

A Positive

“But at the end of the day, or the end of the shift, the uniforms come off and these men reveal that they are not people with super powers, they are just humans, who feel, have highs and lows, get angry and sometimes cry.”

- *Captain Hank Stanley*

Mild language

All medical mistakes are mine.

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At 8:30 a.m., Mike and Roy drove and parked 51's engine and squad where indicated at the LA County Fire Department Training facility. As they exited the vehicles, the men started to gather their SCBA equipment and turn out coats as they were instructed to do at roll call just a half an hour earlier.

“Man,” Johnny said, “It is just too early to be doing this exercise, and on a Sunday to boot.”

Roy had heard Johnny's “disagreement” with this morning's drill for the last 25 minutes as they drove to the remote facility north of Los Angeles. “I know,” Roy said, “Johnny, let's just do what we have to do so we can get back to the station okay.”

The next thing they heard was a megaphoned voice of a battalion chief, “Men, let's gather over here!”

And for the next hour, the six men from 51 and 12 firefighters from 86 and 127 were put through a series of hose, ladder, and rescue scenarios. At the end of the successful drill, the men shook hands with the chiefs in charge and started to return to their respective vehicles.

“Hydro-gardening,” answered Chet as he and Roy walked together. “Basically, I took a sweet potato, stabbed it with about four toothpicks and placed it in a glass of water and left it on the kitchen windowsill for about 2 weeks. It was easy.”

“Yeah. What grade did you get?” Roy asked.

“A C minus,” Chet explained quickly. “I got a C minus on everything in school.”

“Well, Joanne and I are kind of hoping that Chris can do better than a C minus,” Roy said.

“What are you two talking about?” asked Mike, as Marco and Johnny also curiously joined the conversation.

“Chris has his Fourth Grade Science Project Fair this Friday and he wants to build a working volcano like I did when I was his age, and . . . I was just asking for other suggestions.” Roy said.

“I remember I did my science project on the extraction of silver from the mines in Mexico,” and before he was asked, Marco finished his sentence with, “I got a B.”

Mike remembered distinctly what his was on but hesitated to share his childhood project with his co-workers. They might laugh at him. He went to his side of the engine and began to place his equipment back into storage.

“Mike, do you remember yours?” asked Chet.

“Well . . . Roy I got a B plus on my project,” Mike hesitated.

“Really, what was it about?” Roy asked as he too, was putting his SCBA tank back in the squad.

“How to Prevent Air Pollution in Los Angeles” And Mike was right . . . they all laughed.

“Well, whatever you did, it didn’t work.” Chet added.

Normally Johnny would have felt left out of the conversation; growing up on an Indian Reservation in Montana, the schools didn’t require things like science projects but right now, he was more hungry than anything else. “Let’s get going guys, I’m starved,” he said.

“So what’s new!” they all said at the same time as they got in their seats and headed back to Carson.

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The returning traffic on Sunday morning was not bad as the squad led the way through the Los Angeles interstate system that was both the best and worst thing about being a driver in southern California. “A Breakthrough in Modern Civilization” the media reported years ago. No longer will you be hassled by stop signs and signal lights. The new 5-lane freeway with clover-leaf overpasses, would take anyone to their desired destination safely, and in record time. As Roy was driving, he thought if any student ever did his project on relieving traffic in congested areas, but he deduced that that would be more of a social studies project, not a science one. He continued to drive when he heard the HT.

“Squad 51 this is Engine 51,” as he heard his captain.

Johnny picked up his handie-talkie and replied, “Squad 51.”

“Squad 51, let’s get off at Virginia St. We can stop at the store for groceries before we get back to the station,” Hank added.

“10-4 Cap,” Johnny said as he returned the HT back to the bench seat of the squad. “Food!” he said as he rubbed his hands together.

Roy looked over to see if he could see drool coming out of Johnny’s mouth. Ivan Pavlov should have used John Gage in his classical conditioning experiment instead of a dog. *Now that*, he thought, *would be a great science project!*

Roy and Mike easily exited the 405 at Virginia, took a right and headed into the town just north of Carson.

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Virginia Street connected the 405 to an “edge city” where there wasn’t a lot of residential areas, just industrial parks and even larger warehouse companies with loading and unloading facilities for semi-

trucks. Because of its daily clientele, Virginia Street itself was beaten up. Pot holes, rutted out areas and heavy loads made it one rough ride. Chet and Marco, who always rode backwards, had to really hold on because they couldn't see the upcoming bumps like the rest of the crew. Still, it was a four lane state highway, just like 223rd Street in front of Station 51 where unfortunately, there was a signal light every four blocks.

"Come on Roy, run it!" Johnny said as the yellow light was just changing to red.

"Nope," he said. "Your stomach is not going to die in the next say, 45 seconds waiting for this light to change."

"You wanna bet?" Johnny mumbled as he stared out his window.

Sometimes Roy wondered if being a parent helped him with Johnny's childlike "enthusiasm" or the other way around.

As the squad and engine waited for the light to turn green, their occupants could hear a police siren coming from their left, about a half a mile down Milsaps, the cross street. Being firemen, their hearing was acute to picking up distant sirens. As four vehicles were almost through turning left from Milsaps to Virginia, the men saw the need for the police. A very fast Ford Thunderbird was driving erratically down the middle of the two lane street with a police car about a football field behind. When the Thunderbird got to the intersection, Johnny and Roy, and probably the four men behind them as well, noticed that it had no plans to slow down for the 90 degree turn.

Johnny pushed down on his imaginary brake on the passenger side of the squad, held on to the dashboard and yelled, "Shit, he's not gonna make it!"

Tires squealed as the speeding car did manage to pull it off, but as the Thunderbird was coming out of the turn to head up Virginia Street, it side-swiped the last of the four cars that had just, legally turned through the intersection. The speed with which the Thunderbird clipped the other car, caused that car to jump onto the shoulder of the highway and then, as John, Roy, Cap, Mike, Chet, and Marco watched . . . it started to flip. The car with the innocent driver who was following the rules of the road, flipped, over and over again until it disappeared over the side of the Los Angeles River embankment.

Before the squad came to a complete stop Johnny was out of his door, running to the car. He came to the cement railing that was at the top of the structure and looked down. "Hello, can you hear me?" he screamed. What he saw was the underneath of the flipped car but what he heard was even more shocking.

"Yes. I can hear you," said Emma Clark. "Can you help me? Can you call the fire department?"

"My name is John Gage; I'm a firefighter/paramedic with the LA County Fire Department. We're here to help you," he replied.

Damn, they are fast. She thought.

"She's alive," he called back to the crew. "Bring a rope and my belt."

"Are you okay?" Johnny asked, as Cap, Marco and Mike joined him at the railing,

Emma thought about saying *I'm alive*, but that seemed redundant so she said instead "I'm a little dizzy."

Marco and Mike agreed as Johnny said, "I'll bet!"

"My name is Captain Hank Stanley from Station 51, you just hang on and we'll be down to get you okay?"

His voice seemed so official. "Yes sir," she replied and even though she just went through one hell of a roller coaster ride, she accepted his promise to help. A couple of years ago, some of her college friends were into feminism, equal gender rights and all that, but right now . . . Emma Clark was grateful that she was in the capable hands of an officially-sounding Captain Hank Stanley and the *men* of Station 51.

"Mike, do you think you can get the engine down here to help?" Cap asked. Mike looked back at Big Red. Between the street and where they were now was at least 75 feet of distance that also had a vertical drop of, he estimated 15-20 feet.

"No way Cap, it's too steep. If I start, she could tumble and end up in the same position as the car or worse."

"Okay, you're right," Cap said adding, "get some rope and anchor the car to the engine just in case. Johnny, let's get you down there so that you can check out the situation."

Johnny stood on the top of the railing and looked down. He thought to himself that there was no conceivable way the designers of this public works project could have envisioned anything like this freak accident when they designed this "cement river" decades ago. From where he was, to where the car landed was about 15 feet down, with another 15-20 feet more to the ground. He looked back to Cap and Roy and shook his head. In his mind, this was not going to be an easy rescue.

Chet, Marco and Mike returned with three anchored ropes. Roy took one and securely looped it to Johnny's belt. When they were all gloved and in position, they held the rope as Johnny started to repel down. He stopped his descent as he reached the inverted vehicle. "Hi, how you feeling?" he asked as he surveyed the smashed car.

"I've been better," Emma said. "Do you think you are going to get me out?"

"Piece of cake," he said trying to keep her spirits up and added, "A pineapple upside down cake." And just as he said the word "pineapple" Emma said the exact phrase out loud, completely in synchronization. "Hey, how about that?" he said. When he was in school, if one of his friends and he said the same thing at the same time, he would yell "Jinx!" Under the current circumstances he thought the word jinx and its negative connotation would not be an appropriate word to say at this time.

He couldn't see her at all. All he could tell was that her voice was coming from the cement side, not the open side where he was. The car windows on each side and the windshields were gone, leaving just bent metal. Johnny took his feet and pushed off on the car in an effort to swing to the other side of the vehicle but when he did, his leg force made the vehicle drop another foot. "Damn . . . you okay?"

"I'm not a fireman or anything, but I don't think I'm headed in the right direction," she answered.

As serious as the situation was Johnny couldn't help but smile. "Hey, *I am a* fireman and you know what? I agree," he replied. "Cap, this car is very unstable," he yelled up. "We need to really tie it off fast."

"What's your name?" Johnny asked.

“Emma Clark,” she answered.

“Okay Emma,” he said, “can you describe to me your position in the car?”

Emma didn’t really know where she was, but she still felt that her seat belt was intact. “I’m not sure. I feel like a baby that is just getting ready to be born. I’m kinda in a fetal position with the weight of my body pushing down on my head,” she described. “My head really hurts by the way.”

“Okay, tell you what. I’m gonna go up and tell my captain what’s going on down here but I’ll be right back okay?” Johnny promised.

“I’ll be here when you get back,” she said.

Johnny couldn’t help but smile as he yelled, “Pull me up!” Once on solid ground Johnny described the situation to Cap and his crewmates. If they tried to use the Porta-Power, Emma could fall to the base of the cement river below.

“LA this is Engine 51, we need a crane at our location,” Hank said as he pushed the button on his HT. He also requested an ambulance and additional police. A crowd of onlookers started to form. He wanted to keep those people on Virginia Street, not where he was.

In the meantime, Johnny had gathered the men together and said, “Guys, her name is Emma Clark and for now, she seems lucid. We need to keep her talking. I’m afraid that once her adrenaline drops she’s gonna go out on us. I’m gonna go back down and find out some more things. Since it’s really hard to hang on a rope for long, how about we switch every 10 minutes?” Johnny theorized. “Roy, you might want to get Rampart on standby,” he added.

“Already done that. I’ll tell them what I know so far, which isn’t much,” Roy said.

As Johnny lowered himself back down, Cap came over to his crew. “It seems that the crane’s ETA will be about 35-45 minutes, how’s she doing?” he asked.

Roy filled his captain in on what Johnny suggested. “Thirty-five to 45 minutes,” said Roy as the paramedic in him thought, “it’s hot this morning and it’s only going to get hotter. Johnny says that the car resembles a sardine can. I hope we won’t have to worry about heat stroke as well as her other injuries?” Roy didn’t know how accurate his prediction was going to be as he returned to the biophone.

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“Hey, I’m back. You still with me?” Johnny asked as he lowered himself back to the wreck.

“Uh huh. I haven’t moved a muscle,” she said, trying to find as much humor in the situation as she could.

“Emma, your car is precariously stuck within an entrance to an outtake of the Los Angeles River. Right now, you are I are kind of suspended about 15 feet over the dry river bed. We don’t want to risk bringing down our equipment to cut you out of the car because we can’t see you for one and two, we don’t want to cut you accidentally and then we of course don’t want you to fall,” he explained.

“Good plan,” she said.

“So, Captain Stanley has ordered a crane to come here and pick up the car. Got it?” Johnny added.

“I understand,” she answered.

“Now, it’s gonna take a while for the crane to get here, so my firemen buddies and I are going to keep you company until then,” he said. He didn’t want to tell her that the real reason for the vocal company was to keep her conscious. When a victim loses consciousness, the body quickly begins to shut down and Johnny did not want that to happen, so he started talking.

“Tell me about yourself. Age, weight, anything you’d like,” he inquired.

“I’m 25 years old and on a good day I’m about 120 pounds, I like to take long walks on the beach and . . . wait a minute, I feel like I’m being interviewed by *Playboy*,” she said.

Johnny laughed, “Okay, why don’t I ask you questions and, you can just answer them.”

“As long as you answer any of mine,” she came back quickly.

“Deal,” he said adding “are you single or married?”

“Single. And you?” she returned the question.

“Single,” he replied. “Do you live alone? Do you have an apartment,” he continued.

“I have my own house and except for a cat, I live alone. And you?” Emma thought this was a strange place for all of this “first date” information, but Johnny sounded cute, and she didn’t have anything else to do, so what the hell.

“I have an apartment,” Johnny said, “but I’m rarely there with the 24 hour shifts that we work.”

She came up with the next question. “Do you . . . like to cook?”

“Well that’s an interesting question. When we are at work we take turns cooking, but when I’m at home, I usually just make a sandwich or something,” he said honestly. “What about you?”

“Me too, I have a lot of salads and sometimes I order from this Chinese place down the street, they deliver,” she continued.

“Chinese huh? What’s your favorite thing on the menu,” he asked and as he continued talking they did it again, saying the exact thing at the same time. “I don’t know it all tastes the same to me!”

Emma was stunned. “We did it again, didn’t we?”

At that moment Johnny and Emma heard Roy yelling down, “Johnny, let’s switch.”

“Who is that?” Emma asked.

“That my partner Roy. He’s also a paramedic, well not exactly like me; he’s married with two children,” clarified Johnny. He felt his rope pulling him so he said, “Bye, and I’ll see you up top in a few minutes.”

Once on land he told Roy and the guys what he found out about the mysterious woman in the car. Roy was determined to find out more . . . medical things. They lowered him down.

Even before Roy said a word she started, “So Roy, how are the wife and kids?”

A little stunned he said, "Fine." He paused, "Emma the doctors at Rampart Hospital want to get as much information as they can get while you are still in the car, okay?"

"Okay, what do you want to know?" she replied.

"Are you allergic to anything?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Are you on any medication?"

"No." *Roy was not going to be as fun as Johnny!* She thought.

"Great. Can you take your pulse for me, I want to get a reading," he said.

Emma thought about it at first and then said, "Basically, you asking me if I can count, right?"

"Yeah, I guess that was a stupid question. What I meant to say was there any way you could feel your heartbeat," he rephrased the question. "Can you move at all?"

"Roy, I feel like I have been vacuumed sealed in a can. I feel like the weight of my whole body is putting pressure on my head and left shoulder, which by the way, are really starting to hurt," Emma described.

"Can you move a hand at least?" he asked.

"No, but if you want, I can count the throbbing in my forehead, would that work?" she suggested.

"Sure, that will do. I'll tell you when to start and stop counting okay," he said.

"Okay," she answered.

Roy made sure that his rope was secured and switched hands so that he could see his watch. When the second hand got to :00 he said, "Go."

He didn't hear anything so after about seven seconds he asked, "Have you started?"

"You didn't say that I had to count out loud," she said.

"I'm sorry, when you start again, can you please count out loud?" he asked.

"Nope." She said, "I'm gonna keep you in suspense. You are just going to have to trust me."

"Okay," he agreed. *Emma Clark is a very interesting patient.* Again, as the second hand got to :00 he said, "Go."

Emma silently counted, Roy silently waited. When the second hand reached :15 he said, "Stop. What did you get?"

"I got 14, is that okay?" she inquired.

"You have a pulse of 56. That's pretty good considering your circumstances." Roy lied. Her rate was far below what he expected. He would be sure to bring this up to Rampart when he was relieved.

Emma was concerned by Roy's silence so she decided to start the next conversation. "So," Emma asked, "tell me about your family."

“Well,” he hesitated. Roy couldn’t remember a time at a rescue when he was the interviewee and not the interviewer, but since he had gotten all of the medical information he could, he decided to go along with it. “I married my high school sweetheart. Her name is Joanne and we have two wonderful children: a boy and a girl,” he started.

“What do they look like?” she asked.

“My wife is beautiful,” Roy said and he even caught himself smiling. “We met in the fourth grade but we didn’t start dating until we were in high school.” And before he knew it . . . , Roy had gone on and on about Joanne, and how she handles being the wife of a fireman with two children. “She’s my best friend,” he finished.

“Wow,” Emma said. “That’s sweet Roy. Joanne is a very lucky woman.”

He thought. *And I’m the luckiest man in the world.*

“What about the kids?”

“My son is in the fourth grade and he is driving us all crazy because he has to present a science project at school this Friday. Do you remember what your school science project was on?” Roy asked hoping that it was not on Hydro-gardening.

“Believe it or not, you are talking to the Los Angeles County Elementary School Science Fair winner for 1965,” Emma said proudly.

“Are you serious,” Roy questioned, “or are you just pulling my leg?”

“No I’m not lying Roy. I won it in the 8th grade though. My project was on the different blood types and why everyone should know their own blood type and why they should donate blood whenever they can and, oh, by the way, I have A positive blood, if that helps.”

“I’ll let the doctors know,” Roy said. “That’s a great topic, but Chris is only in the fourth grade, so I guess we will just stick to his working volcano demonstration.”

“Good idea, and anyway, I’m sure his school won’t allow a 9 year old to take blood from audience members.” she added, “But, I can give you some suggestions to make his project stand out.” As she finished that sentence Emma started to feel . . . strange.

“Hey Roy,” she said seriously, “I don’t feel so good. My stomach is feeling weird.”

“Can you describe it? Where does it specifically hurt?”

Emma thought for a moment and said, “I don’t know. It’s like when you eat too much and you have . . . pressure. You know?”

“That’s probably from the seatbelt. Can you tell if it is still on?” Roy guessed that it was causing the pressure since she was upside down.

“I can still feel the shoulder strap so yeah, it must still be on,” she said.

“Tell you what, I’m gonna go back up and tell the doctors what I have okay.”

“Johnny, Mike, bring me up!” he screamed and as the rope began to pull him up he said, “Don’t worry Emma, there are a lot of people working to get you out of this car!” Then he was gone.

While Roy was down talking to Emma, Captain Stanley and Mike Stoker were trying to access the rescue plan, once the crane got into position. Cap was concerned that if the crane pulled the car up incorrectly, the car would tilt and perhaps causing more injury. It was decided that Mike would be the next man lowered down. While he was talking to Emma, he could be choosing the best place to hook the crane. Mike secured his belt around his waist and he thought that it was a good thing that all of the men this morning, including the engineers, had to do the training exercises.

Before they started to lower Mike, Roy explained that her adrenaline was wearing off and that she might start to talk less and feel more. Mike understood.

Emma was hot and her body was letting her know that maybe she wasn't going to be able to "walk away" from the wreckage after all. Most of all, it was hot. She thought. *If I could only take a deep breath of cool air.* Then she heard her next visitor.

"Hello," she said.

"Hello, how are you feeling?" he asked.

"I'll feel a lot better once I get out of here," she said adding, "it's getting hot in here. Are you another paramedic?"

"No, I'm the crew engineer. My name is Mike," he said.

"You're an engineer? I didn't know fire departments had their own math wizards?" Emma questioned.

Mike feigned like he was stabbed in the heart. "Ouch! Hey, don't pick on me because I'm smart. I can't help it," smiled Mike as he was trying to keep the conversation upbeat. "So, you don't like smart guys, you like them dumb?" he asked as he was looking for the best possible place to hook the crane to.

"No, I didn't . . . mean that," she stuttered, "unfortunately I usually end up dating dumb guys anyway. There seems to be an awful lot of them in L.A." Emma felt, what is that old-fashioned word, *flabbergasted*. It had been a long time since a man got the best of her so she was determined to change the subject. She took a second and asked, "Mike, what do you think about cats?"

