



There Was One Little Angel

by [Tig](#)

"Johnny, I think we'd better keep you overnight for observation, just to be on the safe side," Dr. Brackett said after completing his exam of the young paramedic.

John Gage frowned. *I don't want to spend the night in the hospital. But, since I've got this killer headache, I'm not going to argue...* He ran his hands through his soot-filled hair and let out an audible sigh, unconsciously rubbing his temples.

"Oh it can't be that bad!" Dixie said as she brought a wheel chair into the exam room.

"Well, I'd really just like to go home, have a nice hot shower, and get something to eat," Johnny replied.

"You can do that here, too, and this way we can keep an eye on you. After all, Roy told us you were out cold after that ceiling fell on you!" Dixie said with concern.

Johnny gave her a crooked grin as he got up from the table. *What's one more ceiling on my head? Geez, everybody keeps telling me how hard-headed I am. Now I can prove it.* He had to stop and steady himself as a wave of dizziness came over him.

"Whoa, steady there," Dixie said with concern.

"I'm okay, just stood up too fast," Johnny replied.

"Well you be sure to tell us if this dizziness continues, or if you get nauseated at all, okay?"

"Okay, Mother," Johnny laughed, "I have to admit my head *is* killing me. I'll be glad to get some rest."

Dixie brought Johnny up to the second floor and into his room. All thoughts of his pounding headache were forgotten as a nurse entered to help get him settled for the night.

"Hello, Mr. Gage, my name is Amber," Amber Leumas said as she pulled the covers down to the foot of the bed.

"Uh..." Johnny was speechless. *Wow.... I don't remember seeing her before....* He looked at her hands for a ring, and felt his heart skip a beat when he didn't see one. *This might not be so bad after all. And Roy complains about my bad luck with injuries. But there are definitely "fringe" benefits...* He eyed Amber with obvious interest.

Dixie laughed to herself and couldn't help the broad smile that formed on her lips. "Amber, I'd like you to meet Johnny Gage, one of the finest paramedics in L.A. John, this is Amber Leumas. She's been working here a couple of weeks. Amber, take good care of him for me. I have to get back to the E.R."

"Okay, Dixie, don't worry. He's in good hands," Amber replied. Then turning her attention to John she said, "Okay, Mr. Gage, let's get you settled."

"Okay, but call me Johnny," he replied hopefully.

"Okay, Johnny. Let's get your vitals," Amber said, obviously amused.

Amber took John's vitals, noting that his pulse was a little fast. "Have you eaten yet? I think I can still get a supper tray for you."

"No, I haven't -- that would be great, Amber," Johnny replied, secretly smiling to himself.

"Okay, I'll be back in a few minutes."

Johnny watched as Amber left the room. *Man, that's got to be the prettiest nurse I've ever seen here.* He absently rubbed his temples. *Time to turn on the old Gage charm!* He was lost in thought when Amber returned.

"Here you go, Johnny," Amber said as she smiled.

"Thanks, Amber. This looks terrific," Johnny said, a little too enthusiastically.

"You *must* be hungry if it looks terrific," Amber laughed. "I have to go, but if you need anything just press the call button. How's your head? Any dizziness or nausea?"

"It still hurts," Johnny said, looking for some sympathy. "I'm not dizzy though."

"Okay then, I'll check on you a little later."

Johnny took a deep breath when Amber left his room. He then turned his attention to the meal before him. He picked up the small sealed bag which contained a fork, salt, and pepper. While he was attempting to open it, it slipped from his hands and fell to the floor. Johnny pushed the small rolling table where the food tray was sitting aside and bent down to retrieve his utensil. *Whoa....the room is spinning again. Hey, this is a great excuse to get Amber to come back.* Leaving the bag on the floor, he quickly pressed the nurse's call button. Amber's voice could be heard through the small speaker on the side of the bed.

"Yes? Can I help you?" she asked.

"Um, Amber? I dropped my fork. Could you help me get it?" Johnny asked innocently.

Amber walked into John Gage's room and struggled not to laugh outright. Johnny lay there, looking up at her hopefully, trying to gain her sympathy. She placed her hands on her hips and gave him her best and

sternest nurse's look. "I thought it was your head that was hurt," she chastised him lightly.

"Oh, but it is," Johnny replied, "it's just that..." he looked at her again with that hang dog expression. "It hurts *far* too much when I bend way over to the floor. I tried and the room spun 360 degrees!"

"I thought you said you weren't dizzy anymore?" Amber eyed him curiously, noting his color and the pinched look around his mouth. *Wonder if he's putting me on... Well, he has had a rough time of it. I'll let it pass. This time.* She retrieved the bag with the fork, salt, and pepper, and handed them to Johnny. "Okay, Johnny, here you go."

"Thanks," Johnny said, smiling. Amber left quickly, before Johnny had a chance to talk to her. He took about two bites of the unappetizing meal and pushed the nurse's button again.

"Yes?" he heard Amber's voice.

"Um, I hate to bother you again, Amber, but could you please bring me a napkin?"

Amber looked at her colleague, Registered Nurse Jan Stevens, who laughed. "I'm glad you got that one!" she said. "I have a feeling he's going to keep you hopping tonight. You know, I've heard about him!"

"You have? What have you heard?" Amber asked curiously.

"I've heard he's dated every single nurse in this hospital! You better watch out for that one!"

"Oh, a real lady's man, huh? I had a feeling he was up to something!"

"That's right, and I bet you're next!"

Amber laughed and shook her head. She went to the small kitchenette a few feet away from the nurse's station and grabbed a handful of napkins. As she walked towards Johnny's room, she was grateful that it was close. *If he's going to keep me hopping, at least I won't have to hop too far!*

"Here's some napkins, Johnny. You almost done?" Amber noticed that he only had eaten about half the meal.

"Yeah, I guess I wasn't as hungry as I thought," Johnny answered.

"Okay, let me take your tray then. I'll be back in a few minutes to get a new set of vitals."

"Okay, thanks." Johnny could hardly wait for her to return. *Wow, she's been here two weeks -- wonder why I haven't met her before?*

Amber returned promptly and proceeded to take a new set of vitals, marking them on Johnny's chart.

"What's the verdict?" Johnny asked as Amber finished.

"Everything is normal, looks good," Amber replied.

"So, Amber, how come I haven't seen you before?" Johnny asked with a crooked grin.

"I don't get to the ER very much. I'm usually right here on this floor, and we don't see too many of the paramedics up here."

"No, I guess not," Johnny mused. "Well, I'm glad I got to meet you."

"Same here, Johnny. Well, I have to go. Do you need anything else?"

"No, I don't think so. I'd like to take a shower in a little while, get this grime off of me."

"Okay," Amber replied. "Everything you need should be in there, so I'll check on you a little later."

"Okay, thanks," Johnny said with a smile.

When Amber left, Johnny started thinking of ways to get her to return. *I got it....*

He pressed the call button.

"Yes?" he heard Amber's voice.

"Amber, would it be possible to get an extra pillow? I like sleeping on two."

"Sure, Johnny, just give me a few minutes."

Amber brought the pillow and left again. Johnny smiled as he watched her walk out the room. *What else can I think of....*

He pressed the call button.

"Can I help you?" Amber asked.

"Uh, yeah, could you come here for a minute?"

"Okay," she replied. *What does he want this time? I may as well just stay in his room all night at this rate!*

"Johnny?" she asked with concern. She thought he looked pale. "You okay?"

"Well, actually my foot was cramping, and I was hoping you could rub it for me," Johnny grinned.

Amber rolled her eyes. "Tell you what, Johnny. Why don't you take that shower you've been wanting. I bet that will help any cramps you might be having. I have to check on some other patients, so I'll be back in a little while, after you're done."

"Okay, thanks," Johnny replied. *Darn it!*

Johnny found a towel and washcloth and stepped into the shower. He let the warm water rain on his sore head, washing the soot away. He grabbed the shampoo and tenderly massaged his head, feeling the goose egg that had formed. *What's that noise?* Johnny wondered, hearing a ringing in his ears. *Sounds like a thousand grasshoppers on the ranch back home. Wonder what mom's cooking for supper tonight...*

Just as he rinsed off, a wave of dizziness overcame him, and blackness surrounded the edges of his vision.

Good thing these hospital showers have seats in them! Where the hell is it? He reached out, blindly searching for the fold-down bench as the water continued to sluice over him.

Struggling to keep from falling, he pitched forward, hitting his already tender head on the shower knob. He put a hand to his head, trying to stave away the dizziness and nausea and frowned when his hand came away covered in blood. Blood was pouring from a nasty one inch gash in his forehead, running into his eyes. *Amber?* He groped for the handle, shutting the water off. He pushed the call button, alerting the nurse's station.

"Yes?" Came Amber's prompt reply.

Slightly disoriented, Johnny forgot why he called. "Um," he hesitated, trying to focus his thoughts, " I think I need help in the shower," he answered.

"You need help in the shower?" Amber asked. She turned to Jan and started laughing. "Did you hear that? This guy never gives up! He's run me ragged all evening!"

"Do you think he really needs help?" Jan asked.

"He's been perfectly fine every time I've checked on him. He probably wants me to scrub his back! Why don't you check on him this time, please?" Amber asked.

"Okay, I'll look in on him, as soon as I give Mr. Sanders his meds."

Amber smiled, "Thanks Jan, I owe you one!"

Downstairs in the ER, Dixie was briefing her replacement before heading out for the night.

"Dixie?" she heard a familiar voice call out.

"Oh, hi, Roy. On your way up to see Johnny?"

"Yeah, we finally got that fire under control. It was a big one... We're really lucky no one was seriously injured. How's Johnny?" Roy asked.

"He was fine the last time I checked. I was going to look in on him before I went home, how about I walk with you?"

"Let's go," Roy said as he headed towards the elevator.

Dixie and Roy made their way to the nurses station before checking in on Johnny. They heard Amber and Jan laughing. "What's so funny?" Dixie asked.

"The paramedic in 210 has Amber running to his room every five minutes. Amber, tell her what he just did!" Jan said, poking Amber in the side.

Dixie looked at the women inquisitively, "Well?"

"He just beeped again a minute ago, saying he needs help in the shower! Jan was just fixing to check on him for me." Amber replied.

