

ABBY

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Chapter 49 - Post-Surgery

I remained in the twilight of the anesthesia and only vaguely aware of being in post-op recovery when a vocal commotion erupted somewhere. I tried rotating my head being afraid of throwing up. I didn't throw up, but my head wouldn't rotate. My eyes had trouble focusing, although I recognized Kittie sitting at my rolling bedside holding my hand. My index fingers were in splints after lengthening the second bone in those two fingers. My masculine index fingers had been shorter than my ring fingers. When my other fingers moved under her hand Kittie bounded up like a jack rabbit. She playfully touched the tip of my nose with a finger. There were tubes running through my nose. One tube went to my lungs for breathing past any bleeding or swelling in my throat, larynx, or windpipe. The other tube went to my stomach.

The Surgical and the Anesthesiology teams came to me even while I remained dopey and strapped down. The surgeons checked under the covers that the new hip bone extensions were up off the mattress. They didn't want those glue joints of hydroxyapatite cement at my hips strained for a few more days. That pad under me kept me up out of the natural hollow of a mattress with another pad under the inward curve of my lower back. The straps kept me from rolling onto my side. The primary Anesthesiologist held my available finger tips in girl to girl fashion. The Surgeons beamed at her side at their professional success in such a lengthy, unfamiliar, and experimental operation. "How are you?"

I tried nodding my head, but that didn't work. I squeezed her finger tips gently. My upper vision saw only a vague white from being blocked by bandages across my eyebrows.

Kittie came to my rescue taking the available fingers of one hand. "I think she means she is terrific and very thankful. Cindi, squeeze twice if that is right. Once for a 'no'."

My finger tips pressed twice against her fingers.

I didn't remember and couldn't feel the catheter, or the tube in my hand, or the incisions and skin staples over those new hip bones. I worried about the surgical scars showing when wearing the mottled blue bathing suit I had been fondly thinking about. I forgot what they had told me about a plastic surgeon could work wonders removing scar tissue because of my young adult age. I could wear that swim suit. A bikini wouldn't conceal enough of me down there anyway.

Kittie had them remove the restraining band over my forehead.

That commotion disrupted the hall again.

The sunlight outside a window had faded for the evening. I had been out longer than expected for all day and then some.

Kittie repeated what had been said out there. Ashley had a delegation in the family waiting area. *Ashley? Why her?* She had continued being a long standing student under Tara and Dr. Christina. Could they come in?

A nurse responded “no, not in here with the other patients right after surgery”. Kittie appeared distraught. I heard a strong masculine voice in the hall I recognized as *Tara!* Who must have stamped a foot while using strong salty language as they were soon wheeling me out into the family waiting area. Two bags were hung above me that came along with the bed and the tubes into me. The nurses rolled the monitoring unit attached to me along with the bed. Now I could see the big numbers on the monitoring screen of my pulse rate and blood pressure. I knew enough about hospital procedure to know I should not be seeing those as part of keeping me calm. But I remained so calm with all that medication I didn't care while feeling relieved my heart still worked. The bags were hung below for the tubes from a catheter and my stomach.

I couldn't see where my bed stopped rolling with those bandages blocking half of my sight. There had been unexpected developments during my surgery requiring more bandages and keeping me out and groggy much longer than expected. Those surgeons had insisted on all the quality they could muster, and had a video of the whole thing for their professional review. Kittie lifted my head up by my hair as she added an extra pillow under my head. We laughed about that later of her using my hair like a barbarian instead of sliding a hand under my head. She had simply been very careful not to painfully pull on any hair as might happen if she slid her hand under my sweat soaked head. With my head raised a little I could see an arc from side to side over my feet. I wiggled my toes which comforted me they still worked. They hadn't made any big mistakes by removing a foot or two along with everything else they did.

Ashley beamed at me along with a flash mob of leaders of the Mansion House plus representatives of outsiders from the restaurant, car and truck repairs, Shannon represented Cedar Valley Trucking, and immigrants for themselves, locomotive rebuilding, and their school. The slight, slender, and short, formerly starved and emaciated, Carmen held the hand of the little girl Linda.

Kittie interceded on my behalf. "As you might guess Cindi can't talk, but she can listen. She can squeeze my hand for yes and no for anything you want to say and ask."

