left hand side.” Maggie replied.

“Not too far, I’m gonna walk it.”

“Standard procedure after an accident is for passengers to remain with the vehicle until help arrives...” She protested.

“Stop nagging, help isn’t coming. I am going to help myself, what time is it Maggie?”

Maggie told Nikki that it was 20:39 in the evening on December 24<sup>th</sup> 2022. Nikki had Maggie record a message to her folks telling them briefly what happened, that she was OK and where she was going to get help. She told the computer to keep trying to send the message to her parent’s phone numbers and to play it for them when she got a connection. Nikki slipped easily into the back seat and exited the vehicle through the rear passenger door, as soon as she got outside the wind whipped snow around her face and body.

She tried to get into the trunk but found it frozen and without tools couldn’t get it open. She doubted she could drag her suitcase far anyway but she wanted to get more clothes she was not dressed for a winter excursion. The wind tugged at her dress as she pulled her light silver wool swing coat on buttoning the three buttons and pulling the faux fox fur trimmed hood over her head. The coat only came down to her upper thigh but it would keep her upper body warm at least.

Nikki said goodbye to Maggie and grabbed the pink and black plaid overnight bag in her thin gloved hand and slung it over her shoulder. Without looking back Nikki drudged off in her calve length white suede boots with the three inch wedged heels into the snowy night.

+++++

“Honey it’s almost nine. I’m worried, we have to do something.” Cynthia told her husband.

“I know me too. The RA at the dorm said she definitely left, her cars gone. Maybe it got too bad and she stopped at a motel?” He said knowing it was a slim chance; there were not many places to stop on the route she normally took.

“Weather says it’s a full blown Nor’ Easter. Rudolf couldn’t get through this.” Wes piped up sitting on the floor playing with the Christmas village under the tree.

Normally his mother would tell him to leave it alone or warn him to not break anything most of the stuff was antiques passed down through the family for three generations. The majority came from his granddad, which always had a large Christmas Village display and gorgeously decorated Christmas tree. He had passed it down to his son’s family a couple of years ago after Grandma passed and all the kids moved away it was too much for him to bother with now so he divided it up amongst his two sons and his daughter so their families could enjoy it. Some of the buildings and figurines belonged to his great grandmother and were over fifty years old.

The only thing Dad said Granddad kept was the large wooden manger he built by hand for his wife to house the large Nativity figurines she had bought when they first got married. Wes remembered one particular Christmas at Granddad’s when he was six and Nikki was about 12 and they were looking at it. The figures were large and beautifully hand painted porcelain from Italy. The Three wise men eight inches tall and brightly colored carrying golden boxes decorated with colored crystals like jewels as offerings to the baby Jesus.

Granddad would let young Wes pretend to pet the large sheep, oxen and jewel decorated camel as they watched the bright twinkling colored LED lights that lit the inside of the large manger. On Christmas Eve like every year since Wes's own Father was a baby, at midnight they would put the two inch long porcelain baby Jesus in his cradle. Then they turned on the shimmering lights that light under the cradle Baby Jesus and the large Angel behind the baby glow. To two small children it enhanced the majesty and meaning of Christmas, it made it special not just about getting presents.

Nikki's favorite thing of all though was the large three foot tall Angel dressed in a brilliant white, silky, flowing gown and large white and golden wings. She had bright blond hair with a golden halo and light pale porcelain skin on her delicate face and bright green eyes. She held a lighted fake candle in her left hand and moved her arms, wings and head as if calling people to join her to celebrate the Saviors' birth.

The angel's name was Noel, it said so on a plaque on her ornate stand but Granddad said her real name was Nikki and she was very special. Granddad said the angel looked like Nikki.

"It does not the angel is a girl and it has blond hair." Wes giggled thinking granddad was teasing.

"Yes it has blond hair, but it has Nikki's green eyes and the same skin and face, see?" Granddad pointed out.

"Yeah kinda I guess." Wes shrugged.

"How do you know the angel is a girl? I've known this angel for many years and I don't know." Granddad said Wes shrugged staring at the angel then looked to his older brother kneeling and staring at the angel with his head cocked smiling angelically.

Of course this was when Nikki was still Wes's older brother but Nikki asked him why the angel was special and if it was magical. Granddad whispered something in his brother's ear and he nodded his head smiling brightly and hugged Granddad around his neck. Wes didn't hear what Granddad told his twelve year old brother but he heard what Nikki said back to him.

"But why didn't you Granddad?" Nikki asked.

"It's too late for me sweetheart but not for you. It's not about magic kids; it's about belief, belief in yourself. If you really want it and believe in yourself and work hard you can be whatever you want, that's the magic." Granddad told them.

That night before they went to bed Wes saw Nikki kneeling in front of that Angel his hands together in prayer with tears on his rosy cheeks. He prayed like that every night that Wes knew after that Christmas Eve, yet it was only last year that Wes finally figured out what his older brother was praying for all those years. He was glad his brother's prayers had finally been answered.

+++++

The wind swirled the snow around her as she marched on fighting against it taking careful steps through snow that at times reached her knees. She thought she was walking in the road still but in the darkness and the snow in her face she was not totally sure. She was thankful for the fur trimmed hood on the swing coat which she clutched tightly closed around her neck, it at least kept her head and face warm and protected from the wind.

She was dreading her choice for being girly and fashionable on this drive wearing a dress instead of jeans or dress slacks. She had found this gorgeous dress she thought would be perfect for Christmas Eve and meeting her father face to face for the first time. The dress was mostly white with wide shoulder straps and a round neck line decorated with silver and glass stones and covered enough on top and dipped lower in back. It was a Poly-Rayon blend and the skirt had a light iridescent sheer silver overlay with silver glitter all over that sparkled in the light. The skirt flowed beautifully when she moved with white tulle double layered underskirts to fluff it out a little the hem stopping just past mid-thigh with a shiny satin silver sash that tied in a long pretty bow in back.

It was feminine, girly and modest but sexy especially with the silver glittering strappy heels she planned to change into later. She also had a silver sheer Lurex sparkling wrap for her shoulders and the silver Gothic crucifix and sparkling silver and crystal angel wings dangling from each ear her mother had bought her she thought was the perfect holiday theme. Nikki hoped that showing up dressed in something so girly and feminine it would make her first meeting with her father a little more comfortable for him.

Right now though as she fought the wind driven snow she was wishing she had worn skinny jeans and knee high boots and changed later. Nikki paused pulling her hood back a little to survey her surroundings hoping to see a light or sign for this Tree Farm. She had to be close she guessed she had walked at least a mile though with nothing but trees and white all around it was hard to tell if she was really on the road still. She could be standing in a cow pasture for all she knew. She pressed on thinking she could see a hump on the left side of the road that might be a snow covered fence and followed it.

She had been walking up a slight hill for a few minutes and now the ground seemed to be leveling out standing in an area with thick pine trees on both sides of her. The wind had picked up again blowing the snow into her face so she walked leaning sideways into it her eyes nearly closed. One thing at least since she started, her wet panties were no longer as cold on her skin either they had dried or she was too numb to feel them anymore.

She pulled her hood back again blinking against the snowflakes and cupping her hand over her eyes examined the left side of the road looking for any markings or signs and thought she saw the posts of a gate on each side of a snow covered driveway a few yards ahead. She was getting really cold now her hand gripping her bag was numb never mind her legs, face, and ears while fairly well protected at first were feeling the effects of the long hike.

