



Some *Fireman* Like You

An Emergency! Story by [Tig and Carla Keehn](#)

10-20-66

The sound of tones woke the crew of LA County Station 27 in the early morning hours. Four firemen hurriedly pulled on their turnout pants as the dispatcher announced, "Station 27, structure fire, 4355 North Pecan, 4-3-5-5 North Pecan, cross street Bentley, Time out, 0200."

When they arrived at the two-story home, it was already fully involved. Another engine pulled up and the men were busy pulling hoses and directing them towards the flames that shot out through the roof. Everyone stopped what they were doing the second the screaming started. It was a sound that would haunt these men the rest of their lives. On the second floor was a little girl, about ten years old, banging on the window screaming for help. Two of the crew of Station 27 rushed in to bring the girl to safety, and to check for other family members.

When they made it to the girl's room, she was still screaming frantically. "My little sister!!! She won't wake up!! She's in the top bunk!" she cried, pointing to the bunk beds.

"Okay," the first fireman soothed, "We'll get her. You come with me and my partner will get your sister."

The girl stopped her frantic screams as she reached out to the fireman. He picked her up and gently carried her to safety outdoors. Just as they made it out the door, a huge explosion knocked them to the ground. The fireman looked behind him. His heart sank when he realized his partner had not made it out.

* * * * *

10-10-76

"Miss Sutton, are you listening?" The annoyed tone of Head Nurse Dixie McCall's voice interrupted the young woman's thoughts.

She took a deep breath and nodded. "Yes, Miss McCall," Denise Sutton said coming out of her reverie. "You were going over the admittance desk procedures."

Denise listened intently as she smoothed her stiffly starched skirt. *This is my first day. I can't screw up. I want to make a good impression on Miss McCall. I hear she's the best.*

"Now," Dixie explained, "when a patient . . ." She stopped suddenly and turned her head as the emergency room doors swung open. The ambulance attendants hurriedly rushed through the door pushing a gurney, flanked on either side by two LA County Fire Department paramedics.

The white-sheeted man on the gurney groaned loudly in agony. One of the paramedics put his hand on the injured man's shoulder. "Just lay back and take it easy, sir," Roy DeSoto said in a calm voice. "You're at the hospital now and they're gonna fix you right up."

Denise watched for a moment as Dixie hurried towards the new arrivals. She hesitated before joining them. The sight of the injured man didn't disturb her as much as the presence of the two firemen did.

"Dr. Brackett's waiting for you in three," McCall said.

"Thanks, Dix," DeSoto said. "He's in a pretty bad way. For a while there, I thought we were gonna lose him before we got here." He paused at the treatment room door and nodded towards his partner. "Hey, Dix, do me a favor?"

"Sure, Roy, you name it."

"While I'm with Brackett, would you take a look at Johnny's hand? I think it's more than just a little cut."

She gave his arm a comforting squeeze and smiled. "I'll take good care of him, Roy." As Roy disappeared into the examining room, she went over to the dark-haired paramedic and took a firm hold of his arm.

"Come with me, Johnny."

John Gage looked confused for a moment, then noticed red-haired Denise Sutton standing at McCall's side. His face broke out into a boyish grin. "Sure, Dix, what's up?"

"Your partner tells me you hurt your hand. Let me see it."

Gage rolled his eyes. "Aw, Dix, you know Roy worries too much. It's nothing. We had a hard time getting that guy out of the car and I cut my hand on some glass. That's all."

Dixie motioned for Denise to take Gage's other arm. "Now, John, you know you'd do the same for Roy," Dixie looked at him, knowing he couldn't disagree. "Well, then, you won't mind letting me take a look." The two steered him into one of the treatment rooms.

Dixie gave the young man a no nonsense look. "All right, Johnny, let me see."

He held out his left hand. Dixie looked at the jagged cut and winced. "Nothing, huh? Looks like it could use a few stitches."

Johnny frowned, and then gave Denise an appreciative look. "Who's your friend, Dix?"

"Hmm?" Dixie looked up and smiled faintly. "Oh, Denise Sutton, this is John Gage. He and his partner Roy DeSoto are paramedics with the LA County Fire Department. This is Denise's first day at Rampart."

"Oh, well, I guess we'll be seein' a lot of each other then, Denise." Johnny said as Dixie started to clean the wound. Suddenly, the smile left his face. "Ow, Dix!" He jerked his hand away.

"I'm sorry, Johnny." The phone on the wall buzzed and she walked over and picked up the receiver. "Miss McCall . . . yes, I'll be right there." She hung up the receiver, a sober look on her face. "I'll be right back."

Miss Sutton, Dr. Brackett needs help in two. Would you please finish cleaning that wound for me? I'll get Dr. Early and bring back a suture kit."

"Yes, Miss McCall," she whispered softly. Denise bit her lip as she watched the older woman leave the room. She took a deep breath. *That cut isn't even that bad. I don't know why everyone is making such a fuss . . . just over a fireman . . . Still, Miss McCall will be upset if she comes back and the cut on Gage's hand isn't ready for dressing.* She picked up the swab and clamped her cold hand on the man's wrist.