Carmen squeezed through carrying Linda. Nobody saw them as they were so short until they were already close to me. Carmen lifted the little girl Linda who kissed my fingers of the hand with all the tubes. Carmen announced “amor”. The little girl translated. “Love.”

I wept.

Kittie asked. "Squeeze if that is a thank you?"

I pressed her fingers twice again.

A nurse tried pulling Carmen and Linda away.

I squeezed Kittie's fingers rapidly.

She look at me quizzically before rising to the occasion. "Does that mean let Carmen and Linda stay?"

I squeezed Kittie's fingers twice for a yes.

"Cindi tells me she wants Carmen and Linda to stay right where they are and close to Cindi. They have touched Cindi's heart even through all the medications. Cindi frequently cries with anyone's struggles, and Carmen and Linda are a long story of struggle. The love they have shown here is a message from Cindi to all of us. Cindi; do I have that right?"

I squeezed Kittie's fingers twice for a yes.

My other four sister-wives of Kim, Sheri, Peggy, and Megan squeezed through to stand with Kittie. "We want our special time too."

Kittie nodded and made space. She shifted her eyes from me to the crowd. "Cindi says her thanks, her appreciation, and her love for every one of you. She feels overwhelmed you all came." Her other hand signaled to someone I couldn't see.

Pastor Stephanie walked into my view. Shannon squeezed through in Stephanie's wake.

Kittie pulled Stephanie in. "Cindi wants you to add words from the Caring Ministry. Can you do that?"

Stephanie's face made a curious expression. "What words?"

"Cindi talks about the church's Caring Ministry program with tears in her eyes." That had been overstated, but I couldn't say so right then, and I became drowsy again from the lingering anesthetics. "She thinks it is wonderful. She wants you to thank them with all with those words." Kittie flipped her head towards the mini-mob. Both sides of my bed were becoming crowded with a nurse, Carmen, little Linda, Shannon, and Tara on my left side, and my five sister-wives and the pastor on the other.

Pastor Stephanie took my hand from Kittie. "Signal when you want me to stop or change what I say."

My eyes watered again. The anesthesia no longer doused my feelings enough.

She didn't bless me or them with a prayer or any of the religious words I had expected. She gave a straight up explanation of the Caring Ministry program. She talked of the church volunteers who took special training for visiting the homebound, the dying, and any church members in the hospital. She demonstrated the entry into a hospital room of someone you don't know. A Caring Ministry volunteer would be along for me too. She had timed her own visit for when Kittie had said I might be in post-op. She had to wait so long for me to come out of surgery she went visiting others and had dinner until I could be available. Say more? Stop?

I hoped the male Deacon with a pony tail would be the Caring Ministry volunteer visiting me with all his humor.

Kittie had a different thought. "Say whatever comes to you. Cindi is comforted by your presence and by so many friends here. Cindi, squeeze Stephanie's fingers if you

want her to say more. If you want her to tell your admirers here how much they are part of your personal Caring Ministry."

I got my thumb moved around to where I could squeeze Stephanie's fingers and did.

Many puckered up. The hormones in the lactating guys gave them feminine feelings on this the same as myself.

Pastor Stephanie reached into a tote bag and brought out a package wrapped in sheets of the Sunday funny papers. She had a sheepish grin. "I didn't use fancy gift wrapping paper as that might be too commercial and spoil the sentiment. Kim and Sheri told me in the hall this way is right for you." She handed it to Kittie. "Unwrap it for Cindi, please."

Kittie had the tip of her tongue showing between her lips as a tribute to the mystery of whatever this could be. It had been printed on standard sized paper from a computer, but Kittie's face went into a surprised concern. She held it up showing it around for all to see before finally remembering to show it to me. The title on the front page of the *Gospel of Thomas* declared the contents. A new copy of *Wisdom Jesus* had been included.

Pastor Stephanie took my finger tips again. "You may find meaning in number fourteen most of all. Let me read it to you.

"Jesus said to them, 'If you fast, you will bring sin upon yourselves, and if you pray, you will be condemned, and if you give to charity, you will harm your spirits. When you go into any region and walk about in the countryside, when people take you in, eat what they serve you and heal the sick among them. After all, what goes into your mouth won't defile you; what comes out of your mouth will.'"