“Oh thank God, please let this be it.” She prayed and headed towards the opening she did not want to freeze to death on Christmas Eve and was regretting leaving the car now.

Lifting her head she saw through the snow a large curved sign on large posts over the open gates, it read Johansson Christmas Tree Farm with green Christmas tree shapes on each side of the sign

and on the sides of the gates. Her heart raced with excitement at the hope of rescue and felt a surge of adrenalin pump though her cold weary body. Nikki clutched her bag and pulled her hood back up and walked through the gate she thought she could see the dark shapes of buildings but it was too dark and snowy to be certain.

Suddenly she heard a blaring horn with her numbing ears behind her and spun around fighting her hood and the blowing snow to see what it was. She screamed as she saw bright white lights frighteningly close blind her sensitive green eyes. Vertigo overwhelmed her like she was spiraling down a deep tunnel then blackness and cold.

+++++

“When did you last speak to your daughter Colonel Wright, you’re sure she took The Mohawk Trail to North Adams?” State Trooper Evans asked.

“She left from Boston and was going to drop off her roommate in Greensville then take the Eight towards Lanesboro we live between there and Pittsfield Trooper Evans, we didn’t speak to her before she left but she was supposed to leave sometime after four PM. Her dorm RA said her car is definitely gone and she saw her leave. We can’t get through to her roommate either.” Nick Wright explained fighting to remain calm. In combat he could calmly relay information and coordinate tactical commands over a squadron of jet fighters like he was reading a dictionary, but right now his heart was pounding in his chest.

“Well sir the mountain route was closed down at seven tonight when weather upgraded the storm to category three, maybe your daughter stopped before she got to the mountain and is waiting it out. Heck Route Eights barely passable in a four wheel drive. I hate to say it but in her small car...like I said she’s probably hold up somewhere waiting it out. The storms knocked out half the towers between Springfield and Albany so cell use is spotty at best. We’ll do what we can but until the plows can get out there isn’t a lot we can do. I am very sorry.” The trooper’s sympathies were sincere as a parent he knew how he would feel and what would be running through his mind in his place.

“Thanks, but that’s not very reassuring. Is there any way you can get the phone company to ping the GPS on her cell, maybe get some idea of where she was before the towers went down?” He knew they had that capability if she was being picked up by a tower at some point during her drive. If two towers picked her up they could triangulate her signal and get a decent fix on her.

“I’ll call them and see what they can do; and maybe we can get hold of her roommate in Greensville. I’ll let you know if I find anything out.” He promised it was worth a try the guy was military and knew full well the things that could be done with GPS tracking.

“Thanks Trooper Evans.” Wright said.

“No problem sir, ah, and Col. Wright please don’t get a wild hair and try to go looking for her in this storm? Your family needs you there not stuck in a drift somewhere, let us do our job while your home now?” He implored the worried father.



“Yeah, your right you know how it is? Thanks trooper.” He said and cut the line and looked to his wife communicating silently.

+++++

Nikki felt like she was floating drifting in and out of consciousness, images flashed through her cold numb senses. She felt the snow on her face, and thought she saw a handsome blond haired man in a red stocking cap trimmed in white fur with piercing light blue eyes. He was shaking her asking something, she muttered an answer but was unsure of the question or her reply. She thought she felt arms holding her then blackness again.

An unknown time later she saw the inside of a vehicle felt motion and engine noises, maybe she was in an ambulance or dead. She tried to move but felt her body was restrained or something heavy covered her. Her vision blurred again and she thought she heard Christmas music and twinkling lights pass by beyond glass. She blacked out again.

“...warmest place in the state...saplings grown...something hot to...get you warmed up...” Nikki heard a voice speaking to her a disjointed conversation in pieces.

She felt warm though, very warm, thought she smelled earth and pine trees she heard music faintly again. Angels singing, was this heaven?

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

Nikki blinked her eyes fighting for consciousness and took a deep breath feeling warm earthy air fill her lungs warming them. Looking up at the edge of her field of view through her blurry vision she could make out colored lights and silver tinsel covering something. She exhaled and breathed in again and looked to her right her vision swimming fighting focus. She thought she saw reindeer with a glowing red nose smiling at her.

“Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Hallelujah!”

“And He Shall Reign For Ever and Ever!”

“Maggie...love...this s-song...v-volume...please...” Nikki’s voice squeaked softly before falling asleep exhausted.

Mark Johansson looked down at the stirring girl under the blankets listening to her mumbling broken words and wondered who Maggie was. He hoped there wasn’t another pretty girl out there lost in the snow storm, if there was it would be impossible for him to find her. It was only luck he had stumbled or rather almost ran her down in the blizzard.

He smiled warmly at her sleeping peacefully now, seeing her eyelids flutter in REM sleep and wondered what she might be dreaming about. Surely someone so angelically beautiful must be dreaming of something as warm and lovely as she was. He had never seen anyone asleep as beautiful since he left school to care for his mother when she took ill two years ago. She passed shortly after leaving him the tree farm to carry on her work. It had been her dying wish, it had been in their family for many generations and he had to keep it alive, for her.

The young man sighed pulling the covers higher on her chin and stood carefully not wanting to wake her. He left one of the thermo-wraps over her neck and ears to guard her skin from frostbite. He looked down at her one last time as if lending his strength and comfort to her lovely sleeping form. Her skin was like fine china her hair black as coal and when they were open and he saw those brilliant green eyes he felt his heart skip a beat at their beauty. Mark Johansson had never seen such green eyes on a living person. The romantic in him prayed such eyes and angelic features belonged to a personality as angelic. He would have to wait till she awakened to find out though, with a sigh he returned to his work.

+++++

Nikki woke slowly an unknown amount of time later feeling someone shaking her. She was dreaming she was in the North Pole and Santa was showing her his reindeer. She could hear a man's voice gently saying her name and could feel something warm and steamy dabbing at her forehead and cheeks. It felt nice and comforting. She smiled stirring stretching her legs out under heavy covers.

“Nichole...Nichole...come one wake up...need to check for concussion...can you speak?” The male voice said sounding rich and dreamy.

She blinked her eyes rapidly slowly forcing them to focus. She felt her face smile and she shifted squirming under the thick coverings snuggling into the soft warmth feeling safe. A face was looking down at her brushing her hair from her face nudging her shoulders. He was a handsome man maybe twenty one or so, a thick wave of dark blond bangs swept across his forehead under a red snow cap with white trim. Under his thick blond hair light blue eyes glistened reflecting the twinkling lights. If this was a dream it was a damned good one she thought cooing happily.

Nikki gasped sharply pulling away as she realized she was not dreaming and the man was real. She pushed herself up to a sitting position realizing she was in a small bed but not in an actual bedroom. It was more like a makeshift sleeping area in a large room with a high ceiling. Her head spun a little with the effort feeling like she had been drinking which was impossible. The young man reeled as Nikki suddenly swung her legs around pushing him hard and jumped out of the little bed the man fell with a thud to the floor surprised. She turned back at him her heart pumping panting for breath swaying unsteadily for a moment, but quickly straightened forcing sobriety.

“I was in an accident. How did I get here, who are you?” She asked frantically looking at the man grinning up at her from the floor.

Nikki suddenly felt very strange, something was missing that should be there and it wasn't her car. She looked down at herself and shrieked grabbing clumsily for a blanket on the bed missing it. The young man chuckled softly then thought better of his choice of humor and handed the blanket to the shocked young girl as he slid back up on the bed.