As she said that, Mike pushed off the now stabilized car and swung to the other side. "Wait, you don't have to go, we don't have to talk about cats if you don't want to, we can talk about. . ." She thought. *What do engineers talk about?* "We can talk about logarithms or Einstein or. . ."

"Don't worry, I'm not going anywhere, I'm just looking at the car," he said as he went back to her side. "We can talk about cats. I love cats."

Emma relaxed. She really didn't want to be down there alone. "Do you want to know what my cat's name is?"

"Sure, what is it?" he replied.

"Mike," she said

"What?" he asked.

"Mike." And before this bizarre conversation turned into an Abbott and Costello routine she added, "My cat's name is Mike."

“Oh. Well, that’s an interesting name for a cat,” he thought out loud.

“Well, he didn’t look like a Tiger or Fluffy or anything like that. He looks like a “Mike,” so I named him Mike. He showed up on my back porch one afternoon. He’s a tough looking orange tabby cat, who has been through a few fights but he always returns each morning and afternoon, so . . . I guess he’s mine.” Emma’s left arm let her know at that precise moment, that it was still there and that it hurt. “Aaaa. . .” came out of her mouth.

“Are you okay?” Mike asked. No answer. “Emma, are you okay?” he repeated.

“My arm hurts, Mike,” she said. “Give me a minute.”

Mike looked at his watch. It had only been 20 minutes since the call went out for the crane. He changed the topic and kept talking.

“So, you know what I do for a living. What do you do?” he asked hoping she would respond.

“I’m . . . I’m an office manager for Wexler Hall Architectural Firm,” she said.

“Wexler Hall?” questioned Mike.

“They named the business Wexler Hall because they, there are six men in the company . . . anyway, they were all students at USC and after graduation, they formed their own company and named it after the college building where their architecture classes were,” she explained. “And do you want to know something that’s kind of sad?”

“I guess so,” he said.

“All of them, their wives and children are on their way to Honolulu for a two-week vacation. I was just coming back from seeing them off at the airport.”

“So, can I take it that you are on a two-week vacation too?” Mike asked gingerly.

“Sad, huh,” she replied.

Captain Stanley yelled down, “Mike we need you up top, we’re gonna send Marco down next.”

“Bye, engineer Mike,” Emma said.

“Hey, don’t worry, we’re gonna get you out, okay,” he said as he was pulled up.

“Okay,” she said very quietly as she realized just how hot it was becoming around her.

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Dr. Joe Early, who took the call from Squad 51 almost 45 minutes ago, Dr. Kell Brackett and Nurse Dixie McCall, were waiting by the base station for an update. So far, they were told that the patient was inaccessible, 25 year old woman, 120 pounds with head pain and a slow heart rate.

Early pushed the button down, “Squad 51?”

“Squad 51,” Johnny returned to radio signal.

“Do you have any more information?” the doctor asked.

“She is experiencing pain in her left arm, and she’s getting hot. Oh, and she says her blood type is A positive,” Johnny informed Dr. Early.

“Roy, John, Dr. Brackett and I have conferred and we’d like to prepare you for what we think is going to happen when you get her out of the car,” he said. Johnny and Roy knew that they had better pay close attention.

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“Buenos días,” said Marco Lopez as he came level with the car. “Mi nombre es... Marco Lopez, what is yours”

“Mi nombre es... Emma,” she said.

“¿Cómo están?” he asked. (How are you feeling?)

“Mi enfermo,” she answered. (I’m feeling sick.)

“¿Tienes alguno que podemos llamar . . .” Marco continued.

She stopped him. That was all the Spanish that she knew from Mr. Garcia’s Spanish class in high school.

“I’m sorry, that’s all the Spanish I remember,” she said.

“I’m sorry; you sounded so good there for a while.” He started again in English, “Do you have any one we can call who can meet you at the hospital?”

Emma took a minute to catch her breath. She was so hot. *How long was it gonna take?* Her head hurt, her arm hurt and her stomach still felt . . . weird.

Marco was concerned because she was quiet, “Emma?”

“No, there is no one to call. My mom lives in Paris. My dad died about 3 years ago,” she said.

Marco asked again, “Any friends or maybe co-workers?”

“No.” she said softly. “It’s really . . . tengo calor.” (It’s really hot in here.)

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“You need to be ready for what is probably going to happen,” Joe Early said. “She probably has massive internal bleeding. Once you get her out, put her in a trauma suit as quickly as you can. Now about the arm. If she is pushed into a corner of the car, she has probably been leaning quite extensively on her left shoulder and arm, which are probably fractured, possibly compound, so have Kerlex, a triangular bandage and a splint for her arm ready as well. That fetal position that she is in is probably keeping her conscious as her body is preventing her injuries from bleeding out causing hypovolemic shock. If you can, to keep her from adding heat stroke to her problems, soak her with some water as soon as you can to start the cooling process, and then use ice packs.”

“10-4 Rampart,” Johnny said as Roy touched his arm and pointed to something behind Johnny’s back. Johnny turned around and said back into the biophone, “The crane is here, Rampart. We’ll get back to you after we extricate the patient.”

“We’ll be waiting 51,” said the doctor. Dr. Early went to the Doctor’s Lounge for a cup of coffee and a snack. He knew that he had a long day ahead of him.

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“Hey guys, she’s really hot down here, what’s the ETA?” Marco shouted.

Captain Stanley yelled back, “The crane is here. Not too much longer now. Marco, we need you up here. Chet is on his way down.”

As he was lowered, Chet had a confession to make to himself. He just wasn’t that good at talking to single women. Little kids . . . no problem. Old ladies . . . no problem. He just always came off as a jerk talking with women and now . . . they sent him down to keep an injured woman talking. *Shit!*

“Hi Emma, I’m Chet,” he started. There was no response. *Shit!*

“Yoooo hoooo, you okay?” he asked, praying that she would respond.

“Chet,” she said quietly, “can I ask you a question?”

“Sure, let it rip,” he said, with perhaps a little more “bounce” than was needed.

“Are you good at repairing things? You’re a fireman, you’re supposed to be good a fixing things, right?” she asked.

“Umm,” Chet replied. He didn’t really know what to say.

“Do you think you can fix my car?” she asked hopefully. “This was my Dad’s car before he died.”

“No. Sorry Emma the car is totaled,” he plainly said. She was quiet now but that wasn’t going to stop him from keeping her talking. Who cared if he sounded like a jerk? “You know what though,” he said, “I’m pretty damned good with wood and carpentry. In fact, I just built my niece a doll house for her birthday next Sunday. All I have to do now is paint it. I’m thinking that I’ll paint it purple, that’s her favorite color. What do you think?”

It took a while, but Emma finally answered. He could tell that she was having a difficult time catching her breath. “No, don’t do that,” she said.

“Don’t do what?” Chet asked.

“Chet, have you ever seen a purple house? I’d paint it . . . like a house. White with maybe a black roof and then if you want to, maybe some dark purple shutters,” she suggested. “You do that, and she’ll never forget that her Uncle Chet made it for . . .”

Emma stopped talking. He could hear that she was having a very hard time breathing.

“Roy! Johnny! We got a problem down here!” he screamed.

“Okay we’re gonna pull you up, tell her I’m coming back down,” Roy said as Chet’s rope started to pull him up.

Marco and Chet lowered Mike down with the crane hook at the same time Johnny and Captain Stanley lowered Roy.

“Emma, it’s me Roy. How are you doing?” he asked. He could hear her gasping for air, but she wasn’t talking.

“Emma, I know you can still hear me so I’m going to ask you to take your pulse again for me. Okay? Are you ready . . . start.” And again after 15 seconds he said, “Stop.” All he heard was breathing. “Emma, did you count,” Nothing. “Emma!”

“Don’t . . . scream . . . at me Roy. I’m hot,” she said without any energy.

“Cap! We gotta get her out of here. Now!” Roy demanded.

And with that the 5 ton crane, picked up Emma’s car, swung it over to the flattest part and put it safely on the ground. It took less than five minutes.

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Everyone had their assignments. Marco and Cap had the Porta-Power and Mike and Chet had the Jaws. They started the second the car hit the ground. After Johnny pulled up Roy, they went over to the area. Roy contacted Rampart to give them an update and Johnny hovered around the car. He knew that because he was the thinnest member of the crew, he would be the one to crawl into the wreckage. Johnny took off his blue uniform shirt. He didn’t want his department badge or name badge to cause any trouble while he was inside of the car.

In about two minutes, Mike had appeared to have enough space opened up for Johnny’s decent and Emma’s removal.

“Emma, are you still with us?” Johnny asked. Everyone around gave a quick cheer when they heard her respond.

“I’m still here,” she said.

“Okay, I’m going to come in and figure out a way to get you out of here. Stay with us okay?” he said as he managed to push his way into the now opened area. *Damn, it’s hot in here!* Johnny got as close to Emma as he could. She was soaked with sweat. He hoped it was just sweat. The whole time he was assessing her injuries, he kept talking. “Emma,” he said as he tried to straighten her legs, “can you move your legs?” She did. “Good, now I’m going to cut through your seatbelt and see if I can roll you over.” He slowly rolled her over and he couldn’t make out what he was seeing so he reached back and took out his pen light. She had a gash on her left temple, and just like Dr. Early predicted, it started to bleed. Not that bad, but bad enough. “You got a little cut on your head, okay.” He placed the pen light in his mouth and probed her neck and head. Her hair was completely soaked. *God, it was hot in here!*

Then he saw what he was afraid of. The chrome border around the window part of the door was dislocated from the car and it was now twisted and embedded in her left arm, starting at the shoulder and going all the way down. “Emma, you seem to have some metal that’s . . . in the way. We’re gonna fix that once we get you out of here. Are you ready?” She nodded. Johnny backed up a little and grabbed her by her ankles and gently started to pull her out. Now, she felt pain. A few gasps and other indescribable sounds came out of her mouth. As much as he wanted to stop, Johnny knew he couldn’t.

Roy and Marco grabbed Emma’s feet as Johnny passed them through. Roy reached down and grabbed her thighs and held that position until more was available. *Her body is too hot.* Chet was ready and waiting with the reel line to cool her off once she was out of the damned car.

“Okay Roy, we’re gonna have to turn her to your right,” Johnny said. Emma continued to let them know that she was in pain.

Roy and Marco turned her as requested. Marco was not prepared for what he saw. Her legs were as he would say “negro.” Almost black. Roy saw it too. She had massive contusions on each thigh and, within the last hour these contusions started to form dark, deep bruises where blood was pooled. Roy thought this happened when her thighs repeatedly slammed against the steering wheel while the car flipped. *We can’t use the trauma suit now!* Couldn’t chance sending a clot up into her lungs.

Roy was pulled back to reality when Emma started to scream and kick her legs. “Shit Roy, push her back in quick!” Johnny said. “Cap, Mike, we need to open up a spot on this side. Get the Jaws. Quick.” Between the noise of the machine and Emma’s obvious pain, Johnny had to scream to let Roy know what happened.

“Roy, the chrome that is attached to her arm is still attached to the car. We need to cut it loose. Hurry,” he said. *It is so damned hot in here!*

Hank and Mike were trying to find a place to start. Her screaming didn’t help. They started to open up an area but the Jaws didn’t catch and when the heavy machine snapped back Emma screamed louder. They realized that they were going to cut through a piece of metal that was potentially attached to human flesh. Mike, who was the operator of the Jaws shuddered. Chet ran to the squad and grabbed the tin snips out of the compartment and ran back and handed it to his captain. Finally, they opened the wreckage enough to see not only the chrome, but the bloody hand it was attached to. Hank took the tool and cut the metal.

“She’s free,” he yelled.

“Let’s get her out of here,” Johnny shouted and Roy and Marco started pulling. On the inside, Johnny was doing his best to guide Emma’s body through the opening. When Roy and Marco grabbed her waist, Johnny was forced to do something he really didn’t want to do. Because of the small hole that Emma was being pulled through, Johnny knew that the metal that was sticking out was not going to fit through if it was still by her side. Johnny took her left arm and forced it above her head like a student raising her hand in school.

“Johnny! Don’t!” Emma started to scream directly at him. “Johnny! Please!”

It was killing him. “Keep pulling Roy, she’s almost out!”

Knowing what was coming, Hank started to yell louder. “Stoker, switch places with Kelly. Kelly, we need to make an extension to the gurney. Go to the squad and get the half backboard and attach it somehow to the side of the gurney where the arm would rest. Go!”

As Roy finished pulling Emma out Marco grabbed her bloody left arm and between the two of them they made it over to the gurney.

Mike took the reel line and poured water over her torso. Roy cut her t-shirt off as there was no way they could work around the soaked material. Emma was breathing too fast! *She’s gonna stroke out on us!* Roy thought.

“Please Emma, you have to slow your breathing down,” Roy begged. She didn’t hear him.

“Mike, get me the vacuum splint box,” Johnny yelled as he came out of the car. Marco, who was still holding the arm, listened as Johnny explained what they were going to do next.

“Please Emma, you have to slow your breathing down,” Roy begged again as he tried to hold her down on the gurney. She didn’t hear him. Roy took his hand and forcefully turned her head so that she was facing him, not the side with Johnny and Marco.

“Emma, you’re gonna have to slow down your breathing. Come on look at me. Slow them down,” he said again but she didn’t listen.

“Cap!” Roy said. “Cap you have to hold her head so that’s she’s not looking over there. Please keep her head looking at me!”

Hank went to the top of the gurney, removed his gloves, used the palms of his hands and turned and held Emma’s head away from her left side. It had been a long time since Hank had gotten a victim’s blood on him.

“Slow down. Come on. You can do it,” Roy repeated over and over. And now that she wasn’t looking where she was before, Roy was getting through to her. “There you go. Great job Emma!”

But then Johnny and Marco had to bend the metal and Emma’s arm to fit it into the vacuum splint that would eventually cushion the arm. She screamed and it took a lot of muscle to keep her from turning her head back around but Captain Stanley was right there.

“Trust me Emma, you don’t want to look over there,” Hank said.

“Emma,” Roy said. “I want you to look in my eyes. Don’t look anywhere else.” She did. “What color are my eyes?”

“Blue,” she said gasping for air. She was still breathing too fast.

“Good I want you to focus on my eyes and only my eyes. I’m going to put my hand on your chest and we’re gonna count to two. We’re gonna slow your breathing. Okay. One, inhale. Two, exhale. Can you feel my hand? You’re still going way too fast Emma. Let’s try again. One, inhale. Two exhale.” She finally got it.

“I’m thirsty,” she said as she still focused on Roy’s eyes.

“I know you are. This is what we are going to do. Okay. We’re going to get you in the ambulance and take your temperature first, and then we’ll give you some water. Okay,” Roy said. Glad that she stopped screaming and had indeed slowed down her breathing.

“Chet! Get the biophone, drug box, trauma box and the canteen from the squad and put it all on the bench in the ambulance,” Roy ordered. “Johnny, are we ready?” Johnny looked over at Roy and nodded. Then Cap, Marco, Johnny and Roy started to wheel the gurney to the back of the ambulance.

“Mike,” Emma said. Mike didn’t hear her because he was helping Chet. “Mike,” she said again gasping. “Mike!” she yelled as he finally got to the side of the gurney. “Mike, find my purse . . . it has my mom’s phone number in it.”

“Okay, I’ll find it,” he promised

“Cap. My car,” she asked.

“Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll take care of your car for you,” he added.

And with that, she was picked up and rolled carefully into the ambulance. Chet closed the doors and they were finally on their way to the hospital.

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Officer Vince Howard, who had kept onlookers and the media far away from the scene, came over to check on the situation. "How's it look, Hank," he asked.

"Well she's still alive, and she's on her way to Rampart, Vince," he replied angrily. "Thanks for keeping the people back. Sometimes it kills me to see people who stand by the sidelines, just to watch . . . someone else's tragedy."

"They probably just came back from church too," he said agreeing with the captain's cynicism. Vince noticed that Hank was shaking. It had been a long time since he had seen the captain shook up about a rescue. "Hank, you and your guys gonna be okay?"

Hank hadn't thought about it until now. If he was so upset, imagine how the other members of his crew felt.

"Hank," Vince asked again.

"Yeah . . . I don't know, Vince," Hank said appreciatively, "I'm going to make sure that we all get checked out. Again, thanks Vince, appreciate it." And with that, Hank walked over to the radio on Big Red and asked to be connected to Dixie McCall at Rampart Emergency.

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Because of the extended portion of the gurney, the two paramedics were limited to their space in the ambulance. Johnny sat in the chair and Roy sat on the bench. Even though their ETA was 10 minutes, they hoped it would be less. Too many times in their careers as paramedics, getting the patient to the hospital one or two minutes quicker made the difference between life and death.

Since they hadn't gotten any official vitals information since the extraction, they got right to work before they called Rampart. Roy reached in the drug box that was next to him on the bench and pulled out the thermometer.

"Emma, we're going to take your temperature. Do you think you can hold the thermometer in your mouth?" Roy asked.

Still breathing hard and fast she replied, "I'll try." And with that, he carefully placed it between her tongue and the bottom of her mouth.

"Emma, I know that your eyes have a hard time with the light in here, but Roy and I have to know that you're still with us, so keep your eyes open okay?" Johnny said as he started to clean and dress the laceration on her temple. Roy was watching her distress level and he saw that when Johnny was working with her cut, he was causing her pain.

"Johnny, let's hold off on that for just a minute. At least to we get her temp, okay," Roy asked as he contacted Rampart. Johnny agreed and reached over her head and got her respirations and pulse.

"Rampart, Squad 51," he said.

"Go ahead 51," Dr. Early said. *Finally.*

“Rampart we are en route, ETA is eight minutes. We are taking her temperature right now, hold for vitals.”

“Pulse is 140, respiration is 60, pupils are reactive, temperature is . . . 103,” Johnny said and Roy repeated.

“Blood pressure?” Dr. Early asked.

Roy had already put down the biophone because he promised her water. Johnny opened the canteen and handed it to his partner. “Okay Emma, we can’t give you a lot of water, but here you go,” Roy said as Johnny carefully picked up her head a little so that the water would not just spill out.

“More?” she asked.

“Sorry, not right now, maybe later.” Roy lied again. *You can’t give water to anyone who is suspected of having internal bleeding.*

“Blood pressure?” Dr. Early asked again while Johnny took her pressure. “160/100.” Johnny said, Roy repeated.

“Start an IV, Ringer’s Lactate, wide open. Then send me a strip,” ordered the doctor. Johnny had anticipated the need and was already inserting the cannula into Emma’s right arm.

Roy grabbed some 4 x 4s to dry her chest. Then he and Johnny attached her to the monitor. “Dr. Early, this will be Lead 2.”

Johnny returned to treat her cuts and to control the bleeding from her left arm. Because the arm was now held down tight by a vacuum splint, it wasn’t bleeding as bad as before. Johnny’s white t-shirt was covered in blood. *I’m glad I took my uniform shirt off.*

“Emma, look at me,” Roy said again. “You have to keep your eyes open for us okay? Now I’m going to press around on your stomach and you let me know where it hurts, okay.” After he probed her abdomen he almost wished that he and Johnny could switch places. Paramedics are taught during training that, in the interest of the patient’s welfare, if you have to lie to them . . . lie to them. Roy didn’t like to lie. He could feel her stiff abdomen, he knew she was bleeding inside, but he couldn’t let his facial expressions and voice give it away.

“Okay, not too bad,” he said smiling. “Rampart, patient has significant rigidity in the stomach.”

While Roy was talking to Rampart, Emma looked above her head. She was still breathing too fast but she had to ask, “Johnny, who is that man Roy’s talking to?”

“That Dr. Joe Early,” Johnny said.

“Is he going to be my doctor?” Emma questioned.