I have no idea what my face expressed when Shannon had an idea. "Read that again, please. That is so Cindi. That is so much of who she is. Carmen, you have experienced that love from Cindi. Yes?"

Carmen wept too much to say more than a "Sí" for 'yes' in Spanish.

Stephanie read it a second time.

Heads nodded with Tara as much as anyone. He cried from inside his feminine appearance.

Stephanie brought her attention around on me. "Squeeze when you want me to stop. We've always heard so much about you. People say you are a uniquely together person and as one with both genders. That book *Wisdom Jesus* is on a line of thinking about Jesus that has been developing since discoveries in Egypt after World War Two. I felt uncomfortable bringing this Gospel to you thinking this may be too controversial. Until Tara talked about you empowering the others around you and getting it so right for everyone else. Now I see you empowering Kittie to speak for you and to have me speak for you to all these people. You are uniquely one with all of us. This Gospel and that other book say being so unitary of heart instead of an either/or person could be the whole message of Jesus in a radically subversive way. That the apostle who most got his message may have been Mary Magdalene instead of any of the male disciples. The tradition of Western religion has been to ignore Mary. The Romans didn't know what to

do with a woman apostle, and acknowledging her could threaten their control of women as second class citizens. Your having a foot in both the male and female worlds may have brought you closer to Jesus than all the rest of us. I don't know that, and what is said in here doesn't summarize easily. But I can tell you the author of *Wisdom Jesus* writes of Jesus teaching about a Kingdom of Heaven right here on earth. That you don't have to die first to get to Heaven. You might find this Gospel when read with that book fascinating during your recovery."

The waiting area became very quiet. Other families waiting for loved ones had come over and were standing with the people visiting me. Nurses and staff joined in the growing crowd.

Kittie's lips were quivering. I could swear there were glistening drops on her eyelids even though I remained in a drug induced haze. "Squeeze my fingers if you want me to stop." She slipped her fingers in mine. "We're stunned." I didn't squeeze to stop. "Cindi isn't a radical subversive. She's just been trying to be herself and be safe at the same time as if that is too much to ask of the world."

I squeezed to stop. Maybe being a cross dressing transsexual in diapers was being a radical subversive.

Kittie looked down at me for guidance, but I couldn't talk.

Shannon and Tara came to my rescue with Shannon's sweet girl voice being first. "You are the most loving person we have ever met."

Tara's masculine voice took over. "Like that Deacon with the pony tail. Seen the right way, the Jesus way, the nice way, you are a subversive. Just a quiet one working away in the background out of sight generously for all with needs. We all have needs, and you are always available for everyone."

Carmen nodded she agreed. Others did too. Linda had her little hand on my upper arm.

The staff and the family members of other patients appeared to have a stunned silence as if asking themselves *who is this person on the rolling bed? What does she do? Where is this church? Who are these friends of hers?*

Tara's words seemed a bit much, but I couldn't say so with all those tubes in me.

The nurse came to my rescue with a clip board with blank sheets of paper.

My hand didn't work quite right. I wrote in block letters "say more".

More doctors, nurses, and staff arrived as Pastor Stephanie did most of the talking with quips and comments from many of my visitors. According to them I had been the most caring and charitable person anyone had ever met. For me to champion the Caring Ministry Program in my own post-op recovery had become another example of my always being there for everyone else.

A Doctor interrupted. "Say that again. How can we have that here?"

I had almost faded out again when I wrote more on that clip board. "Thak (thank) U 4 comin (coming); fadin (fading)."

I woke up in a room I didn't recognize. They had moved me from post-op to the ICU unit. There they would be better at keeping me from rolling too soon on my fragile new hips. They monitored me closely as they brought me carefully back out from being so long under general anesthesia. Initial recovery took days instead of hours. They sent me to an expensive suite of rooms for all the people who visited me even while I remained securely strapped down.

My sister-wife Kim had always been prone to take charge. When she and Tara visited together Kim asked the hospital staff to show a short segment of the video of me being prepped for my surgery. They had a video for their own review of the entire fifteen hours from inserting the needle in my hand until they rolled me to post-op recovery.

