

UNIVERSAL CHANGES

by
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BLACK MOUNTAIN: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

"This is Black Mountain Control," announced a woman's steady voice over the public address system. "This is an alert! Everyone to their stations; we are initiating the next test!" she warned.

Red lights flashed everywhere, as people scrambled down long, curving corridors past bay after bay of complex electronic components, many of which were illuminated by bright glaring lights. Other people ran along elevated walkways, and up and down grated metal staircases, amongst the giant super-conducting magnetic arrays. The Black Mountain Accelerator was about to begin its sixth series of tests. This time it was different; this time they hoped to exceed the highest particle energies ever created by mankind.

"Closing Target Control shield doors," announced Norman Phillips, the chief scientist of the particle detection unit. While he scanned all the information displays in front of him, he took time note how pretty Martha Reubens looked even with her lab coat over her dress, as she tossed back her long blond hair and passed him on the way to her station. If he were not married, he might have considered starting a relationship with her.

"Recorders all online," she said as she gave an OK-sign with the fingers of her right hand. "Gentlemen: we are about to make history! Oh, and congratulations to you Norm."

"How long till the baby arrives?" asked Ed Mason, who sat at an adjoining console in the other side of Norm's displays. "You'll like the late hours that a baby can...."

"Gretchen is due in seven months and...maybe six to ten days," replied Norm

before Ed could finish. "How does the target area look?"

"The whole array seems to have proper focus," added Ed Mason. "We've sure come a long way in three years, since I was out of a job; then they designed this cheaper super-collider to replace the one that had been canceled."

"And it even got funded," said Norm as adjusted the video image of the target room, which was located thirty feet away, through four heavy shield doors.

"This is Black Mountain Control," continued the woman over the PA system with a reverberant voice. "This is the final warning. All safety interlocks are in place...now! The accelerator is active...now!"

At first, it was a mild hum; then it increased in intensity, as the particle beam began its ever-accelerating path around the complex. Soon, the low-frequency sound waves engulfed everyone and everything. It could be felt as a throbbing vibration in the floor. Norm could even feel it in his console anytime he touched any of the metal paneling.

"This is Black Mountain Control," warned the woman on the PA system. "Beam separation and impact are imminent. Counting: ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two...."

Her voice was drowned out by the sharp snap of the beam hitting its target. It was over in a fraction of a second. Soon, it would be as time to collect all the photo-detection plates that had been placed behind the twenty-foot-thick shielded walls the target vault. After developing, the plates would be loaded into a special scanner that would load the photo-visual information into a computer for processing.

"Why is it still so noisy?" asked Ed.

"I don't know. The test is over, so what are they doing?" asked Norm. "Black Mountain Control, what is going on?"

The three of them waited in expectant silence, while the vibration in the floor unexpectedly intensified. This was not the way the test was supposed to end.

"This is Black Mountain Control," cried the woman finally. "We have a malfunction! Repeat: we have a malfunction! The particle beam refuses to shut off; it has entered a self-perpetuating anomaly! We are attempting to correct the situation! Initiate emergency shut-down and evacuation!"

"I'll get the door," said Ed, as he calmly walked toward the control panel on the wall. The lights flickered; then the power went out before he got halfway there. He continued to grope his way in the dark. By the time he reached the panel, the emergency lighting and power had activated. Ed reached for the switch to open the door.

"Don't do that!" warned Norm. "Look at these readings: the accelerated beam is driving all the field coils backwards, like a colossal generator. There's no shut-off in that direction!"

"My readings confirm that conclusion!" cried Martha. "We're heading for a magnetic overload and electrical meltdown at the same time!"

"If we hurry up the back ladder, we can probably make it through the cable tunnel," suggested Norm as he abandoned his post and moved toward the ladder.

Ed decided not to press the switch. It was a good idea, because a moment later the entire door lit up, driving Ed toward the center of the room. Martha joined him, as streamers of diffuse, reddish-colored radiant energy appeared randomly in the air.

A tongue of energy touched and sparked against the ladder below him, as Norm approached the cable tunnel. "It's not a breach as we know it!" yelled Martha. "Ouch! The whole complex is being ionized!"

"Hurry!" warned Norm as he reached the cable tunnel. He saw Ed and Martha start up the ladder. Waves of intersecting patterns of energy blotted them from view. Norm could not wait, because it was pushing him into the tunnel. He had no choice but to run; the stinging sensations of the air around him were not pleasant. He heard a brief scream in the distance. As he stopped and turned, he was struck by a hot-looking torrent of energy.

COMA: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

A tall brunette arrived at the designated waiting room at River Ridge hospital. She wore a matching black blouse, slacks, and low-heeled black pumps. She was not happy that the room was empty. She was Gretchen Phillips, Norm's wife. She had expected to meet Bob Hiller, the director of the Black Mountain National Laboratory. She sat in one of the uncomfortable chairs and fiddled with her small brown purse while she waited. First she sat in on the floor to the right of the seam of her slacks; then she moved it to her lap. Finally, she let it rest on her chair to the left of her hips.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," Bob apologized. "This whole day has been insane!"

"Any word about Norm?" asked Gretchen hopefully, as she jumped to her feet.

"It's the same for him and the eight others...an unexplained coma. It only happened to those who fled into the cable tunnels," he explained.