Nikki took the offered blanket with a huff and air of offense at her exposure and the man's obvious, yet brief, expression of humor. She backed away wrapping the blanket around her naked form trying to regain her dignity. Feeling less exposed, she stood straight raising her chin

and pulled a long lock of her black hair out of her eyes and glared defiantly at the still seated smiling young man.

“Why am I naked? Where are my clothes and who are you?” She demanded still excited and frightened a little at her situation.

“Jeez rescue a damsel in distress and that’s the thanks I get, figures no good deed, eh. Please calm down. Your clothes were cold and damp if I didn’t get them off you would have frozen to death. At least I left your underwear on.” He answered staring at her with a wry grin.

“Well thank goodness for small miracles. Please stop staring and grinning at me like you can still see me naked, it’s most unsettling?” She said pulling the blanket tighter around her slender body and huffed in frustration as it slipped off her slender shoulder.

“Yes ma’am wiping grin off my face and stopping my staring any other demands your highness?” He asked turning away with a grin.

“That’s not funny. You’re teasing me.” She stated with an audible exhale.

“Sorry, you’re sorta cute when you’re all huffy.” He stated stealing a quick glance over his shoulder at her.

“I am not huffy...I’m...I’m...well alright I’m huffy.” Nikki stammered a little then sighed relaxing a little as she realized she was over reacting it could be worse she could be frozen in a snow bank.

“I’m s-sorry; it’s not every day I end up naked in front of a strange man in a strange place in a blanket.” She said her voice softening as she looked around the strange room.

“Hey, it’s cool I understand. I would have explained things a little different but you didn’t give me much of a chance. I didn’t expect you to jump out of bed like that. You’re feisty for such a little thing.” He observed with that wry smirk again.

“I am not a “little thing” I’m a girl and you keep staring at me like you haven’t seen one before.” She stated adjusting the blanket again still feeling naked.

“I’ve seen them, just not one like you or as pretty in a while. I’m sorry for staring really it’s just not something I expected to find in the middle of my driveway in a snow storm on Christmas Eve.” The man noted standing, Nikki backed away from him nervously.

She suddenly had the fearsome idea he could be some crazed mountain hermit who would keep her prisoner and make her his sex slave and force her to be his wife like some horror movie. He would make her cook and clean for him and she would never be heard from again. All though as she stood there rapidly summing her strange rescuer up, another odd notion crept through her mind. He was certainly handsome for a crazed mountain hermit and didn’t seem like the harmful type she could do worse as far as prisoners go.

He had kind looking light blue eyes that had a certain glimmer of humor and warmth to them especially when paired with that easy grin like he was laughing at a punch line in his head. His teeth were white and straight and his face was smooth and hairless, his sandy blond hair well groomed. He was taller than her by a few inches, his body looked athletic and well-toned and his clothes looked clean and fairly new. Yes, she decided, as sex crazed captors go she could be much worse off. She shook her head of her silly fantasy wondering what she was thinking; maybe she was injured more severely than she thought.

As far as affairs of the heart goes, Nikki was normally very calm and reserved, out-going, open and approachable yet still shy and uncomfortable in her skin, especially her new skin. Like any teenager she had fantasies and desires but also confusion and apprehension about her sexuality and taking that step of letting anyone get too close. She had fears and reservations about how people, especially dates, really felt about her and accepted her as a girl. She had dated a little mostly at her roommate Molly's insistence, but still felt like she was driving a rental car that she would have to return eventually. She still felt very immature and naïve sexually.

As far as sex went she was a virgin in both genders, she wanted to experience it yes, longed for it and dreamed about it, but she wasn't in a rush. Nikki was after all only just turning nineteen this month she had plenty of time to try things out. She was an admitted romantic too; she wanted it to be special, with someone special, for it to mean something not just to do it to try it out.

"I said the name's Mark, Mark Johansson." The young man was saying to her snapping Nikki back to reality.

"Ah, hi, sorry Nikki Wright." She answered back smiling and gingerly took the offered hand feeling the warmth of his skin in hers sent a sudden tingle up her spine. She felt her smile brighten and nodded looking up at him suddenly feeling small and uncoordinated like a goofy school girl then realized the irony; she was a goofy school girl.

"Nice to meet you Nikki. You prefer that over Nichole?" He asked and saw her eyes widen then narrow puzzled. "I'm sorry for being nosey I wanted to find out who you were, I looked through your bag to find a name or cell phone..."

"My cell phone!" She exclaimed suddenly, quickly searching the tables around her.

"Don't bother the storms still knocked everything out." He informed her seeing her shoulders slump a little closing her eyes. She opened them looking warmly at him.

"It's alright; I suppose I owe you my life and thanks for rescuing me, so thank you Mark Johansson." She said smiling warmly. Mark's heart swelled hearing her say his name and smile at him he smiled sheepishly back.

"Anytime, it was pure luck I was checking the east greenhouses when I did and found you. I didn't find anyone else around, I hope your friend Maggie is alright?" Mark said looking concerned.

“Maggie? Oh that’s just my car...ah what I call my car’s computer. She’s not a person thank God, oh that would be awful so don’t worry I’m sure she’ll be fine.” Nikki answered with a soft giggle. Mark smiled broadly feeling relieved.

“That’s a relief. You named your car Maggie?” He asked and felt a stirring in his jeans seeing her blush thinking how adorable she was definitely had an effect on him.

“Well, it’s better than hey you. If you met her you’d think it suits her too.” Nikki giggled again looking around the room. Mark grinned thinking how much he liked her girlish giggle.

She suddenly realized they were not in a room at all but a large greenhouse and everywhere were pine trees in various stages of growth as far as she could see with much larger ones further off in the dim lighting. On long tables close by were smaller Christmas trees some only saplings, some miniature trees decorated with various ornaments and lights on other tables. On other tables on the opposite side of the room were poinsettias of varying sizes some blooming with large colorful flowers. It was some kind of nursery, which explained the various scents.

Holding the blanket tightly around her she walked to the nearest long table looking at the plants there and spied several notebooks and a large digital pad. She skimmed them nosily noticing them immediately for what they were; scientific notations and chemical compositions covered them. She looked back at Mark quizzically who merely shrugged aloofly.

“Do you know where my bag is Mark?” She asked looking at the blanket around her.

“Yeah, right here your dress is drying by the heat vent it will be a while.” He informed her handing her the bag from the floor at the foot of the bed. She looked through it quickly confirming what was inside then nodded with a smile as if silently saying all was in order.

“Do you have a place I can change, I have a...um...nightgown in here, it’s not much but it’s better than a blanket.” She asked noticing his eyes brighten hopefully then his face redden a little that she noticed.

“Yeah, right this way, there’s a bathroom with a shower if you like. I sort of spend so much time here I mostly live here rather than the main house lately, especially...” His voice trailed off the sentence unfinished as she followed him to a corner of the building.

They passed various pine trees on tables then entered a walled off area that looked like a small apartment. Inside was a small living area with a comfy looking futon and a pair of worn recliners and a coffee table. It was Spartan to say the least a flat screen monitor hung on one wall and in the far corner she noticed a small kitchenette. He slid a wide door open and turned on a light revealing a suitable, simple yet clean bathroom with a toilet, vanity sink, wall mirror, and shower. He pulled the glass shower door open and she was surprised to see it was actually quite large made of porcelain tiles in muted earthy tones.