“Yes he is and you will love him,” he smiled.

“Hang on, I’ll check,” Roy said into the phone, then looked at her and asked, “Emma, are you sure about your blood type?”

Emma shook her head and said, “Necklace.” Johnny looked around her neck and saw a delicate silver chain. If something was on the chain, it must have worked its way to the back of her neck, so he

carefully moved it around and saw that hanging from the chain was a small “A” with an even smaller plus sign attached to it. “Trust me,” she said as she started to shiver uncontrollably.

“That’s affirmative Rampart, A Positive,” Roy said.

“My Dad gave it to me when I graduated high school,” she said still gasping for her next breath. “Every time I got an A plus in school . . . we just called it A Positive.”

“What’s your ETA Squad 51?” came from the radio.

“ETA is 2 minutes,” Roy said.

“Two minutes,” she said. “Hey, guys,” Emma coughed a couple of times, “we made it!” Roy and Johnny made eye contact with each other when they heard her cough.

“Hey, can I ask you a question,” she coughed again. Roy and Johnny didn’t answer. “And . . .,” she coughed again, “And you’re not going to lie to me?”

Roy smiled and said as nonchalantly as he could, “I’m not going to lie to you, Johnny might, but I’m not going to lie.”

“Okay, here is the question,” she coughed again.

Roy and Johnny prepared themselves for the question. *What are we going to tell her if she asks us if she was going to die?*

“Am I naked?”

That was her question! Roy and Johnny couldn’t help but smile a little. That single unbelievable question took them by surprise.

“No, you’re not naked,” said Roy looking at her lying there in her ripped shorts, black bra and tennis shoes, “You’re close, but not completely naked.”

“Good.” she coughed. “I’m not that,” she coughed again, “kind of a girl!” Then as the ambulance backed up to the entrance, she started to aspirate. She continued to do so as Dr. Early entered the ambulance through the side door, not the back. He had a unit of A Positive blood in his hands.

As Johnny and Dr. Early switched places through the door, Johnny backed up, his knees buckled and he slowly began to slide down Rampart’s exterior wall. Just as his ass was nearing the ground, Dr. Brackett and Nurse Carol grabbed him and pulled him upright again, but he didn’t feel it. He didn’t feel anything. Johnny wanted to forget. Forget everything. He didn’t want to think about the interminable extraction from the car and that damn ambulance ride and most importantly, he wanted to banish forever the amount of pain that he, a rescuer, a person who is supposed to help people, caused another human being.

“Carol,” ordered Dr. Brackett, “get us a wheelchair out here on the double.”

As Carol went back inside Brackett noticed the amount of blood that covered Johnny’s shirt, his arms, his hands and even his hair. Sitting Johnny and turning the wheelchair to go inside he said, “Carol, let’s take him to Room 2 and Carol, see if you can get him some scrubs to change into.”

As the automatic doors opened outward Johnny looked back to the ambulance and saw Roy still inside. “Roy?” Johnny questioned Dr. Brackett.

“Don’t worry about Roy; Dixie is going to take of him. Let’s get you taken care of.” And with that, Dr. Bracket and Johnny disappeared through the door to Room 2.

It was eerily quiet by the back of the ambulance. The ambulance attendees, Dr. Early and the expectant surgeons had already gotten Emma into the elevator, Johnny had been wheeled inside and there was Roy, . . . sitting in the ambulance chair with his face in his hands. Dixie could see that he was purposely taking deep breaths . . . as if he hadn’t breathed in a long while. She quietly entered the ambulance and sat on the cushioned bench, close to Roy. Once inside, she noticed everything that was a part of the last ten minutes experienced by Johnny and Roy. There was blood everywhere, and used gauze, and plastic wrappers, the biophone and the drug box, which looked like it alone, had been through a small earthquake.

As much as Dixie wanted to reach out and grab Roy’s hand, she didn’t. She sat there until he finished his deep breathing. And, as he sat back in the chair, he lifted his head as if he was looking at the ceiling of the ambulance, even though his eyes were closed.

“Dixie,” Roy whispered, “I promised myself that I would do everything in my powers to forget about the things I saw and heard in Vietnam.”

A secret alarm went off inside of Dixie. She knew that Roy had been a field medic and had experienced the same types of things that she experienced as a nurse in Korea. The fact that Roy was thinking back to Vietnam had her concerned.

“But this rescue was . . . it was as if I was back. . . there. . . you know . . . there was so much pain.” He paused. Dixie didn’t break the silence that was right now, what he needed the most. When you’ve been in the medical aspect of the military, silence was something you prayed for, but rarely got.

“The soldiers on the field would scream from the pain,” Roy remembered. “You know what I mean, you were in combat. That horrible sound that is going to stay with us forever . . . and all you could say was ‘Hang in there, you’re gonna be fine,’ or ‘You’re gonna make it,’ crap like that because that is what we were trained to say to the soldiers,” Roy said angrily as he closed his eyes more firmly. “It’s not fair,” he added and he slammed his fist onto the arm of the chair.

Dixie turned and looked at the double doors and saw Angelo and Hal, the two ambulance attendees rolling the now sheet-less gurney toward the exit. She held up her left hand as if she was a traffic cop and shook her head from side to side, and clearly, without speaking, told the two men not to bother them at this time. The eye-to-eye contact and the affirmative head nods from the guys confirmed that she needed more time with Roy and that maybe, they had better go get a well-deserved cup of coffee.

“Roy,” Dixie felt the need to speak at this time. “I know . . . and I too have had to fight my demons from the sights and sounds of what I have been through.” At this point, she took her hands and cradled Roy’s left hand. He opened his eyes but didn’t make eye contact. “I don’t know if this is going to make a difference to you today but, we used to follow this rule that we, the nurses, doctors, medics . . . hell everybody who lived and worked in the M*A*S*H unit followed. It was . . . well, we called it The Wake-Up Call. I know it sounds silly and I don’t know where it came from, but it’s what got a lot of us through.”

Roy opened his eyes and for the first time looked at Dixie, “Yeah,” he said, “we had The Wake-Up Call in Vietnam too.”

“So,” Dixie explained, “you know the rule. Yes, the patient comes to you in so much pain, screaming and gasping for the next breath. Your job is to stabilize and pass him off to the surgeons knowing that

when the patient wakes up after surgery, he forgets about the screaming and the pain. He is so grateful to be alive that the pain that put him there is forgotten.” Roy just nodded his head. He remembered.

“I’ve thought about this a lot,” said Dixie “and I’m much older than you so let me give you my theory,” she instructed. “The human body is an amazing thing, but the human mind is even better. I figured that once the body has experienced the initial pain, the mind takes over and says ‘That’s enough. We don’t have to remember it anymore.’”

Dixie held both of Roy’s hands now and continued, “Remember The Wake-Up Call Roy. It’s true. Believe that. I do, or otherwise I couldn’t . . . we couldn’t do our jobs.” Roy shook his head in agreement.

“When she wakes up,” she said as she started to pull Roy up and out of the ambulance, “she won’t remember the pain. I promise.”

He thought as he stepped down and walked arm and arm with Dixie into Room 3. *Let’s hope that she does wake up.*

+++++

Vince, Hank, his crew and even Chief McConnike who showed up after the ambulance left, searched the entire area for Emma’s purse. If during one of the flips, the purse flew out, it could be anywhere. They found nothing.

Vince took all the information that they had. Emma Clark, 25. Mom lives in France. Works at Wexler Hall Architectural Firm, but the office will be closed down for the next two weeks. “It’s not much Hank, but I’ll report it and get back to you,” he said.

Mike Stoker, who had promised to help Emma wasn’t going to let the fact that he couldn’t find her purse get in the way. He walked up to Vince with the badly mangled license plate. “Vince, will this help?” Mike asked.

“You bet Mike. Thanks,” he said as he used his police walkie-talkie to phone in the information.

“Chet, Marco.” Hank called his two remaining crew members, “We are all going to go to Rampart and get checked out. Marco, you drive the squad. Let’s go.”

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Dr. Brackett left exam Room 2 at the same time Dixie left Room 3.

“I’ve ordered an IV for Johnny, he needed fluids,” Kell said. “Heat exhaustion. Carol is finishing it up now and then she is going to go the cafeteria to get a milkshake, he needs something. Do we need to get anything for Roy?”

Dixie looked back at the door to Room 3 and said, “His vitals are okay. He just needs to rest a little bit. Kell, Roy doesn’t want to talk about it.”

“I know, Johnny is the same way,” the doctor said. “Let’s leave them alone for now. When Johnny’s IV is empty, we’ll put them both in the doctor’s lounge. Maybe by that time, they will be ready talk to each other.”

“Good idea. I’m gonna run in and check on Carol and ask her to get a shake for Roy too,” Dixie said.

Kell knew that she wasn't going into Room 2 just to check up on Carol.

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"Malcolm, we need those x-rays back STAT," Dr. Early said as the technician started to push his portable machine back to his department.

"You got it Doc," he said.

The nurses did their job. They had Emma stripped and cleaned up and they attached a catheter to her. To get her temperature down, they covered her with a cooling blanket.

As soon as the x-rays got back, they were ready to go.

+++++

As always, Mike parked Big Red in the distant parking lot of Rampart Hospital. He didn't want to cause any anxiety among a patient or relative who was looking out of their window, to see the big red fire engine taking up most of the space in the emergency area. Before they left the scene, the men used the reel line to wash away the blood off of their arms and hands, but were unsuccessful at washing any stains out of their uniforms. Mike, Cap and Chet were walking toward the entrance when they met up with Marco, who had driven the squad. As they entered the building, most concerning to Hank, was the lack of conversation between his engine crew.

Dixie couldn't help but notice the four firefighters as they cleared the entrance hallway, and as she left her base area she called, "Captain Stanley, why don't you four come into Room 2. We've been waiting for you." She stopped an orderly and asked him to get Dr. Brackett from his office. "Tell him we will be in Room 2."

As she entered the room she saw the four men, who normally didn't look this "weathered" at this time of day. "Why don't you all take a seat," she said indicating the extra stools that were already rolled into the treatment room. "Dr. Brackett wants a vitals check for each of you. Why don't we start with Marco," she said as she gestured for him to sit up on the examination table.

"How are Johnny and Roy?" asked Captain Stanley as Dr. Brackett pushed open the door.

"We gave Johnny an IV. He was very dehydrated," the doctor stated. "Roy fared better but they were both exhausted. They are both in the doctor's lounge resting. Now, let's check you all out," he said as he started to work on Chet.

Mike spoke up first. "How's Emma Clark?"

Dr. Brackett answered, "I just got off of the phone with Joe Early. He called down to let me know that I would have to replace him today in emergency because he was going to stay upstairs with the patient. He also said that they were ready to bring . . . excuse me what's her name?"

"Emma Clark," Cap said.

"Well," continued the doctor, "they were bringing Miss Clark into surgery in a couple of minutes."

Chet spoke for the first time in what Hank estimated to be a half hour, "Why in a couple minutes? It's been like an hour since she got here?" He seemed angry.

“Again, I don’t know specifically, but I can only assume that they were taking x-rays and blood tests and generally getting her ready, for what I believe is going to be a long operation,” explained Brackett.

“Oh. Okay, thanks.” Chet said apologetically.

Finished with Marco, Dixie moved on to Hank. Even though he tried to wash it away, she could see the woman’s blood on his uniform shirt. Dr. Brackett moved on to Mike. When they were all done, Brackett asked Dixie to take Mike, Marco and Chet to the doctor’s lounge. He wanted to talk to their boss alone.

“Captain Stanley,” the doctor started, “you and your men all check out physically. I’m going to put a call into headquarters and have the entire station stood down for two hours. Take them back home, let them take a nice long shower, and make sure that they eat and drink.”

“Thanks Doctor Brackett, we appreciate it,” Hank said.

As they were both getting ready to open the exam room door Hank stopped and boldly asked, “This one was a tough rescue doctor. What am I going to do for my men if she doesn’t make it?”

In the five or so years that he had known Hank Stanley, he never heard him talk in such a defeatist manner. He wanted to make it all go away for the six men who he had come to know and respect. But as a specialist in emergency cases, he knew that at any time, a patient could “go sour” quickly and die. He didn’t have the comforting words that perhaps Hank needed to hear so he said, “Just take care of your men first and we’ll worry about any other things when and if they happen.”

They joined the group in the lounge and explained what they were expected to do for the next two hours. Dixie and Kell watched as the six men quietly walked down the hall.

“For the love of God,” Dixie said, “I hope she makes it out of surgery.”

“You and me both,” he added, then went back in his office to find a doctor to replace Joe Early for the remainder of his shift.

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“Suction. Let’s pull this back so I can see what’s causing this bleeding. Retractor. Okay, I see it,” said Dr. Bill Grafton. “Joe, Kathy, do you see that?”

Early and Dr. Kathy Wells looked in and saw the damage. “What do you think, Bill,” Early asked.

“It’s got to come out,” he said. And with that, the surgeons started to remove the damaged parts of Emma Clark.

It would be a long operation.

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Because they had been stood down and there wasn’t a lot of conversation around the station, when the klaxons rang out, it startled them all. Apparently, their two hour break was over.

Station 51, structure fire at 1012 St. Charles Street, that’s a structure fire at 1-0-1-2 St. Charles Street, cross street, Jefferson Avenue. Time Out: 14:10.

Hank hated himself for what he was feeling as he passed the paper to Roy and ran to his seat. He never wanted to see anyone suffer through the loss of a house or a business, but deep down, his men needed this call. They needed to do their job.

St. Charles Street was a nice residential area and when they pulled up to 1012, they found a detached one car garage completely engulfed.

Chet and Marco handled the garage and Roy and Johnny doused the house and backyard trees from adding to the fire. Apparently, the owner's teenage son and his friends were trying their first pack of cigarettes and they stupidly threw their smoldering matches into the trash bin.

The six men were done in 30 minutes.

When they backed into the station, they continued to wait for the call from Rampart.

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One of the "best things" about being the wife of a fireman, Joanne DeSoto thought, was even though you were a single-parent while your husband was on shift, and that sometimes the two beautiful children that you bore could drive you absolutely crazy; the "best thing" was the invention of the TV and, that on Sunday nights, at 7:00 Pacific time, NBC would broadcast *Disney's Wonderful World of Color*. All afternoon projects, play dates etc, had to be meticulously scheduled so that the dinner dishes could be done, baths completed and popcorn could be popped before that three-toned N-B-C sound and the colorful peacock announced the beginning of the program. Then again she thought, being able to put her tired legs on the coffee table and relax for an hour was her ultimate, as her daughter would say, "bestest" thing.

+++++

The station was quiet. Johnny was out by his Rover and Chet, Marco and Mike were in the dayroom. The TV was on, but they weren't watching it. No one really felt like eating a formal dinner tonight so Hank encouraged anyone who got hungry to fix their own sandwich and get some milk.

Chet was at the table with his back to the TV. Something on his left caught his attention. "It's 8:05," he said.

Marco and Mike looked not at the clock on the wall, but to the department phone. They saw the two lit buttons and then both shook their head in agreement.

The single members of 51's A- Shift knew that whenever they were at the station, at 8:05 p.m. Captain Stanley and Roy DeSoto would both pick up the phone and call home. Hank would call from his office on Line 1 and Roy would call from the desk in the dorm on Line 2. Hank's daughters were in their teens and their phone ritual had become common place, but Roy's kids waited every night for the phone to ring.

"I wish I could use the station's phone instead of putting my hard-earned change into that damn pay phone," Chet said.

"Well," Mike replied, "all you have to do is get married and have a kid."

"On second thought, maybe I'll just keep my piggy bank in my locker instead of my apartment," he said.

Oh,” said Marco, “if you still have a “piggy bank,” I don’t think you will have to worry about finding a woman who’ll marry you soon.” Demasiado. (You’re too much.)

“Ha ha, funny Marco,” Chet said as he picked up the paper and went and sat by Henry on the couch.

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“That was great huh Mom? I can’t wait to tell Daddy,” said Jennifer DeSoto.

“I need to talk to him first. I need to ask him about my science project,” said her brother.

“Now you remember,” Joanne stated clearly, “that Daddy only calls when he’s at the station.”

“Yeah Mom, we know, but I still have to talk to him first. The science fair is Friday and he hasn’t started to help me yet,” a very concerned Chris DeSoto said.

Joanne rolled her eyes. *This science project is going to drive me crazy! That’s all he has talked about for a week!* “Chris,” she said for the hundredth time today, “your dad has the two days off this week. He will help you, I promise,” she said and smiled when at 8:05 p.m., the phone rang.

Chris got to the phone first. “DeSoto residence,” he answered. Joanne smiled to herself as she brought the empty popcorn bowl to the kitchen. *I can’t get him to pick up his toys or put his clothes in the hamper, but at least I taught him how to correctly answer the telephone.*

“Hi Dad. How was your day?” Chris said and without waiting for an answer he continued to talk as if he didn’t believe in commas or periods. “You know that the science fair is this Friday remember and you said that you would help me remember and I’ve been reading in my textbook and I went to the school library and checked out some great books with pictures and I have to have the project done by Friday and you said you would help me remember and I have a list of rules and junk that we have to follow and . . .”

Roy had to stop him, if for no other reason, so that Chris could catch his breath. “Whoa son. Calm down. I remember, I remember. Tomorrow, when you get home from school we will get started, but *you* have to remember, your mom and I are only going to help with the big stuff, you have the write your paper and give the presentation yourself.”

“I know Dad,” his son replied and continued, “I promise to do my best.”

“Okay then,” Roy said. “If you want me to, I’ll pick you up from school tomorrow instead of you riding the bus home. It’ll give us an extra half an hour, how about that?”

Chris loved it when his Dad picked him up from school in his Porsche. “That will be so cool!”

Roy thought so. “You be good and don’t drive your mom crazy tonight okay? Good. Have a good night’s sleep, I love you,” Roy said.

“I love you too Dad,” Chris said.

“Let me talk to your sister,” he added.

Roy loved to talk to his daughter on the phone. He usually sat back in the swivel chair, put his feet on the desk and imagined her gesturing with every word. It wasn’t until last year that she realized that her Dad couldn’t “hear” her head nods and that she had to “speak out loud” to get her point across. Roy assumed that within time this fascination with the minute detail into her daily things would

become boring, but for now and especially after today's rescue, he needed this time just to sit and listen to his little girl.

"Hi Daddy," she started, "Disney had on a great show. Did you see it? It was about a lion and the mountains where he lived and one time, he was looking . . ." Roy settled back, listened and smiled. When she was finished with her complete review of the show, she said, "Momma wants to talk to you now. Good night Daddy, don't let the bed bugs bite! I love you."

"I love you too pumkin," Roy said. He could hear Joanne tell them both to brush their teeth and get into bed and that she would be upstairs to tuck them in soon. Then she turned to Roy on the phone,

"Hey baby how are you doing? I heard on the news that there was a bad accident today where they had to call in a big crane. I wasn't in the room to actually see the footage. Was that 51?"

"Yeah. It was us," Roy said quietly.

"Is the driver okay?" she questioned.

"She's a woman, and . . . we still don't know yet. We're waiting on Rampart to call us," he said.

"Well we'll pray for her tonight when we say our prayers," Joanne promised. Roy was not raised with a strong emphasis on religion. He didn't have anything against it at all; he just wasn't accustomed to going to church every week or saying prayers each night. He was grateful that Joanne provided a good religious foundation for their children.

"You doing okay?" she asked. Joanne could tell that her husband had had a rough day.

"I'll be okay," he said and then he and his wife talked about the regular things they had to do this week and that dammed science project. After conversing for a few minutes and their classic phone kiss, which they started doing way back in high school, they both said I love you and hung up. Joanne went upstairs to tuck in the kids, and Roy just contently sat there with a smile on his face.