"But what were his options?" asked Gretchen with a hint of anger.

"None, I guess, considering there fifty-nine casualties," sighed Bob. "Only those who fled the complex or ran into the cable tunnels survived. This hospital has one of the best trauma centers in the whole country. Doctors Montgomery and Greer will be here any moment to give us an update."

Gretchen turned toward the door when she heard the tapping of heels. An attractive black woman entered the room. She was wearing a short lab coat that came down half the length of her straight black skirt. As she lowered her clipboard, she announced, "I'm Dr. Greer. I presume you are Gretchen Phillips, and you are Bob Hiller."

"That's right," said Bob. "Is there any news?"

"Dr. Montgomery wants to meet with us in Norm Phillips room," she explained.

Gretchen grabbed her purse and practically commanded, "Let's go!"

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Norm almost looked like he was smiling, as he lay in the hospital bed. A complex array of tubes and wires engulfed his body. As if hovering over him, stood the elderly, white-haired Dr. Montgomery. When he spied Gretchen, he immediately responded in a slightly rushed voice, "Are you his wife?"

"Yes, I'm Gretchen Phillips. I was hoping for some good news."

"It should be good," explained Dr. Montgomery, "but, for some reason, it is not. Dr. Greer will explain the anomalous readings."

"We have a problem," began Dr. Greer. "Norm, and the eight other survivors, are all showing similar brain readings." She pointed to two different scopes. "Technically, he is not in a typical coma; in fact, he does not appear to be unconscious."

"Is that equipment working right?" questioned Gretchen, as she pointed to the various scopes that surrounded Norm's bed.

"I've sent for a technician, just to be sure," Dr. Montgomery assured her. "Except for some minor ghosting, everything seems to be working perfectly."

"And what about the burns?" asked Gretchen.

"Superficial, mostly, and they've responded well to treatment," replied Dr. Montgomery. "Dr. Greer and I have talked discussed the situation: we recommend that you talk to him."

Gretchen was more than willing. She leaned over and kissed Norm on a clear place on his forehead. "I love you, darling. Please wake up; we have the arrival of the people to prepare for!" Even though no response had been expected, Gretchen was still disappointed that Norm did not move slightly in reaction to her words.

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Gretchen arrived at River Ridge Hospital late in the afternoon, in response to a call from Dr. Greer. She was so hopeful for good news, after two weeks of disappointments, that she had canceled all appointments with her clients for the rest of the day. She worked as a lawyer as a prestigious downtown law firm, *Mitchell and Swanson*.

"Good, you're here," responded Dr. Greer as Gretchen entered Norm's room.

"He looks like he's still in a coma," remarked Gretchen.

"But all the others have awakened in the last forty-eight hours, and his brainwaves show a heightened level of activity. See," she pointed out, "it's a little strange with all these harmonics, but I'm sure it means that he is going to wake up at any moment."

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After patiently waiting by Norm's side for five hours, Gretchen finally went home. She was confident that she get the expected phone call some time the next day. If not, she could always threaten the doctors' superiors.

THE AWAKENING: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

"What happened?" asked Norm, once he realized that he was in bed in a hospital room.

"I'm Dr. Montgomery. You've had a lot of trauma, but it appears to be over."

"My mind is cloudy...exactly why am I here?" asked Norm. He was trying to move around, but he found that all the medical paraphernalia had him pinned in place.

"There was an accident at the Black Mountain Laboratory. It left you in a coma for three weeks," replied Dr. Montgomery.

"What about my friends, Ed Mason and Martha Reubens?" asked Norm, as he

struggled to remember where he had last seen them.

"I'm sorry to say they were among the fifty-nine casualties," replied Dr. Montgomery sadly. "There were nine of you whom were found in a coma...you are the last to awaken." As he started to disconnect several tubes and wires, Dr. Montgomery added, "I think we can do without these; your wife should be here any moment."

Norm stared in confusion as two women entered the room. The black lady, who was wearing a white nurse's uniform, spoke, "Hello, I'm Emily Greer, your nurse. I have a very special person with me...your lovely wife, Gretchen," announced nurse Greer excitedly.

Gretchen bent over and gave Norm a long kiss on his right cheek. She was wearing a new, light-green shirtdress, which she had bought just for this moment. "You look so puzzled, darling?" she wondered.

"I hardly recognized you," Norm replied. "You really let your hair grow long; then you had it tinted red since I last saw you."

"Norm, that accident has affected your memory. I've looked like this for the past two years. Afterall, it is the look that you really like!"

"There's more," continued Norm. "For some reason, I have the impression that you are supposed to be a doctor," he explained as he pointed at nurse Greer.

"Don't I wish," she replied. "There's less than ten women doctors in the whole country; most of us don't have the aptitude for the job."

"Can I take him home, now?" interrupted Gretchen, as she changed the subject.

"I see no reason why not," confirmed Dr. Montgomery. "His brainscan is good, although still slightly eccentric, his EKG is excellent, and his blood tests are good, though he does seem slightly anemic. None of that is any good reason for keeping him, especially when the hospital board and the insurance company are both clamoring to send him home!"

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"What happened to our car?" asked Norm, as the orderly wheeled him to the passenger door. The vehicle was a four-door sedan of the same size, color, and general shape that he remembered, but something was different."