Dixie nodded in understanding. "You two just stay here, I'll give him some help he won't soon forget."

Amber and Jan started to laugh again as Dixie made her way to Johnny's room. Roy followed Dixie into John's room. The door to the bathroom was closed. Dixie knocked, "Johnny, you all right in there?"

No answer.

Roy gently pushed Dixie aside as he knocked louder on the door. "John, it's Roy, open up!" he called. Hearing nothing, he opened the door. Johnny was sitting with his head between his knees shivering. The shower was covered in blood and vomit. Dixie ran out of the room to the nurses station. "Amber!" she called. "Get Dr. Brackett, stat, and then come help us in here!"

She reentered the room to find Roy holding pressure on the cut on John's forehead. Roy gently supported him as he vomited again.

"I feel like I'm gonna black out," Johnny said when the episode was over.

"Put your head down between your knees, Johnny, and we'll get you cleaned up. How did you cut your head?" Roy asked with concern.

"I got dizzy and lost my balance. Hit it on the faucet," he paused and then added, "I feel like shit."

"Dr. Brackett is on his way," Amber said as she entered Johnny's room. She paled visibly when she saw what had happened. "Is he okay?" she asked.

"He's going to need a couple stitches. Go get a suture kit," Dixie answered.

Amber nodded wordlessly and left the room, as Dixie and Roy finished getting Johnny cleaned up and settled in the bed.

"He's really shaky," Roy said to Dixie, who nodded in agreement. Dixie set about getting a new set of vitals as Dr. Brackett entered the room.

"What have we got?" Dr. Brackett asked.

"He took a fall in the shower. I sent Amber for a suture kit. He's been dizzy and has vomited," Dixie answered.

"Well, Johnny, you're going to make me work tonight after all," Dr. Brackett said while looking at the cut on Johnny's forehead. Then he turned to Dixie. "Did you finish getting his vitals?"

"BP is 90/60, pulse is 110."

"How are you feeling now, Johnny?" Dr. Brackett asked.

"Still dizzy. I'm tired, and I still have a headache. Thirsty..."

Dixie handed Johnny a glass of water, which he gratefully accepted. He handed the glass back to her just as

Amber returned to the room with the suture kit.

Brackett put three stitches in the paramedic's forehead. He began writing on the medical chart, and then turned to Amber. "I want a full skull series and CT scan. Give him an I.V. of normal saline, 200cc an hour; 12.5 mg Phenergan; and 30 mg codeine. I want neuro checks done every two hours, and maintain strict bed rest for now."

Amber left Johnny's room in a rush to call radiology, struggling to maintain her professionalism. She quickly made the arrangements for the battery of tests ordered by Dr. Brackett.

Jan was exiting a patient's room. "What happened?" she asked, noticing the flurry of activity and her friend's changed demeanor.

"I can't talk right now," Amber managed to say, rushing down the corridor. *Oh, why didn't I just go in there the minute he called?* she berated herself. *I should have paid more attention. I knew he wasn't that steady.*

"Dix," Dr. Brackett said, "I'm going down to radiology with him, just in case I missed something. You go on home," and then he turned to Roy. "You too, Roy. I'll call if there's any change. This is going to take a while and he'll probably sleep now anyway."

Roy looked uncertainly at Dr. Brackett, and then at Dixie. Sighing, he turned back to his partner. "Hey, I'm gonna head back to the station. Can I get you anything first?"

Johnny shook his head, "No, thanks Roy, I'm fine. Go ahead."

"Okay, well call me if you need me, and I'll be back in the morning, okay?"

"Okay, thanks."

"Johnny," Dixie said, "I'm going too. You be sure to stay in that bed now, I don't want to see any new bruises next time I see you!"

Johnny smiled, "Okay, I promise."

Dixie turned back to Dr. Brackett. "I have to speak to a certain nurse before I leave. Kel, be sure to call me when the test results are in."

"I will, and good luck!"

Dixie smiled and rolled her eyes as she exited Johnny's room, with Roy following right behind.

"Goodnight, Roy. I'll call you as soon as I hear from Kel."

"Okay, goodnight. Oh, and Dixie, don't be too rough on her. Knowing my partner, he was probably giving her a hard time."

"Well, that's no excuse. We can't afford to ignore a call for help, whether we think it's for real or not. She should have realized he was too shaky to get up on his own in the first place."

Roy, not wanting to ruffle anymore feathers, simply smiled and waved as he headed towards the elevator.

I'd hate to be in Amber's shoes tonight.....

Two hours later, Johnny was sound asleep in his room. Amber watched him for a few minutes, hating to disturb his slumber, but the neuro checks Dr. Brackett ordered required her to do just that. She gently raised his hand and took his pulse, and then his blood pressure. Johnny didn't stir. *Wow, he's really out. I should have known he wasn't strong enough to get out of bed on his own. But he was so damned annoying!*

She looked at him, regretting her harsh thoughts. "Good evening!" she said loudly, hoping he would wake up.

"Hmm?" Johnny stirred.

"I came in to check up on you, and you won't even open your eyes for me?"

Johnny slowly opened his eyes. "Oh, hi Amber, did I call you?" he said groggily.

"No, you didn't call me, I came to check on you. Can you tell me your name?"

"John Gage."

"Do you know where you are?"

"I'm in Heaven, looking at an angel," Johnny smiled.

Amber laughed. "You are a charmer, Mr. Gage. Better try that one again before they run more tests on you!"

"I'm at Rampart, it's 1976, Ford is president, and... I'm, I'm still seeing an angel."

Amber laughed again, relieved that he seemed much better. She finished her check list and hung the medical chart at the foot of the bed. "Go back to sleep. I'll check on you again in a little while."

Johnny nodded obediently and closed his eyes, welcoming sleep once more.

Dr. Brackett walked wearily into his office, Johnny's tests results still in his hands. He looked over them one last time, to make sure he hadn't missed anything, and picked up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Dixie? Did I wake you?"

"No, I was reading. How's Johnny?"

"I just got the test results in. They look good. It looks like it's just a bad concussion."

"That's great, Kel. I'll give Roy a call and let him know."

"Okay, Dix, thanks. Goodnight."

"Night, Kel."

The next day was much better for John. The dizziness that had bothered him the night before seemed to be all gone, and he felt his strength returning. He was sitting up in bed, anxiously waiting for breakfast when the door opened.

"Hey Roy!" Johnny called as he saw his partner.

"Hey, Junior, you're looking better this morning!"

"Feeling better too. Hey, did you see the breakfast cart out there on your way in?"

"No, didn't notice. They going to let you go home today?"

"I don't know yet. I hope so," Johnny stated flatly.

"Good morning, fellas," came the voice of Kelly Brackett.

"Mornin,' Doc," Johnny replied.

"Johnny, did you get a good night's sleep?" Kel asked.

"Only if you consider being woken up every couple of hours, good. You going to spring me soon, Doc?"

Brackett looked over Johnny's chart and sighed. "Johnny, with that fall you took last night, I think we'd better keep you here till tomorrow."

Johnny rolled his eyes, "I was afraid you'd say that."

"It's better to be on the safe side. How's the dizziness this morning?"

"As far as I can tell, it's better, but I really haven't been able to move enough to tell for sure."

"Okay, we'll let you get up out of that bed today, and if you don't have any problems, you should be able to go home tomorrow."

One Week Later

Roy was putting on his uniform shirt when he heard his partner arrive at the station whistling.

"Hey, Junior, good to see you back!"

"It's good to be back. Amazing how much time off you can get for a little headache," Johnny grinned.

"What are we whistling about this morning?" Roy asked.

"I had a date last night," Johnny beamed.

"Oh, yeah? Who with?"

"Amber."

"You mean....."

"Yep, the same one."

"Wow! How did that go?"

"It was great! We're going out again tomorrow night. Her roommate is singing at the new club on 34th street. We're going to go hear her."

Chet arrived in the room, hearing the last part of the conversation. "You mean you actually got a second date?"

"Ha ha, Chet," Johnny replied. "I'll have you know, Amber and I got along great! I think she really digs me."

"She's only going out with you because she feels guilty," Chet said.

"Feels guilty? Why would she feel guilty?" Johnny asked.

Before he could reply, the tones sounded, the first call of what would prove to be a busy shift.

Johnny and Roy were on their way back to the station, hoping to not get called out again before lunch.

"What was Chet talking about this morning?" Johnny asked. Roy had been hoping that Johnny would forget that conversation.

"I'm not sure," Roy replied.

"He said Amber felt guilty. She doesn't have anything to feel guilty about," Johnny explained. "Does she?"

"Well, I think Chet is referring to the first night you were in the hospital," Roy said.

"Oh? That was the night I met Amber. I still don't get it."

"Do you remember calling Amber to your room every five minutes?" Roy asked.

Johnny smiled crookedly, lost in thought, "Yeah."

"Well, you called for help when you fell in the shower, and she didn't come right away to check on you."

"She didn't? I don't remember that."

"You were pretty out of it at the time," Roy continued. "You called and said you needed help in the shower, and she thought you were crying wolf again."

"Crying wolf? I never cried wolf," Johnny said defensively. *I thought she liked me...*

The two men got out of the squad and headed towards the kitchen. "What's for lunch?" Roy asked Mike, who was stirring something on the stove. Before Mike could answer the sound of the tones filled the station once again.

By the time the shift ended at 8:00 the next morning, the crew of station 51 was exhausted. "I think I'm gonna sleep for the next twelve hours," Johnny said to no one in particular.

"Don't you have a date tonight?" Chet asked.

"Oh yeah," Johnny replied, less than enthusiastically. "Well, I'll sleep for the next 8 hours then," he said with a smile.

True to his word, Johnny went home and slept, getting up just in time to shower and change for his date. He arrived at Amber's apartment promptly at 7:00, and knocked on the door. *I'll have to prove to Chet she's not going out with me just because she feels guilty.*

"Hey, Johnny, come on in," Amber said when she opened the door.

Johnny entered the neat apartment. He noticed it was very simply decorated. He looked for a sign of the roommate Amber told him about, but didn't see anyone. "Let me grab my purse and we can go," Amber said. Johnny straightened his tie as he waited. He noticed a guitar laying on the sofa. "That's Kalani's, my roommate. She's really good. I can't wait to hear her tonight. She's been practicing so much I have her whole act memorized!"

