

ABBY

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Chapter 34 - The Crane

Ten days later Wendy had a cold from too much air conditioning in that crane's cab. I went as the substitute operator. My wives kissed me as I went out the door. They had packed sub-sandwiches, cold sodas, and an extra diaper in my shoulder bag and a canvas bag.

Jodi was at the punch-in clock when I arrived at the work site. He told me I could take a big knife with me up to that crane cab just in case that syndicate returned. He reported there were enough inspectors and others with an excuse for climbing up there who might want to attack me. They could corner me on the ground. Either way they could threaten me, or worse.

I had rarely been in fights at school, and never excelled at gym class. I also had that big 44 revolver in my woman's shoulder bag. I didn't know what to say to his offer. I took a glance all around and spoke in a low voice. "Take a look." I opened my shoulder bag, and held the two glossy disposable diapers aside.

His eyes went wide. Then he smiled. Not another word passed between us.

Sam was fair with me and Wendy. He coached us when that was called for, or when we asked. He had called Wendy to lock everything in place and to come down whenever a thunderstorm was visibly heading our way. The crane could act like a weathervane, so always park the long arm away from the expected direction of the wind.

Another work site had a crane damaged by a thunderstorm. The whole rig came loose on its swivel and swung around violently. It didn't fall, but was out of action for a few days for repairs which made everybody angry.

I learned to rest in the chair up there when there was nothing for the crane to do. With those rests I could stay alert for many hours.

I learned starting all calls at work with the recipient's name. The system had a delay in its circuits switching the call to the recipient so all we heard was the caller's name. "Abby from Frank" was received in my ear as a crackle followed by "Frank". I

asked and was told that was how everybody experienced the work site style of quick messages. "Crackle Frank crane available?" meant 'to Abby from Frank, is the crane available' was a typical call for me.

A little after lunch my ear piece sounded off loudly. "Crackle emergency emergency. Concrete truck railroad side."

I stood up to see the railroad track side of the construction project. The extra rear axle of a ready mix concrete truck was over the edge of a temporary retaining wall. The whole truck was tilted backwards in a strange way. The ground must have given way under its back tires. That rear axle was on a hinged frame extension for pouring out the wet concrete. "Abby to Sam; crane coming; tell me what to do." I swung the crane arm around towards that truck, ran the pulley out to the far end, and lowered the hook.

Sam's voice came through. "Crackle Abby bring the hook down, but stay off the truck. If it goes over the side it's weight could topple the crane killing you. Wait."

"Abby to Sam. Need instructions."

Men flocked to that truck. They rigged two cables from heavy trucks to the front of the mixer. That was just a stop gap. If that mixer went over it could drag them through the mud and over the side. The drivers' doors on those trucks remained open. Those drivers could leap out. A snapped cable could kill a man. I heard it was too dangerous for the men down there to get to that axle over the edge. It certainly looked that way from way up in the crane's cab. I closed my eyes for warding off dizziness from watching down to that concrete truck.

"Sam from Abby. Could they drop one end of a cable over the side and the crane bring the free end back up? Leave lots of slack so if it goes that crane doesn't go with it. That way they could get a cable under that axle." That's what we did with lots of radio-phone chatter back and forth. When the cable was rigged under that extension behind the tires its free ends were connected to two more trucks. As those trucks moved out they drew that cable tight bringing the axle up. With all five trucks applying power the fully loaded mixer moved away from the dangerous wall. The crane never did any heavy lifting and was never tied to that heavy truck. The crane did assist bringing extra concrete chutes for moving the wet concrete over the side as was the original need.

I worked thirteen hours that day which meant five hours of overtime on somebody's clock. Just not mine. Wendy and I were uncompensated for several reasons starting with we didn't need it, and we were not licensed crane operators.

That evening I was tired. I took my time for my own safety on those two hundred feet of steps from the crane-cab to the ground.

Sam was waiting for me as were several of his crew chiefs and even more of the guys. "Abby, this is Rick."

He shook my hand. "Hello, Abby."

"Uh, pardon me sir, but I'm terrible on faces and names."

"That's OK."

Someone whispered. "He owns the company now. The other two owners fled."

Rick held a sheet of paper in his hand. "This is a letter of appreciation from the insurance company. Sam called in with what a good idea you had today and how you handled that crane in a dangerous place." He held that paper where he was reading it again. "This includes a one thousand dollar scholarship fund for you anytime you want to take courses."

Everybody applauded. These were the guys on the ground who had been working with me. My eyes watered. I wanted a hug, but they didn't do that. I barely squeaked out a thank you.

He handed me the letter and turned to everyone else. "We have a new problem. The State EEOC sent us a demand to document our equal opportunity employment. Over half of our subcontractor crews are Hispanic. They want numbers on hiring people with disabilities."