"I'm so sorry, darling," lamented Gretchen, "but your memory is still giving you problems. We've had this car for almost three years. Remember, you argued with the sales staff at the dealer for five hours to get it?"

"I remember that, but I don't remember this car," he said as he slid in and closed the door. "This does not look like a Honda Accord."

"A what?" replied Gretchen as she closed the driver's door.

"A Honda Accord...you know, a Japanese brand made somewhere here in the United States!" he replied with emphasis.

"A Honda is and always has been a brand of electronics!" she explained with irritation.

At that moment, he glanced at the emblem on the steering wheel hub and blurted, "An **Edsel**?"

"Of course, darling; you always said it was one of the best cars made! You had considered a Sony, but you preferred to buy American!"

Feeling thoroughly confused, Norm stopped talking and watched Gretchen drive. His composure only lasted five miles, when he spied a tall building ahead, that was situated among much smaller structures. It looked much like many other skyscrapers that he had seen, except for the golden, spiral spike at its top. "What building is that?" he finally asked.

"That's the Continental Oil tower, our most famous landmark," she replied politely. She was becoming used to Norm's seemingly irrational questions.

"I'm having a lot of problems," complained Norm. "Doctor Greer changed to a

nurse, because there are no women doctors. We're driving around in an Edsel, which became extinct long ago. There's a skyscraper that I've never seen before...let alone, anything called Continental Oil. Next, you'll be telling me that you don't work for *Mitchell and Swanson*."

"That's where I work, darling," she replied with a smile.

"If women can't be doctors, how can they be lawyers?" asked Norm.

"They can't, because not many of us have the mental aptitude to be a doctor or a lawyer," explained Gretchen. "We women make much better secretaries, nurses, clerks, housewives, and the like."

"Just what...do you do there?" probed Norm cautiously.

"Why, I'm a legal secretary, of course. I worked hard all my life to get such a prestigious job. It's quite an accomplishment, considering my IQ."

"What's happened to world?" asked Norm angrily. "I remember you as an extreme feminist, out to make her mark in a man's world. So, sexism rears its ugly head again!"

"It's not awful; it's not even anyone's fault," Gretchen responded with an annoyed tone. "Besides, you will soon understand my point of view. I am pregnant, after all," she added with a devilish grin.

"What does that mean?" asked Norm.

Gretchen did not reply; she only smiled. "Oh, by the way, there's a staff party for *Mitchell and Swanson*. They've rented a banquet room at the Civic Center. Do you feel like going?"

"I should be able to survive it," he admitted somewhat reluctantly. "Maybe everything there will look the way it is supposed to!"

"It's formal, so you have to dress up," Gretchen added.

"I can manage!" Norm asserted. He was hoping that social contact would help relieve the confusion that he was experiencing.

ACTIVE MIND: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

"What is the problem?" asked Dr. Montgomery, as he hurriedly entered the hospital room.

"It's his brainwaves!" explained Dr. Greer excitedly. "Look, he's still lying motionless in bed; it's obvious."

"Yes, it is, and I see what you're getting at," he agreed as he scanned the various monitors. "All these brain scan readings say that he is conscious; in fact, the readings look like those of a person who is in motion, using a lot of eye and hand coordination. Damn, why isn't he awake? I'll have the technician come and check the equipment again. I wish he could get rid of that annoying ghost image in the background!"

"What do we do, Dr. Montgomery?" she asked worriedly. "He's also talking, at least occasionally. It's like he's dreaming."

"Can you remember anything he said?" asked Dr. Montgomery.

"There was something about being in the wrong car," replied Dr. Greer.

"Hmm...we should set up a tape recorder next to his bed. In this case, Dr. Greer, we should do what any other doctor would do: we call in a specialist," he replied.

"Dr. Montgomery," Began dr. Greer sternly, tapping the toe of one of her pumps, "we **are** the specialists!"

"We are, but I think we also need the help of Dr. Erhardt. He's a former teacher of mine, and he edits the American Journal of Neurology," explained Dr. Montgomery.

"I've met him before," added Dr. Greer. "He's knowledgeable, personably, and probably one of top surgeons in the world."

"He's also black," reminded Dr. Montgomery.

"Which has not escaped my notice," she added with pride. "But will he come?"

"He's bored in education. He'll relish the challenge. I'll call him when I get

home," asserted Dr. Montgomery confidently.

"What about Mrs. Phillips?" questioned Dr. Greer.

"I'd appreciate it if you would handle that; we'll need her release," urged Dr. Montgomery.

"I'll call her in the morning," agreed Dr. Greer.

THE PARTY: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

Gretchen's dinner seemed normal. She served it in their normal-looking dining room. Norm was afraid to enter the kitchen, where he would be most likely to encounter brand-name conflict. As Gretchen put the dirty dinnerware into the dishwasher, Norm wandered into the living room. He glanced nervously at the Honda television.

"I probably can't figure out this remote," he said softly, as he turned on the set on the first try. The evening news was being broadcast on the currently-set channel. Norm could not be sure if there was anything different, because he never paid much attention to the news anyway.

"You should start changing; it's going to take you a while to get dressed," warned Gretchen distantly from the kitchen.