“It’s a great shower actually; too bad the waters ice cold.” He said Nikki frowned slightly until he chuckled. “Just kidding, seriously though be careful the water gets very hot. There’s towels and stuff in here, help yourself. I promise I won’t peek, much.” He chuckled at her eye roll and then left her alone shutting the door.

Nikki folded the blue and black plaid blanket setting it on a small table near the door after noticing how warm it was in the tile bathroom, also noting the tiled floor felt warm under her bare feet assuming it was heated in some way. She placed her bag on the vanity counter and opened it finding her brush, makeup case and hair products and set them on the counter.

She looked at herself in the mirror noting that her makeup was in decent enough shape all things considered and went through the process of cleansing her skin with a makeup wipe. As far as makeup went she didn't use much anyway, mostly her eyes and lips and occasional blush depending on what she was doing. She was blessed with good clear skin something she had long been complimented on.

As far as her surgeries went the only thing she had done besides the big snip was her nose, not that it was huge or anything but she was convinced by the surgeon to do it now rather than later. He had narrowed her nostrils some and turned the end up slightly giving her a very cute button nose which she was very happy with after. Her breasts were her own she liked them small and perky and thought they suited her slender petite frame. All that was added was a small amount of muscle tissue and larger more feminine nipples with more sensitive nerve endings so they would swell and stiffen to a darker reddish pink when excited.

That was something which had taken a little to get used to though. For three weeks after her surgery just wearing a bra sent her overly sensitive nipples into a body tingling, near orgasmic frenzy. She got so excited and soaked so many panties she started wearing maxi pads for a time it was quite distracting. Luckily they had calmed down a bit since then.

But, at least they were all her, grown specifically for her from tissue cells from her own body in a lab at Boston General Hospital. Just the same as her female genitalia. All grown in a special lab to her specifications from her own cells, then surgically implanted. Micro robotic surgery had knitted on a molecular level her new vaginal, nerve endings and blood vessels to her own after her male genitals were removed and the cavity had been created. It was a thing of beauty and worked perfectly as if she always been female.

The only thing she couldn't do was have children, yet. All though the scientists and pioneers in the field were predicting that very soon that would change too. Following generations of transsexuals, if things worked out, would be able to have wombs implanted too and bear children. Her doctor proudly explained that she hoped Nikki could one day have a womb grown from her cells and implanted with a fetus and carry it to term. She would most likely have to have it cesarean but she could feel the joy of having a life growing inside her body. Nikki sobbed happily hearing that and prayed it could be true.

She had read that in the not too distant future they would be able to grow and implant everything even the plumbing if the patient was young enough. It was why she chose the field of study she chose, so she could be a part of it and help bring that lovely dream to reality, if not for herself but for others.

Some protested that medical science as wondrous as it was might be going too far. Science was playing God and it was wrong, dangerous even. As a Catholic Nikki struggled with it too at first fearing the wrath of God, until geneticists in France discovered the gene that decided gender and

after testing hundreds of people like her found the gene switched the wrong way. The explanation was long and complicated but simply put they discovered why people suffered from GID; it was the Holy Grail and changed everything.

Nikki felt something environmental over the last fifty years was switching the gene in the womb which might explain why there was a higher rate growing exponentially over the last twenty years. Oddly it was more common in females than males but there was hope, hope that someone could find the cause and prevent it. That was what she wanted to do, find it and fix it she hoped.

So at least for Nikki and outward appearances she was a normal female and she was ecstatically happy. She was the thirtieth transsexual to undergo the new procedure in the United States and so far everything was perfect even if she still had not tried out her new parts, yet. She was in no rush it had only been six months since implantation, the surgeons called it. She was closely monitored and felt fine and her doctor said everything was fine. She only had to go through a very short time of dilation, which with the previous procedure was one of the hardest parts for many transsexuals because of the limitations of the available flesh.

Still her doctor wanted a full report and examination if and when she had sex there were still precautions and still data to collect and correlate. Which wasn't the reason she had not ran right out and tried it out yet, the biggest part was emotional she was a virgin and she was not going to give that up to just anyone.

Nikki turned on the shower letting the hot water spray over her tender young body. Her nipples tingled and swelled from the temperature difference as did her sensitive clitoris between the thick swollen folds of her laboratory grown labia. At least the cold didn't damage it she thought giggling softly to herself as she touched it experimentally with her fingers. Nikki spread open the puffy outer flesh of her young sex examining the glistening pinkness inside everything looked perfect she noted. The thick skin of her hood pulled back revealing her clitoris beginning to swell and stiffen as she teased it with her half inch long glittering pink fingernail. A tingle rushed through her genitals making her shiver sucking in air through her quivering lips.

As Nikki teased her clitty with her fingernail feeling slowly building pleasure an image of Mark smirking at her flashed through her aroused mind. She shook the thoughts from her mind feeling a little naughty and guilty and decided no damage had been done. She was half afraid it might have gotten frostbite from the cold wet panties from her embarrassing accident earlier. At least she didn't have to call her doctor and explain that. "Hi doctor, I got frostbite on my new pussy" was not a call she wanted to make.

Finished she toweled off and dug out the clean pair of panties from her bag. She always loved the feeling of soft cool satin on her small male genitalia; how a little pair of panties hugged it bent back and hidden tightly to her skin between her legs. She loved it even more now, she was afraid she would miss her old parts a little, miss the feelings. With her new female parts she felt so much better and didn't miss those old little things one bit.

Her fingers slid around the elastic waistband snapping them in place over her slender rounded hips, her fingertips slid over the soft pink satin material covering her pert round little ass examining herself in the mirror. She tugged her little bikini panties higher in back adjusting them so just the bottom of her fleshy little white globes peeked out of the gathered elastic leg bands.

She wondered if Mark would think her ass was cute in these pretty bright pink panties and how the pink satin glistened in the light on her skin and the color matched the color on her fingernails.

Nikki shook her head wondering where that sudden thought had come from then shrugged and giggled softly. Her mother would probably tell her she was just thinking like a normal girl should think that it was only a matter of time before she finally found the right man to give her heart to. Molly would probably tell her to go out and get her freak on or something crazy like that and stop saving it for Mr. Right and worry about Mr. Right now. Molly would laugh her ass off if she saw Nikki right now. She could hear her comments in her head and giggled as she brushed her long dark hair.

After she did her makeup applying a thick coating of waterproof eyeliner and mascara with a slight silver glitter to her long lashes she dusted a little silver and light blue on her lids that made her green eyes scream take me. She coated her lips with a watermelon lip stain then sealed them with a glossy lip sealant making them look thick, wet and kissable. In her hair she clipped a barrette decorated with a small red, white and silver Christmas looking flower to hold one side of her bangs back in a seductive look.

Last she slipped on the matching underwire pink satin bra and pulled the nightie over her head carefully so as not to mess up her hair then posed in the mirror. The nightie was short but not too, reaching mid-thigh in a baby doll style that was feminine and sexy but not too sexy she hoped. All though he had seen her practically naked she did not want to appear immodest or trashy. She loved girly, sexy lingerie and clothes especially the prissy Lolita styles popular with her age group. What had a few years ago been more for Cosplay and costume was now more mainstream in fashion and all the rage. Bows, ruffles, sparkles and lace along with fluffy petticoats and bright colors and pastels, dainty, demure and girly were in and Nikki loved them all.