The crew chiefs cursed almost as a rough masculine chorus.

I spoke too fast without thinking. "Uh, sir, I have a disability, and so does Wendy."

Everyone's eyes snapped around to me including Rick whose attention went up and down my body. "What?" Which expressed his strong doubts. "You look healthy to me even when wearing women's clothing. Ridiculous."

My diaper was soaked. "Could we talk privately?"

He waved his hand for me to follow him. We went to one of the trailers kept at the site. He sat behind a work table piled with construction plans. "Have a seat."

My diaper was too soaked for risking sitting down. "Sir, the reason the Mansion House is building this project is over sixty of us have to wear diapers. We were all victimized and damaged. That works for being up there in the sky all day."

"You do?" His tone said that he clearly doubted any adult would ever do any such thing.

“Yes sir, I do. And there is something else I’ve been hiding from everyone. Away from here I wear women’s skirts full time to conceal the embarrassing bulge.”

Sam had come in without my knowing it. “You fooled me. You’ve been good at running that crane.”

Rick scowled. “Mmmm. Let’s see, what could we claim as a reasonable accommodation? You’re already out of sight up there, so that’s not good enough. The operators don’t come down during the day, so that’s not good enough either. OK. You’re on. Warn the crew chiefs when you’re going to go up or down that ladder as you’ll distract every guy around. They will all strain for anything they can ever see up your skirt. The distraction would cause inattention which could be a safety hazard.”

“Yes, sir, I can do that.” So would Wendy.

The next day I wore a denim shirtdress the seamstresses had made for me. It was more appropriate clothing for a construction work site.

Late that morning my earpiece crackled. “Abby. An inspector is coming up.”

“Abby to site. Yes, sir.” I made sure my skirt was down between my knees. With that thick cloth diaper in plastic pants between my thighs I couldn’t bring my knees together like a woman.

A man with a scarred, rough, and mean looking appearance climbed all the way up and opened the door into the cab. “This crane number 14?”

“I have no idea. If they told me I forgot. This is the only crane I operate, so why should I know? Site from Abby. Crane is on pause with an inspector here.”

“Don’t tell them things like that, kid. You hear.”

“Why not? I can’t watch below and answer questions at the same time. Not safely that is.” I remained seated. “We’ve been so busy today I never had the time to set up my computer.”

His brows furrowed as he raised a clip board with a form on it. He was checking little boxes on it as his eyes darted around. His abruptness and nervousness affected me. Why was he wearing thin cotton gloves?

He slipped a sheet of paper out from the stack on the clip board and handed it to me. “Those are your instructions for watching for the cops.” His eyes went to the bottom of my skirt.

My stomach clenched so badly I almost threw up. This was the crime syndicate.

His hand went into a pocket and brought something out. With a flick it became a switch blade with a scary six inch double edged blade. "You follow."

I was watching that knife. "How?"

"We'll provide a handheld phone. Plug it in to an outlet." His eyes darted around seeing there was at least one household electrical outlet. "It will play softly whatever music you want. We'll call you on it, and you call us. Understand?" We waved that switchblade around in a menacing way.

All I wanted was for him to leave. I'd figure something out later. "Yes, sir."

He waved that scary thing closer. "You a girl?"

"No sir. I wear dresses for my own reasons."

He swore a long string of bad swear words ending with a title that was pejorative for him. "Cross dresser."

"Yes, sir. When do we start?"

"When we say so little squaw. You keep your mouth shut and do as you're told."

"Yes, sir."

"Good." He folded that knife blade back into its handle and slid it into the right front pocket of his jeans. He watched out the windows for a moment before opening the door. As he turned I saw an edge of what might have been a bullet proof vest under his shirt. He stood in that opened door as he watched out into the horizon.

I reached deep into my shoulder bag at the side of the operator's chair for my revolver. "No, I'm not doing it." I leveled the revolver.

"What?" He screeched as his hand had that switchblade out and flicked it open before he had fully turned in my direction. I didn't have time to aim. I merely pointed that gun at his legs and fired at a distance of three or four feet.

That boom inside the small space made my ears ring.

His injured leg collapsed under him as he fell out the door. Out there he dropped down the ladder.

"Abby to Sam. Emergency; emergency. Man fell down the crane ladder."

Several voices came through my ear piece all at once with a stop work order. Sam's voice of authority dominated. "Abby; what happened?"

“He threatened me to make me report on the police. He had a big switchblade. I said no and hit him in self defense. He stumbled down the ladder.”

A voice I didn't recognize reported what happened next. “He hit the first landing in an awkward way. Part of him went under the safety rail. He rolled under it and over the side all the way to the ground. He must be dead.” That second fall was a hundred feet to hard concrete. I heard later a typical impact speed was 125 miles an hour.