"You from around here?" Johnny asked, trying to break the ice with the quiet nurse.

"Yes, I was born here." She dug the swab harder and harder into his torn flesh.

Johnny sucked in a sharp breath. "I'll do that," he said, pulling away from her. Just then the door opened and Dixie McCall came back into the room, followed by Dr. Early.

"Everything okay in here?"

He saw a look of fear in the young woman's eyes. *It's her first day, she's probably really nervous . . .* He turned and gave Dixie a weak smile. "Everything's fine, Dix."

"Good. Miss Sutton, Dr. Morton needs you in four. Johnny, Roy's waiting for you outside, so let's finish this up."

Dr. Early looked at red and angry wound on Johnny's hand. "That's a nasty looking cut. Dix, better give him a local. Johnny, I want to look at that hand again in two days, but if it looks like it's getting infected let me see you before, understand?"

"Sure, Doc."

As Dr. Early worked on Johnny's hand, Roy walked in. One look at his partner's face answered all of Johnny's questions.

"I'm sorry, Roy."

DeSoto let out a heavy sigh. "Well, we knew he was in bad shape when we got him out of that car."

"Yeah. That still doesn't make losing him any easier . . ." he sighed. "Hey, how's your hand?"

Johnny flashed his bandaged wrist. "Doing okay."

"He took five stitches, Roy," Dr. Early informed.

Roy winced. "Well, Johnny, did Dixie introduce you to the new nurse?"

"Yeah, she did." He frowned. "Her bedside manner needs some polishing though."

"Oh? You mean she didn't go for the old Gage charm?"

Johnny scowled. "C'mon, Roy. Maybe if we hurry, we can make it back to the station before lunch."

From the other end of the hallway, Denise Sutton watched the two firemen with a critical eye. *That accident victim didn't deserve to die, any more than my sister did . . . Someone should be holding the Fire Department accountable for these mistakes instead of wasting time fussing over those two firemen . . .*

"Who's fixing lunch today?" Johnny asked Roy while they checked over the squad at the start of their shift.

"I think it's Chet's turn," Roy answered.

"YEOW!" Johnny yelled. He bumped his tender hand while putting the drug box up.

"That hand still bothering you?" Roy asked concerned.

Johnny winced, "Yeah, it's still pretty tender."

"Want me to take a look at it?" Roy offered.

Before Johnny could answer, the tones sounded.

"Station 51, structure fire, 45632 Green Oaks, 4-5-6-3-2 Green Oaks, time out 9:20."

The two-story house was fully involved when they arrived. A woman ran from the house screaming.

"My children!! Get my children!"

Captain Stanley approached the nearly hysterical woman. "Where are they?"

"They're upstairs! I couldn't get to them! Oh my God! You have to get them out!"

"Let's get the ladder to that window," Stanley ordered.

Johnny and Roy quickly climbed the ladder and entered the two-story home. Two children lay unconscious on the floor in the room. The heat was nearly unbearable as Johnny gently picked up the first child and handed him out the window to Chet, who was waiting on the ladder. Roy was right behind with the second child.

Outside the burning home, Johnny and Roy began tending their two young victims. The frantic mother approached when she saw where they were.

She stopped suddenly and began to look around. "Where's Cindy? Did you get Cindy out?"

Johnny looked up at the woman. "Is there someone else in there?" he asked.

"Yes!!! My five-year-old!! Cindy! Oh my God, she's still in there!" the woman screamed as she ran toward the house. Johnny jumped up and stopped her. She tried to pull away from the paramedic.

"I'll get her, you stay here! I'll bring her to you," he said. He ran to Captain Stanley. "Cap, we have another child inside. I'm going back in."

"Chet!" Stanley called, "Go with John."

The two firefighters climbed up the ladder and went back into the inferno. Johnny could feel the heat penetrating through his turnout coat. The smoke was so thick he couldn't see. Crawling on his hands and knees, he felt his way around the room, searching for the child. Chet was doing the same thing. *Where did she hide herself?*

Chet was inching his way beside the bed when his hand felt something. A leg! He continued probing blindly as he maneuvered the small child out from under the bed.

"I got her, Johnny!" Chet called. "Let's get out of here!"

Johnny got out on the ladder and Chet handed the girl to him. Her limp body dangled lifelessly as he descended the ladder. Johnny gently laid the small child next to her siblings. Roy looked at Johnny. Johnny returned the look saying nothing, a knot forming at the pit of his stomach. *Oh God, don't let it be too late...*

* * * * *

Roy arrived at the hospital first, with his two small victims. The smell of smoke from their singed clothing filled the emergency room. "We've got it, Roy. You can take off," Dr. Early said.