"Kalani... that's an unusual name." John said.

"She's Hawaiian. Her family moved to Sacramento when she was about ten I guess. We've been roommates about six months," Amber replied.

"Ahh," Johnny nodded, "you ready?"

"Yep, let's go!"

The couple had just finished eating when Kalani was introduced on the stage. She came out, saw Amber and her date, and waved. Johnny couldn't help but smile at the young lady on the stage. *Wow! Wonder if she sings as good as she looks!* He didn't have to wonder long. As soon as Kalani began singing, everyone got quiet to listen. Her smile was infectious as she sang. Johnny found that he could not take his eyes off of her. Amber noticed this as well.

"Hey," she said as she tapped Johnny's arm. Johnny didn't even glance at her, still lost in his trance. Amber rolled her eyes and blew in his face.

"Huh?" Johnny asked.

Amber laughed. "I told you she was good!"

"You were right! I'm impressed!" Johnny replied.

"This is her last night to sing here, I'm glad you got a chance to hear her," Amber said, watching as Johnny and Kalani continued to make eye contact. *Maybe this wasn't such a good idea afterall...*

Johnny, suddenly brought back to the reality that he was not paying his date much attention, cleared his throat. "Do you need another drink?"

"No, I'm fine," Amber replied. "Oh shit."

Johnny raised his eyebrows. "Huh?"

"My boyfriend just walked in."

"B-Boyfriend?" Johnny stammered.

"Yeah... George. We've been dating a few months. We had a big fight and I told him I wanted to start dating other people."

"Um, Amber, why didn't you tell me about George before now?"

"It just didn't ever seem to be the right time. Listen, Johnny, I'd better go talk to him, okay? He's kinda the jealous type. I know he's looking for me. I'll be back in a few minutes."

The jealous type... with a thirteen inch neck. Great.

Johnny watched in bewilderment as Amber walked away from their table and headed toward a large, burly figure she'd identified as her boyfriend, George. George stood at least a foot taller than Amber, and looked to be close to 300 pounds. *Man, I'd hate to get on his bad side...*

Play it cool, Gage...

"Hey, Dix, is Amber working today?" Johnny asked. It had been two days since their date, and he couldn't keep his mind off of Amber's roommate. *Man, I want to see her again.*

"Yes, I believe I saw her earlier," Dixie replied.

Johnny turned to his partner. "Roy, I'm gonna run upstairs for a minute, okay?"

"Okay, Junior, just make it snappy. Cap wants us back to get ready for that inspection," Roy replied.

"All right, be right back," Johnny replied.

Johnny got off the elevator and spied Amber coming out of a patients room.

"Hey!" he called out.

"Hey, yourself," Amber teased, "What brings you up here?"

"Oh, I just thought I'd stop by and see how you were doing."

"I'm doing just fine, thanks. How are you?"

"Oh, just fine here too."

"I'm really sorry about the other night. I really like George. We're getting back together."

"Oh? That's great. I'm happy for you... both." John wondered how he could ask about Kalani without being too obvious. Fortunately, he didn't have to wonder long.

Amber broke the silence, "Say, John, what did you think of my roommate?"

"Oh, I thought she was great!" John answered enthusiastically.

"Hmmm, you know, John, Kalani was really impressed by you."

"Oh, she was?"

"Yep, which reminds me..... I was hoping you could do me a favor."

"A favor?"

"Yes, you see, Saturday is Kalani's birthday, and I'm having a party for her. I know she'd just love it if you were there. Think you can come?"

"I'd love to. What time?"

"Seven o'clock, at our apartment."

"Okay, I'll be there! I've got to go, my partner's waiting for me downstairs."

"Okay, see you later, Johnny!"

"Bye!"

Saturday afternoon, Amber and Kalani were busy making final preparations for the party.

"Are you sure he's coming?" Kalani asked as she looked once more through her closet.

"I'm positive! You know, Kalani, I think he really likes you," Amber hinted.

"Trying to play matchmaker, Amber? I thought you liked him yourself."

"Oh, I like him, but we could never be anything more than friends. It'd be great if he asks you out sometime."

Hmmm, I hope she means that, Kalani wondered. Now what am I going to wear.....

Later that night, the party over, Amber and Kalani said goodnight to the last guest. Kalani walked him to

the door, and stepped outside with him. "Johnny, I'm so glad you could make it. I really enjoyed your company tonight," she said. She felt her heart pound as she stood close to the man. *He's so tall!*

Johnny smiled, "It was my pleasure, Kalani. I hope you had a happy birthday."

"Yes, I did, thank you."

"Think we could go out sometime?" *God, she's so cute!*

"I'd really like that. In fact, I'm singing tomorrow night at the Hilton downtown. Why don't you come hear me, and we could go out afterwards."

"Okay, you sure it won't cause any problems between you and Amber, right?"

"It's not a problem, really. In fact, she told me she wouldn't mind if I went out with you."

"Okay then, it's a date! See you tomorrow."

The next night, Johnny arrived at the Hilton and waited expectantly for Kalani's performance. He was not disappointed. When she sang, he somehow felt a part of the music. It was like nothing he'd ever felt before. He watched her up on that stage, and could not take his eyes off of her. Her dark brown hair accentuated her petite features. He was so lost in the moment he didn't see the couple approaching his table.

"Hey, Johnny!" Dr. Kent Donaldson, Jr. said, his blue eyes beaming. He had a cute blond hanging on his arm that Johnny did not recognize.

"Hey, Kent. What are you doing here?"

"Now, I was just about to ask you that same question! Where's your date?"

"She's onstage. That's Kalani, we're going out when she finishes singing. Have a seat and join me?"

"Thanks, we'll do that. John, this is Susan. Susan, meet John."

"Hi, John," Susan said.

Kent looked at Kalani on stage. "Wow, John, she's some singer. Where'd you meet?"

"Do you know Amber Leumas?"

Kent gave John a questioning look. "Name sounds familiar... should I know her?"

"She's a nurse at Rampart. I met her the last time I was in the hospital, on the second floor. She helped, uh, take care of me," John grinned.

"Oh yes, I know who she is now. That's the time you were in with that concussion?"

John nodded. Susan raised her eyebrows. "How did you get a concussion, John?" she asked.

"Oh, I'm a firefighter/paramedic with the LA County Fire Department. I got injured in a fire a couple weeks

ago. Ceiling fell on me."

"Oh my! Glad you're all right!"

"Thanks, me too!"

Kent interrupted, "What does Amber have to do with how you met that great singer on stage?"

"That great singer is Amber's roommate," John stated.

"Is that a fact?" Kent mused. "And Amber doesn't have a problem with this?"

Before John could answer, Kalani finished her song and walked to join her date and his companions.

John stood and pulled a chair out for the young lady. "That was just great, Kalani," he told her, not taking his eyes away from her as she took her seat.

"Thanks, John. Gonna introduce me to your friends?" Kalani raised her eyebrows.

John grinned. "Oh, yeah." He cleared his throat. "Kalani, this is Dr. Kent Donaldson, Jr. and his date..."
What's her name.... I can't remember...

"Susan. Susan Wilks," Susan supplied.

"Nice to meet you both," Kalani said. "Where do you practice, Dr. Donaldson?"

"Rampart General. I'm doing my internship now. And call me Kent, please." Kent's crystal blue eyes sparkled as he spoke.

"Oh, Rampart? Is that where you and John met?" Kalani asked.

Johnny threw Kent "that look", causing the young doctor to clam up. "Yes, that's where we met, Kalani. He knows Amber, too."

"Hey, I just got a great idea," Kent said. "I'm actually off this weekend for a change, and I was thinking of taking my family's sailboat out. Why don't you and Kalani come along, and maybe Amber and her boyfriend could join us as well?"

John and Kalani exchanged looks.

"We'd leave early Saturday morning and return Sunday evening," Kent continued. "Are you guys free?"

"I'm game if you are," John said quietly to his date.

She promptly smiled and nodded her head. "Sounds wonderful!" Then she turned to Kent. "We'd love to join you! What would you like for us to bring?"

Kent grinned. "Just yourselves and your bathing suits. I'll have everything else we'll need."

"I have to work the Friday shift, Kent. So we won't be able to leave before 8:30, or as soon as I can get there. If we get a call, it maybe later than that." Johnny informed.

"We'll wait for you, Johnny."

"John, I'll see if Amber and George want to go, and I can just get a ride with them. That'll save time so you can just come straight to the harbor when you get off. If they can't, I'll just meet you at the station. Okay?"

Johnny couldn't help but smile. He liked the idea of showing Kalani off to the guys at the station. "Okay, that sounds great," Johnny agreed.

Kent stood up and extended his hand to Kalani. "Kalani, nice meeting you." Then he turned to John. "I guess I'll be seeing you at Rampart this week. When's your next shift?"

"Tomorrow."

Kent smiled. "Hopefully we won't be seeing too much of each other. I could use a slow shift for a change."

"I know what you mean," John agreed.

Kent took Susan's hand and helped her stand. "John, Kalani, goodnight."

"Nice meeting you Kalani," Susan said. "Hope you both can make it Saturday."

"Thanks, Susan," Kalani said. "We'll be looking forward to it, I'm sure. Nice meeting both of you."

Johnny walked into his dark apartment, closed the door behind him and leaned against it. Still in the dark, he reflected on the events that had just unfolded. He closed his eyes, and could still smell the fragrance that Kalani wore. He could still feel the silky texture of her long dark hair. He could still hear the sweet melody of her voice as she sang. He put his fingers to his lips, remembering the taste of the kiss they had parted with.

The week passed by relatively uneventful. Johnny was glad Friday was here at last. He was looking forward to spending the weekend with Kalani. They had gone out every night that he was off this week. He opened his locker and began to get dressed for his shift.

"So, Gage, what's with the big grin on your face?" Chet Kelly asked as he passed John's locker.

Johnny just looked at Chet as he continued to get dressed, still grinning.

Chet shook his head. "I know that look... you're in love... again!"

"Get a life, Chet," Johnny replied. He laughed quietly and finished getting dressed.

Chet was determined not to let Johnny get off that easy. "Okay, who is she? Where did you meet?" He began his bantering.

"You'll get to meet her tomorrow morning. She's picking me up when our shift is over. We're going sailing this weekend."