"I'm usually pretty fast," he complained. "I do not understand why you are so concerned. You usually do not pay that much attention."

"It's important that you look good," Gretchen added as she stuck her head through the doorway from the dining room. "I want to show you off; and, remember, I am pregnant!"

"You keep saying that...," Norm started to complain. He stopped once he realized that his wife had returned to the kitchen.

Norm's attention turned to the television. The male newscaster had caught his attention.

"...investigation is still underway to discover what caused the accident at Black

Mountain Laboratories. Dr. Bruno von Kemp, a scientist not connected with the laboratory, claims that the accelerator caused a fracture in the fabric of space and time. Sensitive instruments located in Mars Base seem to corroborate this hypothesis."

"Gretchen, how long have we had a base on Mars?" asked Norm, as he stuck his head into the dining room.

"I guess we have had one...for about two and a half years. The landing was very exciting, but I have trouble following all the science stuff."

"Gretchen, you got straight A's in science!" cried Norm.

"Stop it, Norm! You know they don't teach much science to girls in school," she complained.

"Somehow," replied Norm sarcastically, "I will understand what you just said, because you are pregnant!"

"Exactly," she replied as she gave him a kiss on the cheek. "Please, darling, you have to get ready. Come, I'll help you."

Norm followed her into their bedroom. He knew she had a certain expectation, but he could not figure it out. He pulled a gray, pin-striped suit from his closet and held it in front of him. "This should be okay, shouldn't it?" he asked expectantly.

"Certainly not!" she scolded. "Are you trying to embarrass me? You can't go to a staff party wearing that." Gretchen reached way down to the end of Norm's side of the closet and pulled out a selected garment.

Norm's mouth dropped, as he weakly commented, "A red dress? You want me to wear that red dress?"

"Of course," she said; "it's your favorite. You always look so pretty and feminine in it."

"I don't see how," he objected. "I've never worn a dress in all my life. It's a ridiculous idea!"

Gretchen began to cry. "I don't know what is so wrong," she sobbed. "You've

never acted like this before. Why do you want to be so strange? All the other men will be wearing their best feminine finery. I am so proud how you always outshine them!"

Norm put his right arm around her and waited for her to calm down. "This is not a joke," he stated.

"No!" she answered sharply.

"This is not a costume party," he added.

"No, just a regular formal affair," she asserted.

"I don't think I know how...." he said, honestly claiming ignorance.

"I'll show you, if I must," offered Gretchen. That was what Norm was afraid she was going to say. Now, he had no choice for to follow her every demand.

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"That stuff even removed my beard," commented Norm as he stepped from the shower and dried himself.

"It's some kind of hormone cream. I don't understand how it works," explained Gretchen. "Now I will prepare you. Just follow my directions, and you'll soon be ready."

Gretchen first placed a strange, flesh-colored prosthetic garment in front of Norm. It was shaped in the form of a woman's narrow waist above wide hips. It even had a patch of simulated pubic hair in the front. Gretchen motioned him to wriggle into it, once he had placed his penis in a special groove. Just when Norm thought he could relax, the waistline of the garment suddenly contracted, as Gretchen tugged on protruding cords, knocking the wind from his lungs. A moment later, Gretchen attached two artificial breasts to his chest, which seem to stick by magic.

"There," she said, as she smoothed several seams with her hands. "You're looking good already."

Norm took her comment as an understatement. If he ignored the obvious seams, he had unexpectedly acquired a convincing woman's body. He even felt different when he stepped up to the full-length mirror; he could not swing his hips normally, nor could he conveniently control the undulations in his artificial breasts. "But how will I get this off to use the toilet?" he asked weakly.

"Silly, it all works fine, so long as you act like a woman," she giggled.

Gretchen did not let Norm rest, as she motioned for him to set down, while she rolled the legs of a pair of black pantyhose. Once the pantyhose was on, Norm did not even have time to ponder the feel. Gretchen immediately pulled out a pair of black women's sandals. The shoes had intricate, crisscrossing straps. They also sported three-inch heels that were narrower at the middle than at the ends.

While Norm stood up and fought for his balance, Gretchen placed the red strapless bra to hold Norm's altered buxom; then she had Norm step into a red half-slip. The red dress was next. Seeing that the garment was already contoured for a woman's shape, Norm found it hard to believe that it would fit. Gretchen did have to tug a little as she pulled it down over his head, but the dress fell into place. She was even able to pull the back zipper all the way up. Norm was shocked the garment revealed so much flesh around his shoulders, and he was equally shocked that the skirt did not quite reach his knees. Most shocking of all, however, was that he actually resembled a woman from his shoulders to his feet.

"Norm," began Gretchen sincerely, "you really act as if you have never done this before. Can't you even manage the makeup yourself?"

"What do I know about makeup?" he asked with a hurt expression.

"Every little boy learns how to do makeup!" she asserted. "Really, Norm, I hope this memory thing of yours gets better soon! What happened to your usual in-charge personality?"

Next, Gretchen added makeup, blush, shading and highlights, lip liner, eye

shadow, and mascara. Norm had never felt so helpless, as his wife blended and smoothed it all; then she added powder and fixed the powder with alcohol. Lipstick and an eyebrow pencil completed job.

"This looks a bit phony," he commented.