Roy nodded and left the room, just as Johnny entered the corridor with the third child. "In here, Johnny!" Dr. Brackett ordered. Dixie and the new student nurse, Denise, were already in the treatment room waiting for the patient. Johnny helped transfer the child onto the exam table, and hung the IV bag. He wiped his soot-smudged face with the back of his bandaged hand.

Twenty minutes later, all the flurry of activity in the exam room came to a halt.

"Time of death, 9:45" Dr. Brackett announced solemnly.

Johnny stood frozen, holding his tender hand. He looked at the small child, unable to break his gaze.

"Dammit," he said softly, not intending for anyone to hear.

"You should have gotten her out sooner!" a female voice screamed.

Taken aback, he looked up. Denise was now standing in front of him with tears in her eyes.

"What?" he asked, dumbfounded.

"It's your fault! You could have saved her! But now she's dead! You didn't get her out in time!" Denise yelled, standing her ground.

"Miss Sutton!" Dixie reprimanded, "Meet me in Dr. Brackett's office, NOW!"

Denise stormed out the room angrily. Dixie looked at Kel and Johnny. "Excuse me, gentlemen."

"Johnny?" Kel began, "You okay?"

Johnny could feel tears threaten to spill from his eyes. He turned away from the doctor. "She's right..." he said softly. "If we'd have gotten her out the first time we entered the house, she'd be alive now."

"You don't know that, Johnny," Brackett consoled. "You did the best you could. The other children are going to be fine."

Johnny just shook his head, unable to trust his voice. He turned to leave and winced as he bumped his bandaged hand.

"Wait for me in 2, Johnny," he said as he noticed John cradle his hand. "I want to take a look at that hand of yours. Johnny nodded and left the room.

* * * * *

Dr. Brackett saw Dixie and Denise returning from his office.

"Where's Johnny? Miss Sutton has an apology to make," Dixie stated.

"I told him to meet me in treatment 2 so I could take a look at his hand."

"This way, Miss Sutton," Dixie ordered.

Dr. Brackett, Dixie, and Denise entered the treatment room to find Johnny sitting quietly on the table. Roy was standing nearby. Both paramedics looked like they had aged years in the last few hours.

Dr. Brackett carefully removed the bandage on Johnny's hand, noting that it was obviously causing a great deal of pain. Once he saw the wound he understood why.

"Johnny, you have a nice infection going here. Dix, let's get this cleaned out. I'm going to start you on antibiotics, and I want to see that hand again in a couple of days." He scribbled on a pad and handed the prescription to Denise. "Miss Sutton, go down to the pharmacy and get this filled for our fireman friend here."

"Yes, Doctor," she complied. Turning to Johnny she said, "I'm sorry about what I said earlier. I just don't know what got into me."

Johnny gave a small smile, but said nothing in return.

"I'll be right back with your prescription," Denise said as she left the room. *I'll give him a prescription, all right.*

* * * * *

Johnny hit the snooze button on his alarm clock again, opening his eyes a crack to see if he could snooze a little longer. *Damn, I should have gotten up an hour ago!* Even with this realization he failed to get up. *I'm gonna be late for sure, Cap's gonna kill me!* Slowly he pulled to a sitting position. He sat on the edge of the bed, rubbing his eyes wearily, trying to find the energy to get up. As he got to his feet, a wave of dizziness washed over him. He stood bracing himself against the wall until it passed. *I can't be getting sick... I'll feel better once I get going...*

Sipping his first cup of coffee for the day, he picked up the phone and dialed.

"Station 51, Captain Hank Stanley," came the voice on the phone.

Not expecting his own captain to answer, Johnny lost his voice for a moment.

"Hello? This is Station 51, can I help you?"

"Um, Cap? This is John," he sighed.

"John? We were wondering where you were. Do you know what time it is?"

"Um, yeah Cap, it's almost 8:00. I overslept. Um, I'm gonna be late."

"Well, that's a given, Pal. You've had two days off to sleep! How long will it take you to get here?"

"Um, 'bout half an hour. I'm sorry, Cap."

"You sure you're feeling okay, John? I can get someone to cover for you."

"Uh, no, Cap, I'm fine. Just overslept is all. I'll be there as quick as I can."

"Okay, well don't break any laws getting here."

Johnny hung up the phone and finished his coffee. No time for a shower this morning. He hastily got dressed and splashed cold water on his face. Not taking the time to shave, he walked out the door.

The traffic was not helping his case this morning. Already late and stuck on the freeway. He rested his head against his arm as he waiting for the cars ahead of him to inch forward.

BEEP! BEEP!

The noise caused him to jolt upright. *Did I doze off?* Finally the traffic had begun to move and he was able to direct his attention to his forward path.

He pulled into the station parking lot and checked his watch, 8:45.

Johnny slowly walked to his locker and began to put his uniform on.

"Nice of you to join us," Roy teased.

Not finding the energy to spar, he smiled halfheartedly. "Sorry."

Red flags went up automatically for Roy. Something's definitely wrong... "No problem. You sure you're feeling all right?" he asked with concern, noticing the dark circles around his partner's eyes.