"Sailing? She must be a brave chick to go sailing with you, Gage. Doesn't she know that you and the big blue sea don't mix too well?"

Damn, why did he have to go and bring that up! "Well, just because I got sick a time or two doesn't mean it will happen every time." Johnny was no longer smiling.

Chet laughed. "Better wear your life vest, Gage, for when she throws you overboard!"

Before Johnny had time to reply, they heard Marco call for them to line up. As soon as roll call was over, the tones sounded.

Station 51, traffic accident with multiple injuries. 405 S expressway near the Avalon Blvd. exit, 4-0-5 S. expressway near the Avalon Blvd. exit. Time out, 8:05.

It was a horrific sight... about 10 cars involved. Johnny and Roy began with the first vehicle they came to. A Chevy Nova with a woman in the driver's seat and a child in the back. Roy reached in through the driver's open window and felt for a pulse. Johnny ran around to the other side of the car and yanked the door open.

"Oh my God," he swore softly as he gazed upon an infant who was thrown from the front seat to the floor board. Knowing there was nothing he could do for the infant, he concentrated his efforts on the child in the back seat. He was able to reach the child easily and lifted him out of the car.

Roy joined him with the drug box and biophone. "The mother?" Johnny asked. Roy shook his head.

The two paramedics turned their attention to the small child before them.

"Rampart, this is County 51," Johnny said into the biophone.

"Go ahead, 51," came the voice of Dr. Kent Donaldson.

"Rampart, we are at the scene of a traffic accident with multiple injuries. The first two victims are Code F. The third victim is a 3-year-old male. He is unconscious. Pulse 100, BP 130 over 70, respiration 16. No other apparent injuries."

"51, is there an ambulance on the scene?"

"Negative, Rampart."

"I need a paramedic over here!" Chet called from another vehicle.

Johnny picked up the biophone. "Stand by, Rampart."

"I got it," Roy said as he got up and headed in Chet's direction.

"Johnny, we have two victims over here," Roy called. "The first one is a male, approximately 40 years old. He has a laceration across his forehead and some glass fragments in his eyes. He's semi-conscious. The second one is a female, 35, she's alive but currently inaccessible."

Johnny relayed the information to Rampart. As he did, the small patient in front of him began to stir.

"Shhh," Johnny soothed as the child began to cry. "It's okay, you're going to be okay."

He couldn't help but look at the bodies of the child's mother and baby brother, who lay covered nearby.
Poor little guy...

Johnny leaned wearily on the counter at the base station. It had taken nearly three hours to secure the scene and to get all the victims transported. He couldn't remember the last time he'd felt so tired... and the day had only just begun.

Kent left the treatment room and saw his friend at the base station. "Hey, Johnny! We still on for tomorrow?"

"Hmm?" Johnny looked up. "Oh, yeah, tomorrow."

"Everything okay, John?" Kent asked.

"Yeah, just a rough scene back there. It'll be good to get away."

"I can't argue with you there. Listen, that little boy you brought in... he's going to be just fine. His father is on his way in."

"That's good." Johnny looked down, unable to say anything more. He couldn't get the image of that tiny infant out of his mind.

The rest of the day was a slow one. The crew was tired none-the-less and everyone had turned in around 10:00 that night. At 2:00 AM, the tones sounded.

Station 51, Station 36, structure fire, 1357 W. Delmar Blvd. 1-3-5-7 W. Delmar Blvd. Cross street Carson. Time-out 0200.

The fire kept them busy until until about 7:00 that morning, and it was 7:45 before Johnny and Roy made it back to the station. Johnny got out of the squad wearily and walked to his locker, glad that B-shift was here and his shift was over.

"Gage!" Captain Stanley called. "You have a visitor!"

Johnny looked at Roy and grinned, his weariness forgotten. He walked to the kitchen, where he saw the men from both A and B shift gathered around the table. The center of attention stood up when he entered the room.

"Hi, John!" Kalani beamed. She was wearing white shorts and a white mid-drift top that accentuated her bronze skin. "Amber and George couldn't make it, so I thought I'd meet you here."

"Hey! That's great! You're all ready to go?" Johnny asked as he approached her, giving her a small kiss.

"Yep, but you're not!" She laughed. "Go ahead and shower and change. I'm not going anywhere."

"Hmm, I'm not too sure I want to leave you alone in here..."

"Oh, go on, Gage, we'll keep Kalani company," Dwyer volunteered.

"That's what I'm afraid of," John frowned.

"Oh, John! It's beautiful!" Kalani said as she and John walked arm-in-arm toward the harbor. "Where is Kent's sailboat?"

"It should be over there," John pointed north. "Boat slip 27-B."

As they approached, they saw Kent on the bow of a beautiful sailboat. "Hey!" he called.

John helped Kalani get aboard and handed their small bags up to Kent before following.

"Welcome aboard!" Kent smiled. His brown hair was disheveled from the wind.

"This is a great boat, Kent!" John said.

"Yes, it's nice, isn't it? It's a forty-foot sloop. Let me show you around before we set sail."

He guided the couple down a small ladder that lead into the boat's cabin. When everyone was inside, Kent pointed to a small door immediately to the left of the ladder. "This is the cabin Susan and I will share" He opened the door, giving everyone a glimpse of the berth immediately under the cockpit. Turning around, Kent gestured expansively at the main room. "This is the galley and dining area." He patted a four-by-five foot table. "The table converts to a bed." Kent guided them past the table to a small archway. "Here's the other cabin." He pointed out a triangular-shaped berth in the bow of the boat. "It's called the V-Berth for obvious reasons," he winked. "The head's over here," Kent continued, turning to his left and opening a tiny door between the cabin in the bow and the galley area. "Remind me to show you how to flush it before you use it," he said with a grin. "Okay, guys, choose your beds."

"I'll take this one," Kalani spoke up, walking inside the V-berth and throwing her bag on the cushions. Johnny looked up at her questioningly. "Well, I'm sure the other cabin will be fine for you, Johnny," she grinned. "You'll sleep just fine on the table."

"Hmph," Johnny grumbled. "I'm sure I will." Kent and John walked to the next room where Johnny threw his bag on the bench seat next to the table.

"John," Kent whispered. John raised his eyebrows. "Kalani's cabin has a door... and a lock."

A wide grin spread across Johnny's face. *This is going to be great!*

"Oh, and John.... one more thing," Kent said with a mysterious smile.

"What?" John asked.

"Take a couple of these before we set sail." He handed a pill bottle to Johnny.

Johnny looked at the label. "Dramamine?"

"Well, I've heard you tend to get sea sick... won't hurt to be cautious, now will it?"

"Oh, all right. Just better hope I don't fall asleep on you, though. We were up ALL night and I'm pretty tired."

"Come on, guys, let's get going!" Susan called. She and Kalani were ready to set sail. John and Kent followed them to the deck. Thirty minutes later they were underway.

It was a sparkling day -- the weather was gorgeous, and the two young couples were having a glorious time. Johnny was thankful he didn't get sea sick, and the scenery was enough to keep him wide awake. Kent and John remained on deck as the sun was setting, while Susan and Kalani were preparing a surprise for them below.

"Hey, John, have any rescues lately with people doing ridiculous things? Like that man who cleaned his chimney with gasoline?" Kent laughed.

"Every day, Kent. Every day. But you should know that by now."

"Yeah, but it still amazes me what people can do."

"This sunset is beautiful," John remarked. "I'm going to get Kalani to come watch it."

Kent agreed. "Tell Susan to come up, too," he called out.

The evening was as spectacular as the day had been. Kent and Susan went below deck, leaving John and Kalani gazing at the moon and the stars.

Kalani could hear John's heart beating as she lay against his bare chest. She couldn't remember when she had been this happy with anyone. She felt so safe and secure in his strong arms. She felt his hand tracing up and down her shoulder in a gentle caress. She looked up, and he bent down, kissing her moist lips. John stood up and took Kalani's hand. Wordlessly, she followed him to her cabin.

Sunday morning, John woke up still holding Kalani in a tight embrace. He watched her sleeping beside him. *God, this feels so right...* He felt the gentle lull of the boat as it sailed. He got up quietly and attempted to steady himself as the boat swayed. *Oh no... I don't feel so good...*

John made it to the head just as he began to heave. The noise woke Kalani.

"John? You okay?" she asked.

"I've been better," John answered, just as he heaved a second time.

Kalani dressed quickly and handed John his shorts. "Here, get dressed and let's get you on deck."

"Oh, man, I am so sorry," Johnny apologized. "I should have taken more of that Dramamine last night I guess."

"Well, it's a little too late for that now. Come on, you'll feel better up top." Kalani guided the sick man to the deck, and sat him down on a benchseat in the cockpit.

Kent rolled his eyes upon seeing his friend. "So the rumors are true... you DO get sea sick."

Johnny nodded miserably and held his stomach with both hands.

"Well the day is still young. If you're not feeling any better in an hour or so, we'll head on back." Kent eyed his friend with concern. *He looks positively green... I don't think he's going to be feeling any better in an hour.*

"Good morning, everyone!" Susan called. She was holding a tray. "I made breakfast and coffee. Here you go, Sweetheart," she said as she handed Kent a cup of coffee.

As the food aroma invaded his air, Johnny turned and heaved again over the deck railing.

"Keep the food in the cabin," Kent suggested. "Away from Johnny."

Johnny looked up miserably. *I'm never gonna live this down...*

"Stare at the horizon, John!" Kent called. "It'll help if you look at something that doesn't move." He turned and smiled at Kalani and Susan. "I guess we'll have to head back a little earlier than we planned. Hope you girls don't mind too much."

"No, it's okay, Kent. We had a great time yesterday," Susan replied. "Poor John... I think we should head back now."

Kalani nodded in agreement. "Yeah, he's been sick since he woke up this morning. We'd better get him to shore."

Kent stood up and walked back to the wheel. He steered the sloop in a northerly direction.

"Oh, man," he heard Johnny moan as he continued what were now dry heaves. In his haste to check his friend, he let go of the wheel. The boom swung rapidly. Kent never knew what hit him.

Johnny was knocked off his feet as he struggled to breathe. He realized Kent was laying on top of him. He rolled from under the dead weight. *Oh, shit! He's out cold...*

"Kalani! Susan! I need help over here!" Johnny called. He pulled his T-shirt off and applied pressure to the gash on the back of Kent's head.