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I'm too old for this. Joe Early said to himself as he pulled off his scrub cap and threw it in the hamper outside of Surgery No.1 where, for the last six plus hours he and a team of finally trained professionals worked to save Emma Clark. His feet were killing him and he needed coffee. *I'll take you to the Doctor's Lounge after I get her into Recovery* he promised his feet.

Fifty feet from the surgery rooms were the Recovery Rooms. Because she was in the military, Dixie called the area Post-Op, but it didn't matter. This was a patient's next stop after surgery. The job of the medical team there was to monitor the patient's vitals and to make sure that they would successfully come out of the anesthesia.

By the time Dr. Early got down the hall, Emma was already there, still hooked up to a respirator and heart monitor. He stood by her bed and just stared at her beaten up body. Right now, she looked like the 25 year old female that was wheeled in here hours ago. But years of experience taught him that within the next two to three hours, the trauma that her body went through would change her face and torso into a massive amount of swollen, bruised skin that will completely distort her features. *No mirrors for her for a few days.*

A very tired Joe Early rode the elevator down to the emergency department. He really wanted a cup of coffee but he needed to call Station 51. Joe had hoped that Kell was gone for the night because he wanted to use his office to make the phone call. He was also hoping to nap on Kell's couch as well.

He knew that he was ethically okay to leave the hospital once a patient made it to Recovery, but he instinctually knew that he would be there all night.

The office was empty. Joe turned on the light, sat at the desk and looked through Brackett's phone list. He toed off his shoes, put his feet on the desk and made the call.

The phone rang and even Captain Stanley surprised himself with the quickness that he had at picking up the receiver. Hank lived with two teenaged girls. At his house, there was no way he could get to the phone faster than them, so he just stopped trying. If the phone was for him, they'd let him know. He often thought that if "Picking up the Phone Receiver" was an Olympic event, his two girls would be gold and silver medal winners. *Maybe I'd win the bronze?*

"Station 51, Captain Stanley speaking."

Joe was too tired to be formal so he just said, "Hank, Joe Early. She made it out of surgery."

And for the next couple of minutes, he described the operation and her immediate future. Hank wrote it all down so he wouldn't forget to tell the men, who were now gathered around his desk.

"Hold on, I'll check," he said as he questioned the men. "Dr. Early needs to know if Emma has any friends, relatives or maybe co-workers that he can contact. As far as he knows the police have yet not been able to reach her mother in Paris."

Marco started, "Her father passed away a couple of years ago."

Mike added that, "The people she works for are all on a vacation in Hawaii."

"She didn't mention any friends to me," said Chet. Johnny and Roy concurred.

"Doctor Early, it doesn't look good. Okay, will do. Goodbye and thanks for the call." Cap said as he hung up the phone.

"Let's go in the day room men," Cap added as he stood up and brought the memo pad with him.

Once they were all seated he started reading the list. She had internal bleeding. They removed a fairly substantial section of her lower intestine. Her kidney was bruised but, they felt it would heal itself. Her stomach lining was strained, but not torn. Her lungs and heart were fine. Her legs have massive contusions, so she is on blood thinners to keep any clots from traveling through her system. She took 20 stitches on the left temple and 348 stitches from her shoulder down to her hand. They aren't sure if she will be able to 100% use her left arm again.

Hank finished with, "She's in critical condition, but gentleman, she's alive."

The men around the table relaxed, just a little. "We all know how tough Emma is right," Mike said, to which the men agreed. "We just have to stay by her side, right?" Now it was like Mike, of all people, was becoming the cheerleader of the group. "Right?"

"Let's celebrate! I'll fix some of my best tacos," Marco said as he got up and went to the fridge.

"Yes, I'm starving!" Johnny said. But unlike this morning, his coworkers all said at the same time, "Me too!" And within 20 minutes, at around 10 p.m. the A-shift was enjoying their dinner on what was a very long day.

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Ring . . . Ring . . . Ring. . “Station 51, Captain Stanley speaking.” Who was calling at, he looked at the clock, 3:35 a.m.? This was a night that they all needed some sleep. After Rampart’s call had put everyone more at ease and the additional congratulatory repast that followed, every one welcomed the call for “Lights out.” The five crew members thought the same thing as their boss as they woke to hear the one-sided conversation.

“I see - I see – I see – No problem – Thank you for calling Dr. Early,” Hank said as he hung up the phone. As soon as they heard “Dr. Early” all five crew members sat up. Hank walked carefully to Roy and John and as emotionless as he could he stated, “Emma has taken a turn for the worse. She’s in Recovery. Her fever is up. She’s yelling out your name Roy. Dr. Early is asking for your help.” Roy and Johnny started dressing as if they were called to a five alarm fire. Hank continued as they grabbed their blue jackets and ran to the door, “He asked that you hurry and meet him down at Emergency. I’ll call it in to headquarters.”

And with that Roy and Johnny were gone.

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Dr. Joe Early waited just outside of the automatic doors to the emergency department of Rampart. He needed some fresh air or at least as fresh as Los Angeles could provide. It had been a stressful day and something inside of him badly wanted a cigarette, but he hadn’t smoked since his intern days. He began to pace as the nervous energy that had been building up all day took over his body. He kept thinking back to Emma’s arrival in the ambulance just a few hours ago and how quickly her condition turned critical. Going immediately from the ambulance up the elevator to the surgery department on the fourth floor, she had lost consciousness and by the time they pushed through the double-doors to pre-op, she began to aspirate blood. It took a team of professionals to intubate her, get her x-rays and to stabilize her.

Normally he would have just turned his patient over to the surgeons who were skilled with all types of emergencies, but for some reason, Dr. Early insisted on being there in surgery. Even if he was just going to observe the procedures, he needed to be there. As the surgeons worked on stopping the internal bleeding, Dr. Early studied the x-rays of the twisted, mangled arm and had made a game plan as to the best and least damaging way to remove the now deeply imbedded chrome from her body. All in all Emma was in surgery for six and a half hours. Joe looked up from his pacing and saw Roy and Johnny walking toward him. They knew that they were technically not at Rampart with a rescue so they parked along the edge of the ramp as not to take a parking place from a potential ambulance or squad. For some reason, Dr. Early held out his arm and shook the hands of his two favorite paramedics. It was not a normal thing to do, but he really needed their help.

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Entering the building, Johnny and Roy listened intently to Dr. Early. It was almost as if Joe Early was justifying his actions today.

“When she arrived, we took her, as you know directly to pre-op where the portable x-ray was waiting. Believe it or not, she had no broken bones,” he said as he pushed the “up” elevator button. Because it was a close to 4 a.m. the elevator, which was resting on the first floor immediately opened. Early continued as they entered and he pushed 4. “It took us about an hour to get her stabilized enough for surgery. We pushed in two pints of blood and her blood pressure got back to within a normal range, considering what she had been through. The two on-call surgeons, Dr. Grafton, Dr. Wells and I were

not happy about bringing her into surgery with a fever, but with ice packs, we had managed to get it down to 101. We didn't really have a choice. We had to get in there and stop the bleeding."

The elevator opened and the trio stepped on to the now quiet, and dimly lit, surgery floor. Dr. Early motioned for the two paramedics to sit in the waiting area chairs while he continued.

"She may have had no broken bones, but her insides had looked like they had been through a commercial dryer. It took hours, but we felt that we had removed the damaged areas, searched for and stopped the internal bleeding and painstakingly removed the chrome from her arm. She's been in the Recovery Room since then." Joe Early, a normally easy going man, started to pace. "About two and a half hours ago, she began to wake up. We removed the ventilator and she even took a sip or two of water. "

"That's good," Johnny said.

"Because of the possible infection from the foreign body . . . we decided to let her stay in Recovery instead of bringing her down the hall and up the elevator to Intensive Care to avoid additional infections. But then about an hour ago, her fever started to climb and she had a seizure. A bad seizure. By the time the nurse got to the bed, she had almost thrown herself to the floor. During the duration, Emma's head was repeatedly banged up against the bed railing. It's a damn good thing that the railing was up. The recovery room staff got the seizure under control as quickly as they could but, many sutures were torn and now Emma has two swollen and bruised eyes."

"She can't see?"

"No, Roy, she can't . . . and that is a part of why we felt the need to call you two," Early said. "She's worked herself back into a critical position. Her fever is back up to 103, her pressure is also up and she's becoming delusional. I've already given her more medication than I should in her condition." The doctor stopped pacing and looked directly at Roy. "She keeps yelling your name Roy. She has been repeating other things but your name is all we can make out."

Dr. Early started to back up toward the door that separated the waiting room from surgery. Roy and Johnny got up and started to follow. The two paramedics had been to the surgery ward at Rampart many times and they knew that they were following Early past the surgery rooms to Post-Op, or the Recovery Room. As they got closer, they could hear Emma . . . and you didn't have to be a medical professional to know that whoever was making that noise was clearly distressed.

"Roy . . . Johnny," Early asked as they reached the open ward, "If you can settle her down . . . just get her blood pressure down . . . just calm her so that the medicine that is already in her system can do its job, we can get her into Intensive Care and take it from there."

"We'll do our best Doc," said Johnny.

The post-op ward at Rampart was an open ward with each patient bed separated by a wall on each side and for privacy there was a curtain where a wall and door would be. Before Johnny and Roy got to the edge of the hinged material Dr. Early warned, "Hey, guys. Be prepared. She looks bad."

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Mike gave up on falling back asleep. Johnny and Roy had been gone for almost an hour. He just lay on his bunk, staring up at the ceiling and he thought about Emma and the fact that, even though he had known her for less than a day, he felt as if he had known her for years. Nope, he was not going to sleep anymore tonight. He turned his head to the right and looked at the new thing called a digital

clock on the desk by Cap's bunk - 4:10 a.m. He turned and quietly sat up on the side of his bed, put his feet through the legs of his turn-out pants until they found the boots below, stood and pulled up the suspenders as he, without a noise, walked into the locker room to splash water on his face.

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When Roy and Johnny pulled back the curtain they saw a nurse leaning over Emma, trying to calm her down but blocking her from their view at the same time.

"You have to let me take your temperature," loudly pressured the nurse. "You are getting ridiculous. Now you have to stop it!"

Roy and Johnny looked at each other, silently agreeing that the nurse had . . . well, been less than compassionate. Johnny went behind the nurse and urged her to stop. Roy went to the other side of the bed. It was then that both he and Johnny saw Emma. Yes, both of her eyes were bruised and swollen shut, in addition to the swelling and the bruises around the stitches from the contusion on her left temple. Her left cheek was severely bruised and swollen down to her chin. Heart monitor wires came out from beneath her gown, which was on for privacy sake, but was folded way back to the top of her breasts. You could see the bruises and swelling from the shoulder seat belt and the first of the 300 plus stitches that started on her left shoulder and worked their way down her arm.

"Emma, it's me, Roy," he said as he searched for some part, any part of her body that he could hold on to try to comfort her.

"Roy!" she pleaded. The sound of her voice, raw from the ventilator tube and her uncontrollable emotions tore at his heart. "Roy . . . Roy . . . I . . ." She turned her face to his direction. "Icanan . . . Roy . . ." she tried to speak. Everyone could see that his presence was making her more agitated, and between her utterances came quick shallow breaths. "Icanan . . . idoe . . . Roy," she continued to repeat. "Icanan . . . idoe"

"She has been saying that for the last 45 minutes," said the nurse. "She is not listening to a word I've been trying to say to her."

Roy decided that he could again, like he did earlier in the day touch Emma where the base of her neck meets her chest. "Hey, hey, hey. Now calm down. Do you remember from earlier? Uhm? You've got to slow your breathing down. Come on . . . come on, you can do it."

Emma continued gasping for air and continued her "Icanan . . . idoe."

"Enough already!" The nurse screamed so loudly that Emma was startled and before Dr. Early could jump in, Roy reached over the bed and got Johnny's attention.

"Johnny, get everybody out," Roy said calmly but firmly as he looked at the nurse and Joe Early. "You brought us in here to help, fine. Leave us alone with Emma, please," he added.

"I have to do my job," claimed the nurse, who had been pushed to the edge with this patient. She had been working the night shift in Recovery for 5 years and normally, at 3 a.m., the area was usually quiet. She didn't like this screaming patient and now, two paramedics coming in and taking over. "I have been trying to get her vitals for a very long time, I just can't . . ."

"We can do it," Johnny said quickly.

"But I . . ." she protested.

“Dr. Early please,” Johnny pleaded.

“Okay, Nurse, let’s give them some privacy. Roy, John, we’ll be at the back desk,” explained the doctor as he pulled the nurse out of the patient area.

“Doc! I’m gonna need a stethoscope,” said Johnny.

As the younger paramedic was clearing the room and getting the necessary material, Roy continued to calm Emma down.

“That’s it . . . slow your breathing . . . come on . . .you can do it.”

And all the while she kept saying “Icanan . . . idoe.” She was determined to tell him . . . something.

“Emma, you have to listen to me, you have to focus.” But as he said the word “focus” her volume increased with the same “Icanan! . . idoe!”

Roy took both of his hands and carefully held Emma’s face on both sides and cradled it as much as he could without causing her any more pain. “Emma, you are going to stop talking right now! You are going to slow your breathing down and then, and only then, am I going to let you talk. Do you understand?” He told her sternly, knowing that she would eventually be able to talk more clearly if she just calmed down. Emma shook her head “yes.”

“Okay, it’s a deal. Now that’s good . . . slow your breathing down.” He took his left hand from her face and placed it again on her chest. “Remember from the accident . . . we’re gonna count to two before we take another breath. One . . . two. Come on. One . . . two. Good girl.”

She was indeed slowing her heart rate down. Roy continued his praise as he counted out loud. With his right hand still on her face and his left hand monitoring her respirations Roy said, “Johnny, let’s see if we can move this IV pole back a little and . . . can you see if you can find some chairs, we might be here a while.”

“Got it,” Johnny said as he rounded the bed and pulled the pole as far away from the right side of the bed as he could. Then he went through the curtain and came back with two rolling stools. He placed Roy’s stool as close to the bed as possible.

“Hey, let’s lower the bed rail on this side, she’s not going to go anywhere with me holding her,” Roy said and Johnny quickly lowered it, now giving his partner an unobstructed chance to get as close to Emma as he could.

“Good girl. Just keep counting. One inhale, two exhale. Very good,” smiled Roy.

“Great job Emma,” said Johnny as he pulled his stool to the other side of the bed. This was the first time Johnny could look at her left arm. The chrome from her car really did a number to her body. It was like her arm was one of those candy canes that you get at Christmas time. You know the ones that have the spiraling red line from top to bottom. He could see that the bandages were purposely loose to allow the skin to breath. The stitches looked like they hurt, and the removal of the metal border had obviously pulled out parts of her skin, causing the doctors to stretch sections of her arm to adjust for lack of coverage. The entire arm was swollen to about twice its normal size. Johnny wanted to give her a comforting touch as well. Hell, Johnny wanted to pick her up and cradle her in his arms, but . . . he settled for her left hand, well at least the very end of her left fingers that were not bandaged. That would have to do.

The trio quietly stayed in the same positions for about three good minutes of silence, except for the beeping of the monitors.

“Emma,” Roy said quietly, “We’re going take your temperature and then give you some water, okay?” As Johnny removed the thermometer from its case and shook it down, Roy realized that he and Johnny were about to repeat the exact things they did in the ambulance a little over 14 hours ago. Were they indeed rescuing the same person twice in one day?

Johnny placed the tube in her mouth and then went outside of the curtain area to get some fresh water and a cold pack for Emma’s forehead. While there, he talked to Early and the nurse. “She’s calming down. We’re taking her temperature now. Roy’s got her listening again.” Johnny took the cup with a straw and returned to Emma and Roy.

“I don’t understand it,” questioned the nurse. “Are Emma and these paramedics related, do they know each other?”

“No,” Early said simply. “They are just damn good at their job.”

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Marco remained in his bunk even though he heard Mike leave the dorm. At least he wasn’t the only one who couldn’t sleep. All his life he was brought up in a loving family that believed in a God who always gave spiritual guidance and help during difficult times. Throughout his childhood and especially in his professional life as a firefighter, he had experienced many hardships and sad situations, but because of his faith, he could always find solace in his God. Marco closed his eyes and took a deep, cleansing breath. He was fortunate that his crewmates always respected his outward religious beliefs and never, ever, made him feel uneasy about his strong faith.

But tonight . . . just lying there, he couldn’t find any comfort. He was confused, disappointed and on the border of becoming angry. No, not the type of angry that could make him want to hit a wall, but just the type of anger that made him question his faith. Emma Clark was as innocent as any victim could be and He allowed it to happen, in front of Marco’s eyes. Why? What kind of God could allow that to happen? Marco closed his eyes and took another deep breath. He looked to the little night table that was between his and Chet’s bunk and saw his black velvet pouch which held his rosary. He sat up and looked at the well-worn pouch, that one item that has given him peace for many years. But tonight, he couldn’t pick it up. Not this time. He was angry. Quietly he got dressed and walked out of the dorm. Maybe it wasn’t too early to make a pot of coffee.

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Emma’s temperature was down to 101. Johnny placed the straw into her mouth and she sipped in a small amount of water. “Hey,” Roy encouraged, “you can do better than that. Come on, a little bit more.” She took another small sip, then turned her head away a little to let them know that she was not going to have any more water at this time. Johnny put the cup down and carefully placed the cold pack across her forehead.

“Emma.” Roy said calmly. “Do you want to tell me something?”

She turned her head back to his direction and said, “Roy.”

He responded with a quiet “What?” His goal was to keep her as calm as he could.

“Roy,” she repeated. “I can’t and . . . I don’t.” Well, at least they could understand what she was trying to say before.

“Are you talking about the fact that you can’t see? Emma, your eyes are swollen shut and . . .” Roy started to explain but he was interrupted.

“No! I can’t and I don’t!” she said a little louder and more forcefully. Johnny held her fingers again and Roy pushed down a little more on her chest. They did not want her to become upset again.

“You can’t what? You don’t what?” asked Roy.

“I don’t . . .,” she repeated and then she pressed her lips together tightly as if she was waiting for *the word*, the right word to make it through her brain and out her lips. “mmmmmm I can’t . . . mmmmm.” Roy and Johnny could tell that she was struggling to speak.

“I can’t and I don’t . . . mmmmmmmmm,” she tried again with all her might to speak, but she just couldn’t do it. Her breathing started to get a little quicker and she pointed her head straight up at the ceiling, not leaning at all to Johnny’s side or Roy’s side.

Emma wanted so much to speak. She started to cry. She couldn’t help it and the tears somehow made their way through her swollen eyes and flowed down her cheeks, dropped alongside her ears and onto the pillow.

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Chet kept thinking about the things he and Emma had talked about this morning. It was weird because, although he had known her for less than a day, he too felt like he’d known her for years. She was so easy to talk to and even though this morning she was “a captive audience,” still he believed that their conversations could have just as well been spoken at booth in a restaurant, or a small cafe table at a coffee house, or maybe side by side on a park bench, not in a mashed up pile of metal and broken glass. Emma made it easy to talk to and unlike other women he had had conversations with, he really, honestly liked *listening* to what she had to say. Chet closed his eyes and thought about the sound of her voice. He hoped with all of his might that he would, one day, hear it again. He quietly turned and sat on the edge of his bed, got dressed and left the dorm. He really didn’t know where he was going, but he wasn’t going to be able to rest until Johnny and Roy came back.

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“Johnny, hand me a tissue,” Roy asked as he reached across the bed. “Emma, hey, don’t give up. Try again,” he said as he wiped the tears away.

“Roy. I don’t ddddddduuu. I can’t ddddddduuu! Roy, I . . .,” she tried again and Roy and Johnny could see that she was getting herself all worked up again. She said even louder, “Dddddduuuuu, I don’t dddduuuuu . . . and I can’t dddduuuu.” Her breaths became shorter and shorter and Roy put both hands on each side of her chin and encouraged her to keep trying. “I don’t . . .,” she said again, gasping for a little more air than before. “Roy! I can’t dduumm. I don’t . . dumm, Roy! I can’t dum. Roy! No!” She started to hyperventilate as she stopped and took a quick, shallow breath in between each word.