"I'm just tired. I'll be fine once I get going. Was Cap mad?" Johnny asked.

"I don't think he was mad. Dwyer's still here waiting for you to take over. I'll go let him know he can leave."

Johnny smiled, "Thanks, Roy."

"Oh, and Cap wants to start a new drill as soon as you make your way to the rec room."

"Okay, I'll be right there."

Roy started to walk away but stopped as he noticed the bandage on Johnny's hand. "Your hand any better?"

"I guess it's a little better. It's still sore. I'll let Brackett take a look sometime today."

"You've been taking the antibiotics?"

"Yeah, but not this morning. I'll take it though." *Better not tell him I forgot to take it a few times...*

Satisfied, Roy turned and left the room.

Johnny sighed, expecting to feel sleep crusted to his eyes as he rubbed them. Why do I still feel like I'm half

asleep? He walked into the rec room where Dywer was just standing to leave.

"Thanks for staying, man," Johnny said.

"No problem, glad you made it. See you in a couple days." Dwyer turned and waved as he headed out the door.

"John, come on over, we're about to start a new drill," Captain Stanley said.

Johnny made his way to the chairs where the rest of A-shift sat.

"Okay," Stanley began, "There's some road construction on the south side..."

Johnny stifled a yawn as the Cap's voice droned on.

"Johnny!"

"Yeow! Roy!" Johnny scowled.

"Gage! In my office! Now!" The Cap's voice resounded.

"What'd I do?" Johnny asked his partner.

"Johnny, you fell asleep, that's what. You sure you're all right?"

Johnny frowned. "I won't be for long," he moaned as he headed towards Cap's office. Luckily, the tones sounded before he had to face Hank's wrath.

* * * * *

Roy carefully backed the squad into the apparatus bay. When he finished parking, he looked at his partner, who had fallen asleep. *He must have really tied one on last night!*

"Johnny," he said while gently shaking Johnny's arm.

"Hmm?"

"Johnny, wake up! What's going on?" Roy's voice was filled with concern.

"Roy, don't be a mother hen," Johnny snapped. "I just need some coffee is all." He got out the squad and slammed the door, heading straight for the kitchen. As soon as he walked into the room, the tones sounded once again.

"Station 51, Man injured in a fall, Trinity Redeemer Church, 59902 Pacific Ocean Drive, 5-9-9-0-2 Pacific Ocean Drive, time out -11:40."

"So much for coffee," Johnny muttered as he got back in the squad. He tried to ignore the queasy feeling that he felt in his stomach. *Man*, he thought, wiping the beads of perspiration from his face, *maybe something is wrong . . .* He took a deep breath and tried to focus on the road.

The old stone building of the Trinity Redeemer Church was an imposing landmark. A man stood outside on the church steps, waving frantically at the rescue vehicles as they came to a stop in the parking lot.

"He's in here," the man shouted, "Hurry!"

Gage and DeSoto got their gear out of the squad.

Cap motioned for Kelly to follow him. "Stoker, Lopez, you stay out here until we see what we're dealing with. Kelly, give Gage and DeSoto a hand with their gear."

The man hurried them into the church and led them through a labyrinth of winding hallways. A remodeling project on the administrative portion of the building was under way. They noticed piles of cinderblocks and partially demolished walls as they walked. They passed through another doorway and stopped suddenly at the sight of the huge hole in the middle of the room.

"How did this happen?" Cap asked, looking down into the hole at the still body that lay on the floor below.

"I-I'm not sure. We were working on the shaft for the elevator when suddenly the flooring gave way." He clutched at Cap frantically. "Can't you do something? He hasn't moved for about 15 minutes now."

"We'll have him out as soon as we can." Cap motioned back the way they came. "All right, we don't want to send anything else down on top of him, so let's step back out here." He looked at the man grimly. "I notice that you've got all the stairwells torn out. Is there another way down to the basement?"

He shook his head. "No, just what you saw. Those stairwells weren't supposed to be taken out at all, but the subcontractor made a mistake."

"That's a mistake that could cost your friend his life," Cap said. "I didn't really want to send anyone else onto that floor, but I guess there's no other way. Gage, DeSoto, get what you need. We'll have to lower you down there. Kelly, get some ropes and have Lopez and Stoker come in here – we're going to need all the muscle we can get."

Roy studied his partner with concern. Despite Johnny's protests, Roy was afraid something was really wrong. He watched Gage fumble with the rope for a minute, then put his hand on his partner's shoulder. "You stay up here, I'll go down and get him."

The long walk from the squad through the building had used up the little strength he had. "No, I'll do it."

"Look, Johnny, I'm not going to let you go down there, not in the condition you're in right now. Don't make me pull rank on you."

"Roy, please . . ." Johnny began. "I'm fine. Look, I promise, I'll see Brackett today just . . . don't make a scene about it, okay?"

"You promise?"

"I said so, didn't I? Now tie that rope off, so we can get that guy out of there."