The nightgown was princess cut with a sweetheart bodice that hugged her slender torso held up with wide shoulder straps trimmed on wide ruffled lace that also trimmed the cups of her perky breasts. It was all shiny pink heavy satin with a sheer layer of lighter pink chiffon covered the cups with two layers which covered the skirt that puffed out from her slender waist over her hips. A darker pink and white satin bow decorated between her breasts with a matching bow on the pink satin elastic sash at the center of her waist.

It flowed and bounced daintily when she walked like a fairy nymph's costume in a movie. The material wasn't transparent but clung to her young body perfectly in all the right places. Looking over her shoulder at her reflection she could see the prominent outline of the thick gathered elastic leg bands of her little pink satin bikini panties hugging her round little bottom invitingly.

Over the nightie she wore a pink and white matching robe with small cap sleeves in semi-sheer chiffon that hung loosely over the nightgown and came down to mid-thigh. The only thing she had to wear on her feet was a pair of clear plastic bedroom platform slippers with a small two inch heel and a fuzzy pink marabou trim across her toes. The little heels had a dramatic effect on her long slender legs showing off the shapely definition of her taut muscles especially the heart shaped ones in the back of her calves, a result of a youth spent, biking, skating and skiing.

It was the outfit she was going to wear for Christmas morning to shock her father; though she didn't really know why she wanted to shock him, perhaps to slap him into the reality that she



was now and forever his daughter. Now she was about to shock a perfect stranger who had rescued her from certain death. As she looked at herself in the mirror one last time she felt her heartbeat quicken and her tummy flutter at the thought of her rescuer seeing her and smiled broadly at her reflection. Ready or not she whispered.

+++++

“I have got to go look for her, I can’t stand the waiting Cynthia.” Nick told his wife pacing impatiently. “It’s driving me crazy.”

“Nick you don’t know how happy I am to see you so protective and worried about your daughter, it makes me so happy to hear but you can’t. I won’t let you it is much too dangerous. I won’t lose my husband too in this storm, your children need you. Please believe me when I say that I really think Nikki is safe and warm some place.” She implored with her husband grabbing him firmly around the neck. “Trust me a mother knows and I know she’s safe and will come home.”

“How can you be so sure?” He asked.

“I am that’s all.” She explained with confidence looking into his eyes.

“I hope your right; I can’t stand the thought of my little girl out there alone.” He groaned.

“She isn’t not tonight, have faith.” She said hugging him tightly. He kissed the top of her head smelling her hair and felt her strength and the faith of a mother and felt better knowing how sure she was.

“Kids help me get the presents from the spare room in the basement and put them under the tree.” She said after a moment to the exuberant cries of their younger children.

+++++

Nikki took a deep breath letting it out slowly feeling calmer and pulled the door aside and glided through it with her chin raised like it was no big deal.

Mark on the other hand turned with a plate of several slices of buttered toast in his hand witnessing her float into the room like a gossamer dream on angel’s wings and froze his mouth agape. The plate dropped from his strong hand clattering on the rubberized floor luckily not breaking but scattering toast everywhere.

“Oh my God...” He said softly his eyes frozen by her incredible beauty.

“What? What is it, is there something wrong?” Nikki asked looking behind her then smiled demurely back at him as it dawned on her what he was staring at, her.

“Silly, I hope you don’t think I’m going to eat off the floor, it’s surprisingly clean in here for a guy but not that clean.” She stated with an innocent giggle.

“Huh, what? Ah...huh...eat what?” He stammered his mind fried. Nikki crossed the room closer to him while Mark just stared at her wide eyed. “I made, um, toast soup.”

“Toast soup strange combination is it your own invention? Well it’s a good thing you didn’t drop the soup you might have been burned.” She said crouching down to pick up the slices of toast and the plate she carried them to the counter and set them down. Nikki smelt the soup in the pot seeing it was chicken noodle and smiled.

“Chicken noodle my favorite, smells good.” She said smiling.

“...made soup toast.” He repeated in a daze still.

“Yes its perfect sit down you look tired, I’ll finish it if I can find the bowls.” She told him with a nudge to sit in a chair at the small wooden table. “Ah, here they are. I’ll make some more toast too if you want?” He nodded watching her float around the small kitchen like a fairy princess in a Disney cartoon.

Moments later she had remade the toast buttering it and poured the soup in thick earthen bowls and sat down beside him to eat. He just stared at her while she took the first sip blowing on it daintily and sipping the spoon.

“It’s good still pretty hot though. Here taste it.” She said spooning some blowing on it and raising it to his lips. He tasted it and smiled finally shaken from his daze she was afraid she came on too strong and he had short circuited, it was sweet.

“I’m sorry for staring like that, Ni-Nichole. I just...you surprised me.” He said in a hoarse whisper.

“That’s sweet I didn’t expect that reaction though, I’m sorry I shocked you. I didn’t have many choices of clothing it was this or my bra and panties.” She giggled then blushed realizing what she had said and saw his face redden and then turn away trying to hide it. “I’m sorry, I’ll shut up now.”

“No, please don’t. I love to hear your voice.” He confessed between sips of soup. “I haven’t had much company in a while. Just working on stuff all the time, except when I deliver the trees and poinsettias.”

“So that’s what you do with them, I was afraid you were creating monster killer trees to take over the world or something.” She giggled he grinned enjoying her humor and the feminine sound of her laughter.

“No, I wouldn’t do that but it might make a good movie.” He snickered.

“I think it’s probably been done already.” She assumed smiling but not knowing it was an old Saturday Night Live skit from the early days when her grandfather was her age.

“God, my parents must be worried sick I wish I could call them.” She said.

“We’ll try again after we finish eating.” Mark promised. “Maybe the land lines will be back up.”

While they ate she told him about going to school and her family and anything else she could think of except of course that secret part of her past. He listened asking questions and joking with her as she revealed all she felt she needed to for now. He revealed a little more slowly letting her talk more and seemed to enjoy the sound of her voice. She hoped it was more than that; she was starting to really like him.

“Nikki can I show you something?” He finally asked with an excited boyish twinkle in his eyes.

“Sure.” She said smiling.

He led her back into the nursery to the table she had seen the notebooks and computer pad on and the small Christmas trees in varying shapes and sizes. He looked at her with a devious smile then picked up a plastic spray bottle and sprayed two of the little two foot tall trees then touched the screen on the pad. The lights near them dimmed slowly while they stood there watching. She felt his excitement and felt it spread through her making her pulse quicken as she watched.

Suddenly the two trees started to twinkle all over their needles first white then in a multitude of colors slowly growing brighter and more intense until the glow lit their faces in a wash of colors. She felt her smile broaden across her face as she watched in wonder at the sight before her eyes.

“It’s beautiful...oh my goodness. It’s a Christmas Miracle. How?” She asked breathily like a child seeing Christmas morning for the first time or glistening virgin white snow on a meadow in the moonlight.

“Thanks, it’s just simple chemistry.” He said looking at her beautiful face washed in a glow of color he eyes wide as was that beautiful smile.

“No, it’s a wonderful thing, it’s beautiful, and I love it.” She exclaimed clapping her fingers together moving around the two little trees looking at them at different angles. Slowly the colors faded to plain dark green trees again.

“It doesn’t last long.” He said sadly a sadness that Nikki felt was much more than the trees short lived glow, it made her heart ache.

“Why Mark?” She asked her voice soft and caring.