Kalani quickly grabbed the wheel and got the boat back on course. The change in direction caused Johnny to get sick again. Susan grabbed the make-shift bandage on Kent's head. "I've got him, John." Johnny nodded gratefully as he ran back to the railing.

"How is he?" Kalani asked Susan.

"He's totally out, but the bleeding has slowed some. I think there's a first aid kit down below."

"Okay, I'll get it. John... just watch the horizon, okay?"

Johnny shook his head. "No," he rasped. "You stay there." He sat down next to Kent and began taking his pulse. "Susan, go get the first aid kit. I'll stay with him. I'm okay." John was now in full paramedic mode, willing the nausea to remain at bay.

"John, we're about an hour out," Kalani reported. "How is he?"

"He's starting to come around," John informed. "Kent! Look at me, Kent. Wake up!"

"Wha... what happened?" Kent asked in a weary voice.

"You let go of the wheel... that's what happened. Just about knocked your head off!"

Kent winced. "I remember." He started to get up, but John pushed him back down.

"Just stay put, Dr. Donaldson," John ordered. "You've probably got a concussion."

Susan brought the first aid kit, and John was able to put a bandage on Kent's head.

"Do I need to radio for an ambulance to meet us?" Kalani asked.

"No!" Kent answered. "I'll be fine. I certainly don't need an ambulance."

John suddenly noticed Kalani at the controls. "Hey," John called to Kalani, "where'd you learn how to sail?"

"I was born on Maui, in the Hawaiian Islands. Did you forget?"

"Oh, yeah, I guess I did," John confessed. Suddenly as the adrenalin wore off, he found himself no longer able to win the battle with his stomach. As he made his way once more to the railing, Kent shook his head.

"I don't need an ambulance, but he might by the time we get ashore." Kent pointed to John.

Kalani frowned. "Susan, let's get these boys to dry land. I think it's a lot safer!"

Susan laughed. "You're right about that! And our first trip when we get back will be to Rampart!"

"So, how was the sailing?" Chet asked as he passed John in the locker room.

"Don't ask," John replied.

"Gage, when are you ever going to listen to me? Didn't I tell you that you and the big blue sea just don't mix?"

Johnny just rolled his eyes and sighed as he continued to get dressed. *This is going to be a long day...*

One Month Later

Roy had no idea what was going on with his partner. It was noon and he'd barely spoken two words all day. He had been in a strange, dark mood for several days, but today was the worst he'd seen. Everytime he'd try to talk to him about it, Johnny would wave him off by either changing the subject or simply ignoring him. Finally, he could take it no longer.

They had just finished a follow-up at Rampart and were in the squad. Before starting the engine, Roy

decided it was time to see what was on Johnny's mind.

"Squad 51 available," Johnny said into the mic. He looked at Roy, expecting him to start the engine, but instead he just there looking at him. "What?" he asked.

"That's what I'd like to know." Johnny looked truly bewildered at Roy's words. "You haven't been yourself for days," Roy continued. "Wanna tell me what's going on?"

Johnny tensed the muscles in his jaw at Roy's question, but he know he deserved an explanation. "Kalani and I broke up," Johnny replied.

"She dumped you?" Roy asked, surprised.

John shook his head. "No..."

"Then you dumped her? Are you crazy?"

"No... it wasn't like that. I didn't *dump* her... I just suggested we not see so much of each other..."

"Oh?"

John rubbed his hands over his mouth, something he often did when he was deep in thought. "I was afraid, Roy," he finally said, quietly.

"Of what?"

"I don't know, I'm not sure.... I guess... I mean... I thought we were just moving too fast."

"And how do you feel now?"

"Miserable."

"So, have you spoken to her since? Do you want to get back together?"

Johnny shook his head. "She won't answer her phone. I don't even know where she is."

Roy started the engine.

"I really hurt her, Roy."

They rode back to the station in silence.

The rest of the week didn't improve. Johnny continued with his dark mood and interacted as little as possible with the rest of the crew. Roy managed to track down Amber in the hospital and discovered that Kalani was, in fact, very hurt over the break up, and had moved back to Sacramento with her parents.

"Johnny, you should call her," Roy said. They had just returned to the station and were still in the squad. Roy found that they had their best heart-to-heart conversations in the confines of the cab.

"It's too late, just stay out of it."

"Johnny, I talked to Amber. She said Kalani was suffering over this just as much as you are. She's with her parents in Sacramento."

Johnny looked up. "You don't understand, Roy."

Roy threw his hands up in the air. "Well then explain it to me, because what *I do* understand is that you're miserable and you're making everyone around you miserable too."

"I already called her."

"And?"

"And nothing. She won't talk to me. She said she needs time to figure things out." Johnny paused. "I blew it. I blew the first good thing that's happened to me in years. I just threw it all away."

Before the discussion could continue, the tones sounded.

Station 51, Station 36, Battalion 14, Structure collapse, Ten Oaks Apartments, 46799 S. Parkway, 4-6-7-9-9 South Parkway. Cross street, Victoria. Time out 1300.

"Oh, man, this could be bad," Johnny said. Roy nodded in agreement as they headed to the scene.

Johnny wiped the sweat from his brow as he leaned against the squad. They had been at the scene for nearly three hours and were taking a short break before returning to help with the search and rescue attempts. He looked up at the sky, wondering what nature would do to hamper their efforts. *Man, what's going to happen next? Rain? That's all we need.* Dark clouds rolled in from the south, threatening to change the senerio. A broken water main had caused the foundation of the older building to give way. Located on a hillside and already weakened from an earthquake, it had been a disaster waiting to happen.

Suddenly, a rumbling sound could be heard coming from the building. Johnny looked at Roy. *Was that thunder?* He glanced at the building. *Nope. This isn't good. There's still 10 people missing.*

"Gage, DeSoto, Kelly!" Stanley called. "Go to the north side and begin searching the apartments. The south side just collapsed, so we don't have very much time."

"Right, Cap," Roy acknowledged as the three men headed back into the maze of destruction.

The trio entered the north side of the building. The excavation crew had shored up an area for workers to enter. Two firemen from 36's were on their way out, each with a victim. One of them looked at Roy.

"There's at least two more victims back there. We could hear them calling from the left but we couldn't see anything. Make it fast, guys. It's really unstable."

John, Roy, and Chet made their way as fast as they could through the debris. There were chunks of concrete barring the path. Soon, they could hear the faint cries for help.

"In here! Oh, God, please hurry!" came a woman's voice.

They quickened their pace. As they neared the voice, they could tell they were in what used to be a family dwelling. At first, it almost gave the eerie appearance of normalcy. A small kitchen lay to the right of a living area, and two open doors led to what looked like bedrooms. As they progressed further into the dwelling it looked anything but normal. Pictures that had once been on the walls lay on the floor, still in the frames, glass shattered. The room slanted ominously as it bore down on the failing foundation.

"Ma'am? Where are you?" Johnny called when they did not see the woman.

"I'm trapped! Back here!" they heard her call.

Following her voice, they finally found her. It took the three of them to get the debris off of her. When they did, they exchanged looks. The woman was nine months pregnant. She had been trapped in a pocket of debris and had been unable to dig her way out. Other than a broken ankle, she seemed to have been very lucky.

"Did Sarah find you? I sent her to get help! She's been gone for an hour at least!" She coughed as the confined space was filled with dust.

"How old is she, ma'am?" Roy asked.

"She's seven. Long brown hair, in a braid, and brown eyes. She was wearing a red sun dress."

Roy picked up the H.T. "HT51 to Engine51."

"Engine51, whatcha got, Roy?"

"Cap, we have a woman here who is asking about her daughter. Name Sarah, age 7, brown hair and eyes, wearing a red sundress. Has anyone seen her?"

"Stand-by, Roy."

After a few minutes, the HT crackled again.

"Engine51 to HT51."

"HT51."

"That's a negative, Roy. She must still be in the building."

"10-4, Engine51."

"Oh, God," the woman said. "I have to find her!"

"We'll find her, ma'am. Don't worry. Let's concentrate on getting you out of here first." Roy tried to calm the frantic woman.

Just then, the woman screamed, clutching her swollen belly. "Oh, God! The baby is coming!"

It was obvious that she was in extreme pain. Chet and Roy carried the woman, while Johnny followed from behind. When they got to what had once been a hallway outside the woman's apartment, she pointed.

"Sarah might have gone that way. There used to be an exit."

"Roy, I'll go have a look," Johnny stated.

"Just be careful, Junior. I'll get some back-up in here for you as soon as I can," Roy responded. *I don't want to leave him in here, but it's the only way. I hope we can get back in...*

Roy and Chet had just made it outside with the woman when the building rumbled again.

Johnny made his way precariously through the destruction, coughing as the dust filled his nostrils.

"Sarah?" he called. He stopped to listen. *I heard something.* "Sarah? I'm a fireman, I'm here to help you! Can you hear me?"

It was very faint, but he heard it. *Just a little farther... there.* The little girl lay beneath a slab of concrete. She was crying.

"Shhh, it's okay, I'm going to get you out of here," Johnny soothed. He lifted the slab, uncovering her small body. Before he had a chance to assess her condition, he heard the building start to groan. He covered her body with his as debris rained down on top of them. Then, all he knew was blackness.

Johnny woke up to two brown eyes staring into his. "Hey there," he said, his voice raspy.

"You scared me," Sarah replied, her face still damp with tears.

"I'm sorry," Johnny said as he attempted to sit up, stopping short as his ribs protested. *Damn.* As he became more alert, he was also aware of a sharp pain from his left leg.

"Who is that with you?" Sarah asked.

"There's no one with me, Sweetheart, but they'll be coming." *She must be seeing double...*

"Who's coming? The angels?"

Johnny smiled. "No, more firemen, like me."

"What's your name?" Sarah asked. Johnny frowned when he noticed the child still lay in the spot where she had been originally. She hadn't even changed her position to get more comfortable.

"My name is Johnny. And you're Sarah, right?"

Sarah looked amazed. "You were calling me. How did you know my name?"

"We found your mommy. She told us."

"Is mommy okay?"