“Emma, I got it! Calm down. I got it! I know what you are saying,” Roy exclaimed as he continued to calm her down.

A confused Johnny said, “Roy?”

“I got it Johnny; I know what she has been trying to tell us,” smiled Roy. “Calm down sweetie. That’s a girl. I know what you mean now . . . and I promise I’ll talk to you once you slow your breathing again.”

Johnny was as confused as ever. He didn’t know what Emma said and he certainly didn’t know what Roy said and to top it all off, Roy was smiling, as if his “discovery” was like winning a lottery. Roy’s right hand returned to her chest, “One inhale, two exhale. Good girl.” Maybe three minutes passed before he got her breathing normally again.

“I want you to listen as carefully as you can. Okay? Do you still feel my hand on your face?” he asked. Emma nodded. “You ready?” asked Roy, and both Emma *and* Johnny shook their heads.

“Emma. In the last . . . 15 hours you were in a terrible car accident. I know. I saw it. You have also had major surgery. And Emma, I don’t think that there is a square inch of your body that is not, swollen, bruised or stitched.” He calmly continued, “Dr. Early has given you a lot of medication. He’s given you antibiotics to prevent any infections and he has also given you medication so you won’t feel any pain. Can you still feel my hand on your face?” Again, she nodded.

Roy leaned as close the Emma’s face as he could. “Sometimes all of that medication makes a person a little . . . confused, as if they can’t think.”

“I can’t dum,” Emma whispered as she shook her head from side to side.

“I know. I understand. But you have to believe me that nothing is wrong with your wonderful brain.” Roy smiled and continued, “You do not have any brain damage and you are not going to be dumb.”

“No dum?” she asked.

“No, dumb,” he answered. A smile had formed on Johnny’s face as he too, had finally understood what Roy had discovered.

“I don’t dum,” she repeated.

“Nope, no dumb. You’re going to be fine.” Roy paused. “Do you remember in the car when I wanted you to take your pulse for me and you wouldn’t count out loud and you said that I had to trust you? Remember that?” Emma nodded.

“And do you remember in the ambulance when Dr. Early asked us to confirm your blood type as A positive and you said that we’d have to trust you? Remember that?” Again, she nodded.

“Well, this time, you are going to have to trust us, okay,” he stated. “Your doctor is one of the best neurosurgeons in Los Angeles and he says that you did not experience any brain damage.”

“No dum?” she asked again with such a childlike innocence.

“Nope. No dumb. So why don’t you calm down, okay,” Roy stated. Roy could see a few more tears escaping from her eyes. He hoped that this time, they were Happy Happy Tears and not Bad Sad Tears. His daughter Jenny had come up with the labels Happy Happy Tears and Bad Sad Tears a little over a year ago when she saw the film, *The Incredible Journey*. Up until that time in her life, her tears were as a result of something bad or sad. But after seeing the end of the film, when the boy and his dog were reunited, Jenny started to cry but didn’t know why. Roy and Joanne had to explain to their confused child that sometimes people cry because they are happy, not sad.

“Emma. When you were in the car, I know I talked a lot about my son . . . but did I mention that I have a daughter as well?” Roy asked.

“Jen . . . nee,” she said.

“That’s right, Jenny. Her real name is Jennifer Lynn DeSoto but we all call her Jenny. Except for her Uncle Johnny who calls her . . .”

“Jenny Bean,” Johnny completed Roy’s sentence.

“She’s beautiful. She looks just like her mother . . . but she has my eyes,” the proud Dad said.

“Blue,” answered Emma. Roy was glad to see that she was comprehending and adding new words to the conversation.

“That’s right. Blue,” he smiled. The two paramedics could see that Emma was focused so much on listening that her breathing problems had almost disappeared.

“Oh, and Joanne has made her the most beautiful bedroom. It’s all pink and white, with lace curtains, pillows and a Barbie bedspread. Last year Joanne had me put up some shelves for all of her stuffed animals and dolls. Remember that Johnny?” Roy asked.

“Yep, and remember,” Johnny added, “We had to add a special lower shelf so that she could put all of her doll’s clothes in one space.”

“But you know Emma, and I think Johnny would agree with me, as much as Joanne has tried to make it frilly and feminine, I think that my little girl is turning into quite the tomboy. She’s a feisty child who won’t let anyone stand in her way. Just ask her older brother.” Roy laughed. During that last confession, Roy took his hands and carefully bent Emma’s right arm at the elbow and, without crimping any IV tubes, placed her hand on her stomach. She could now feel her own respirations.

“Jenny is five years old,” Roy continued proudly, “but if *you* asked her she would say she was five and a half. And Emma,” Roy hesitated as he tried to control his own emotions that were coming to the surface, “I can honestly say that there won’t be a second of her life . . . I don’t care how old she gets, when I am not going to consider her to be my little girl.” Roy’s voice started to waver.

Roy gently held onto her hand. “Emma, do you feel me holding your hand.”

She nodded.

“You know, sometimes when Jenny is hurt . . . or sick, or sad, I sit by her bed and hold her hand until she falls asleep,” he said. At this point, Roy had to use his arm to wipe away the moisture from his own eyes. Roy was crying now and the sound of his voice dropped even lower. “I know that your father is not here anymore; so if you don’t mind, I’m going to sit here and hold your hand until you fall asleep . . . because that’s what Dads do for their little girls.”

Silently, they all shed some tears.

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There weren’t many times when he regretted his decision to become a firefighter, but as Captain Hank Stanley lay in his bunk, hearing his second in command and his two linemen leave the dorm, he thought maybe he should have gone into accounting, or bookkeeping or something that was in other words. . . mindless. A job where he was not directly in charge of anything or anybody. He would just

be “Mr. Hank Stanley,” 9 to 5, Monday through Friday, a half hour for lunch, with absolutely no work on the weekends and a two-week vacation each year. That image made him smile up at the ceiling for about . . . 10 seconds. Then he closed his eyes and realized two things. The routine life which the thought of “Mr. Stanley” would have made him absolutely miserable. And, being involved in other people’s lives was a big part of his personality. He enjoyed helping people. Always has. So how was he as “Captain Hank Stanley” going to help his crew, no, more importantly, his friends through this rescue?

There are a couple of mantras in the fire business. Firemen never leave a fellow brother behind and, they should never get personally involved with a rescue. The first has been figuratively and literally etched in stone for firefighters for over a hundred years. It’s completely unbreakable. The second, as far as not getting personally involved, was sometimes much harder to do. Sure firefighters, paramedics, police and others in the public safety business train constantly and are always re-schooled on new techniques in the effort do their jobs better. But at the end of the day, or the end of the shift, the uniforms come off and these men and women reveal that they are not people with super powers, they are just humans, who feel, have highs and lows, get angry and sometimes cry. Today’s rescue was personal. Emma Clark had entered their lives.

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“Roy, maybe you should tell Emma about Lily,” John suggested.

“Lily?” asked Emma.

“Lily is my daughter’s best friend. She’s a rabbit. And no, I don’t want to sound like the Jimmy Stewart character from that movie *Harvey*. You see, Jenny’s birthday falls around Easter, so that means that her gifts usually have an Easter theme. On her second birthday she received a stuffed bunny rabbit, which she in turn named Lily.” Roy described, “Lily looks more like Bugs Bunny’s sister than an actual rabbit. She has long floppy ears and a puffy tail and she has been everywhere. She’s been on our family vacations, to church, the fire department picnics and one time we even took her to the beach. Joanne has a very hard time sneaking Lily away when it comes time to throw it in the washing machine.”

“One time,” Johnny interjected, “Joanne had a freshly washed Lily hanging to dry on the clothesline in the backyard. The animal was hanging by her ears. It looked very funny.”

“Until Jenny screamed,” Roy added. “It took all of Johnny’s and my paramedic skills to calm Jenny down. Do you remember what you said Johnny?”

Johnny laughed, “I told my Jenny Bean that in the woods, all bunny rabbits hang from the trees when they are wet and since Lily didn’t live in a forest, her mom just put her on the clothesline instead.”

They both laughed.

“Jenny never goes to bed without Lily by her side. It’s kind of comforting,” Roy thought out loud, “to know that she is never alone.”

After a minute of silence Johnny said, “Emma, I’m going to take your blood pressure now, okay?”

She nodded as she was slowly falling asleep. Johnny took the borrowed stethoscope, walked around to Roy’s side of the bed, pulled out the wall-mounted BP cuff and without any fanfare, took her reading.”

“130 over 90,” he said smiling. “Roy, I’m going to go give the vitals to Dr. Early.”

“You’re doing great.” Roy said to Emma, and then he leaned in and said, “It’s just you and me right now, and I just want you to know that . . . it’s okay to be scared.”

Emma barely nodded again as Roy could see that she was almost completely asleep. Dr. Early and Johnny came to the bed. Early moved to Roy’s side and injected some more medication into her IV. “Just something to make sure that she stays asleep this time. I can’t thank you enough gentlemen,” he said graciously. “We’re going to give this a few minutes to work,” he explained, “then we are going to get her right to the Intensive Care Unit.”

Johnny and Joe started to leave and Roy stood up as well. He was still holding her hand. He looked at her asleep in the bed. Her body was so bruised, swollen and was literally being held together by a lot of nylon thread. He gently placed her hand by her right side, raised the railing, and started to leave the room thinking to himself what an absolutely beautiful woman was Emma Clark.

Dr. Early and Johnny were talking at the desk. Roy paused briefly and said, “I’ll meet you in the squad.” Then he left. Johnny knew that Roy was emotionally drained.

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Dawn was breaking as the squad backed into the bay, the crew gathered around the door to the day room. “Damn,” Chet quietly said, “Johnny’s driving. Why is Johnny driving?”

“Roy must be upset,” added Mike.

“I don’t like this. Roy doesn’t get upset,” continued Chet.

Once parked Johnny exited from the driver’s side and put his hands up and gestured as if to say: *Let’s talk in the day room.* While Johnny was pushing his friends back inside, Roy slowly got out of the squad, walked in front of the vehicle, hit the button to lower the door and without a word, walked around the front of the engine and entered the dorm.

“Johnny, what’s wrong with Roy,” questioned Marco and before the same thoughts could be heard out of the mouths of Mike and Chet, Johnny said, “Hey guys, I need some coffee, do you have any made?”

“Sure, a fresh pot,” Mike said, “I’ll get you some.”

Johnny pulled out a chair and he gestured for everybody else to take a seat around the table. Once everyone was seated, Johnny started to tell the guys about Emma. He told them about the confusion in the Recovery Room, about her fever-induced seizure that eventually closed her right eye, temporarily leaving her blind. Johnny told them about her surgery and the massive amount stitches and the swelling and the bruising and the fever that had all combined to make her scared and confused.

“We were eventually able to get her blood pressure down,” explained Johnny. “Then, Dr. Early could safely give her additional sedatives, you know, to make her get some needed rest.”

The room stayed quiet for about a minute as each man took in all of the news.

“Is Roy okay?” asked Mike.

Johnny looked down at his cup of coffee and paused a little longer than his crewmates expected. “Yeah, he’s okay . . . I think. But I have to tell you,” Johnny said moving his head back and forth, “it was tough and . . . emotional you know.”

“Well, at least she’s gonna get better,” Captain Stanley said as he clapped and rubbed his hands together like he always did. “So, who in here is ready for some breakfast?”

“Sounds like a good idea Cap,” said Mike adding, “I’ll get the frying pan, Marco you start the toast.”

“No, this is a special occasion,” Marco smiled, “I’ll make homemade biscuits. Chet get the plates.” As the new flurry of activity started to take place in the day room, Captain Stanley made eye contact with Johnny and the paramedic knew exactly what his boss was looking for. Johnny shrugged his shoulders and shook his head and just between the two, he let Cap know that not everything was all right with Roy.

Hank got up, filled his cup, grabbed and filled a second cup and left the day room, crossed the bay and went looking for his senior paramedic.

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Cap entered the locker room but found it empty. He walked between the banks of lockers and pushed open the door to the dorm and saw Roy sitting in the chair next to the desk, his hand on the phone, just looking at the floor.

“Roy,” Cap said quietly, “you gonna be okay?”

“I wanted to call Joanne, but I . . . don’t want to wake her up,” Roy said eventually and sighed, “I guess I’m being a little selfish. I kinda just wanted to hear her voice.”

Hank placed the cup of coffee for Roy on the desk and sat on his bunk. He didn’t want to necessarily force Roy to elaborate any further, he just wanted him to know that he was here if he wanted to talk. “Johnny told us a . . . “

“She needed a father tonight,” Roy interrupted, and then paused. “She needed her Daddy,” he said quietly as if saying it out loud would justify what he did in the recovery room.

“Roy, Johnny told us that Emma was scared and that . . .,” explained Cap.

“Cap.” Roy interrupted again, “I’m scared,” admitted Roy as he swiveled to face his captain. “I . . . and I am feeling a bit of pressure . . .” as he put his hand over his stomach.

“Do you want me to call Johnny?” Cap said as he got up but, Roy stopped him with his words.

“No Cap. It’s not physical. I’m scared. Can’t you understand that? Have you ever really felt so scared that it hit you right in the gut?”

“Sure I have. I’d like to think that all firemen have,” explained Cap.

“That’s just it. I’m not scared as a firefighter or a paramedic.” Roy was having a hard time putting his fear into words. “I’m scared as a . . . Dad, a father, a husband.” Roy was becoming more irritated with himself. He felt conflicted . . . or something. He didn’t know what.

"I can't really describe it but . . . it's there. I . . . I've known Emma Clark for less than a day and I know that she is just a few years younger than I am and still, . . . I have this . . . connection . . . this parental connection to her and it's eating me up inside." Roy took his hand and scratched the growth of hair on his chin. "What's gonna happen when, heaven forbid, it's Chris or Jenny? Am I going to be able to make it? Am I going to be able to be their father . . . to be their Dad when they need me? Or is this fear going to prevent me from being there for them?" Roy questioned as he ran his fingers through his hair.

Hank could see in Roy's physical presence that he indeed was a man in conflict. He thought about a time when he was in the same position as Roy and he did indeed have the same pressure.

"Cap." Roy looked him right in the eyes and pleaded, "Hank. You have a family. You know. . ." Roy stuttered apologetically, "Well I'm not saying that Mike, Chet, Marco and Johnny don't have relatives that they care about but . . .," he quickly added. "I'm just saying that they . . . they don't know. You know?"

"Roy. I know what you are feeling and if you don't mind, I'd like to tell you a story," Hank said. He pushed himself back on his bunk so that his back was up against the brick dividing wall and his legs crossed in front, almost Indian style.

"Have I ever told you about my brother-in-law Lenny?" He decided that the room needed a little more upbeat story. As Roy shook his head "no" Hank just continued on. "Emily's younger brother Lenny is a piece of work. He was the first one of my wife's family to ever go to, and eventually graduate from college." Hank took his right index finger and swirled it around as if to say "whoopie!" "So, Lenny gets a college degree in business management and he gets a great job in a prestigious department store. Very, very high up in the business. He has his own office with a window, a couple of secretaries and enough people working around him on a daily basis to let him know how great he is." Hank smiled and put both arms out to his side to emphasize, "Everybody likes him. He has a convertible sports car and a great apartment in a singles building and a new date every week."

Roy was a little surprised to see his captain so animated.

"So . . . I think it was last . . . Thanksgiving when Lenny graced us with his appearance at our house, by-the-way, with a new girl in tow. Anyway . . . the kids were watching a movie in the den and the adults were sitting around the big table talking and waiting for the food to settle before we considered any type of desert, and Lenny was telling us all about his important job, and the *multitudes* of employees that he had relying on him and the *pressure* that he faced, and . . . well, I think at that point. . . I might have made an audible grunt that was not necessarily delivered in a negative way but I think that's the way he received it. So Lenny says, 'Hank, you know what that's like right? To have a job with a lot of pressure?' Of course I agreed, because we *both* have stressful jobs."

Roy noticed that Hank wasn't smiling anymore.

"Lenny then asked me which of my jobs was the hardest. Being a fireman, or when I was promoted to engineer or now being a captain?" And Hank looked Roy right in the eyes to prove his point and said, "I said neither."

Roy could only assume that the people around the Thanksgiving table were as stunned as he was.

"Neither?" Roy asked.

"Neither." Hank said as seriously as he did to Lenny years ago, "Roy, the hardest job that I have . . . is being a father." Hank worked his way to the edge of his bunk, put his feet on the floor and put his

elbows on his knees and continued, “No job is more difficult and no job is more important. There is no down time, or vacations from being a father, it’s a 24 hours a day, seven days a week job, and as a Dad you never . . . , ever stop worrying about the safety and happiness of your children.”

Roy shook his head in agreement. He and Hank looked at each other and found an agreed connection that they alone could share, and that no one else on 51’s A-Shift could understand.

“Roy,” Hank finished, “you are a great father and I’m confident that if the need happens, you will be there when they need you. I think the fact that you are so emotional about Emma Clark is a testament to how, deep down in your gut, you have the ability to help people, whether they are family or not.”

After about a minute to let it sink in, Hank walked over to the chair and placed a hand on Roy’s shoulder. “Let’s say we go get some breakfast. It’s been a long night.”

“Good idea,” Roy said as he stood up and looked his friend right in eyes and added, “Thanks Hank . . . for everything.”

“So,” Roy said as they entered the bay, “Is Lenny still single?”

“Yep. But you know what?” Cap asked.

“What?”

“I don’t think he’s happy at all. You know why?” Hank threw out the question and before he knew it both he and Roy answered at the same time, “Because he’s not a Dad.” The two men smiled as they walked into the day room.

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At 6:30 a.m., Dixie was not surprised to find Joe Early sleeping on the couch in Kell’s office. And, as much as she wanted to let him sleep, he had to take this overseas phone call. She nudged him awake and told him that Emma Clark’s mother was on Line 3.

He straightened out his tired back and blessed Dixie to the high heavens for bringing him a hot cup of fresh coffee. “This is Dr. Joe Early,” he calmly started the difficult conversation. “Is this the mother of Emma Clark?”

“Yes, I’m Charlotte Clark. How is my daughter,” she asked anxiously.

“I’m going to be honest with you Mrs. Clark, she’s in critical, but stable condition. She is in the Intensive Care Unit. Will you be coming to Los Angeles?”

“Yes, I’ve made the best flights I could get, but unfortunately, that means, Paris to London, London to New York and then the red eye from New York to Los Angeles. I don’t think I’ll be there until sometime tomorrow. Can you call her office, maybe someone there can stay with her until I get there?” she requested.

“From what I’m told,” Early responded, “the whole company is out of town. Do you have any relatives or do you know of any friends?”

“No. No relatives and Emma’s friends were mostly from work,” Mrs. Clark sounded lost for words.

“Well, don’t worry Mrs. Clark,” he said as he was politely interrupted.

“Charlotte,” she said.

“Charlotte, we’ll take care of your daughter until you arrive. Have a safe trip and call when you get to New York,” he requested.

“Thank you Dr. Early. I’ll get there as soon as I can,” she said as she hung up the phone.

Dixie heard the conversation and tried to find a solution. “Joe, you can just put a nurse by her side today and . . .”

Joe stopped her, “No Dix, that won’t do.” He thought about Emma’s fears in the Recovery Room last night and he didn’t want that to happen again.

Then Joe asked boldly, “Are Roy and Johnny on shift today?”

“No, not today. Well, they are going to get off at eight this morning, why,” she inquired.

“Let’s get them on the phone,” the doctor said.