"Almost done," she said as she placed a heavy necklace that followed the neckline of his dress. Matching pierced earrings were next. Norm did not speak, because he was sure that his wife did not want to hear that he could not remember ever having his ears pierced.

After she handed Norm a ladies' wristwatch, Gretchen took a long, blond wig from Norm's closet. It rested on a styrofoam head, which was attached to a wooden pedestal. Norm watched as she quickly brushed the wig. He knew it was the final touch. Again, he really felt numb as Gretchen placed it on his head. He only stared at the image in silence, realizing that this attractive-looking woman had totally usurped his image in the mirror.

"Norm's gone, but Norma's back," joked Gretchen as she emptied the contents of Norm's pockets onto their bed. She stuffed everything into a fancy red handbag; then she forced Norm to take it. "It's a good thing I did most of my preparation earlier," she explained as she removed her green shirtdress; then she quickly slipped into a black velvet evening gown, which had a fancy V-neck and a long, doubly-slit skirt. "Let me slip into these heels...there, it's time to go, darling; we're already late."

"I can't go out like this? What will the neighbors think?" Norm protested.

"Shut up and follow me," she ordered. "I'm driving! And I hope you're going to **adjust** your voice better; Norma always sounds like a lady!"

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Arm in arm, Gretchen led Norma into the banquet room. The embarrassing

moments he had so feared never came, but he refused to think of himself as someone named **Norma**. There was not a man to be seen anywhere. Every male at the party was dressed like a woman. Some were obviously men dressed as women, while others were more passable. Gretchen beamed with joy every time Norma got a compliment.

A pretty, shapely brunette took Norma aside. Her drunken status exaggerated her slinky motions. She giggled a lot, while she continually brushed her long hair from in front of her face and flashed her long, bright-red nails. "Remember me, I'm Valerie. Actually, I'm Del Verdunn, but I'm going to be Valerie for a while. My wife, Karen, is expecting next week. I hear that Gretchen is pregnant too."

Norm nodded. He remembered Del, one of the young lawyers at *Mitchell and Swanson*; however, Norm could not remember him looking so feminine. Valerie looked like a very slender, attractive woman. Her dress fit her tightly, practically like a glove. She had high cheekbones, a small nose and a petite chin, delicate-looking muscles, and a perfect hourglass figure. "So how are you doing?" asked Norm, trying hard to please Gretchen by sounding feminine; besides, that kind of voice went better with his current appearance.

"This *gyning* takes getting used to, but I really like being a woman. I did not believe it until it happened to me. I'm a text-book example, they say. I thought being demoted to a receptionist would be the end of the world, but I'm already used to it."

"That word: *gyning*, just what does it mean?" asked Norm curiously.

"Norma, dear," giggled Valerie, "you are going to experience it **so** soon! Oops, Karen is signaling. I've to go...bye!" Valerie stumbled without falling twice before she reached her wife. Norm noted that Valerie even walked like a woman.

Norm realized that he had many questions that needed answers. He also knew that he probably would not like those answers.

STRANGE FANTASIES: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

"Is there something you're not telling me?" asked Gretchen, first looking at Dr. Montgomery and then at Dr. Greer. "And why have you called in Dr. Hurd? How can a psychiatrist help a man in a coma?"

"I'm glad you asked that," explained Dr. Hurd, who was a tall, younger man with a short hair cut. He put his left hand to his cheek while scratching his left ear. He paused; then he continued, "I don't know why your husband is locked in this coma. However, he talks a lot, and what he's been saying has been recorded. We could be peering deep into his subconscious mind, but I need some information from you. I might be prying into your private life."

"In what way?" asked Gretchen in an annoyed tone.

"Does your husband have a secret life? I don't know how to properly phrase such an embarrassing question, so let me be blunt. Is your husband a transvestite? Does he like to dress up as woman to go to out on the town...to parties?" asked Dr. Hurd somewhat shakily.

"I will be blunt...**NO!**" replied Gretchen sharply. "I don't know why you would even suggest such a thing."

"It's not my idea," apologized Dr. Hurd. "He appears to have lived out a fantasy where you helped him dress up as woman; then the two of you went to a party. Strangely, he talked about the whole thing in a most reticent manner."

"Norm is still in a coma, while questions without answers continue to pile up," said Gretchen in an exasperated tone. "From a lawyer's point of view, I sense that you people are blindly groping."

"Dr. Erhardt will arrive tomorrow," Dr. Montgomery reminded Gretchen; "he is best brain specialist in the country. If anyone can find an answer, he's our doctor!"

"You assume that it's a medical problem," objected Gretchen.

"Of course it's a medical problem," agreed Dr. Montgomery.

"I am going to call this Dr. von Kemp in the morning," warned Gretchen; "he has a theory about a rip in the fabric of space and time."

"That's not exactly medical science," commented Dr. Montgomery.

"That's exactly why I want to talk to him," replied Gretchen with a quick nod of her head.

REVELATIONS: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

"Don't you dare change yet," ordered Gretchen when they got home; "I want to take pictures. Tomorrow, I'm taking **Norma** shopping at the Mall. She is going to need a couple of new outfits in the next three months!"