"She's fine. My partner and another fireman got her out." Johnny stopped talking for a minute and looked at his surroundings. He had managed to turn himself around and now sat beside Sarah, who was lying down on her back in a pile of rubble. The path he had taken when he found the child was now completely

blocked. He turned again to look at Sarah.

Ignoring his own pain, he turned his attention to the child. "Let's take a look at you. Can you tell me where you hurt?"

A single tear rolled down her cheek, leaving a damp path in the dirt that clung to her face. "My leg hurts. It hurts to breathe a little. I'm so cold."

Johnny pulled off his turnout coat, grimacing as he held his ribs protectively. He was out of breath by the time he got it off.

"Here ya go, Sweetheart," he said as he covered her with his coat. *Damn, she's shocky... that help better get here quick.* "How's that?"

Sarah nodded and closed her eyes. "Thanks, Johnny."

John's heart sank as he watched the child. *An IV would keep her going... maybe I can find a way out of here...* His breathing quickened as he tried to move. A sharp pain in his ribs caused him to stop his efforts. He leaned back against the slab, cradling his side. The movement also awoke the throbbing in his leg. He shook his head. *Dammit!*

"Johnny?" Sarah's voice brought Johnny's attention back to her.

"Yes, Sweetheart. You okay?"

"Johnny, can you hold me? I can't get warm."

I shouldn't move her, but she's cold, and so am I. Ignoring the throbbing of his chest and leg, Johnny cradled her in his arms. He wrapped his turnout coat over her. "How's that?"

"Good." She nestled against Johnny's chest. He could feel her struggling to breathe.

"Sarah? Where do you go to school?" *Just keep her talking...*

"Pinegrove."

"Pinegrove? What grade?"

"First. Look, my tooth is loose. See?" She opened her mouth wiggled her front tooth.

"Well, look at that, you're right." Johnny smiled down at the child. "Do you like school?"

"Yes. Want me to sing a song for you that I learned?"

"I'd like that very much."

"It's a song about angels. Just like the ones that are coming to help us."

Oh, God, just let them get here soon...

The little girl cradled in John's arms began to sing softly.

"There was one,
there were two,
there were three,
little angels.

There were four,
there were five,
there were six,
little angels.

There were seven,
there were eight,
there were nine,
little angels.

Ten little angels in the band."

Click [HERE](#) to hear the song.

Johnny closed his eyes and listened to the child's sweet voice. He could almost picture her all cleaned up and smiling, singing for her mother and the new baby.

She stopped singing and got very quite and still, causing Johnny to open his eyes. *Shit! Shit! Shit! She's going out on me, Dammit!*

"That was beautiful, Sarah," he said, causing her to open her eyes again. She nodded, "I'm tired." Her eyes drifted shut once again.

Johnny shivered. *I'm tired and cold too, honey.* He tightened his grip on his precious bundle. He could feel her breathing become ragged and labored. *I can't help her. I can't even help myself.* He felt tears stinging his eyes as he watched her life slip away. *What's taking them so long?* He closed his eyes, unable to fight his own weariness any longer.

John awoke to the sound of the K-12. *They found us.*

"Sarah, Sarah, wake up," John urged the child, shaking her gently. When Sarah failed to respond, John felt a knot form in the pit of his stomach. "Sarah," he spoke more urgently. He felt for a carotid that he knew wouldn't be there. "Oh, God, no..."

"Johnny?"

Johnny looked up upon hearing his name. Roy came toward him. He reached for the child Johnny still held in his arms. He saw Chet and Marco standing just behind Roy.

Johnny shook his head. "No..."

"Johnny, let me take a look."

Johnny shook his head again and pulled away, holding the child tighter.

"Johnny?" Roy froze when his partner glared at him.

"You're too late, Roy." Johnny looked at the child who appeared to be sleeping in his arms. "You're just too god dammed late." His voice cracked.

Roy looked at Chet and Marco. He suddenly felt sick. *Johnny's been down here for over an hour... watching her die...*

"Johnny, we need to get out of here."

Go with them, Johnny.

Johnny shook his head and closed his eyes, cuddling the child a little closer. *Too late...*

Go with them, Johnny.

Roy saw Johnny relax, so he bent and took the child, handing her lifeless body over to Chet. He then stooped down to get a closer look at his partner. Johnny's face was pale and drawn, but it was the empty look in his eyes that caused Roy's heart to skip a beat.

Johnny watched Chet walk away. He could see Sarah's feet dangling over the side of his arm as he carried her. He turned his head away. "Too god dammed late," he whispered, losing the battle to stay conscious.

When he awoke, the first thing he was aware of was pain. He moaned.

"He's coming to," came the voice of Dr. Early.

"Johnny?" Dr. Brackett's voice this time.

"Mmmm," Johnny moaned again as he struggled to open his eyes.

"BP's 100 over 65," Roy reported. "Pulse 110."

The light overhead was blinding him, but he managed to open his eyes. *Everything hurts. Oh no...* He closed his eyes when recent memories came flooding back. *Sarah...*

"Stay with us, Johnny," Dr. Brackett urged. "I need you to tell me where you're hurting."

Johnny opened his eyes again and caught sight of Roy. "You were too late," he said, his eyes burning with unspent tears.

Brackett looked at Roy. "What's he talking about?"

Roy looked down, unsure if he could trust his voice. *If only we'd gotten there... just a few minutes sooner...* He looked at Brackett and shook his head, deciding now was not the time to discuss what had happened. Kel got the message and turned his attention back to John.

"Johnny?"

Johnny groaned again and took a breath, which caused him to wince. "My leg hurts the most... my ribs, my head. Tired."

"Okay, Johnny. X-ray is here and we're going to get some pictures and see what's going on. We'll see you in a few minutes. Hang in there." Brackett patted the man on the shoulder. *Something's not right...*

He followed Dr. Early into the hall, with Roy a step behind. "Roy, let's go to my office."

Dr. Brackett leaned against his desk and put his hands in his coat pockets. "Okay, Roy, what was he talking about? What happened?"

Roy walked to the sofa and sat down, looking as if the weight of the world was on his shoulders. Kel studied the paramedic with concern. *This isn't good...*

Roy began telling what happened back at the apartment complex. When he got to the part where he'd last seen his partner healthy, he paused and looked down. "Johnny went to search for the child. I shouldn't have let him go alone. He should've had back-up." He looked at Brackett and then looked down again. "The place was too unstable. I knew Squad 36 was right outside to take care of the woman, so Chet and I were going to turn right around and help him search for the girl, but there was another cave in, and we couldn't get back to him." Roy stopped talking.

Kel pulled a chair beside the sofa and sat, facing the distraught man. "Go ahead," he urged.

"It took us over an hour to find him. He was holding the little girl." He shook his head. "She died right in his arms. He..."

"He what, Roy?"

"He accused me of being too late, taking too long to help him. And he was right."

Brackett frowned. *Now I've got two paramedics to worry about.* "Roy, you can't second guess decisions you made on the scene. 'What if's' won't do anyone any good in this situation. You did what had to be done under the circumstances."

Roy looked at the doctor. "Some part of me understands that... but..."

Before he could continue, Dixie opened the door. "X-ray's done, they need you back in four."

Kel stood and faced Roy. "Let's go see what we've got."

Roy stood back out of the way as Dr. Brackett and Dr. Early studied John's x-rays. Johnny was awake, but had his head turned away from him. *I never should have let him search alone... I let him down... I let that little girl down...*

Kel approached the exam table. "Well, Johnny, looks like that leg is going to need traction. You also have two cracked ribs and a concussion. We're going to send you upstairs to get that leg set soon."

John looked at the doctor, indicating that he'd heard him, but he didn't say a word. *Why can't they just put me out of my misery?*

Dr. Kent Donaldson rounded the corner on the orthopedics floor on his way to check on Johnny. His shift in the ER was about to start, but he wanted to see if his friend had improved since they'd brought him in three days ago. He saw Chet about to enter the room with a guitar in his hand. "Hey, Chet," he called out. "What have you got there?"

"Hey, Doc," Chet answered. "Oh, this used to be John's guitar. He gave it to me a while back, and I just thought maybe it'd give him something to do while he was laid up."

"Oh, good thinking, Chet. Say, you mind if I go in with you?"

"Not at all. The last time I visited him he didn't say two words. At least if you're in there too I'll have someone to talk to."

"Yes, he has been on the quiet side lately."

"Too quiet if you ask me. Well, maybe this'll cheer him up." Chet held up the guitar.

"Let's give it a try," Kent said, motioning for Chet to lead the way to John's room.

John heard the door open to his room but he didn't look up. He didn't care who it was or why they were there. He just stared at the television. Seeing, but not watching. The nurse had turned it on an hour earlier, but he didn't care. Several untouched magazines lay by his bedside. A barely touched breakfast tray was still on the rolling table, which had been pushed away from the bed.

Kent and Chet looked at their friend. He looked pale and tired. Dark circles were under his eyes. He still had an IV attached to his left arm, and his right leg was in traction. The hospital gown he wore covered his taped ribs.

"Hey, Johnny! How you doin'?" Chet asked.

"Okay," John answered.

Kent picked up the chart that hung on the end of the bed and looked it over. "I see you haven't lost that IV yet, buddy."

John shrugged.

"John, I brought you something to help the time go by in here." Chet held up the guitar. "I never really got the hang of it. I want you to have it."

John smiled. "Thanks, Chet, really, but I don't think I'm up to fooling with that right now. Why don't you just keep it."

Kent took the guitar from Chet. "What are you talking about, Johnny? You'd pass up an opportunity for live entertainment? Right in your hospital room?" He played a chord on the guitar. He saw John roll his eyes, so he played another chord. "I bet you didn't know this, but I'm going to let you both in on a little secret."

Chet and John exchanged looks, Chet grinning from ear to ear. John just shook his head.

Kent began playing the guitar with expertise. When he finished, Chet applauded. "Wow, Doc, I'm impressed! Maybe you can give Johnny here some lessons!"

Kent smiled, "Thanks, Chet. I think what Johnny needs now is rest." He placed the guitar in the chair next to the bed. "I have to get downstairs before Brackett has my head! I'll check on you later, Johnny. Try to drink more so you can lose that IV, okay?"

"Sure, Doc," Johnny replied, rolling his eyes.