It was all for nothing. By the time Johnny reached the bottom of the shaft, the room was spinning dizzily and he felt like he was going to lose what was left in his stomach. He reached down and pressed his hand against the man's neck. *Dead* . . . he thought bitterly. He looked up and saw Roy's face peering down at him from the upper floor.

"No carotid pulse!" He shouted. It was a struggle to sit the body up and wrap the rope around the waist. Johnny looked down; his hands were visibly shaking. "Okay, take him up!" He yelled in a hoarse voice.

When he got topside, Johnny saw Roy working feverishly to revive the construction worker. He could tell by the expression on Roy's face that it wasn't working. For the second time that week, they had been too late to help . . .

* * * * *

Johnny drove the squad to the hospital and parked next to the ambulance. He slowly got out and walked to the entrance, feeling every muscle in his body protest. *I'm glad Roy brought the victim in... This has been the week from Hell.* He walked to the base station and started to pour himself a cup of coffee.

"Hey, Dix, where are the cups?" he asked, fearing that once more he'd be out of luck when it came to getting his caffeine fix.

"Oh, I just sent Denise to get them. Here she comes," Dixie said, seeing the nurse approach.

Johnny gave her a cautious grin, which she returned. *I must be making some progress...*

Denise had about six cups in her hand. *I can't believe they have me washing cups for these men. I can't believe he's still on his feet!* She set the cups down carefully and then picked one up and filled it with coffee. Unseen by anyone, she took something from her pocket. *This should do the trick...* "Here you go, sorry for the wait," she said sweetly as she handed the coffee to Johnny.

Johnny grinned crookedly, "Well thank you! And no problem about the wait. My partner's still in the treatment room." Just as he drained the cup, Roy came out.

"They couldn't save him," Roy said quietly.

Johnny sighed. He set his cup down and turned to join his partner. A wave of dizziness washed over him, causing him to stop and steady himself for a moment. He glanced up. *Glad nobody saw that.*

"Johnny, you said you'd have Dr. Brackett take a look at you while we're here," Roy reminded.

"Awe, Roy," Johnny admonished. "I'm fine, let's just get back to the station. I really want to get something to eat."

"No, you're not fine, Johnny. You've felt bad all day. You promised me you'd let Brackett check you out today."

"And I will... just not right now. I'm going to the squad." Johnny turned on his heel before Roy could protest further and headed out. They walked back to the squad in silence.

* * * * *

Johnny looked out the window of the squad. *We're about half way back, I'm not gonna make it...* "Roy, pull over," he said.

Frightened by the look of his partner, suddenly pale and grabbing his stomach, Roy pulled into a vacant lot. He sat uncertain for a moment as Johnny immediately opened the door and began vomiting. Roy jumped out the squad and ran to his partner's side, supporting his head.

"Can't breathe," Johnny gasped.

Roy reached inside the squad and grabbed the mic. "LA, this is squad 51. We have a code I on the corner

of Martin and Wellington. Respond Engine 51 and an ambulance to our location." He didn't know why he called for the engine, except for the fact that he knew they were just a few blocks away. He didn't wait for acknowledgment as he realized Johnny was not breathing.

"Johnny, what's going on with you?" Roy asked as he pulled his partner's limp form from the squad. He grabbed the biophone and the defibrillator and placed them on the ground next to Johnny. Then he grabbed the drug box.

Roy ripped Johnny's shirt open and then opened the defibrillator, placing the paddles on John's chest for a quick look. *Shit, he's in v-fib, what the hell is wrong with you, Johnny?* Roy watched as the defibrillator charged. Once it reached 400 watt seconds he placed the paddles on his partner's chest. Johnny's body jumped as the electrical shock went through his him.

Roy checked for a pulse. *Nothing. God, I hope the engine gets here soon, I need help here!* Relief washed over him when he heard the distant sounds of a siren. He continued his resuscitative efforts. Within minutes the engine pulled to the scene. "Roy?" Capt. Stanley asked, alarmed at seeing Johnny laying unconscious on the ground. "What happened?"

"I don't know, Cap," Roy answered, relieved that he'd finally gotten a pulse. He began to take John's vitals. "We were on our way back to the station. Johnny told me to pull over... when I did he opened the door and threw up... then he just passed out and stopped breathing." He stopped his report for a moment, making eye contact with the captain. "Cap, he was in v-fib. It took two tries to get him back. Can you get Rampart for me?"

Hank nodded. He quickly got on the biophone to Rampart, while Marco put the resuscitator mask on John to give him oxygen.

Roy saw that Hank had contacted the hospital. "Cap, his pulse is 140, BP 80 over 40."

Hank nodded and relayed the information to Rampart. "Roy, Rampart ordered 100 milligrams of Lidocaine, then a drip of 3 milligrams an hour, and an IV of D5W T.K.O."