“Why doesn’t it last long? I can’t seem to get it right for some reason the...” He began she cut him off putting her open palm on his cheek in the dim lighting. The warmth of her touch rushed through his body like a flame her scent of vanilla and wild flowers made him lightheaded. His manhood throbbed in uncontrollable desire from the effect of her compassion radiating out to him, God he wanted her. He shook his head stiffening his nerve for control which he knew was a losing battle.

“No Mark, I don’t mean that, I mean why so sad. I know deep sadness; believe me.” She said sympathetically.

“I’m sorry, Nikki I didn’t mean to...” He started to say trying like he was trying to close a door on her face.

“Mark, please tell me? You saved my life tonight; talk to me let me help you?” She urged.

Mark brought the lights up a little and showed her the notebooks most of them filled with his mother’s hand writing some of the pages over two decades old. He explained how she had worked on a special project for many years with only partial or brief success. Some thing’s killed the trees or wilted them; some thing’s glowed too brightly other times they actually caught fire drying out so quickly. Still she tried and tried experimented and tested. She manipulated their genes making the trees stronger some could survive long weeks after being cut with little or no water. Some glowed so brightly you couldn’t look at them for long.

Then she had gotten ill, cancer was eating away at her while Mark was away at school. He came home to find her weak and fading fast but excited, jubilant even. She had found the answer she had gotten one tree to glow perfectly in beautiful iridescent colors, another twinkled white like stars were setting on the tips of the needles, it was beautiful.

Last fall she had finally passed but when she did she gave him her notebooks and told him it was the sound thing to do for the trees. Nikki thought it was an odd way to phrase a request for Mark to continue her work. He told her she was in a great deal of pain and on a lot of medication by then and not making a lot of sense.

Still Mark had to do as she asked; he had to figure out what it was she had done right and what she meant. He had poured everything into the project with only modest fleeting success. By the time he was done telling his story Nikki’s cheeks were wet with tears and she held his hand tightly in silence staring at the trees through glassy eyes.

Everything happens for a reason her Grandfather had told her, there is no chance. She took a deep shuddering breath and sighed softly and for the first time in her young life she felt she could give her heart to someone. She felt love.

She leaned against him feeling his warmth as he brought his arm up over her shoulder and held her apprehensively at first afraid to let her know too much. She snuggled against him her hair touching his cheek as he breathed in her scent and shuddered deeply. Before either of them knew what was happening they were face to face their lips touching lightly, testing, probing then both gave into the passion they felt building like a fire stoked by a fierce wind.

Nikki had never been kissed like that in her life, never felt the heat and passion passing through another being before, consuming her, burning away any doubt or fear she had in herself or in her desire to be loved. She submitted to his need and her desire and felt herself guided to the small bed and herself float downward until she was lying on her back and eagerly pulled Mark down with her. As their lips melded together their tongues writhed for dominance over the other she succumbed surrendering to his power and her deep desire.

Her skin burned at his touch gasping for breath as he found her soft burning wetness as she pleaded for him to take from her what she knew they both needed. Nikki felt his hardness slip inside her body as she screamed not in pain but in release and acceptance of her full womanhood

as she received his passion deep inside her. Nikki's chest felt aflame as did her loins as she cried his name again and again gasping for breath that she did not need to live any longer. All she needed was his deep passionate love for her. He gave it freely; urgently with force and power filling her as she opened up to him and gave it back in return her orgasm was a supernova until her vision faded to black.

When Nikki woke later she was still in Mark's arms her head lying on his naked chest her cheek felt the warmth of his skin, her ear the slow steady beat of his heart. She circled his stomach with her finger teasing him lightly and smiled when his flat muscled stomach rippled in reaction. Mark's fingers slid through her hair tracing her face tenderly like a blind man committing her feel to memory then traveled down her shoulder to her small full breasts. She giggled squirming slightly at his touch and heard him snicker at her ticklish reaction just another thing he was rapidly adding up on an ever growing list of things he loved about her. There was a lot to love about this girl who was a total stranger hours ago and yet, he felt like he knew her better than anyone he ever knew.

He could love her forever he knew, there was something about her, something that said; love me and I will love you. But would she, did she, could she? What if this was just a one night stand, a chance encounter never to be repeated a memory to haunt him for the rest of his days? Maybe she had a lover already or was married or promised to another and she did this with him in a moment of weakness or sympathy? Maybe this was all a dream and he was really dying on the side of the road or in the greenhouse finally surrendering to death after neglecting himself too long. He had to know.

"Mark...I...I hope you don't think I'm...that kind of girl? I don't know what came over me." She confessed pleading in a whisper. "I've never done..."

"Shhhh it's alright, I don't." He whispered back.

"Funny I was just thinking this was all a dream, crazy huh?" He explained still tracing her satin covered side with his fingers. God, he loved how that material felt on her skin, how she felt in his arms soft, delicate and submissive yet filled with a powerful energy of strength and determination. He didn't know how long it would last, but he knew how long he wanted it.

"No, I'm really here I can hear your heart beating in your chest, it sounds like music." Nikki said softly smiling and kissed his chest wetly. "I love music, I play guitar a little and I love to sing." She didn't know why she told him that, she just needed to tell him more about herself.

"Really, so did my mother, I think one of her guitars is in a closet here somewhere." He said stroking her hair with his other hand and felt her kiss his fingers. "You should play something."

"What time is it?" She asked.

"Midnight." He answered looking at the clock on the nearby table.

"It's Christmas morning, Merry Christmas." She said tenderly nuzzling against him feeling his warmth.

“Yes it is Merry Christmas angel. You are so beautiful.” He said looking into her glistening green eyes and kissed her passionately. Nikki felt so open and vulnerable and happily enjoyed his affectionate attention, she really loved being kissed and held by him, how she tingled all over when he touched her. As their tongues writhed in her mouth she felt her nipples stiffen against the satin nightie making her squirm and writhe in his arms. She felt that tingling inside her spreading through her body centering on her recently virginal sex like a fire of wetness. She gave into her intense desire and rode him to another mind shattering climax.

A very short time later after Nikki cleaned herself up and after a brief examination that nothing was damaged or bleeding, she rejoined Mark in the nursery. He was standing at the high table looking through his mother’s last notes while a holographic projector displayed a multi-colored 3D image of the chemical and the trees genetic compound.

She slipped her arms around his waist and hugged him nuzzling her head against his back as she had seen her mother do to her father. Mark grasped her hand with one of his and put his other around her pulling her under his arm planting his hand firmly on her slender waist. She giggled at the modification to her parents’ special loving embrace thinking that she now had one of her own. He bent down a little and kissed her tenderly on the lips when she looked up at him.

“Are you...OK angel?” He asked with tender concern.

“Perfect...even better the second time.” She giggled tickling his chest playfully.

“Practice makes perfect.” He snickered.

“Then I think we should practice a lot more.” She said snuggling against him.

“Love to, but that wasn’t what I was wondering about. I meant how you feel.” He asked touching his fingertip to her chest.

“Oh, that’s perfect too I think it still needs more practice. So that’s the formula?” She asked watching it spin slowly in the air. Mark nibbled on her neck making her squirm and giggle.

“Yeah, I don’t get it, it should work. What’s wrong?” He asked puzzled turning to the display.

“Maybe it’s the spray bottle; maybe the vinyl chloride in the plastic is degrading the photo luminescent phosphors see the strontium line, its rolling off slightly here.” She said pointing to a colored graph below the chemical model. “Maybe when it sits in the plastic bottle the PVC is absorbing it or, wait see the phosphor here and here its small but it might be part of the problem.”