“Sam to Abby. Lock the crane and come down. Come down now before you are too nervous to climb down safely.”

“Yes, sir.” Before I came down I centered the crane arm in an easterly direction for protection from the prevailing wind. I brought the hook all the way up, and the winch trolley into the base of the crane arm. I packed my stuff into my bags and came down. I got the jitters part way down and stopped at one of the landings. I held tightly onto the ladder until my arm and leg muscles stopped having spasms.

The police were there before I reached the ground. They had his broken switchblade and clip board. I handed them that sheet of instructions.

Sam and the others' faces were a mixture of things. The impression that predominated was they were proud of me for what I had done. I barely held in my tears from their praise.

The police had that dead man's cell phone which had been smashed in the fall. They had the memory chip out, installed it in another phone, and were reporting the names and phone numbers to headquarters.

Back at the Mansion the other residents who had been at the site that day told the whole story with great praise.

Tara led a post traumatic stress syndrome session for everyone using my feelings as the example. No matter how deserving that man might have been, killing him affected me too. I would never have the opportunity of knowing him. Tara pointed out that just because I felt I would never want to ever meet him again wasn't quite the same.

She was right.

They never did an autopsy on that mangled body. The blood from my bullet hole disappeared in the bloody mess. The shattered thigh bone was just another broken bone from that fall. Or, so they might have thought. They never said and I never asked.

Wendy was up that crane more than I. One of the women volunteered to learn and be a backup relief. That crane was running two shifts which meant the work site

was running two shifts.

Our police had their own little huddle and support group. Everybody had some form of a group. My wives were a group among themselves, and they joined other groups. Tara reported the groups were the best thing going for everybody's healing. I was too busy to be in a self-help group.

Tara pointed out that the finance, plans, and other committees may have had their primary focuses, but they were groups too. Tara took me aside. "I decided to try training pants. Didn't work. I prefer the moist warmth of the diapers." One less mystery.

I was in a difficult meeting with the finance committee being angry with the plans committee. Ruthie the resident police woman came close and waited until somebody asked. "Yes?" The police thought it would be wise to expand the back of the building twenty feet. Rearrange space in the front for a receiving area for prospective new residents. They wanted us to be careful with the retaining wall on the railroad side. They suggested keeping it wide enough for heavy trucks to get past the main building for any more construction out back.

"More residents coming here?"

"That's what we hear from headquarters."

People became angry.

"Hold on. That is a fabulous compliment. Tone it down. Anybody need calming medications?"

One of the guys appeared so angry I thought he was going to explode. To his credit he held out his wrists. They cuffed him and took him in the back. He stayed back there on medications for a day and a half. Tara held his arm as she brought him out although he remained in handcuffs. She signaled for me. "He wants to apologize."

"No need. Crashes are quite common here. You know what we need?"

He couldn't bring himself to talk. He wagged his head for 'no'.

"Volunteer for the security committee. They don't seem to be watching us quite right. You have experienced one of the more dangerous episodes. I think you might have an edge for spotting trouble before it mushrooms out of control."

"Miss Abby, you don't know me."

"What have you been hiding?"

"I don't know. I just know that I do."

"Does that interest you at all?"

"Sure does."

"All of Tara's students are natal women. Go be a guy psychology student. Go ask."

He did, complete with staying in the handcuffs for at least a week. He changed dramatically in his attitudes. He kept up his shaving and appearances. He went to the beauty salon and the seamstresses. He became our guy student psychologist and our most dedicated cross dresser. He wanted his facial hair removed which was no problem. He became our model male to female trans-gender, and attracted other guys to his newly formed group.

They collectively did something for us. They studied our women's mannerisms. They came up with a coaching guide for that day coming when we had to appear outwardly credible to customers.

Late one afternoon I was enjoying being in my warm wet diaper instead of being changed as they pumped my breasts. The police runner found me. "Miss Abby. Wendy is on the phone. The work crew invited her to go drinking with them. She wants to know if that's OK."

I suppressed a few salty words that came first to my mind. "She can go; but no drinking. Better not show up here drunk, and if she did have any alcohol, don't tell anybody. Can you reliably relay that to her? I can't come to the phone for awhile." I felt an especially powerful let-down reflex in my breasts. I dribbled into my already wet diaper. Her kit bag for work in that crane did have fresh diapers and a breast pump.

"Yes, ma'am."

I thought. *Should all of our problems be so easy.* But I worried. I was waiting at the door when she came in.

"Aw, Miss Abby. I only had water. I was a sensation at a crappy smoke filled bar. Smelled of spilled beer. The guys were wonderful. They let everyone think I was a woman and guarded me as one of their own."

We let more of our crew go with them on Friday evenings.