"I'll walk down with you," Chet said to Kent. Then he turned to John. "I'll see you in a couple days, Pal. Hang in there."

"Okay. Thanks, Chet," Johnny replied politely.

Outside John's room, Chet and Kent stopped and exchanged looks. "He looks bad," Chet remarked.

Kent frowned. "He's not eating, not sleeping well..." Kent shook his head. "Bringing that guitar was a good idea, Chet. I'm going to check in on him every chance I get."

Chet nodded. "I have a feeling I'm the *last* person he wants visiting."

Kent looked up with the unspoken question on his face.

He's still blaming me and Roy for not getting to him sooner. "Never mind, I don't know why I said that. He's just going through a tough time right now." Before Kent could press him, Chet continued. "Look, I have to run. If Johnny needs anything, you know you can call me, right?"

"Sure, Chet. Talk to you later," Kent said.

John stared at the guitar. *Why did Chet have to bring that here?* He closed his eyes. His mind drifted. He could hear another guitar playing, the sweet voice of a woman singing him a love song. He could see her face, her smile, her dark eyes. He could feel his lips upon hers, the touch of her hands, the smell of her silky hair... He opened his eyes, staring once again at the guitar. Another song, another voice filled his thoughts. He could hear Sarah singing the angel song to him.

Amber Leumas straightened her white skirt as she got off the elevator. She'd missed four days of work, thanks to a flu bug that kept her flat on her back. She was still feeling a little tired but couldn't afford to miss another day. She approached the desk and greeted her coworkers.

"Hey, Amber! Good to see you back. How are you feeling?" Jan asked.

"Much better, thanks," Amber answered as she began looking over patient assignments. It was still thirty minutes before she was officially on duty. She wanted plenty of time to be prepared before things got hectic. She was pleased to see that it looked like it would be a calm day... not too many patients.

"Amber, did you know John Gage is here?" Jan asked.

Amber looked around, not sure what Jan meant. "As a patient?" she asked when she didn't see him.

"Yes, up on the third floor. His leg is in traction."

"Oh, poor Johnny! No, I didn't know. How long has he been here?"

"About three days, I think."

Amber looked at her watch. "Jan, I have about a half hour before I'm on duty. I'm going to run up and see him real quick. I haven't even told him about the wedding yet."

Jan smiled, "Okay."

Amber knocked on the door to John's room, and then pushed it open gently. "Hey there, good looking!" she teased.

"Well, hey yourself, Amber," John answered.

"I had no idea you'd been hurt, Johnny. How are you?" she asked with concern.

"I'll be okay," John replied.

Amber reached over and straightened the covers. "Can I get you anything, Johnny? Need an extra pillow?" she laughed.

Johnny smiled and blinked slowly. "No, thanks. I'm fine."

"Well I'm sure you'll keep the nurses here busy." *He looks terrible. So... sad.* "I'm sorry I didn't come to see you sooner. I've been out for nearly a week with the flu. I had no idea you'd been injured."

"Oh, it's okay."

Wonder if now's a good time to tell him...

"Johnny," she began, "I have some good news!"

John raised his eyebrows.

Amber smiled. "George and I are getting married. We set the date for next month. I hope you'll be able to come."

John forced a smile. "That's great, Amber. Congratulations."

Should I tell him about Kalani? I think they really need to see each other...

"Johnny," she began, sitting beside him on the bed, "Kalani's coming back. I spoke to her last night. She'll be here Wednesday."

John looked at Amber, uncertain of what to say. "Oh?" he finally settled on.

"She's going to be my maid of honor. She's going to live with me again until after the wedding. Then she's going to find a new roommate so she can keep the apartment. She said she's going back to school to finish her degree this fall."

Johnny nodded. "That's great. I was hoping she'd do that."

"Yeah, me too. Well, John, I have to get to work before they come hunt me down. Don't give the nurses here too hard a time, okay?"

Johnny gave her a half smile with a slight nod and waved her off. She rose and left his room. *I don't like this one little bit... He's way too quiet.* Looking down the hall, she saw Nurse Beauchet.

"Mrs. Beauchet," Amber called, waving the stern nurse down. "May I speak with you for just a moment?"

"Make it snappy, Missy, I have a schedule to keep," she piped.

Amber smiled politely. "Yes, ma'am. I just wanted to know how John Gage was doing. Is he giving you a hard time?"

"Giving me a hard time? Not at all! He's been a model patient. Wish they were all like him," she mused.

Amber looked concerned. "You mean, he's not complaining about anything? Or calling for help every five minutes?" *Something's definitely not right here...*

"Oh no, nothing like that. He's been very quiet and polite. Like I said, the model patient. If he would only start eating and drinking more, we could pull his IV."

"Hmmm, well I'm worried about him. Keep a close eye on him for me, will you?"

Nurse Beauchet frowned. "He'll get the same amount of attention as all the other patients on this floor. Aren't you supposed to be somewhere?"

Amber sighed, "Yes, ma'am. I'll come back on my lunch break."

Johnny stirred the mashed potatoes on his plate for the umpteenth time. *Wednesday... She doesn't want anything more to do with you, Gage. All you manage to do is hurt people. You don't deserve someone like her...* He looked up at the hospital walls which seemed to be closing in on him. *I gotta get out of here...* He looked at his leg hanging from the traction device and sighed. *God, this is as bad as being locked up in a cage...*

There was a soft knock on the door. John look up as Roy entered the room. *I'm not ready for this...* He turned his head away from Roy.

"Johnny, how ya doing?" Roy asked quietly. *Chet was right, he looks like shit.*

John scratched his head. "I've been better, I guess."

"Joanne and the kids are here. They wanted to see for themselves that you were all right. Up for a short visit?"

"Sure," he lied.

"Okay, well they're waiting right outside. I'll go tell them. We'll make it short," Roy promised.

Johnny sighed. *Great, just what I need.*

The DeSoto family filed into the small hospital room. Ten-year-old Chris was first, followed by his seven-year-old sister, Jennifer.

"Hey, Guys," Johnny made an attempt at a smile for the children.

"Hi, Uncle Johnny," Chris said, echoed by his sister and mother. "How's your leg?"

"Oh, it's getting better," John answered.

"Does it hurt?" Jennifer asked, eyeing the contraption that held the leg suspended above the bed.

"Not anymore, Sweetheart."

"How long are you going to have to stay in?" Chris asked, obviously concerned. "Dad's always in a bad mood when he has to work with someone else."

Johnny couldn't help but smile. *He must be working with Brice this week.* "Oh, I'm not sure. They'll have to keep taking x-rays, and when my leg has healed enough I'll be able to get out and move around with crutches."

"I guess it'll be a while before you can go back to work, huh?" Chris asked.

"Yeah. About six weeks, I guess."

Chris looked from John to his parents. "Are you going to have to work with that Brice guy the whole time?" he asked.

Roy and Joanne both laughed. Roy was pleased to hear Johnny laugh as well.

"Uncle Johnny!" Jennifer suddenly exclaimed. "Look, my tooth is loose. See?" She opened her mouth wiggled her front tooth.

Look, my tooth is loose. See? Sarah's voice... Johnny looked at Jennifer, his breathing becoming rapid as the memory of his last rescue suddenly overwhelmed him.

Roy noticed the color drain from Johnny's face. Joanne noticed it too. "Kids, tell Uncle Johnny goodbye. He needs to get some rest." She ushered them out so fast they didn't realize that Johnny never returned their goodbyes.

"Johnny, are you okay?" Roy asked. Before waiting for an answer he pressed the nurse's call button.

"Just leave, Roy. I can't handle this right now." Johnny said as he tried to control his breathing. *Oh, God, I'm dizzy...* He tried to sit up.

"You're hyperventilating. Slow down your breathing," Roy said as he gently pushed his shoulder down on

the bed. "Lay back."

"Just leave me alone, Roy. I don't want you in here."

The words hung in the air. Roy felt like he'd been slapped in the face. The door opened and Nurse Beauchet entered. Seeing her patient in obvious distress, she looked at Roy.

"What happened?" she asked tersely.

"I--I'm not sure," Roy stated. "He got upset suddenly and started hyperventilating."

"Okay," the nurse answered. "I'll handle this. You may leave."

Roy took one last look at his partner before turning to leave. He felt numb. He left John's room and he gazed at his family, waiting patiently at the end of the hall. When he reached them, he took Joanne's hand. "He's okay, but I'd like to stay awhile. Take the kids home. I'll call you when I'm ready."

Joanne nodded, noticing the look of anguish in his eyes. "Come on, kids." She ushered the children toward the elevator.

Satisfied that John's breathing was under control, Nurse Beauchet began to get a set of vitals on her patient. She eyed his untouched lunch tray.

John felt the bp cuff inflate. His head was swimming. *What the hell did I just do? I have no right to place any blame on Roy.*

"I--I need to see Roy again," he pleaded to the nurse, his breathing increasing again.

"I don't think that's a good idea. I am going to see if I can get you something to help you relax."

"You don't understand. I need to see my partner," Johnny pleaded. He blinked to clear the stars invading his line of vision. He tried to sit up.

"Mr. Gage, please, try to relax. Your bp is elevated, you need to calm down." She pressed the call button in the room for assistance. When the student nurse entered, she told her to page Dr. Brackett.

Johnny was still making a feeble effort to rise when Dr. Brackett entered. He glanced at Johnny and picked up the chart, looking at it carefully.

"Bp is 170 over 90, pulse 110. He's been agitated for about fifteen minutes. Ever since his partner left." Nurse Beauchet reported.

Dr. Brackett frowned. "Johnny?"

"Doc, I need to talk to Roy again. I made a mistake."

I think I know what this is about. "Okay, Johnny. Roy's still here. I'm going to give you something to help you relax and I'll send him back in, okay?"

Johnny nodded, relief evident on his face. He rubbed his weary eyes, expecting to find tears, but his hand

came away dry. *I can't fall apart in front of Brackett.*

The nurse left, leaving Dr. Brackett alone with Johnny. Brackett put a mild sedative in Johnny's IV. "Johnny, is there anything you want to talk about?"

"I just don't understand it, Doc." Johnny stated flatly. "I've been on enough rescues gone bad, why was this one so different?"

"You tell me," Brackett said, folding his arms across his chest.