“Holy cow, I never noticed it before. But what would she have used everything’s plastic?” He puzzled looking around.

“Try glass, darkened glass specifically.” Nikki suggested.

“Hmmm, worth a try. Then if I re-bind the three chemicals and...excite the chlorophyll receptors...” Mark said typing in to the pad excitedly and hit enter. The process on the screen

readjusted changing the lines making them hold longer and brighter but they still rolled off after a few moments, but they did last longer.

“You are incredible, beautiful and smart.” He said kissing her passionately.

“I’m happy you noticed.” She said breathily after the kiss was broken.

“Let’s see if we can find some glass, I think I remember some old bottles in a closet.” He said pulling her with him, her plastic bedroom slippers clip-clopping on the hard rubberized floor. She felt a little strange mincing around with a man she barely knew in a plant nursery in a little pink satin nightie but not in a bad way. In all honesty she felt sexy and liked the feeling especially because of him. An image of her prancing around the nursery in other sexy lingerie for him flashed through her developing naughty little mind made her giggle as she followed.

He opened a closet turning on a light it was surprisingly clean considering she noticed as she looked around seeing various things stored inside. She wondered why he didn’t spend more time in the main house but sort of understood but hoped it wasn’t a mad scientist thing.

“Mark, why don’t you use the main house?” She had to ask.

“I do when it’s not Christmas season, well more that is. I don’t know I guess I got kind of consumed by all this.” He admitted pausing in his search and looked at her. She must have had a concerned expression on her face because he suddenly got serious looking and let out a sigh.

“Nikki you don’t think I’m obsessed do you?” He asked. She looked at him in silence letting him figure it out. “Oh God, baby I’m sorry, I don’t want to scare you away believe me not because of this. I..I couldn’t stand that...I would drop it all in a heartbeat if it meant not seeing you anymore, I mean that.”

For emphasis he cupped her soft cheek tenderly in his hand and pulled her to him after a second and kissed her deeply. Nikki felt that tingling heat rush again through her body felt her foot float off the ground as her leg bent on its own. When he loosened his grip on her their eyes were locked for a long moment, her’s blurred with tears. Mark slid his thumb affectionately over her soft cheek seeing her tears and knew they were for him. He never thought anyone could look at him with that much love before, he vowed he would never hurt her.

“I promise Nikki, I mean that baby.” He said she nodded silently accepting his word as he silently vowed not to break it. He continued his search.

“Look what I found.” He exclaimed holding an old acoustic guitar in his hands she brightened seeing it taking the offered guitar.

Seeing how dusty it was Nikki took it into the small living quarters and found a soft cotton rag and some mild furniture polish. To her surprise it was an old Yamaha and still had all the steel strings after a little polishing and tuning it didn’t sound half bad.

When Nikki rejoined Mark in the nursery he gave her a broad smile but wasn’t sure if it was seeing the guitar in her hand or her giddy little mince in that cute little nightie. She sat down with

her long pretty legs crossed and started picking the strings lightly with her half inch bright pink polished fingernails, nothing in particular just warming up. Mark sat back and listened watching her smiling approvingly as slowly a tune began to emerge he recognized.

Mark nodded his head as he recognized an old Tears for Fears song and Nikki softly started singing it in an impressive alto. Her natural voice had a wide range capable of singing soprano easily which impressed her listeners especially when she was a boy. When she finished that song she tied it into her version of What Child Is This switching to a higher soft soprano, Mark sat mesmerized falling deeper in love with each note.

“Wow, Nikki that was awesome, you should record those people would buy them, I would.” He said clapping.

“You are only saying that because I’m dressed in this little nightie playing for you. But thank you for saying it.” She said smiling.

“Whatever, I would too; no you really are good I mean it.” He said. “Please keep playing?” Mark turned to the computer listening to Nikki run through a couple of other Christmas songs and a more recent pop song while Mark reprogrammed the sequence and mixed some new chemicals in the dark brown glass spray bottles he found. Nikki was playing a very mournful Oh Little Town Of Bethlehem when Mark sprayed the trees again and touched his pad. Like before the lights dimmed while Nikki strummed the guitar humming softly watching the trees.

The trees lit up brighter than before the colors swirling through the needles the tips glowing brighter then dimmed a little and held steady. Nikki kept playing watching while Mark watched the seconds tick on digital counter. This time to their amazement it passed the previous time and kept going. Mark let out a loud whoop jumping from his chair.

“Look at it baby, I can’t believe it, it’s still going.” He exclaimed jumping up and down.

Nikki set the guitar down jumping excitedly into his arms, it worked the trees were glowing running through a range of brilliant colors. The moisture readouts said the trees were holding their moisture and not drying out. It worked, something had anyway. Mark held Nikki tightly kissing her on the cheeks and lips while they bounced on the rubberized floor. After a few moments they settled down and just watched and after twenty minutes the trees slowly started to fade. Thirty minutes later they had gone almost completely dark.

“Wow, do you know what this means?” He shouted hugging her tightly.

“Yeah you’re going to be rich, congratulations.” She said.

“Well no, we’re going to be rich but besides that, it worked on the small trees we need to test a bigger tree.” He stated excitedly holding her around the waist.

“Sounds good to me, I’d like to see a big one.” She said then blushed about what she said. He slowly got it and laughed giving her a playful pat on the ass.



“You go find one, I’ll be back in a sec, I need to tinkle and try and call my folks again.” She told him.

Like the other times the cell phone had no signal and the land line was still dead. She dropped it on the cradle in frustration. Nikki checked her dress again and found it was dry but decided against changing into it, there really wasn’t any need it wasn’t like she was cold and didn’t need to be modest around Mark anymore. Nikki danced happily through the nursery among the trees and flowers, her pink nightgown floating around her as she swayed, bounced and spun before she found him standing in front of a twelve foot tree and counting the time.

She shook her head no when he looked quizzically at her and slipped his arm around her tiny waist watching the tree. It looked beautiful glowing and sparkling lasting for a few minutes but not nearly as long as the small trees.

“Maybe it’s too big.” He said with a shrug a little down but still excited.

They chose another tree this one about six feet and sprayed it. The results were about the same. They tried two other trees a four and a five foot with the same result. Now he looked puzzled and a little dejected thinking maybe it was a fluke. Nikki thought for a minute watching the last two trees slowly fade.

“Something else looks different.” She said. “Stay here.” She said and scurried off her plastic heels shuffling on the matting.

She rejoined him with the guitar in her hands and started plucking the strings singing What Child is This? To their amazement the two trees slowly brightened she played louder and the trees got brighter, but even more amazing were that the other two trees did as well. Soon they were all glowing and sparkling in a multitude of colors. Mark was jumping up and down excitedly again.

“This is amazing it’s you my beautiful angel, Nikki you’re making the trees glow.” He exclaimed as she continued to sing with an enormous smile on her face and happy tears filled her green eyes.

She sang for a few minutes as Mark sprayed several trees around them soon they were slow dancing in a forest of Christmas trees all glowing brightly with Christmas color. If she had not seen it with her own eyes she would not have believed it. The thing was she knew what the answer was what Mark’s mother had meant, her dying words. After he calmed down she would tell him.

+++++

She woke a few hours later from a sound happy sleep; it was morning the sun was pouring through the windows of the nursery. She stirred shifting her body still in his embrace and looked at the two little trees. She still could see them glowing colorfully in the light while music played softly from the digital pad.