Getting out of the red dress was not currently important. Norm was so intent on grabbing a dictionary that he did not even hear what Gretchen was saying. He was not even conscious about brushing away his long, blond hair as he searched through the G's. Incredulous about what he had found, he read the definition of the verb, to gyne, out loud.

"1. [less common] For a man to dress as a woman, especially for a formal function. Instead, simply to dress up. 2. [more common] For a man to assume to the complete, external physical characteristics of a woman, though he remains a true male, usually in response to hormones secreted by his wife during her pregnancy. During this period, the man experiences the life of a woman, including the characteristically reduced IQ. This condition is usually temporary, though it can become permanent, especially after three or more pregnancies."

"How farfetched!" cried Norm. He remembered how he was dressed, and he even went to the nearest mirror for confirmation. "Okay, considering how I look, maybe it's not so farfetched."

"You'll soon start the transformation," confirmed Gretchen. "Dr. Montgomery

said the coma probably caused a delay."

"I'm going to look something up," said Norm as he spied their older encyclopedia set. He hesitated when he noticed that the name on each volume was **Webster's New World**, instead of the **Britannica** name that he was used to. Finally, the desire to know overcame of reluctance. Still ignoring the way he was dressed, he pulled four volumes and took them to a small table. Cautiously, he began to browse the first-selected volume.

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"How are you doing?" asked Gretchen politely, as she came up behind him and gave him a hug and a kiss. "I love it when you're Norma; you're just so gorgeous."

"Thank you...," he began before he caught himself. "This is an encyclopedia, not a complete history or biography, but there are things that do not match my memory."

"We can't remember everything," complained Gretchen. "Is it really important; we have our lives to live, and we have a baby on the way. I certainly can't remember everything, but I do not make a big case of it!"

"President McKinley was shot by an assassin in 1901, not crushed under a falling scaffold," asserted Norm.

"Dear, you were not even born then!" countered Gretchen. "What does it matter?"

"Then there is this big World War I discrepancy. I do not remember the Germans accidentally creating a biological weapon that infected the entire world. **Gyning** seems first to have appeared shortly after that. Many names are different, but most events are almost the same," explained Norm excitedly.

"Like what?" questioned Gretchen skeptically.

"Well, I read that Nagasaki and Berlin had atomic bombs dropped on them three days apart, but Hiroshima was not touched. This is not the way I remember it!" continued Norm, feeling that he was on to something.

"Why are you acting this way?" questioned Gretchen with a scowl.

"I am acting this way because, until I woke up from a coma," began Norm, "there was no such thing as *gyning*. Robert Kennedy was assassinated, but not in 1963, and he was never the President. A Dr. von Kemp has a theory about a rip in the fabric of space and time. Maybe I can talk to him tomorrow."

"Don't forget that you **are** going to dress up to go shopping," reminded Gretchen.

After taking a nervous gulp of air, Norm replied, "I'll do whatever you like, so long as I get to see Dr. von Kemp."

DR. Erhardt: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

"Norman Phillips is an interesting case," remarked Dr. Greer, as Dr. Erhardt quickly shook her hand. "It's a pleasure to...."

"Remarkable," commented Dr. Erhardt as he speed-read the twenty typed pages of Norm's latest chart, while waving off all attempts by Dr. Greer and Dr. Montgomery to converse with him. "His brain scans have always looked normal, and his muscle tone has remained good without any mechanical stimulation?"

Dr. Greer and Dr. Montgomery both nodded.

"The service technician could not eliminate the ghosting. How old are these monitors?" asked Dr. Erhardt.

"They're all less than five years old," assured Dr. Greer. "Oddly, when the technician attached the contacts to himself, the ghosting went away. He said he always uses his own readings as a point of reference. There is something very strange about our patient, especially his vocal dreams."

"If there weren't something unusual, I would not be here," Dr. Erhardt reminded her. "I also notice the orderly's comments: that the intervals between his facial shaves have been growing and that all his body hair seems to be turning finer."

"I had not noticed," admitted Dr. Montgomery, "but it is obvious," he commented, as he examined Norm's left arm. At that moment, Norm murmured some speech fragments, including comments about walking in high heels and trying to find Dr. von Kemp's phone number.

"Interesting; I need more tests. Dr. Greer," continued Dr. Erhardt, "I would appreciate it if you would draw five vials of blood from Mr. Phillips. I want to send it back to my laboratory by priority mail, so that some of my colleagues can study it. I suspect some kind of a major hormonal shift may be occurring."

"We have an excellent lab right here in our...." began Dr. Montgomery.

"We have several experimental tests that I also want performed," countered Dr. Erhardt. "I would also like copies of everything he has been saying...on cassette, of course. By the way, did I hear him mention Dr. Bruno von Kemp's name?"

"That's eerie, because Mr. Phillips wife said she was going to meet with him," said Dr. Montgomery. "He has some kind of crackpot ideas about a rip in space-time."

"Dr. von Kemp is one of our foremost quantum physicists, and he has some credentials in neuro-biology," countered Dr. Erhardt. "Don't be too eager refuse his help!"

DR. VON KEMP: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

Norm felt extremely self-conscious, knocking at Dr. von Kemp's door wearing an orange and brown-tone floral print dress and freshly-attached bright red salon nails. He was not looking forward to any excursions at the mall either. He realized that he somewhat resembled a woman, but he found it difficult to believe that he would soon undergo a transformation into a kind of a weird pseudo-female.