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The six men sat around the table and compared . . . no argued about what was better, Marco’s homemade biscuits or the Pillsbury Dough Boy biscuits that are “Poppin’ Fresh.” Chet liked the uniformity of the store bought variety. “They all look alike!” he said.

“But homemade biscuits taste better,” Johnny said as he shoved the last half and the last biscuit in his mouth.

“Well, I guess the debate is over since we are all out of evidence,” Mike said as he got up to put his dishes in the sink. Everybody else, except Johnny who was still chewing, started to pick up the mess they made.

Captain Stanley had just finished putting the butter and jelly in the refrigerator when the phone rang. He was the first person to pick it up. *Damn, I’m on a roll.*

“Station 51, Captain Stanley,” he said and as he listened, he slowly made eye contact with everyone in the room as the caller was obviously saying their names. “I don’t know, but I’ll ask them. Hang on. Guys, this is Dixie and Dr. Early, they want to ask you a favor.” And Hank quickly explained the reason why they called. After no more than 10 seconds Hank spoke again into the phone, “They said they would be happy to help. They are gonna work it out, and the first man, we don’t know who it is yet, will see you about 8:30 if we don’t get a call. Okay. Glad to help. Bye bye,” he said as he hung up the phone.

Captain Stanley left the new debate that was starting in the day room and went to his office to get ready for the shift change. Roy placed a call to Joanne, who had no problems with the idea, as long as he was ready to help Chris with his project after school. Knowing how special this woman was to the men, Joanne even volunteered to spend the night with Emma at the hospital.

It was determined that because of his family duties, Roy should sit with Emma first. The rest divided the day into shifts and then Roy and Johnny filled them in on what to expect, and some things that they could do to help the Intensive Care nurses.

By the time they got the breakfast dishes washed and put away, and Mike had raised the flags, the members of B-Shift started to appear. It wasn’t long after that they all started to drive out of the lot.

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Roy met with Dr. Early and Sara Palmer, the head nurse for the Intensive Care Unit. Not wanting to ruffle any feathers, Joe explained that these men weren't coming in today to get in the nurses way, they were there as friends to keep Emma calm. He also explained to Roy that when the nurses needed to help Emma with something that was inappropriate for the men to see, that they would leave the room.

Once the ground rules had been laid out and agreed on, Roy went in to Emma's room. Her bruises were a little darker. Nurse Palmer did suggest that Roy and the men who would follow him, could be in charge of replacing the cold packs on her forehead and her swollen thighs. He touched the packs and determined that they were still cool enough; but he made a mental note to switch them with colder ones in about 30 minutes.

As a precaution, Dr. Early had the bed railings cushioned for Emma's safety. Roy seemed content. He brought the chair in the room to the same side of the bed he was on last night in Recovery. He took out his small pad of paper and his pen and started to write down all of the things he had to buy at the hardware store.

Around 9:15, her left foot started to move. He cautiously watched as she started to move more parts. She moved her head slowly from side to side and whispered something unintelligible. It was then that Roy decided that she was just dreaming, and not getting ready to have a seizure. He placed his hand on her chest and pressed down just a little. With that simple physical gesture, she settled down and went back to sleep. *I'll have to pass this on to the next man.*

Mike Stoker buzzed in and checked with the nurses at the desk. As Sara and he were walking to Emma's room he asked if it would be okay to read out loud to her. He had seen it in a movie and it seemed to help the character, who was also in a car accident. Sara chuckled a little and said that it couldn't hurt.

"Roy, your replacement's here," said the nurse. She started to take Emma's vitals and Roy used the opportunity to pass along all of the things Mike had to do. When Roy and Sara left, he sat down in the chair. He was depressed. Emma looked terrible. The actress in that movie still looked beautiful even though she was in intensive care. *I guess Hollywood has a distorted view about medical "realism."*

Once his initial shock subsided, Mike started to talk to her. He thought that the guys would be amazed that he wanted to talk period. But, she was easy to talk to.

"Emma, I went by your house this morning. I hope you don't mind. A friend at the police department gave me your address. I called Vince, that's the policeman, because I was worried about Mike. After I parked in your driveway, I went through the gate into your backyard. I saw Mike. He was just sitting on your birdbath. I guess you don't get a lot of birds. He looked at me a little strange at first but I told him what happened to you. I didn't know what type of food you give him, so I just picked up some Cat Chow. I put some in the bowl that you had on the porch and found your hose and replaced the water in his water dish. You know that I am excellent with water hoses. As I was leaving, I saw him walk up to the bowls so don't worry about Mike. He is fine. By the way, I'm gonna go back and mow your lawn on Wednesday. It needs it. I knocked on your neighbor's doors but no one answered. I'll check back this afternoon when I go back to feed Mike again. I took your newspaper. I have it now so let's see what's in it."

Mike Stoker, the man who barely talked at work, read out loud a significant part of the Monday morning edition of *The Los Angeles Times*. There was an article about Emma's accident in the Metro Section. Mike read that silently. There was even a large picture of the crane pulling up the car.

Mike had just folded the paper back, a couple of times, to do the crossword puzzle when he saw Emma's left foot move a little. He remembered what Roy had said and was prepared. She started to wake up.

"Hey Emma, this is Mike."

"Thirsty," she whispered. Mike grabbed the cup that was on the bed stand and placed the straw on her lips.

"Here you go," he said. She took a small sip and then . . . stopped. "Emma, you need to swallow," he instructed. She did and before he could put the cup back on the tray, she was back asleep.

Mike went back to speak his way through the *LA Times* notoriously difficult crossword puzzle. He did realize that doing a puzzle out loud actually made it easier. He worked on the puzzle for about 25 minutes.

"Emma, I'm still stuck on this one word. Twenty-four across, nine letters, ends in an e: dangerous outlook on something. You've got to help me." It wasn't the only word he couldn't get so he gave up on the puzzle and turned to the sports section. "Let's see how badly the Rams lost yesterday!"

Before he knew it, Sara had brought Marco in the room. Mike talked to Marco and showed him how to change the cool packs and where her water was among other things. He could see that Marco was just as stunned to see Emma's physical condition. "Marco, she's going to be alright. Just say a little prayer for her," Mike said and as he got to the door, Emma whispered something.

"What did you say Emma," Marco asked. He got closer to her so he could better hear what she whispered. Marco shrugged his shoulders as he stood back up and looked at Sara and Mike.

"What did she say," asked the nurse.

"She just said one word," Marco said, "Precipice."

Twenty-four across. Mike didn't know that he could smile as big as he was smiling at that moment. He left without a word. Emma fell back asleep.

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Looking in his cart, Roy was almost finished scratching through the items he needed from his list. "Chicken wire. Check. Plastic sheeting. Check. Well, that's everything on my list." He really didn't want to come to the hardware store again. He often imagined that the employees at the store would make secret bets on how many trips a person would have to take back to the store to complete the simplest task. Yes, he was a well-respected firefighter/paramedic for the Los Angeles County Fire Department, a man that you would want to have around in an emergency; but for the life of him, he always had to come back to the hardware store for something he forgot. He rolled up to the checkout line and was surprised to see Chet Kelly in front of him.

"Hey Chet, what in the hell are you doing here," Roy asked as he looked in his friend's basket. "Paint. What are you painting?"

Chet didn't want to let it out that he made a doll house for his sister's little girl. He didn't think that the crew would laugh at him, but he kinda just felt that this was going to be a special thing between his niece, himself . . . and of course Emma. "My mom needs me to do some touch up painting. How was Emma this . . .?"

“Paint! I need paint for the volcano! Thank you, thank you, thank you Chet,” Roy said as he made a u-turn with his cart and headed to the paint department. *Hah! No one is going to make any money betting on Roy DeSoto today!*

Chet just shook his head and said, “Should have stuck with the sweet potato.”

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Even though he felt a little ashamed with himself for his lack of faith earlier this morning, Marco had made peace with his God. Sitting in the chair, he knew that He would always be there. Marco took his rosary out of the pouch in his pocket and began saying the prayers, in Spanish. His mom and grandmother taught him that when you say the rosary, you should softly say it out loud with your head bowed a little. Around the tenth Hail Mary, Emma’s left foot began to move. She was waking up again.

“Emma, it’s me Marco.” he said.

After about 30 seconds she replied, “Buenos Dias, Marco.”

“Buenos tardes Emma,” he politely corrected her. “It’s after 2 p.m.”

“Mi Madre?” she asked. She was obviously remembering more phrases from Mr. Garcia’s class.

“Your mother is on her way. She sends her love.”

“Gracias, chico,” she hoped she didn’t just call Marco a girl.

“Gracias, my friend.” he returned the thank you.

At that time, Sara and Dr. Early walked in the room. Joe was taken aback when he heard Emma speaking . . . and in Spanish of all things. *How could this woman even think she had brain damage?*

“Afternoon Marco, afternoon Emma. Marco, it’s time for us to do a check on her so, you might want to go to the cafeteria and get something to eat. I’m sure the food down there isn’t as bad as Johnny says it is,” Dr. Early stated. “It shouldn’t take us more than 30 minutes, okay.”

“Thank you Dr. Early. Volveré pronto. ¿Entiende usted?” he asked. (I’ll be back soon. Do you understand?)

“Si,” she answered. Marco put his rosary in his pocket and left the room.

“Well Miss Emma, do you have any more surprises for us. I see that you are bilingual,” Dr. Early said joking around.

“Trilingual. I’m fluent in French too,” she paused then quietly said, “Surprise.”

Emma’s vitals were better but Dr. Early was still guarded. She still had a fever and her blood tests that were run an hour ago made him worry a little. Maybe he would have her up and eating something soft by Wednesday. But for now all the nourishment that she needed was dripping in intravenously.

Sara and Dr. Early carefully checked her sutures. The ones from her lower quadrant looked good as did the ones in her left temple. When they started to unwrap the bandages around her arm, Emma’s level of pain rose.

“Emma,” Sara asked, “what is your pain number?”

Emma thought and answered, “I don’t know what that means?”

That’s one of the responsibilities of the nurses in recovery. Sara felt bad as she just assumed that her colleagues had done their job.

“Emma a pain number is a way for a patient to tell nurses or doctors how much pain he or she has. The scale is from 1 where there is little to no pain, up to 10, where the pain is unbearable. Okay. So, what is your pain number?” Sara asked again.

Because she had just been probed, her catheter checked and her body moved about she said, “8.”

“Thanks,” Sara said and she looked at Dr. Early for instructions.

“Let’s go ahead and give her the next round of medication now,” he said adding, “I’ll be down in Emergency, continue to update me on vitals and let’s get a full blood work up again in an hour. Emma, we’re going give you something to take away the pain. Remember; try to get as much rest as you can. *Vu ne comprenez?*” (Do you understand?)

“Qui,” she replied.

As they returned to the desk in the ICU, Dr. Early thanked Sara Palmer for her professionalism and compassion when dealing with his patient. After he left to go back downstairs Sara blushed. Rarely did doctors take the time to compliment their nurses.

+++++

Roy couldn’t help it. He was a cool Dad! Every time he picked up his son from school, he used the Porsche and made sure that the top was down. He knew that there was certain protocol for picking up children after school. You can only enter from this lane, and you have to exit from that lane. Station wagon after station wagon after station wagon. Roy’s Porsche wonderfully stood out. That and the fact that he donned the coolest aviator glasses he could find. When he pulled up to the “official carpool line” he honked his horn about three times. Chris ran up to the car and instead of opening the door, he just jumped in and slid down in the passenger seat. Roy handed him his own pair of smaller aviator glasses and the two cool DeSoto men just drove off.

“Dad, did you get everything?” he said.

“Yep, everything on the list . . . and I also picked up some extra chicken wire just in case,” Roy said.

“Mom said we can’t build the volcano in the kitchen. She said we have to use the deck,” Chris explained.

“Chris,” Roy smiled, “you know how Mom gets when it comes to anything messing up her kitchen.”

“Yeah Dad but,” he said, “I think Mom’s losing it.” Roy couldn’t help but smile wider as he continued to drive. “I mean, it’s not like we are building a real volcano! Geeze Dad, you don’t know what it’s like when you are at the station.”

“Oh really,” inquired Roy. “Life’s that bad, huh?”

“Do you know that she still makes me wear pajamas? I mean, you don’t wear pajamas Dad.” Roy got a little concerned but relaxed as his son continued. “Just last week, after I took a bath, I put on a t-shirt and my bathing suit and do you know what she said?”

“Why did you put on your bathing suit?” Roy asked not realizing that he had already answered Chris’ question.

“How’d ya know that?” questioned the boy. “Anyway, when she asked me, I said that I was too old for pajamas and that I wanted to sleep in a t-shirt and underwear like you Dad. But I don’t have any like you . . .”

“You mean boxer shorts,” Roy described as he pulled onto their street.

“Yeah. . . that’s right. Boxer shorts. I don’t have any boxer shorts so I figured I could wear my swim suit instead.” Chris continued, “And do you know what she did? She made me go upstairs and put my pajamas on. Dad, I’m too old for pajamas. You know I am in the fourth grade.”

“Yeah . . . look Chris,” Roy started to change the subject but Chris was apparently on roll. Roy kinda felt like he was at the station and Johnny was complaining about . . . anything.

“Dad, maybe you could talk to her for me, you know. She’s got to stop treating me like I was a kid,” he begged. “Please Dad!”

Roy parked his car in the garage, took a deep breath and looked at Chris and said, “Son, I’ll do my best. I can’t guarantee anything though, but . . . at least I’ll ask her to buy you some boxer shorts. Okay?”

“Great Dad, you’re the best,” smiled Chris.

“You too son, I am so glad we had this man-to-man talk,” Roy said as he placed his arm around Chris’ shoulders. “Come on my man, let’s go build us a volcano!”

+++++

The rest of Marco’s shift was heartbreaking. The pain medication allowed her to relax both physically and emotionally. She told Marco about her dad. Emma’s dad, Richard Clark was, as she quoted, “An artist for love but a printer for money.” Her mom and dad met at an art gallery opening. It was love at first sight. Both only 20 years old, they married and within a year had Emma. If he could have, Richard Clark would have loved to paint and sculpt 24 hours a day; but the responsibilities of a wife and child forced him to enter the world of offset printing. She said that at least he could design a poster or two every now and then. After Emma started first grade, Charlotte, her mom, went back to school to get her degree in education.

Three years ago, while working at the print shop, her dad’s appendix burst. By the time the ambulance got him to Harbor General, it was too late. Campus security at the community college Emma was attending pulled her out of her business class and told her in the hallway. Three weeks later, her mom stood proudly, but alone, at her daughter’s college graduation.

Marco, who was quietly fingering his rosary beads along the side of the bed, was more worried that she seemed more angry than sad about the tragic death of her father.

In an effort to lighten the mood, Marco went back to his Spanish lesson. Emma mastered her numbers, 1 through 10, and was working on the days of the week when she started to doze off. This time the teacher let the pupil close her eyes and sleep.

When the door opened the next time, Sara's shift replacement brought in Chet Kelly. Just as the guys did before him, he passed along the necessary things that Chet was expected to do.

Before he left the building, Marco stopped at the hospital's chapel.

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On the drive to the hospital Chet rehearsed what he was going to talk about. He had found that it was more beneficial to have "conversation starters" ready to go when he was going to be talking to a woman. That way, he thought, he wouldn't look like a fool. So as the traffic forced him to sit in the same place instead of moving forward, Chet started practicing out loud. "I started painting the doll house today Emma, thanks for your help with the paint colors." "How about those Rams? Are they ever gonna win another game?" "Hey, maybe in a few weeks, we can go out to dinner? Would you be interested?"

"Probably not!" said the burly man in the car in the next lane. Chet was glad that the next exit was his.

Now that he was in her room, and he saw her . . . the way she was, he was speechless. He hoped that the two hours that he had agreed to stay with her would pass by quickly. It's not that he was afraid, he just felt inadequate to take care of someone in her condition. When Mary, the nurse came in to draw some blood, Chet made an excuse to leave. He said that he got queasy around needles and that he would maybe go get a drink from the water fountain by the elevator. What he really needed was to go somewhere where he could take a deep breath. Sure, he heard Johnny and Roy describe her condition this morning in the break room, but he really didn't believe it until now. After a couple of minutes he returned to the ICU, ready to be there if she needed him.

The first hour he was there she was asleep but as he was replacing the cold packs Emma's left foot started to move. She was waking up. *Dammit!*

"Marco?" she whispered.

"No Emma, it's me Chet. Marco is gone."

"Thirsty," she said.

He relaxed. This I can do. So he did. And as quickly as she woke up, she fell back asleep. Chet saw the sports section and started to read the NFL schedules for the rest of the season. *Maybe the Rams won't win another game?*

"Chet," Emma whispered.

"What," he replied. He thought that if he kept his answers short, mathematically his chance of saying something stupid was minimal. At least that is the way math worked for him. *I still don't understand how I got ranked 74th on the engineer's test.*

"Chet," Emma repeated.

Again, he said "What?" About 5 seconds later he heard.

"Chet."

"What Emma?"

"What day is it?" she asked.

“Monday,” he answered.

“Monday?” she repeated.

“Yep.”

“Okay,” she said and she seemed to go back to sleep, but she didn’t. She would slowly say his name three times and then on the fourth time she opened her mouth she would ask a question. Chet couldn’t help but smile and the routine she established. Three “Chets” and then a question. Three “Chets” and then a question. At first the questions were simple: What time is it? Is it raining? How’s Mike? *Why did she ask that question?*

Then the questions became difficult to answer: Why did he hit my car? What did I do to him? What am I going to do now?

As the questions got more disturbing Emma started to become emotional and she started to move around in the bed. She even kicked so hard that one of her cold packs fell on the floor. Chet was getting ready to press the call button when Mary walked in with Johnny and for the first time today, he didn’t pass anything along. He figured that Johnny is a paramedic; he’ll know what to do. He didn’t even say goodbye. He just left.

The first thing Johnny did was to place his hand on her chest where Roy did last night. She quickly calmed down and went to sleep. A half hour later, he was concerned because her face looked flush and he couldn’t tell if she had a fever because of the cold packs on her forehead. Johnny stuck his head out of the door looking for Mary. “Do you have a thermometer; I want to take her temperature?” Johnny asked. Mary looked on the counter and picked up a plastic case with the tube inside and Johnny went to get it.

“Chet” Emma said. Hearing nothing she said, “Chet” with a little more urgency. Still she heard nothing. “Chet!” She took a breath. “Chet!” Emma started to panic. “Chet!” And by that time, Johnny had returned to the side of the bed.

“Calm down Emma. Chet is gone, it’s me Johnny. You’re gonna be alright,” he said, “you’re gonna be alright.”

“Can you . . . get me a blanket?” she asked.

“A blanket? You bet.” Johnny went to the counter and found the blanket. “Here you go. Are you cold?”

“Cold,” she said. Johnny carefully put the blanket on her.

“Emma, I’m gonna take . . .”

“I’m sorry,” she apologized.

“Why are you sorry,” he said as he removed the thermometer from the case.

“I’m sorry,” she apologized again.

He didn’t even take the time to tell her, he just put the thermometer in her mouth. She was getting distressed. She started to move her legs again and she needed to breathe so she just spit out the thermometer and started to panic. Johnny pushed the call button. In the 10 seconds that Mary took to get in the room, Emma’s right leg started to have a small muscle spasm, a leg cramp. Being a member

of his high school track team, Johnny knew that he had to *push against* the cramp. So he did and her leg muscles eased.

Mary looked at the IV hanging from the pole. It was still functioning properly but apparently Emma needed more fluids. "Johnny, get her to drink something. I'm going to check with Dr. Early," she said as she quickly left the room.