"Maybe because I know, deep down inside, that that little girl would have lived if help would have gotten there sooner." He shook his head. "Doc, she was alive and conscious almost the entire time we were trapped. She talked to me. She sang to me." *She showed me her loose tooth... she was so proud of that.* He closed his eyes.

"At least you were with her, Johnny. She didn't die alone."

John looked up at the doctor and shook his head. "I don't know if I can do this anymore. I'm tired. I'm tired of death staring me in the face everytime I turn around."

Brackett nodded understandingly. He'd seen his share of death as well. "I know where you're coming from, Johnny. Right now I want you to concentrate on getting well. I can tell by the looks of that food tray that you still aren't eating. I'd like to set up a consultation with Dr. Peters."

"You think I need a shrink?" Johnny asked, a trace of anger in his voice.

"I think you have a lot on your mind, and that you need to work through some issues you're dealing with. Dr. Peters can help you with that."

For a moment, neither man spoke. Johnny felt his eyes growing heavy, the stress and the sedative taking their toll. "Doc, could you tell Roy I need to see him?"

Brackett nodded, then turned and left the room. *Looks like he's taking a step in the right direction.*

Over the next several days, John continued stepping in the right direction. He felt so much better after talking things through with Roy. Dr. Peters was helping him put things into perspective, and he definitely felt his burden lifting. Physically, he was also improving. After two more days in traction, he'd be able to go home. That in itself was enough to make him feel better.

John was playing a few chords his guitar. *Just like riding a bike... I guess you never forget how.* He looked up when the door to his room opened.

"Hey, John," Kent said as sat next to the bed. He had a brown paper bag with him that he placed on the floor.

"Hey, Kent. I thought you said you were off today."

"I am. I came here for that guitar lesson I promised you."

Johnny laughed. "Yeah, right. I almost forgot."

"Well, I didn't forget. In fact, I have a plan."

"A plan? What kind of plan?"

"A plan to help you get though to Kalani," Kent stated.

Johnny shook his head. "She doesn't want anything to do with me, man. She's been back in town for three days and won't even come to see me."

"I know, that's where my plan comes in."

John's eyes narrowed. "Okay, I'm listening."

"You're going to serenade her."

Johnny was shaking his head.

"Just hear me out, Johnny. She loves music, right? She's a singer after all. What better way to melt her heart than to serenade her with a love song, straight from your heart."

"No way, man. I could never do that."

"Why not?"

"Because *she's* a singer. *I'm* a fireman, remember? I don't sing," he laughed. "As a matter of fact, the last time I tried to sing I got a comedy award!" He shook his head. "You can forget *that* plan. There is NO WAY I'm gonna sing."

"Come on, Johnny. Just give it a try." Kent picked up the paper bag. Reaching inside, he pulled out a tape recorder. "Just listen to this tape a few times. This is the perfect song. Sure to melt any girl's heart."

John shook his head again. "You're crazy, man!"

"I'm tellin' ya, John, it'll work. Just try it."

"Kent, she won't even see me."

"We'll worry about that later. Just listen to the song a few times, and then I'll show you the chords. Okay?"

"Okay, whatever." Johnny help the guitar out. "Can you set this over there?" he asked.

Kent did as Johnny asked. "Listen, I have a lot to do this morning, so I can't stay. I'll be back later on though, for your first lesson!"

Johnny shook his head. "Get out of here, you nut!"

Kent laughed. *At least he's got his sense of humor back!* "See you later!"

The next day, Kent and Roy were in John's room. They'd been there for over an hour.

"Johnny...." Kent said.

John was singing and strumming the guitar, oblivious to anything else around him.

"John!"

Still singing and strumming.

"JOHN!! STOP!" Kent grabbed the guitar and shook his head.

"What?" John asked indignately.

Kent, still shaking his head said, "It's not good, John."

Johnny frowned. "Well, it wasn't THAT bad, was it?"

Kent refused to answer. "We've got to come up with a different plan."

"Hmph. I TRIED to tell you that in the first place," John retorted. "It was you that kept insisting that I do this. And now you're giving up on me. Just like that."

It was difficult for Roy not to laugh. *I knew this would never work.* "Johnny... maybe... maybe if you just played something for her... without singing," Roy suggested.

"Well what good would that do?" Johnny asked. "She needs to hear from me how I feel about her."

"He's right, Roy," Kent agreed.

Roy thought for a minute. "I got it!" he announced. "She won't talk to you, right?"

"Right," John said with a sigh.

"So write to her," Roy stated.

"Huh?"

"Johnny, you're a good writer... write her a poem!"

"That's it!" Kent agreed. "And you can make a recording of yourself playing that song. *Without* the singing. She can listen to it and read the poem."

"She'll be running in here faster than you can blink," Roy smiled.

"Yeah! You know, that might just work!"

"I'm willing to bet on it, Junior," Roy agreed.

"Okay... okay. Hey! Get me a pen, and some paper, will ya?"

Kent handed Johnny a couple sheets of paper. "He's gonna need more than that," Roy laughed. "He

changes his mind... a lot!"

Kent and Roy got Johnny his paper and pen and left him alone to work.

"Kalani, can you go to the Bridal shop with me this afternoon?" Amber asked. "I need to have one more fitting for my gown, and we still need to find something for you!"

"I should be able to. I have to go register for classes this morning, but I think I'll be back by lunch time," Kalani answered.

"Okay, great! I'm going to run my errands this morning, and I'll meet you back here around noon, okay?"

Kalani was on her way back home from the university. *Rampart's the next block over... Johnny...* Without thinking, she turned the corner and drove her little sports car into the parking lot at Rampart. She parked the car and looked at the large facility. An ambulance and a squad whizzed by, heading to the emergency entrance. *Oh Johnny... I'm sorry I didn't come to see you. I don't even know if you're still there or not.* She looked at her watch. 11:30. *No time now. Maybe I'll come back this afternoon...* Without ever getting out of the car, she headed back home.

She made good time going back to the apartment. She didn't see Amber's car in the parking lot. *She must be running late.* She approached her apartment and was surprised to find a box with her name on it in front of the door. *Wonder what this is...* She picked the box up and studied it. She fumbled for her keys, opened the door, and took the package inside.

Sitting on the sofa, she opened the box. Inside were two envelopes. A lumpy one said "Open this first." She found a cassette tape inside with a note.

Kalani,

Since you won't talk to me, I didn't know what else to do. Please listen to the tape I made for you, and while you're listening, read the words from my heart in the next envelope.

John

Kalani couldn't help herself. She started crying. Again. She brought the cassette and the second envelope into her bedroom. She put it in the tape player and began listening. She smiled. Picking up the second envelope, she opened it, her hands trembling. Wiping the tears from her eyes, she read:

My Dear Kalani,

*Lying next to you
Made me feel so complete
Now I'm all alone
Why does my heart still beat?*

*I just couldn't believe
When you said you loved me
I wanted to tell you I felt the same
But I told you I needed to be free.*

*I feel like such a fool
Sitting here alone in the dark
Knowing that I lost you
With my one remark*

*I should have listened to you
Should have given us one more try
Darling I've never been a bigger fool
Than the day we said goodbye*

*Running wild and running free
Like the horses in my mind
Hell all I'm doing is running scared
Chasing my tail and running blind*

*Now I know just what I've lost
And just what I must do
Here with my hand say what my heart feels
Baby, I miss you.*

*Please call me,
John*

Kalani began to cry again. The song ended and she carefully folded the paper in her hands. She didn't hear Amber walk in.

"Kalani?" Amber asked in concern. "What is it?"

"It's from Johnny. He wants me to call him."

"Are you going to? He's really missed you."

"I want to, but I just don't know. Amber... he's the only man I've ever been with. I loved him so much. I *still* love him. But I NEVER want to be hurt like that again."

"He's hurting too, Kalani. You should have seen him just a few days ago. Between getting hurt at work and that terrible ordeal he went through, and missing you, he's was really in bad shape."

Kalani shook her head. "I did a lot of thinking when I went home. I'm still really young. Too young to get serious with someone. And I want to finish my degree before getting that involved again."

"That sounds like something your parents would say! Did they also say a fireman wasn't good enough for their little girl?" Amber could tell by the look on Kalani's face that her words struck a nerve. "Kalani, you should at least go and see him. He's being released sometime tomorrow."

Oh, God, how I long to see him... Kalani shook her head. "I can't."

"Well, Junior, looks like you're all settled in," Roy said after bringing John home.

"Yeah... thanks, Pally," he paused, "for everything."

"Johnny, I have something here for you." Roy pulled an envelope from his pocket. "Amber gave it to me when we were still at the hospital. She said I should give it to you after you got home."

He handed the envelope to Johnny, who took it hesitantly. He looked up at Roy and gave him a crooked, half-hearted grin. "It's from Kalani," he said quietly.

Roy nodded.

"I'll, uh, read it later," he said, his tone somber. "I have a feeling our plan didn't work."

"Are you gonna be okay?" Roy asked.

"Yeah, you go on. I'm fine."

Roy sighed. *I hate leaving him, but I know he needs to be alone.* "Call me if you need anything." *Or if you need to talk...*

Johnny smiled and waved, the envelope still in his hand. When Roy left, he opened it slowly and read the note.

Roy closed the door to his friend's apartment and stood outside for a few minutes. *Why was I the one that had to give him that note.* He jumped slightly when he heard a crashing noise coming from inside. He turned and knocked on the door.

"Johnny? Are you all right?"

No answer.

Roy took the spare key from his pocket and opened the door. He let himself in.

"Johnny?"

"I'm okay, Roy. You can go."

Johnny was sitting in the same chair where Roy had left him earlier. The crashing noise, Roy observed, was the guitar, which now lay smashed nearby. Roy turned and left. *When your ready, Junior... we'll come up with a new plan...*

THE END

Author's Note: Parts of Johnny's poem were written by Enola Jones! Thanks En!! I would like to thank my numerous beta readers, who stuck with me throughout the duration of this "monster story!" They include Lisa, Pat, Theresa, Kel, Carol, Mel, Carla, and Paula. I hope I didn't forget anybody! I'd like to thank the chatters in #station51 and #rampart for allowing me to bounce ideas and helping me when I was stuck!! This was my first attempt at an Emergency! story, and I couldn't have done it without the help of everyone

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