A gray-haired man opened the door; then he stepped out beside Norm and looked suspiciously up and down the street. It was the same Dr. von Kemp, whose special series

of lectures Norm had once attended. "Are you alone?" he asked nervously, with a heavy German accent.

"Just my wife waiting in the car," replied Norm in a puzzled tone. "Sorry about this get-up. My wife insisted on it. I can understand if it makes you...."

After he shut the door, he ran some kind of electronic detector from Norm's wig-covered head to his high-heeled feet; then he stuck it into Norm's purse for a few seconds.

"I was going to attack you with a concealed weapon, I certainly would not do it in high heels!" asserted Norm.

"Why should a man dressed as a woman bother me; I see it all the time. When I was young, I even went to work that way half the time. No, I wanted to make sure that the Secret Service did not plant any bugs," explained Dr. von Kemp.

"Why would the Secret Service bother you?" wondered Norm. "After all, this is the United States, a free country!"

"Yes, we are free to do as we like, as long as we don't cross them!" replied Dr. von Kemp defiantly. "By the way: if anyone ever asks, we did not have this conversation!"

"Why would anyone care what you say?" wondered Norm. "Scientists are generally ignored anyway!"

"First of all, I'm a naturalized citizen. Being the radical I am, I get assigned to all the subversive people lists. I'm a homosexual, and I've never allowed myself to be *gyned*. They would like nothing better than to turn me into a feeble-minded woman, to silence me forever!"

"This whole world is turned around for me!" complained Norm. Until I awoke from my coma, I had never heard of this *gyning*. Men did not go around dressed like women, except, of course, on talk shows. I'm even told that I will go on double dates with my wife, and that I will want to have sex with men! I had never before driven an Edsel. My wife was a high-paid attorney, not a lowly secretary! Robert Kennedy had

never been president, and there was no base on Mars!"

"Very interesting comments," replied Dr. von Kemp excitedly, as he grabbed both of Norm's hands, tightly pressing the salon nails into his palms. "I had wondered what effects the breach in the space-time continuum might cause. My friend, I think you have undergone a type of transposition with your counterpart in my universe!"

Norm paused for a moment; then he raised his eyebrows in excited understanding. "You mean this is like on *Star Trek*, where they ended up in the **Mirror Universe**?"

"Like what?" questioned Dr. von Kemp, raising his eyebrows.

"Oh," grimaced Norm, "you don't have that here either. How can everything be so much the same, and yet so different?"

"I don't think you can transpose, unless your parallelism is nearly perfect," speculated Dr. von Kemp.

"My counterpart could at this moment be having a similar conversation with another Dr. von Kemp, in my universe," suggested Norm.

"That is very possible. This is so wonderful; it proves my hypothesis!"

"So what!" complained Norm. "I seem to be stuck here, and I think I am starting to gyne. I did not shave this morning, and my waistline seems to be growing smaller. How come doctors can't find a cure for *gyning*?"

"I'm sure a cure exists," explained Dr. von Kemp, "but they do not really want to make it available. Think about it: nearly all the world's females are kept from power due to low IQ's. If a male becomes a problem, he is suddenly eliminated by unexpected permanent gyning. It's even happened to some of my friends, who have never had sex with a woman!"

"So what do I do?" asked Norm.

"Carry on as if you belonged here," urged Dr. von Kemp. "Adapt as much as possible to *gyning*. Discuss your transposition with no one, not even your wife. In the meantime, I would like to run regular tests using some special electronic equipment. We

can say that we are conducting a quantum mechanical probability study, which may not be far from the truth.

DR. VON KEMP: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

Gretchen Phillips approached the front door to Dr. von Kemp's house. She had come directly from her office, where she had worked for two hours. She did not usually work on Saturday, but she had been putting in a lot of overtime lately; it helped her forget about Norm's problems.

With her long hair blowing in the breeze, and wearing her favorite turquoise skirt-suit, Gretchen looked outstanding. Even her blue-green pumps were a near-match in color. A heavy, dark-green purse hung from her right shoulder. Impatiently, she rang the doorbell.

"Mrs. Phillips?" asked Dr. von Kemp after cracking the door. He was plainly trying hard to avoid his German accent.

"Yes! Please, may I come in; I do not have a lot of time," she urged.

"Please forgive the mess," he apologized; "I do not have many visitors. "The dining room table is more convenient for me. Please have a seat. So, you read my letter in the journal?"

"No," replied Gretchen as she pulled out a chair and seated herself. "My husband needs help, and you seem to be the only one I can turn to. Your theory about a rip in the fabric of space and time is my only hope, because no one else has even so much as a clue about what's happened."

"I'm still puzzled," Dr. von Kemp persisted, "about how you found out about my theory."

"It must have been in the newspaper, or on television," she responded curtly. "Why are you asking?"

"If you don't read the journal, I do not know how you can have found out, because I am still working on the press release for tomorrow. I was really shocked when you called me," he confessed.

"Look, my husband is lying in a hospital bed in a deep coma, but they tell me that it is really not a coma. His mind is active, but he won't wake up. His muscles have not even atrophied. If that is not strange enough, he is having dreams or fantasies about dressing like a woman. Recent comments indicate that he even **thinks** that he is turning into a woman!"