The ambulance arrived just as Roy completed the IV. They got Johnny loaded up and Roy climbed in after him. As the ambulance made it's way to Rampart, Roy stared at the steady blip on the heart monitor. Just as they pulled up at the Emergency Department, the blips on the monitor changed to a low squiggle. Before he could react, the doors opened with Dr. Brackett reaching in to help

"He just went into v-fib," Roy called out as he began CPR. He continued CPR until they got John in the treatment room.

For the second time in the past half hour, Johnny's heart was shocked into it's regular rhythm. Roy stepped back to get out of the way. "Let's get him intubated," he heard Dr. Brackett say. He stood aside and watched as the endotracheal tube was pushed down Johnny's throat. He let out a deep sigh as the ventilator was connected. It seemed to Roy that it took forever to get Johnny stabilized.

"Dix," Brackett said, wiping the sweat from his brow. "Let's get him up to ICU." He watched a second as McCall hurried out of the room, then turned to DeSoto. Roy's blue eyes were filled with pain. "Is . . . is he gonna make it?"

Brackett let out a breath. At the best of times, talking to the victim's families and friends was never easy: being as close to Gage and DeSoto as he was made it much worse. "I'd like to be able to tell you what you

want to hear, Roy – but I can't. Right now, he's stable. I wasn't sure for a while we would even get that far."

"But how could something like this happen?"

"Let me ask you that, Roy. Is Johnny taking any other medication besides the antibiotic? Is he being treated for something I'm not aware of?"

"No, nothing." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small bottle. "I had a hard time getting him to take it."

Brackett frowned. Something caught his eye as DeSoto held up the bottle in the bright light of the treatment room. "Wait a minute . . . let me see that."

The paramedic handed the bottle to the doctor. "I found it on the kitchen table this morning at the station. I picked them up in case he needed them while we were gone," Roy explained.

Brackett swore under his breath. "This isn't what I prescribed for him . . . Roy, how many times a day has Johnny been taking this?"

"I'm not sure. Maybe a couple, three at the most."

He dumped the capsules in the palm of his hand. "From what's left here, it looks like he didn't take many. Not the amount he *should* have taken at any rate." He strode over to the treatment room door and pushed it open. "Dix!"

Seconds later, McCall was back in the room. "Yes, Kel?"

"Dix, get this to the lab. I want it analyzed right away. Tell them I need the results back Stat. Also, who was on duty in the pharmacy the day we treated Johnny for that infection?"

She thought for a moment. "I think it was Debbie Hollister. Why?"

"I'm not sure yet, Dix. But I intend on finding out. All we know right now is that someone gave John Gage the wrong medicine. I want to see Debbie Hollister in my office in five minutes."

"I'll take care of it, Kel," Dix said.

* * * * *

Up in ICU, Roy DeSoto shuddered as he looked at the IV's and monitors his partner and friend was hooked up to. *I kept pushing Johnny to take those pills, I'm just as responsible for what happened as the person who doctored his medicine . . .*

The door opened softly. He vaguely felt someone put their hand on one of his shoulders in comfort, but he was too wrapped up in Johnny's struggle to find out who had entered the room.

"Roy . . ."

He remained silent. The hand squeezed him tighter.

"Roy . . ." The voice was more insistent the second time. He turned and saw Dixie McCall's looking at him in concern.

"Dix . . ." He said in a strained voice. "I know Brackett said not to come in, but I had to . . ."

She nodded. *Poor Roy... what must this be doing to him?* "Look, why don't you and I go get a cup of coffee."

Roy turned away from her and shook his head. "I – I want to be here. In case . . ." his voice broke for a moment. "in case we lose him . . ."

"Don't say that – don't even start thinking that way," she replied sharply. "You know that Kel and Joe are doing everything they can for him."

"Yeah, I know, but..."

She grabbed the crook of Roy's arm with both hands and led him away from the bed. "Roy, listen to me. This is exactly why Kel and Joe didn't want you to come in here. This isn't doing you or Johnny any good." Her expression softened. "Now, come with me. Kel's going to be making his rounds soon. He might have some better news for us after that."

He looked back at her, silently, his blue eyes on the verge of tears.

"C'mon . . ." she said softly.

Roy glanced back at Johnny one final time before allowing Dixie to lead him out. A few seconds later, Denise Sutton slipped into the room, a satisfied look on her face.

This is all working out too perfectly . . . she thought gleefully. Once she finished Gage off, then her work would be completed. It was no secret that his death would be devastating blow to DeSoto. *Two firemen taken care of . . . two less, who won't be killing innocent people anymore . . .*

Her hand reached towards the plug of the respirator. Johnny's eyes, slowly opened and Denise stopped in mid reach.

Gage tried to moisten his dry lips. He blinked his eyes, trying to clear his vision. The last thing he remembered was feeling sick in the squad. *Roy?* She pulled a syringe from her pocket, and quickly injected the contents into one of the IV lines.

She had planned to just finish him off and leave. But the thought of telling him before hand why he was going to die sent a pleasing chill through her. Denise spoke in a hard voice as she tucked the syringe into her pocket.