The selected few minutes of the video showed them inserting a two-part plug in my rectum. A thin latex covering easily went in. They liberally put a lubricant in that and all over the second part. The second part seemed much firmer, almost hard, and quite wide. They both had a one way valve at the tip. A half inch diameter clear plastic tube on a pump pulled stool out. Another with a clear plastic rod pushed suppositories in.

I blushed deeply.

Tara blurted. "I want one."

Kim had consulted with the changing and pumping crew. That butt plug and those tubes would eliminate smelly messy diaper changes. "YES." They wanted those.

The hospital installed the first ten. After that the small medical clinic in the residential unit installed all the rest. Both used a muscle relaxant and a local anesthetic for those installations. Everybody appreciated the reduced odor at the changing station.

Carmen arrived at my room in a nurse's aide hospital uniform. Her white apron reached around her thin frame and overlapped in back. She told me she had decided she wanted to be a pediatric doctor with full hospital privileges. She knew her educational credentials would not get her into college. So, she decided, she would have to work her way up another way. Her plan reminded me of the slogan 'those who say it can not be done, should not get in the way, of those who are doing it anyway'. Further, she had asked to be the nurse's aide to me. That is full time. As long as I had to be held down I would need feeding, bathing, changing, and whatever else. She had not known I had been heavily lactating and cheerfully took that on too. She had a big surprise on being told of my true gender.

She wasted no time taking charge. She had accompanied many immigrant children to the hospital either carrying the smallest the mile and half journey by walking, or holding the hand of those who could walk. When the hospital had balked about a sick child she held her ground at the emergency entrance. If that didn't work, she had called the Cap'n Jackie restaurant for contact into the Mansion House. If the first available Resident couldn't persuade the hospital, eventually I had been found and came to their rescue.

She had the insight into human nature to have a nurse show her how, even though Carmen already knew most of this from having seen it all before with a sick child. I couldn't talk so I sat there silently. The nurse showed Carmen how to take my temperature, blood pressure, hook up an intravenous tube, insert a catheter, pump stool, pump my breasts, and make a comfort audit with her hand on my forehead. Carmen's gentle thin hand made a soft, warm, and comforting impression on me. She

bathed me which had me blushing. The nurse arrived with a baby style bottle with my medications dissolved or ground up in the fluid. Carmen held that between my lips. It had been made sweet and delicious.

When I cried, which I often did, Carmen would sit and hold my hand. No words were needed.

She didn't go home that night. She intended to sleep on the family member sofa in my room. That is until Kittie arrived. Carmen and Kittie had an intense discussion. I remained on 'no talking' status with the clip board for writing notes and messages. Carmen went out, returned with a rolling gurney, several pillows, and lay down on that for sleeping. Kittie became so embarrassed by Carmen's professionalism that Kittie yielded the sofa and slept in another room of the suite.

Carmen found a doctor nearby. Talking mostly with her hands she asked the doctor if my hospital bed head-end could be raised a little even while I remained strapped down. Now I could watch the TV. I had become bored as they reduced the anesthetics. When pain arrived from a little too much reduction I flipped pages in the clipboard to find the one with the word 'pain'.

She didn't wait for a response to the call button. Instead she trotted out to the nursing station and returned with a nurse or a doctor; usually a Doctor. If they made too many excuses Carmen would glare at them and talk rapid fire Spanish. They installed a bag of morphine solution with a button called a drip button for self-administered pain reduction. Except Carmen intervened against my using too much. She kept her own paper record. She had seen plenty of the ravages of drug addiction, and didn't want her own personal Savior and maybe her personal Saint to suffer any of that.

She didn't react to my having five sister-wives. She thought those were the same as a village Priest's domestic staff. Tara made the first guess that Carmen wanted to be the sixth. Tara reported that Carmen had given me a new title in a voice so low as to be almost a whisper. Carmen had called me Momma Cindi. For me that was better than being called a Saint. Tara told that to everyone she could. She also told me that matched better how all the Mansion House residents saw me now that Carmen had thought of it.

Carmen escorted in all the guests from the central nursing station.