They had made love again this time slowly, passionately taking their time exploring each other while the trees glowed around them. It was beautiful and romantic and she could not have been

happier. Well maybe if she could get home, she hated the thought of her folks worrying about her all night on Christmas. Mark stirred beside her and she rolled over seeing his eyes open smiling at her. She nodded her head at the trees and he smiled with a slight nod and touched her cheek tenderly with his hand brushing her hair from her face. He kissed her gently.

She had told him about what she thought his mother meant; that it wasn't that she was saying it was a sound thing to do for the trees but that the trees needed sound...music specifically. It all made perfect sense to Nikki, she had seen the musical notes scribbled on the last page and put two and two together when she was playing. Mark thought the trees looked better when it was her they listened too, she thought he was imagining it but still it was sweet of him to say.

Before they had made love for the third time that night she nervously told him the truth about her, she owed him that much. She didn't want any lies between them laying all her cards on the table. He didn't care one bit, he loved her for her, just the way she was born no matter what, and she was perfect in his eyes. She joked that he was getting his eyes examined as soon as possible. Still Nikki didn't think it could get any better especially on Christmas she was in love and loved in return, only one thing could make this day better.

"Mark do you think the roads are drivable now? The storms over." She asked.

"I doubt it baby, it will be a while before they get us plowed out, but who needs roads anyway?" He chuckled.

"What do you mean?" Nikki asked puzzled.

"Just what do you think I was driving when I found you last night angel?" He laughed. "I got a snow track."

By eight in the morning they were bumping along down the snow covered mountain road seated in the roomy warm cabin of an arctic snow tracked vehicle. Nikki sat in the thickly padded seat in the dress she wore last night it was better than having Mark meet her parents dressed in a little baby doll nightie. She figured it would be best to save that part of the story for another time, like after the honeymoon. If anything Nikki was an old fashioned girl and some things were better left unsaid.

+++++

Two hours later after a fun bouncy ride in the snow track they pulled up in front of her parents' large ranch style country house the sun gleaming on the new snow. Mark pulled up as close as he could to the house and carried a giggling Nikki to the porch. They paused for a moment kissing happily but separated quickly as they heard the door noisily open.

Nick and Cynthia slept all night on the sofa in the living room along with Nikki's brother and sister on the floor under the tree. They were all awoken by the loud rumbling sound of a diesel engine very close to the house. Nick thought it might have been a snow plow crashing through the yard and woke up cursing for a moment until his wife calmed him.

Their eyes were wide with surprise and relief seeing their missing daughter and they pulled her inside out of the snow crying and thanking God for bringing her home safely. Nikki told them it was more like God had brought Mark to her and he brought her home safely but still to them all a Christmas miracle none the less.

They sipped hot coffee as Nikki and her Mom made breakfast while Nikki and Mark told them of the exciting ordeal, leaving out a few private parts of course. After a long thankful breakfast they finally went into the living room where Nikki's youngest siblings were anxiously waiting to finally open presents. Of course Nick, Cynthia, Nikki and Mark had already gotten the most important presents they could ever wish for. Still it was fun having everyone together and listening to the younger children unwrapping gifts.

It only took a moment for Nikki to notice sitting on a table the manger her grandfather had built so many years ago. Her mother told her he had sent it in a large box with the gifts he had sent them. She wished he could be there with them and hoped she could see him soon and tell him about Mark, she knew he would be happy for her.

Nick spent a lot of the time looking at his lovely new daughter smiling proudly, holding her hand and hugging her whenever he got the chance. She was as happy as a girl could be at that moment in time. Nikki opened a few gifts mostly clothes which she would need lord knows how long it would be before they find Maggie again and get her suitcase. Not like she didn't have things at the house to wear, but hey a girl always needs new clothes, and shoes.

Finally her mother handed her a large box from Granddad she smiled thinking of him wrapping it something his old arthritic hands had trouble with and she thanked him silently for caring. She tore the paper off slowly wondering what it could be. As she pulled the wrapping paper off a familiar worn old box came into view and peering out of a plastic window in that old box a familiar angelic face. A face that looked different somehow.

"I don't believe it." Nikki said softly as she opened the top of the box and slid the beautiful angel out and stood her on her stand on the coffee table. Her brother quickly unwrapped the electric cord and plugged it in; the angel immediately sprang to life her head, wings, and arms moved in that familiar way, the candle lit her face and made her green eyes sparkle.

Granddad had the angel's golden blond hair replaced or dyed a glistening deep black. Nikki's eyes blurred with tears that rolled hotly down her cheeks and her chest ached. She wished she could hug her granddad so badly. Her father seated on her right and Mark on her left both reached for one of her hands and held them tightly.

"She looks just like you did that first time I saw you in my headlights in the snow last night, angel." Mark said softly not caring that anyone else heard him use such a familiar term of endearment. It was what he kept saying when he saw her in the snow, later sleeping and after playing guitar making the trees glow. She looks like an angel, my angel.

Nikki leaned back resting her head on Mark's chest looking at the angel sobbing quietly, not tears of sadness but far from it. Her mother found a card inside the box which read: An Angel for my angel of a granddaughter come see me soon, we'll go shopping. I put an extra ticket inside in case you want to bring someone special. All my love always, Granddad.

The tears poured from her eyes as she sniffled heavily wondering how he could have known. She leaned over to her father falling into his chest who wrapped his arms around his lovely daughter, joining her tears and thanking God silently for bringing her home.

+++++

Shortly after dinner Nikki's father was in the den watching a basketball game the Boston Celtics were beating the Miami Heat, which Nick felt would make this a perfect holiday. Mark walked in and sat down on a recliner beside him with a serious look on his face. Nick paused the game waiting in silence.

"Sir, I have to be going but I just wanted to formally ask your permission to date your daughter. She's very special to me. I, um, I love her...a lot." He asked nervously but managed to keep his voice steady.

"Son, I hope you're serious and you aim to make her happy, my little girl is very precious to me?" Nick said firmly.

"Yes sir I will me too." Mark said with a hard swallow.

"She's one in a million you know?"

"More like a trillion sir." Mark corrected.

"Hmmm, well maybe you are as smart as my daughter says you are, young man. See you around then." He said offering his hand which Mark took smiling broadly.

"Yes sir, you will. Good night and Merry Christmas sir." Mark said leaving Nick alone.

"Yes, I guess it has been, Merry Christmas." Replied the satisfied Mr. Wright.

Epilogue: Wedding Announcements: Mark Johansson IV and Nikki Wright were married after over a yearlong courtship the following spring, witnessed by many family and friends including her grandfather. The young bride looked beautiful in a flowing princess ball gown with a sweetheart cut corset backed white satin bodice decorated with sparkling crystal beading and voluminous Cinderella skirts of layers of white tulle in large vertical ruffles over white taffeta accented with sparkling crystals. Of special note were the self-glowing sprays of delicate miniature pine and baby breaths in her bouquet of white roses and the multi-colored glowing Christmas trees that surrounded the venue that seemed to dance to the music. She became Mrs. Nichole Johansson IV in May of 2023. After their honeymoon the happy bride and groom will live on Greylock Mountain running the family Christmas tree business and selling their Miracle Tree Glow Spray which Forbes Fortune 500 Magazine predict will be the hottest selling Christmas item since the electric light. They are planning on a having large family as soon as they get done practicing.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Nikki Wright". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned at the bottom center of the page.