"How does it feel, Gage, to know that you're going to die? Just like you let that little girl die."

Johnny tried to shake his head, but found that he couldn't move. *No...*

"Your partner isn't here. There's no one here to help you - It's just the two of us. Did you know that my little sister would have been 15 this week, Gage? Would have, if it weren't for some fireman like you, who let her die . . ." She looked at him in disgust. "I've waited ten years for this chance . . . ten long years . . ." She stopped for a moment, lost in a tormented memory.

"It's very simple really," she continued, "my little sister is dead . . . so you're going to die. Then you're partner will die. Then as many firemen as it takes, until my sister's ghost is at peace . . ."

* * * * *

Outside the door, Sharon Lawrence, the duty nurse, paused, confused by the sound of a low voice. . . . *You're going to die* . . . The words made her blood run cold. Her heart pounding, she pushed the door open and ran into the room.

"Who are you?! What - - what are you doing?" She grabbed Denise Sutton's hand and tried to jerk her away from the injured fireman.

"Get out!" Denise hissed, gritting her teeth and attempting to wriggle free from the other woman's grasp.

"No - you must be crazy!"

"I'm not crazy!" She whispered fiercely, her adrenaline pumping wildly. "I'm not crazy - -"

Denise threw her arm back, flinging Sharon Lawrence backwards. The frightened nurse crashed and against the wall. Denise Sutton launched herself towards the other woman, her eyes glaring murderously.

Sharon Lawrence turned and ran out of the room, the sound of Denise Sutton's laughter ringing in her ears. *I can't stop her* . . . She turned, her eyes searching through the hallways. *Dr. Brackett . . . I've got to find Dr. Brackett* - -

* * * * *

Denise looked at her victim, and then unplugged vent hose. She pressed the temporary alarm silence button on the vent to keep from alerting the staff. "The drug I gave you has paralyzed you, Gage. I know you're very much aware of what's going on, just can't move a muscle. Totally helpless. Totally dependent on this machine to breathe for you. But look," she smirked as she held the end of the hose. "Too bad. No one will get here in time to save you. They'll be too late."

She turned to leave, and then looked at Johnny again. His eyes had closed. *It won't be long now... and even if they revive him, it won't help. I'll never tell anyone what I gave him.* She had to laugh at her own brilliance as she left the room.

* * * * *

Sharon ran blindly through the hall, running right into Dr. Brackett as she turned the corner.

"Whoa, slow down," Kel demanded, his eye brows turned in a frown.

"Oh, Dr. Brackett, thank God! There's someone in John Gage's room... a woman! She's trying to kill him!"

Kelly Brackett looked at the nurse as if she was crazy. "What are you talking about?"

"Dr. Brackett," the nurse was suddenly very commanding, "We have to get to Gage's room NOW! Someone is trying to kill him!"

Brackett hurried down the hall and entered the dark room of his friend. "Oh my God," he swore quietly as he took in the sight before him. Johnny's vent hose was unplugged, and a flat line displayed across the heart monitor. The room looked as if it had been ransacked.

Brackett felt for a pulse. "Nothing, dammit, Johnny, don't do this." He turned to the nurse, "Get a crash cart, STAT!"

She left the room quickly, alerted the staff on the intercom, and grabbed the crash cart.

Dr. Early walked in and froze as he took in the scene. The room was a wreck. IV tubing and fluid was all over the floor. Johnny was laying on the bed unconscious. "What happened?"

"Someone tried to kill him, and they may have damn well succeeded," Brackett spat as he performed CPR.

* * * * *

A long twenty minutes later, a tired Kelly Brackett said with a sigh. "Okay, he's stabilized. Has anyone called the police?"

"They're are on the way," Dixie replied. "I paged Roy too. Kel... how long?"

Kel shook his head. "I don't know how long he was without oxygen. I don't think it was more than 3 or 4 minutes. We won't know anything until he wakes up."

"Who would do this? Who would want Johnny dead?" Dixie pondered.

"It was a woman," the duty nurse responded. "She looked familiar... the way she spoke... it sent chills down my spine."

"I don't know the why, but I know the who," Brackett stated flatly. He looked up to see three sets of eyes staring questionly at him. "I spoke to the pharmacist, Debbie Hollister. The prescription she filled for Johnny was for Phenobarbitol. It was not the same prescription that I wrote. That only leaves one person who could have altered the prescription..."

"Denise Sutton," Dixie said quietly.

"I want her found. I need to make sure that's all she drugged Johnny with so we'll be able to treat him."

"And what if you can't find her?" Roy asked. Nobody had seen him enter the room. "Or what if she won't tell? She's pretty determined to see him dead."

"Roy," Brackett acknowledged, "We discovered that the drug in the bottle was Phenobarbitol. Taking it in small doses like he did shouldn't have caused this dramatic an effect. I think he was given a larger dose just before he collapsed."

Dixie looked up, stunned. "The coffee..."