She arranged for every child from the immigrant community to visit me a few at a time. That had an immigrant adult accompany each child. Carmen would explain to every child who I had been for them. She would pick up every small child and hold that child standing in her lap. The small child Linda squirmed in Carmen's lap. I signaled for Linda to come to me. She put her little hand on one of my breasts as before, but this time I had been protected by the suction cup. We hugged and wept together. Carmen handed me a disposable bowl of mashed potatoes and gravy. I gave small spoonfuls to Linda.

I cried often. I held up that clipboard where I had written on the top page:

"Hi
I am not allowed to talk
Thank you for coming
What is new for you"

Nothing it seemed would stop Carmen from what she thought a patient, in this

case myself, needed. She used her hand in a latex exam glove for bringing me off with orgasms.

The church Pastors alternated who visited me on most days. My efforts at entertaining them became discussions from two books and that Gospel. Carmen worked on her English by reading those books out loud to me. The Church's Caring Ministry visited almost as frequently. Nurses from the surgical unit would drop by. The hospital and Mansion House Board members visited. On my suggestion Kittie stocked cookies for all the guests and the nursing station for the trouble all the guests must have caused. The hospital cafeteria kept us stocked in lemonade and iced tea for everyone. I never felt lonely although I dozed and rested so much.

Karli, the new Mansion House Chair, visited nearly everyday. She explained she had found people would do what she said more quickly, or at all, if she added "Cindi told me". She brought Carmen an English-Spanish dictionary. Except Carmen had learned to read in English. She had only a limited vocabulary in Spanish. Karli spent serious time explaining words to Carmen who proclaimed herself to be a sponge for learning all she could.

Judge Wagner came by on a Saturday morning while multiple people, Karli, Tara, a Doctor, and two more were explaining a big medical phrase to Carmen. I recognized the Judge when the others did not.

I wrote on the clipboard "welcome Judge Wagner".

Everyone went silent completely intimidated by the arrival of a Judge.

She rose to the occasion explaining she had come by in her personal capacity. She had not believed what she had heard about me and my surgery. "You have a knock 'em dead gorgeous face now." She added that from what she had seen that morning that Carmen must be a wonderfully dedicated person. When needed, the Judge would write a recommendation, and hoped to preside at the ceremony when Carmen became an American citizen.

Of course I cried at the Judge's comments.

The Judge added if Carmen could keep at it and focus on quality, that the Judge would recommend Carmen's admission in the four year college in the nearest big city. That college had a nursing and health department. Do well there, and the Judge would work on her admission into one of the medical schools. Of course, our hospital would want Carmen as a Doctor intern. Karli quit being the Chair of the Mansion House and dedicated herself to tutoring Carmen.

It came out that Carmen had no last name. The Judge tilted her head. "Mansion. Mansion House. Mansion." Her voice became joyful. "Madison, from James Madison the founding father." No one ever had a better idea. I think all of the refugees without last names may have used it. It helped them out in the world by not sounding Spanish.

I wrote on a fresh page of the clipboard.

"Tara

Maybe the Judge would like a tour

Include the places most people don't see"

Tara told me later they spent hours on that tour. The Judge had extended

conversations with the locomotive repair shop, a locomotive engineer, and toured the special support car in the middle of a string of locomotives waiting for the next train to arrive. The Judge asked to see our lawyer. A new Order arrived more explicitly protecting our immigrants, and especially the children.

A few days later, I had the bed head-end up to nearly sixty degrees when Kittie arrived as Carmen kept a sharp eye on me. Carmen answered the room phone. The two of them hustled at brushing my hair even though my hair roots had begun to show, and put a new patient's gown on me. Minutes hadn't gone by when the knock at the door announced the arrival of the Hospital Chancellor Dr. Tom Harrison.

That chin of his never stopped intimidating me. He moved the chair Kittie had been about to use. The tone of his voice became so friendly it unnerved me. "How ya' doin', Cindi? You look healthy under those bandages. But seriously, how is our favorite fix-it girl and advisor coming along?"

I wrote out a long response. "Thank you, sir. Friends visit all day. No complaints. The staff over did it with me before the surgery. Carmen is more than wonderful. They have this anesthesia business down to a science." I held up a hand with a splint still on that index finger. "Sometimes my finger complains, but that is bone work. I tell them I'm using that as my barometer before anything else hurts too much."

He smiled at that barometer word. "Do you know just how much you are loved around here? Respected? Admired?"