He wanted to get her some fresh water so he grabbed the cup and went to the nurse's station for ice. And then he heard her scream again, just like she was screaming back in the car. By the time he and Mary got to her, she was laying on her right side as her *left leg* was in a severe cramp. Mary ran back to get an emergency pre-loaded hypodermic needle of morphine. Johnny grabbed the blanket that was now flapping in the air and threw it on the floor. As she suffered through the cramp, Johnny stood by the end of the bed and grabbed her left leg with his right hand and he grabbed her left foot with his left hand. Then, he put her foot flat against his chest and pushed! He pushed hard! Privacy be damned. He didn't care that the sheets were no longer covering Emma's body. He just pushed.

All the time Emma screamed "Johnny! It hurts!" "Help me Johnny! It hurts!"

"I got it Mary," as the nurse and Dr. Early entered the room at the same time. "Keep pushing Johnny until the MS takes effect," he said as he gave the medication to her directly in her shoulder.

"Dr. Early!" Emma screamed, "Ten! Dr. Early ten!"

As the leg cramp lessened, Mary did her best to discretely cover up Emma's exposed body with the sheet. Dr. Early could see that Emma's fever had indeed gone up. He was also concerned with her latest blood work. He took Emma's face in his hand, almost the exact way Roy did last night and calmed her down.

"Emma," he said "I want you to listen to me. Your body is fighting you. Your mind is telling your body that it's okay to wake up. Listen to me. I'm going to give you some strong sedatives that will make you go to sleep. Do you understand? I'm going to magically make tomorrow disappear. Did you hear me?"

Emma was still "out of it."

"Emma, tell me that you understand?"

"Dis...a...pear," she said.

"Good. We're going to give your body a chance to get the healing sleep it needs. Okay." he reassured her.

"Dis...a...pear," she said again as the medicine finally did its job.

Early had to look around for Johnny, he had retreated to the far corner of the room. "Johnny, can you stay with her for a minute until Mary and I go over the orders? Oh, by the way, were you the last one or is there someone else coming?" he questioned.

"Joanne DeSoto is coming to spend the night," Johnny said.

"Call her up and cancel. I'm putting in a no visitor rule. And anyway, she will be sedated regardless. The next person I want her to see is her mother, sometime tomorrow afternoon."

Johnny didn't sit down. His adrenaline was too high. He just stood and looked at her. When they returned to her room, he left. He didn't take the elevator. Instead, he ran down the stairs. He had calmed down by the time he hit the first floor. He knocked on the door to Brackett's office. No one answered so he went and used the phone to call Joanne.

+++++

Tuesday morning, after roll call Johnny explained what happened with Emma Monday night. He had to explain it twice to Marco who didn't understand.

"Marco. Dr. Early has put her into what is kind of like a . . . medically induced coma. He said that her brain was telling her body that it was okay to wake up, when clearly her body needed more rest," repeated Johnny. "And, he has ordered no visitors until her mom arrives sometime this afternoon. He isn't even going to let me and Roy in, so we just have to wait. Okay."

"Okay, I got it, but I don't like it," he said.

Today was the second Tuesday, and 51 was the LA County Fire Department's station of the month, which meant that if any civic organization wanted to view the facility, or a school was to take a field trip, Hank and the rest of A-Shift had to be on their best. At 9:00 a.m., they played host to a van load of men and women from Carson's Senior Citizens Activity Center and at 11:00 they had a bus load of preschool children, who proceeded to climb all over Big Red. By 1 p.m., the visitors were gone, lunch was consumed and they were put back in to rotation.

The squad was called out immediately and stayed busy for the rest of the afternoon while Mike, Chet, Marco and even Hank himself had one hell of a time getting the engine clean again. All of those little fingerprints everywhere.

The station's phone rang and Captain Stanley put down his shammie and went to his office. "Station 51, Captain Stanley speaking," he said.

"Captain Stanley, this is Dixie McCall from Rampart, I want you to know that Emma Clark's mom just arrived and that Dr. Early has stopped the sedation. Emma will probably be asleep all night anyway, but he still wanted me to tell you."

"That's great news Miss McCall. Johnny and Roy are out on a call so you might be able to tell them in person," he thought.

"Great. I'll do that. Stay safe," she concluded.

And as predicted, Dixie saw Roy and Johnny accompany a very embarrassed man with a bandaged arm into Room 4. The man had accidentally cut his arm while doing a simple home repair and probably needed a few stitches.

"Take care, Mr. Steib. They are going to take good care of you," said Roy.

"Thanks for your help," he replied.

Johnny and Roy brought the drug box over to the base station to get supplies.

"I just phoned the station," Dixie said. "Emma Clark's mother is here. Joe is talking to her in Kell's office. Why don't you go meet her?"

"Do you think it would be okay?" Johnny asked.

“Absolutely,” she reassured. “Just leave your drug box here. I’ll figure out what you need.”

They knocked on the door first.

“Come in,” Dr. Early said and then when he saw who it was he welcomed them in and introduced them to Emma’s mother. Roy and Johnny were a little stunned, as was Joe Early himself a few minutes ago when they looked at the woman. She was beautiful. And not a “glamour” beautiful, but a natural beautiful. And she sure enough didn’t look old enough to be Emma’s mother.

“Charlotte Clark, I’d like you to meet the two paramedics who helped to rescue your daughter. This is John Gage and Roy DeSoto. Men, Charlotte Clark.”

“Thank you so much for saving my daughter,” she said as they shook her hand.

“Guys, Mrs. Clark was just telling me more about Emma, please continue Mrs. Clark,” asked Joe Early.

“Just “Charlotte” please. Well as I was telling Dr. Early, Emma is a strongly independent young lady. She’s definitely not one of those women who shop and gossip and go out to bars.” She laughed a little, “Emma would rather repair the garbage disposal than pick out a pair of shoes. Her independence . . . her ability to take care of herself was what made me feel secure enough to take my teaching job in Paris. A year after her father died, she encouraged me to go out and look for a challenge, try something new. So, when I was offered the job, I moved to France. But I promise you that I would not have done that if I wasn’t so sure about Emma’s ability to take care of herself.”

Joe Early thought to himself that Charlotte had to explain her actions. It was obviously cathartic.

He said, “I’ve told Mrs. Clark, oops, I mean Charlotte, that her daughter is probably going to sleep through the night and that she should also go home and get some sleep as well.”

“You must be exhausted from all of those planes,” said Roy. Charlotte agreed.

“But I promised that I’d let her look in on her now. Gentlemen, if you will excuse us?” said the doctor and they all left the office with Charlotte’s suitcases stacked in the corner. She would get them later.

+++++

He was making good time. After he got off of work at 8:00 a.m., Mike went directly to Emma’s house to feed Mike and mow the lawn. His plan was to do her lawn, go home, shower, maybe take a nap and then finally, he would go to the hospital. The cat was getting used to him . . . a little. At first he would sit on the birdbath and wait until Mike had closed the gate before he would approach his bowl. Now he didn’t wait, he just sauntered up to the bowls. Mike thought that by the end of the week Mike would let him touch him.

He found all of Emma’s lawn gear in the shed at the back of the yard. The mower had enough gas, he hoped, to do both the front and back lawns. Mike pushed the mower to the cement patio and pulled the cord. It didn’t start. He tried again. Still nothing. He primed the engine a couple of times, waited a second, pulled again and the mower came to life. Just as he was thinking about which geometric way to cut the lawn, something caught his attention. He looked to the sliding glass door and saw a woman standing there in a robe. She was beautiful.

“Who are you and what are you doing here?” inquired Charlotte Clark.

Mike quickly turned off the mower and said, "I'm Mike Stoker, ah uhm, I'm a friend of Emma's, I told her I would mow her lawn and feed her cat while she's in the hospital. And you are?"

"I'm Emma's mother, Charlotte Clark. Nice to meet you," she said adding, "Emma has a cat?"

"Yes, his name is Mike and look, he's over there," Mike pointed at the cat sitting by the shed.

"Your name is Mike," she said. After traveling for the last 36 hours she was understandably confused. Mike started to explain when she gave up, held up her hand and said, "I tell you what, why don't you take a break for a few minutes. I'll make some coffee, if she has any, and you can tell me the whole story okay."

"Good idea," Mike said as he walked into Emma's house wiping his hands on his jeans. Mike the cat curled up in the sunshine and took a nap.

+++++

Over coffee on the patio, it was decided that while Mike mowed the lawns, Charlotte would bathe and get ready, and then Mike would take her to a car rental place so she would have a way to get around.

When she arrived at the hospital she was told that her daughter had been moved from the ICU and placed in Room 221. Dr. Early was pleased with her recent tests. Sedating her yesterday and letting her body regenerate itself made a world of difference. The doctor left instructions with the floor nurses about his goals for the patient. Depending on her vitals, he had planned to remove her IVs by this afternoon and get her to eat something soft for dinner tonight.

Charlotte was pleased to see that the swelling had gone down and that she could completely open her right eye and a little bit of her left. She was still weak and even though her stitches started to itch and pull, she was willing to let her mom elevate the bed just a little. Overall, Charlotte's spirit was in a much better place than seeing her daughter for the first time yesterday.

Around 3 p.m. Marco, Marco's mother and Chet knocked on the door. Charlotte was pleased to see that Emma had so many friends. Roy and Johnny from yesterday, Mike from this morning and her current visitors. Marco and his mom got along pleasingly well with Emma and her mom. At one point in their visit, Marco and his mom were talking in Spanish on one side of the bed, and Emma and Charlotte were talking in French on the other side. Chet was standing by the foot of the bed, just smiling, not really understanding much. After about 30 minutes it was clear to everybody that all of this activity was starting to affect Emma, so the visitors said their goodbyes and left.

Emma quickly went to sleep.

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"Give me back my Barbie!" yelled Jenny DeSoto at the top of her lungs.

"I need it for my science project. You've got another one," Chris said as he ran down the stairs holding the doll up high, higher than his sister could reach.

"Daddy! Chris has my Barbie doll," she screamed so loudly that Roy thought the people living in the next block could hear her. "Give it back! Give it back!" she said as she tried, without success, to jump and get her doll.

"No. I need it." Chris yelled again and he ran out the back door with his little sister jumping right beside him.

“Give it back! Daddy, make him give it back,” she said as she started to cry. “Please Daddy, Uncle Johnny make him give it back.”

Roy snatched the naked doll out of Chris’ hand and returned it to his daughter. Instantly Jenny’s tears dried up and as she hugged her little doll, she stuck out her tongue at her brother and went back to her room.

“Why must you torment your sister?” Roy demanded an answer.

“It’s for my science project,” he said.

Roy just closed his eyes and slowly counted to 10. Johnny, who was standing right next to him tried not to laugh out loud.

“Talk,” Roy said using his most serious daddy voice.

“I saw a *Gilligan’s Island* show when once there was a volcano on the island. They said something about to stop a volcano eruption, if you sacrifice a virgin and throw her into the top of the volcano, the volcano wouldn’t blow. So I thought I could put the doll on the top of my model. Good idea huh!” Chris said.

Johnny couldn’t hold it in any longer. He started laughing and he had to leave Roy’s side and go sit in the lawn chair.

“No. No doll Chris. Now just give me and your Uncle Johnny some peace and quiet, please,” pleaded Roy.

“Okay Daaad” he said and before he walked back into the house he turned to his dad and asked, “Dad, what’s a virgin?”

“Go to your room Chris!” Roy said and looked as seriously as he could at his son. The second Chris closed the door, Roy and Johnny exploded with laughter and they wouldn’t stop laughing for a long time.

+++++

The next morning while Roy was getting their daily supplies Johnny went to go visit the Clarks. When he got up to the second floor he was surprised to see Mrs. Clark sitting in the hallway alcove by the window. He could tell that even though she was turned to the glass, she wasn’t really *seeing* anything. Charlotte seemed upset. He quietly walked her way and tried to put on the Gage charm to ease the situation. “You know, if you look past the smog, occasional wild fires and landslides, L.A. is a beautiful place to live,” he said with his classic Gage smile. She looked up at him.

“Good morning, John,” she said as she gestured for him to sit next to her on the window bench.

“Is everything okay?” Johnny asked as he looked back to Emma’s closed hospital door.

“Yes. Well, no. Well . . . I hope,” she stammered. “It’s just that Emma had a bad night last night.”

“What do you mean, she’s . . .” he asked as he took one of Charlotte’s hands in his.

“She’s sleeping right now John. She didn’t get any sleep last night. It makes me so . . . angry that I could scream,” the mother exclaimed.

As simply as he could he asked, "Charlotte what happened."

She looked down at the floor and sighed. Johnny decided to not push her. He would just wait for her to speak.

"You know that Emma had a reasonably good day yesterday. The IV was removed and her fever almost returned to normal. She even asked for me to elevate the bed so that she could sit up a little," she said.

Johnny nodded.

"She almost seemed, you know, on the way back to being her regular self."

"Almost?" Johnny questioned.

"Dr. Early and the whole staff here has been wonderful, you know that, and that I am, *we* are very grateful for what they have done but," she was having a hard time putting her thoughts into words.

"Charlotte. What happened?" he repeated.

"Since the IVs were removed, Emma was told that she had to start eating again. Not a lot, but they said that she had to try. So when the dinner tray arrived, she ate. The whole thing," she said.

A woman after my own heart. Johnny thought.

"But," she paused, "and this is the part that gets me angry. Emma was encouraged to eat. So she did. But no one told her that the medicine that she was taking could possibly make her nauseas. And it did. And she threw up."

John couldn't tell who she was angrier with, the nurses, Dr. Early or herself. "John, throwing up is not a pleasant experience as it is but, throwing up with close to 400 stitches has to be excruciating. She threw up hard, all night long and she even started to run a fever again. They eventually put her back on an IV to keep her from dehydration."

"I'm sorry. Were you here all night?" he asked.

Charlotte nodded her head.

"Well, I think that you need to go home and get some sleep yourself," Johnny insisted. At that time, Roy walked up to the pair.

"Good morning," he said.

Charlotte nodded politely and then she thought about the folded up paper in her pocket. "Roy, I have something for you. Emma and I worked on it last night. It's about the science fair."

As Roy sat down to look at the paper, Johnny took the opportunity to go check up on Emma. Her bed was down flat and yes, there was another working IV in her right arm again. The paramedic in him took her pulse and respiration. They were normal. He then placed his hand on her forehead. It was warm, but nothing to worry about. He didn't want to do anything further that could wake her up, so he quietly left the room and returned to the alcove.

"Roy, we should go back to work. Mrs. Clark, remember, you should get some sleep," he insisted.

“I will,” she promised. And with that, Johnny and Roy made themselves available and returned to the squad, and Charlotte Clark silently gathered her purse from room 221 and headed toward her car.

+++++

Later that day Johnny rode in the ambulance with their latest rescue. An elderly man slipped and fell down the stairs. They suspected a broken hip and a cracked rib or two. Roy backed up the squad and parked. He found Johnny in Room 3 and said, “I’m going to check on Emma.” Johnny nodded.

Roy knocked on the door first and then slowly entered the room. Emma turned her head toward the door as Roy said, “Can I come in?”

“Sure,” she said quietly. Charlotte was not in the room. Roy assumed that she was still at home catching up on her sleep. Emma’s bed was, as always flat, but she seemed to have a couple of more pillows underneath her head so she had looked like she was half sitting up. Unfortunately, she still had an IV.

“Feeling okay,” he asked.

“I’m okay,” again she spoke very softly.

“Johnny and I told the guys about your bad night last night and Marco said that he was going to make you some nice, mild, creamy soup. What do you think?” he said.

The last thing that Emma wanted to think about was food. But she was so very hungry. She was also afraid of having another night like last night. She eventually answered, “I’d like that.”

“You know,” Roy started, “you’re not going to get better overnight, you have . . .”

“Please, let’s change the subject. I’m tired of talking about me. Please.” she quietly begged.

“Okay,” he said. Roy was concerned by her lack of energy but he just figured that she was still tired from before.

Emma asked, “Did Mom give you the list of things for Chris’ project? We worked on it last night. Do you have any questions?”

“No, your mom explained the things to me, and I’ve already called Joanne and shared the suggestions. Joanne is going to make sure that he is well dressed for the presentation and we both love the idea of passing out cookies to people who stop by and see his display. Your mom told me this morning that at your presentation, once people found out their blood type, they could take a cookie with an A or a B or an O on the top.”

Emma quietly added, “And anyone who was AB could get two cookies.”

“Joanne thought that since Chris was doing volcanoes, she could make a lot of chocolate cupcakes, turn them upside down, so that they kind of look like a mountain, then carve out the middle and put dark red frosting coming out of the top. What do you think?”

Roy felt better because even though her voice was at a whisper level, Emma started to smile. “That’s very clever. You have a smart wife Roy.”

“Of course she’s smart, she married me, remember!” Roy smiled.

“Roy. I’m thirsty. Can you get me some water,” she asked. Roy went to the sink and saw that there was already a cup of ice in the room. He took her cup with the bendy straw, placed in a few cubes and added water.

“Here,” he said as he held the straw to her lips. “Better?”

She nodded.

“Roy, do you remember when I was in the car, we had this nice conversation about you, Joanne and the kids?”

God, he really didn’t want her reliving the accident. He pulled up the chair next to her bed and nodded.

She softly continued, “And you said that your favorite time of the day was at night, after the kids were tucked in, you and Joanne would sit around the kitchen table and talk about anything and everything. Remember? And then you said that sometimes, you really didn’t need to talk, you just liked being in the same room with each other. Remember?”

“I remember,” he answered.

“You know what?” she said.

“What?”

“I think that’s nice,” she finished so softly that he almost didn’t hear her.

Roy was speechless. How could this woman, who had been through hell and back, think so much about him and his family? She was the special person in this room, not the DeSotos.

“Don’t *you* think that’s nice?” she asked him again.

“Yeah Emma, I think that’s nice,” he answered.

Johnny came in the room to let Roy know that they needed to get back to work. “Did you ask her about Marco’s soup,” he inquired as Roy returned the chair back to where it was.

“I’m looking forward to it,” she said quietly.

“Great then, we’ll see you around dinner time,” Johnny said as they started to leave.

Roy turned back at the door and looked at her. He estimated that she would be asleep again in no time.

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In what seemed like the middle of the night, the Klaxons sounded.

Squad 51 Maternity case, 5300 Reserve Avenue, cross street O’Dwyer, that’s 5300 Reserve Avenue. Ambulance is responding. Time 5:10

When they got to the address a very nervous man met them at the curb and led them inside. Johnny and Roy worked as a team. They got the mother ready to transport and most importantly got the father calmed down enough to drive his own car to the hospital. Johnny was riding in the ambulance and before Roy closed the door he said, “I’m going to be in Emma’s room when you’re done.”

“Okay,” Johnny said as the ambulance took off.

When Roy got to the second floor everything was quiet. He looked at his watch, 5:50 a.m. *Maybe it's too early for me to be here?* He carefully opened the door to 221, looked in and relaxed.

“Hey, you’re awake. I was afraid I’d wake you,” he said and he walked over to the foot of the bed.

“I’m awake. I like laying here listening to the silence. I can even hear some birds outside,” she described. “Today’s the big day huh?”

“Yep. I don’t know who’s more nervous, Joanne and I or Chris,” he admitted as he pushed his fingers along the footboard of the bed. Roy was pleased to see that Emma had more energy than yesterday.

“Roy,” Emma said, “you and Joanne have to do me a favor.”

“Anything,” he answered quickly.

“You two have to make it a big deal. It’s important,” she said seriously.

“What do you mean?” He asked.

“I mean everything. Bring the camera, take pictures, and even if the volcano doesn’t work, or if it falls on the floor and breaks into a million pieces, it doesn’t matter. Just show Chris how proud you are of him,” she said and before he could respond she continued, “Show him that school matters and that’s it good to get a sense of pride in his schoolwork. If you do that, Chris will always want to be better in school. Promise me that you’ll make a big deal out of today. Okay.”

“I promise, Emma,” he said.