Everyone looked at her. "Denise fixed Johnny a cup of coffee just before he got sick," Dix continued.

Dr. Brackett sighed. "We're giving him activated charcoal every four hours. If we can keep him stablized, the drug should pass out of his system within the next 48 hours. I won't lie to you, Roy, it's going to be touch and go until then."

Roy sighed in anger. *She can't have gotten too much of a head start.* Roy rushed from the room before anyone could stop him.

* * * * *

Denise Sutton tried to look inconspicuous in her attempt to exit the hospital. Still on the ICU ward, she watched the flurry of activity around Gage's room. Now's my chance to get out of here... Just as she started

to walk down the hall when, she spotted Roy. He saw her as well. She turned to run the other way.

* * * * *

Roy did a double-take when he saw the red-headed nurse in the hall. He cursed out loud when he saw that she recognized him and turned the other way. He started off in pursuit when he saw Vince Howard round the corner, just as Denise was approaching.

"Vince!" Roy called. "Stop that woman!"

When Denise heard Roy's shouts and saw the police officer, she started to run. Vince grabbed her just before she was able to get away. He winced as Denise Sutton dug her nails into his arm. The woman fought viciously against the police officer's grip.

"The game's over," Howard said, leading her towards the door. "So why don't you do both of us a favor and calm down . . ."

Denise looked at the faces around her. Dixie McCall, her eyes wide with fear, standing next to Kelly Brackett, his arm in front of McCall protectively. Next to them stood Roy DeSoto, his face looked haggard; the hours of worry and fatigue had weighed heavily upon him. She smiled. *I almost finished what I started.* That alone gave her some small amount of satisfaction.

She looked up Howard. "You're right, I won't give you any more trouble," she whispered.

Again they started for the elevator. Vince Howard's hand rested loosely by the holster at his side.

Denise jerked to a stop in front of DeSoto. "I'll be back, you just wait," she hissed, " and then, it will be your turn . . ." her voice trailed off into a gale of laughter.

Roy swallowed hard; the look of hatred he saw in her eyes sent a chill through him. "Why . . ? Why Johnny? Why me? We never did anything to hurt you."

She smiled at him. "Because... you're firemen, . . ."

"Vince, get her out of here!" Brackett shouted, his patience at an end.

* * * * *

A week later, Roy DeSoto paused outside of the door in the hospital corridor and grimaced as he loosened his tie. He felt uncomfortable in the dress clothing that he wore. Denise Sutton's court hearing had lasted a lot longer than Roy thought it would. He would have rather not gone at all but, at the last minute, the police decided that they needed DeSoto's testimony after all.

Roy took a deep breath then pushed open the door. His partner looked up from the magazine he was reading, then Gage's face broke out in a wide grin.

"Hey, look at you, Roy!"

"Hey, yourself. You're looking a lot better. How are you feeling?"

"Great," Gage said, shifting to an upright position. "Brackett said I could probably go home in a couple of days."

"That's good news," Roy said, sitting on the edge of the bed. "I don't know how much longer I'm gonna be able to put up with Brice as my temporary partner."

Johnny laughed. "He's drivin' you crazy, isn't he, Roy. I can tell, you don't seem like yourself today."

Roy nodded. "Yeah, he is, but . . . I guess being here, you lose track of time. I just got back from Denise Sutton's competency hearing."

"Oh, yeah, that was today . . ." The smile disappeared from Gage's face. "So, how did it go?"

"Well," Roy began, swallowing hard, "let's just say it's an experience that I hope I never have to repeat again." The image of Denise Sutton screaming threats at DeSoto and Vince Howard after the hearing flashed through his mind. "The court decided she was unfit to stand trial. Vince thinks they'll probably send her to one of the hospitals around here that specializes in problems like hers."

"I guess that's the best we could hope for."

"Yeah. Well it'll be a long time before she has a chance to bother you or anyone else again." He gave his partner a stern look. "I always knew that chasing nurses would get you in trouble one day."

"Chasing nurses? Man, Roy, have I learned my lesson. Those days are over for John Gage."

"They are?"

"Yeah - I know what you're thinking, but I really mean it - -"

The door opened. Roy turned his head and saw the petite, blond nurse smiling at them from the doorway.

"Mr. DeSoto?"

"Yeah, I - I'm Roy DeSoto." He stood up nervously.

"Miss McCall said to tell you that you'll have to leave now. Your partner shouldn't be tired out." She walked across the room and look at Gage. "Are you comfortable, Johnny? Can I get you anything?"

Roy saw Johnny sink back against the pillow. He took the nurse's small hand and patted it.

"Well, Patty, this pillow is really hurting my back . . ."

As he walked across the parking lot towards his car, Roy couldn't help smiling to himself. Some things will never change . . .

The End

Note from Tigger: This story was so much fun to write! Carla and I got to be real good friends in the process. We hope you enjoyed it as much as we enjoyed writing it. Write us at the addy above and let us know what you think!!