I thought *that's what Tara keeps telling me*. I wrote. "How so?"

"Casual comments pop up like dandelions in the grass. The surgical staff owns you as their own. Security showed me their log of who visits you. How do you feel about so many guests? Too many?"

I glanced at Kittie who nodded that could be OK before she answered for me. "Not a problem in this big suite. This must be very expensive. Are you sure this suite is an acceptable expense?"

He went on. "None of that. Everyone likes you. The surgeon's office took this on as a professional challenge. Some of what they did could be highly controversial, but they say you authorized everything on full disclosure. You are being the model patient. What brings me up here is they all forgot the budgeting rules. Not your fault. But accounts receivable is worried sick with what Medicaid will do when your longer than a full day surgery hits the books. The surgical suite hours are in that computer with staff time, supplies, utilities, medications, and anesthetics."

Kittie held up a finger where she was standing out of his sight behind Dr. Harrison. "Cindi; just listen. You're too honest; more than the accounting rules. When the Foundation Board visited I asked for their business cards. I was going to write them all thank you notes. Instead I'm going to call them. The surgery staff is up here all the time and I can go visit that wonderful head surgeon. Several times he came to me in the family waiting area explaining how your surgery had been coming along, so we know each other. I'm going to ask the Foundation to fund something. Maybe the surgical center lounge, but then have the Mansion House activities staff do the work."

I glared. "Can't do that. Any audit will discover that ploy."

“Oh hesh, Cindi. Just let me. I’ll find something. The surgery people can say they did it for free as an experimental and educational opportunity. We just need a little money and a good reason. Right? Dr. Harrison?”

Surprise and joy flowed in succession across his face.

They never told me exactly everything they did. The Foundation Board wrote a check for funding research in trauma surgery. One of the tricks they used in the much reduced invoice developed into ‘corrective surgery for errors after a traumatic accident’. If asked, the trauma they would refer to had been an auto accident from the interstate. They taught me that honesty and deception comes in many forms.

Kittie knew I had been using about half my disability income for charitable giving. Notices went up all over reporting I needed that money for my surgery without explaining the surgery. Excess donations of more than what I had been giving would go to a fund for the costs of my surgery. Little wooden boxes hung below those notices. Several of those had to be emptied more than twice a day. Tara organized volunteers for that task. Barbie-Doll at the cash register ran the fund. Of course I cried at all the money they raised.

The surgical staff wanted that catheter out of me before it caused any trouble with an infection. Carmen promptly removed it without a blush, and put me in a diaper.

Two days later they told me the time had come for me to get out of bed and stand up.

I agreed I could be ready. One of the surgeons watched. Carmen stood on one side of where I could rotate for having my feet on the floor and a nurse stood on the other side.

Carmen pulled off the sheet leaving me in just my diaper and patient’s gown. I pulled myself up with an overhead bar. I rotated myself around with my legs over the side. The nurse lowered the bed to where my feet were flat on the floor. Carmen rubbed my back with a salve for any skin sores.

With Carmen holding me by one elbow and the nurse holding me by the other, I stood up. That hadn’t been hard. My dizziness surprised me.

They nudged me to take a step. And another. And more.

The nurse swung open the door for the small closet with a mirror on the normally inside side. She adjusted that door and mirror until I nodded she had it right for me to see myself.

Wow! I thought looking at my new hips and face.

Those new bone extensions were stretching my skin creating a hollow effect that would need filing if my fat didn’t move there from the estrogen treatments.

My sister-wives brought a seamstress who took my new measurements multiple times and ways.

Tara visited and wanted to see the new me. The he inside the she meant a total view of the new me. His reaction became priceless when he saw my new body with

nothing on. “Wow! I have to tell you that even though I know your true gender, when I look at your new hips, my mind substitutes feminine genitals for yours. If I look, of course, that isn’t true. But if I let myself be lazy, and especially after a glance at your gorgeous face, that is what my mind sees. So much so I want the same surgery.”

We agreed she would have to wait for the hospital to resolve all of the funding issues. Tara and Barbie-Doll managed to assemble Three Hundred Thousand Dollars for their surgery.

Months went by before the lingering anesthetics wouldn’t make me drowsy at unexpected times.