“You know, we weren’t the wealthiest family on the block, but my mom and dad always made me feel special. Whenever I got a good grade on something in school my Dad would say, ‘Emma.’” she lowered her voice to sound like a man and continued, “You’re Mom and I are very proud of you. You showed us that you are turning into a young lady, so tonight, we are going to let you choose what’s for dinner.’ Or he would say, ‘Emma. You’re Mom and I are very proud of you.’” She paused for a moment then said, “He always started with ‘You’re Mom and I are very proud of you.’” She said again lowering her voice, “You’re Mom and I are very proud of you, so we’ve decided that you can stay up an extra hour tonight.”

“Roy, do you have any idea how great it is to know that as a kid, your bedtime has been extended by a whole hour? Of course, I probably fell asleep at the same time anyway, but I earned it,” Emma said and then she paused. “And it didn’t cost a thing. My parents were not going to let the lack of money get in their way.”

As Roy was getting ready to respond, the HT beeped, “Squad 51, are you available?”

“Sorry, I gotta go. I’ll come by tomorrow and let you know the results.” He smiled as he pulled open the door and said into the handie-talkie, “Squad 51 available.”

+++++

Room 221 of Rampart Hospital was a busy place. Chet came directly from work. He wanted to tell Emma that now that it was complete, his niece’s doll house looked beautiful. Emma could tell that he was proud of his accomplishment. The birthday party was on Sunday and yes, he was planning to take photographs.

At the house, when Mike the firefighter was done checking Mike the cat, Charlotte opened the sliding glass door and again, the two enjoyed another cup of coffee on the patio.

When Charlotte arrived at 221, Emma was being placed in a wheelchair for her first trip to physical therapy. Her therapist said that they weren't expecting too much from her today, maybe just a step or two. Still, both mom and daughter were anxious.

With her mom on her right and the physical therapist carefully holding her left side, Emma took three steps! *Well, it's a start.* Emma thought. Because it was Friday and the therapy gym would close for the weekend, Justin, her therapist, asked her to start sitting up more in bed, or even sit in the chair in her room. Emma said she'd try.

By lunch time Mamma Lopez and Marco brought her some soup and stayed for a small visit. After lunch both Emma and Charlotte took a good nap.

In the late afternoon the two ladies were talking about Paris and how much Charlotte loved her job teaching when there was a knock on the door.

"May I come in?" asked a very tall, lanky dark-haired man.

"Yes," said Emma. It took her a second to place the voice with the man but she smiled and said, "Mom, this is Captain Hank Stanley of Station 51."

Captain Stanley said that he had to pick up some forms from Dr. Brackett and since he was here, he'd thought he'd stop by. Charlotte got up and hugged the man who orchestrated the rescue of her daughter. When he was leaving, Johnny and Mike came in.

"Hi Cap," they both said surprised to see him there.

"Men. Well I have to go, see you tomorrow and Charlotte and Emma, take care," he said and he was gone.

Mike, Johnny, Charlotte and Emma gathered around the bed and played Scrabble until dinner time. Charlotte was not to use any French words and Johnny was not allowed to use any medical terms. They laughed and argued and wished they had a dictionary to look up Johnny's word chautauqua. He promised that it was a real word and since the Q fell on a triple word square, he won the game!

The nurse's aide came in with Emma's dinner, and even though she was bone tired from all the activities in the day, she ate as much as she could.

+++++

"Now look Chris. She's probably tired so I don't want you to talk for very long okay," Roy pleaded as he dialed the phone.

"I won't Dad; I just wanted to thank her," Roy's son said.

I must be doing something right if my son wants to say Thank You to someone he's never met. Roy thought as Charlotte picked up the phone.

"Hello?" she said wondering who would be calling.

"Charlotte, it's me Roy. My son wants to talk to Emma. Can he?"

Charlotte smiled and said, "Sure. Hold on." Without the IV, Emma could now bend her right arm, so her mom handed her the receiver. "It's for you."

"Hello," she said.

"Emma, it's Roy. I have someone here who'd like to talk to you," and before she knew it, Chris was on the line.

"Miss Emma, this is Chris DeSoto, I just wanted to thank you for all of your help with my science project. I got 2nd Place!" he said as Joanne and Roy smiled and listened from the kitchen.

Chris continued and like always, his enthusiasm prevented him from talking with punctuation. "It was great and the volcano worked and all of my friends were impressed and Mr. Pearson the principal said that I looked very nice in my suit and tie and everybody loved the volcano cupcakes."

"That's great," Emma smiled as she listened.

"And, my mom and dad said that I could choose what was for dinner so we are going to have Mike Stoker's Spaghetti," and then Emma heard another voice over the phone.

"I get to choose the dessert. We're having ice cream with strawberries!" yelled Jenny in the background before Joanne could put her hand over her daughter's mouth.

Chris gave his little sister a serious stare. Then he continued, "And guess what, my parents said that I could stay up for an extra hour tonight. Isn't that great?"

Roy thought Chris was done but when he went to grab the phone, his son continued. "My mom says that when you get out of the hospital, we need to invite you over for a bar-b-que. What do you think? We have a pool, it is not a fancy pool but people like it. And I was going to ask you about my social studies fair project that I have to do next year, I'm kinda thinking about . . ."

At that exact time, Roy touched his son on the shoulder and said, "Say goodbye Chris."

"Goodbye," and Chris covered the receiver with his hand like he had seen his mother do many times and whispered to his parents, "Can I call her Aunt Emma, you know like we do with Uncle Johnny?"

"No not yet," his mother said smiling. "Maybe later though."

"Goodbye Miss Emma, thank you very much." Chris finished and handed the receiver back to his mother.

"Emma, this is Joanne. Thank you for listening to my very excited young man and, I also want to say thank you."

"I'm so glad that everything worked out. And I would love to come over for a bar-b-que," said Emma.

"Here's Roy," Joanne said as she handed the receiver to her husband who listened for a second or two before he started to laugh out loud.

"I'll explain tomorrow. Good night and thanks again," Roy said as he hung up the phone.

"What's so funny," Joanne asked.

"Emma wanted me to explain what Mike Stoker's Spaghetti was?" They both laughed as they set the table.

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“Mom,” Emma said, “I’m really tired. It’s been a great day but, I think I’m going to go to sleep early tonight. Why don’t you go on home and get some good sleep as well?”

Charlotte felt a little guilty, “Maybe I shouldn’t have let you do so much today. Je suis désolé,” (I’m sorry.) she said.

“Don’t be mom; this was one of my favorite days ever, thanks,” she replied and after Charlotte lowered Emma’s bed she said, “Adieu mère.” (Goodbye mom.)

“Revoir ma fille, je t’aime and Charlotte left. (Good bye my daughter. I love you.)

“Je t’aime trop.” Emma said. (I love you too.)

+++++

Roy and Joanne DeSoto sat in the kitchen feeling very proud of themselves. One: They *survived* the Carson Elementary School 4th Grade Science Fair. Two: Their child won second place. Three: They had one of the best dinners ever. Four: Their young man, who tonight could have stayed up until 10 p.m., fell asleep on the floor in front of the TV with his blue ribbon laid out in front of him at exactly 9:07. Five: They had every intention of continuing their winning ways later tonight in their bedroom.

+++++

A little after 1 a.m., Cindy the floor nurse quietly stepped in Room 221 as requested. “You called,” she asked Emma.

“Sorry to bother you Cindy, I can’t get comfortable tonight. I did too much today and my back really hurts. Can I get an Aspirin or something?”

“Do you need another pillow as well,” the nurse suggested.

“Uhm, that sounds like a good idea,” Emma said.

“Okay, I’ll be right back,” Cindy said as she left to check Emma’s approved medication chart.

+++++

When he pulled into the station Saturday morning, Hank noticed both the engine and squad were out on a call. He parked his old but faithful car in the lot behind the station, removed his newly cleaned uniforms and went to his locker. It was nice, changing into his uniform without anyone in the station. He went and checked the status of the coffee and determined that he needed to make a new pot.

While the coffee was brewing he went to his desk to check up on any phone messages or mail. Just as he sat down the engine and squad returned. He went out to welcome them home and told them that he had just made a fresh pot of coffee.

By 7:45 a.m., the locker room was crowded as C-Shift was leaving and A-Shift was getting ready. Mike and Marco were changed already, Johnny and Chet were tying their shoes and Roy was shaving at the mirror.

“He got second place, the volcano did exactly what it was supposed to do and everything Emma suggested we do worked. I don’t think I’ve ever seen my son happier,” Roy said carefully as he was shaving and talking at the same time.

“And no Barbies were sacrificed to the Gods,” Johnny added knowing that Roy was the only one in the room who would get the joke.

“I guess that’s better than Hydro-Gardening after all,” Chet admitted.

“You know Roy, John,” Marco added, “my mom and I were glad to see that she was in a better mood yesterday.”

At that time Charlie Dwyer from C-Shift stuck his head in the door and said, “Your Cap wants to meet you all in the day room before roll call.”

“Thanks Dwyer,” said Chet. “Yeah John, I think Emma is gonna be all right.”

“You know yesterday, she asked me the craziest question,” Mike said, and they started to walk through the door that led to the apparatus bay. “She asked me if I had a kitchen table.”

They all agreed that it was a strange question and they shrugged their shoulders as they left the locker room. Roy, who was still seated by his locker tying his shoes couldn’t help but smile at Mike’s confusion. He knew the answer to Emma’s question about the kitchen table and he secretly agreed with her selection.

Roy took two drawings that Jenny and Chris drew for Emma last night out of his locker before he closed it. He wanted to put them in the squad so he wouldn’t forget to give them to her. They would cheer up Room 221.

Captain Stanley came out of his office with his clipboard and saw Roy slip the Crayola sketches into the squad and said “I like to meet with you in the day room.”

“I’m on my way Cap.”

Roy went to the sink to get a cup, Mike sat in his usual seat by the door to the bay, Chet sat by the refrigerator and Marco sat opposite of Mike. Johnny was at the stove making the second pot for the day.

Captain Stanley walked in and stood at the head of the table. He had both hands holding his clipboard as if it was for now, a security blanket.

“Men, I received a phone call this morning from Dixie McCall. Around 3:00 a.m. this morning Emma Clark was put back into surgery. She experienced severe back pains and they took some x-rays and they determined that she was bleeding internally. The doctors said that during the initial accident, her stomach lining was strained and that probably over the last few days, with her seizures, leg cramps, bouts with nausea, and even yesterday’s physical therapy, it ruptured.”

“Maybe that’s why she didn’t like to sit up,” Chet said.

Marco added, “And that’s why she wasn’t able to eat much.”

“Well,” Captain Stanley continued, “whatever the cause, I’m sorry to say . . . she didn’t make it. Her mother has been notified.” He now held his clipboard a little closer to his chest.

“What?” Chet asked.

Hank Stanley clarified, “She died on the operating room table, around 5:30 this morning.”

“What?” Chet asked again. “Cap. What are you saying?”

“She’s dead Chet. Emma Clark is dead. Don’t you get it?” Mike yelled as he left the room.

Captain Stanley added, “I thought Marco could lead us in a . . .”

Chet forcibly pushed his wooden chair back and stormed out. Marco folded his hands in front of him and just looked at the table as if he’d never seen it before.

Roy was leaning on the counter. He had never been hit in the head with a bat before, but that’s how he felt. His ears were ringing. He couldn’t hear. His eyes were experiencing some sort of tunnel vision. Dammit. Why were his ears ringing? He felt a wave of nausea come over him. At that point Roy DeSoto pushed open the kitchen door and ran out to the side driveway, got on all fours and began retching.

Captain Stanley and Johnny saw Roy run out. Johnny looked through the door’s window, grabbed a couple of kitchen towels, wet them a little and went out to help his best friend. Marco Lopez and Hank Stanley were the only two left in the room.

Outside, Johnny knelt by Roy and put one of the towels around the back of his neck and the other on his forehead as he supported him as he repeatedly vomited. Once he was unable to throw up anything else, Johnny guided him to sit back with his back against the building.

Roy grabbed his knees with his arms as if he was suddenly very cold. Roy started to shake. Johnny took his pulse. It was fast.

“Cap, bring me the drug box,” yelled the paramedic.

“Is he going to be okay,” Hank asked when he handed the case to John.

“I think so Cap, he’s just in . . . shock.” Johnny described as he pulled out the BP cuff.

Stanley decided to go search for Mike and Chet. Chet was sitting in his car. Mike was lying face down on one of the bunks that were never used in the back of the dorm.

Marco was still sitting there at the table when Johnny walked back in.

Johnny and Cap met up again at the phones. “Cap, Roy needs to go home. Can you call Joanne and explain to her what happened. I’m going to call Brackett to see if I can give him a sedative?”

“It’s that bad,” said Hank.

“I don’t think it is as bad as it looks, but he definitely won’t be able to work today. Tell Joanne that Marco,” he looked at Marco who had just raised his head and asked him, “Marco do you think you can drive?”

Marco nodded. “Tell Joanne that I’ll drive Roy home in his car and Marco will come pick me up, okay.” And with that, Johnny put in a call to Dr. Brackett.

Kell Brackett prescribed a mild sedative for Roy, but told Johnny not to administer it until he was home in bed. Sleep was the best thing for Roy today.

+++++

Joanne got off of the phone with Hank and called her neighbor down the street who volunteered to take Chris and Jenny to her house for the next couple of hours. Joanne didn't want them to see their dad this way. She quickly bagged some toys and snacks and told them that she had to do something important and Miss Lisa was going to watch them for her. She got them and their bags out of the house and they walked down the street until her friend caught up to them.

"Hey guys, let's go to my house and watch some cartoons okay," Miss Lisa said.

Joanne knelt down and hugged her children. "You be good for Miss Lisa and I'll be back to get you in a couple of hours." And with that, they walked into the neighbor's house.

Chris had been through this before. Something was wrong with his father.

+++++

Johnny thought that the air from the convertible was just what they needed. As he drove he talked a little to try to get Roy to respond to something. But Roy just looked out. Johnny parked the Porsche in the garage and went around to help his friend get out of the car. Johnny saw that Roy was staring intently at something in the garage. When Johnny followed Roy's gaze he saw Chris' volcano project.

"Johnny. What am I going to tell Chris," Roy said quietly.

Johnny couldn't help his friend. He didn't have an answer. "Roy, let's get you inside."

Joanne met them at the back door and they got him upstairs. Joanne helped Roy change into sweats and a t-shirt. Roy sat down on the bed, Johnny gave him the sedative, and then Roy lay down and closed his eyes.

"Dr. Brackett says this will last about three hours. If you have any problems, just call," Johnny instructed as he closed the door to the bedroom.

"Are you going to be okay Johnny?" Joanne asked.

Johnny was so concerned about Roy that he didn't even have time to think about Emma yet. "What did Scarlet O'Hara say? 'I'll think about it tomorrow,'" he said as he went and met Marco in the driveway.

+++++

A couple of hours later Joanne went and picked up her children. When they got in the living room she asked them to sit on the couch. Chris had been through this before. He prepared himself for the news.

"Your Dad had to leave work this morning. Something happened that made him . . .sad."

"Is Daddy hurt," Jennifer asked.

"No your Daddy is not hurt. He upstairs right now sleeping. He just needs to sleep today. So that means no noise please. Why don't you quietly go to your room and grab a book or a game and we'll stay down here all day okay?"

Chris and Jenny did what they were told and Joanne went into to the kitchen to make lunch.

Chris went and got his book bag and a puzzle. Puzzles are quiet he thought. As he left his room he saw Jenny take a few dolls and a couple of books. He took her things for her and they started to walk down the stairs together when Jenny whispered, "I forgot something."

"Just be quiet, okay." Chris whispered.

Jenny shook her head and quietly went back into her room. When she got what she needed, she looked down the stairs. Chris had already gone down. Jenny went to her parent's bedroom and looked in. She couldn't remember a time when she saw her Dad asleep in the middle of the day. Jenny went to the side of the bed he was facing and looked at her hero. She placed what she took from her room next to him and whispered, "I love you Daddy. I'm sorry you are sad." And then she kissed him on the cheek and quietly left the room.

Sensing something around him Roy started to open his eyes. He looked down, and on the bed next to him was Lily. He clutched the stuffed animal, rolled over to face the wall and cried.

+++++

Two weeks after the funeral Hank Stanley parked his car in the lot behind the station and went into the locker room to change. He was early as usual, and after he checked his uniform in the mirror, he decided to check with Hookrader on any new bulletins or paperwork that needed to be done. Half way through the bay, he stopped and looked outside. It was a typical southern California day.

"Cap, how was your shift?" Stanley asked

"Not bad." Hookrader replied, "We did have a 3-alarm yesterday at that abandoned warehouse on Commerce and the squad stayed busy all day. But all in all, it was a good shift."

"Glad to hear that," Hank said as he sighed when he saw the amount of paperwork on his desk. *It never stops!*

"Oh by the way," the C-Shift's captain added, "there was this woman who came in yesterday looking for you and your crew. I told her she missed you and that you wouldn't be in until today. She said that she was flying out and that she couldn't come back, so she sat here and wrote you a letter. It's all in there." Hookrader pointed to the 8 x 10 brown envelope on the desk.

Hank looked at the writing on the outside of the envelope. *"To the members of 51 A-shift"*

"Do you know who she was?" Hank asked curiously.

"Her name was Charlotte Clark. She took about 20 minutes to write whatever she did," he said and Hookrader, who never let anything unofficial out of his mouth slipped and added, "Boy, Hank, I don't know who she was but she was stunning."

Hank just shook his head and agreed. He left the unopened envelope where it was and went in the grab some coffee.

When the last of C-shift left and all of his men were ready, he called for roll call. "Men, C-shift had a 3-alarm yesterday so Chet, Marco, let's double check the hoses. Mike, I want you and Johnny to do a rope check. If we have to order some more rope, you know where the forms are. Roy you check your supplies. Mike you're the cook of the day and the rest of us will be on general clean up. And finally, before we start our duties, I'd like to talk to you all in the day room. Grab a cup of coffee and I'll be there in a minute."

Hank went into his office and put down his clipboard and picked up the envelope. Over the last two weeks, his crew had experienced some rough spots when they thought about Emma, but even those started to taper off somewhat. He hoped that whatever was in this envelope wouldn't reverse the progress that he had seen. He took a long sigh, closed his eyes for just a second, and went to the day room.

When he got there, they were all seated around the table.

"Men, Charlotte Clark came by yesterday and dropped this off. I haven't opened it yet so let's see what's inside," he said as he broke the seal.

Hank pulled out a letter and started reading it.

Good morning,

I'm so sorry that I missed you. I wanted to thank you again. I'm leaving to go back to Paris today.

I sold the house. The first couple who looked at it loved it. They are young and I envision a great future for them in that house and Mike, you don't have to worry, they said that they would take care of the cat as well. In fact, I introduced them to Mike on the back porch and he seemed content.

Mike smiled.

I don't know if I told this to any of you but, as I was flying to Los Angeles after I got the call, I kept imagining the horrible experience Emma must have had, being stuck in that car for so long. When I asked her about it, she said that she felt safe the whole time. "Safe" was not the word I'd expected. She simply explained to me that she felt safe because Station 51 was there and they weren't going to let anything bad happen to her.

As a parent I cannot tell you how grateful I am, to know that during the most stressful time in my child's life . . . she felt safe. Thank you for doing your job so well.

As I was packing up the house, I realized that you never really got to see the real Emma. I've enclosed a picture of her that was taken in Paris last year and Roy; there is a small package for you that I'm sure Emma would want you to have. Use it for Jenny when the time comes.

I'll never forget you,

Au revour mes ami,

Charlotte

Cap reached in and pulled out the photograph. It was a picture of Emma at the base of the Eiffel Tower. She was smiling and she was beautiful. He gave it to Mike who then passed it to Marco. Cap then reached in the envelope and found a small, red quilted case. He handed it to Roy.

Roy looked inside and smiled as he pulled out that delicate silver chain with the A+ dangling from it.

The End