Dr. von Kemp excitedly stood up. "Mrs. Phillips, I would like to take some specialized electronic equipment into your husband's hospital room."

"Equipment?" she questioned with a perplexed look. "Dr. von Kemp, I was hoping you would have some answers now!"

"All I can do is speculate. I think that your husband is situated at a locus between this universe and another space-time continuum, but I need to take specific types of measurements," he replied. "If I know what kind of field-effects we are dealing with, I might be able to help."

"I will take whatever help you can give me," said Gretchen softly as she touched his left hand. "I need my husband back, and I'm also pregnant."

"Remember, I am not a medical doctor," he reminded her. "I will need a release from you, as well as the cooperation of all the medical staff."

"I'll get it for you," she said confidently. "After all, I am a high-powered attorney!"

* * *

THE EXAM: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

"How did you do?" asked Cynthia Robertson, the secretary of Norm's Target Control group. It was Friday; Norm was getting ready to go home.

"No noticeable reduction in IQ," sighed Norm in a contralto voice; "however, the rest of the transformation obviously speeding along." Norm gestured with contour motions around his expanding hips, narrowing waist, and growing bust line.

"No matter how often I see these changes, I'm always astounded," admitted Cynthia. "You say that it is entirely painless, including the nipples on your breasts?"

"Except for some minor gnawing aches, I feel just fine. Physically, everything is okay. It's the mental part that bothers me. Next week is a paid medical vacation: transition week. I get a new driver's license and a legal name change. I'm not being given any choice," moaned Norm.

"Good luck!" said Cynthia, trying to offer encouragement.

UNEXPECTED CHANGES: REGULAR SPACE-TIME

"I came as soon as I heard the news!" cried Gretchen excitedly as she burst into Norm's hospital room. "Hey, he still looks unconscious to me! My gosh, his skin tone looks awful! What are you doing to him?"

"I'm sorry," apologized Dr. Erhardt. "I was so excited when I discovered the changes taking place in his body, that I called you down here really without a proper explanation. This process has been doing on for a long time; we just did not notice how far it had advanced."

"Maybe you should sit down," warned Dr. Greer. "Your husband appears to be undergoing some kind of transformation. These fantasies no longer exist only in his mind!"

"What the hell is going on?" questioned Gretchen. "Why does Norm look so strange?"

"He looks strange," began Dr. Erhardt, "because he is undergoing a radical transformation. This sort of thing is often reported in supermarket tabloids, but your

husband is the first known actual case."

"Quit talking in circles," Gretchen demanded. "I want to know what is going on. Why does his chest look so strange?"

"Because he is growing female breasts," blurted Dr. Greer. "That's not all. He has lost a lot of weight, and all his muscles are growing more delicate. His beard has stopped growing, and all his body hair is growing finer."

"It's all so fantastic," explained Dr. Erhardt. "All his bones have turned plastic and are rearranging themselves. Unlike cancer cells, his cells are rearranging themselves in a controlled manner. His waistline is growing smaller while his hips are widening. At the same time, his jaw is receding and his cheekbones are growing larger. If I could decipher the physiological processes taking place, I would have the key to treatments way beyond plastic surgery!"

"If I did not know better, I would think you're telling me that he is changing into a woman," commented Gretchen with a strong hint of irritation.

"Though he will still be a male genetically, your husband will soon look like an attractive woman," confirmed Dr. Greer. "Estrogen levels in his blood far exceed his normal testosterone levels."

Gretchen looked at Dr. Erhardt with a pained expression. "Can't you do something to stop this?"

"So long as this process is not pathological, I think it is too dangerous to interfere," explained Dr. Erhardt. "I also think that this process is reversible. Until we understand it, it is not advisable to arrest the process at this point."

"How much like a woman **will** he look?" questioned Gretchen nervously.

Dr. Erhardt explained, "I estimate the transformation will be complete within five weeks. His new, external appearance should be so accurate, that he should be able to pass a woman even naked. His penis and scrotum have shrunk considerably and are taking on a most **feminine** appearance. This transformation is thorough and is also

without precedence! But think about the knowledge we will learn: a new glimpse into the body's chemistry. Cancer researchers will be most interested. My colleague, Dr. Bowers in Colorado, will be elated!"

"That's all very nice, but did you clear Dr. von Kemp?" asked Gretchen angrily.

"Why, yes...but why?" questioned Dr. Erhardt.

"I have him scheduled to run some tests on Wednesday. I am just praying he can find out what's happening," Gretchen asserted.

"We will give him all possible cooperation," assured Dr. Erhardt.

CRITICAL MEASUREMENTS: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

As she walked across the parking lot toward her Edsel, Norma thought about how well she was adapting to her strange predicament. In this alternate universe, wives actually rejoiced in the knowledge that their husbands might, eventually, have to literally walk in their shoes. This was neither a party event nor any kind of a stunt; **Norman** had legally and officially become **Norma**. The letter **G** had been placed in the sex box of her driver's license. Following Dr. von Kemp's advice, she pretended to accept the transformation, which would be complete in five short weeks. Today, she wore the outfit that Gretchen had selected for her first full day as a woman. It was a dark-green shirtdress, which had a matching dark-green belt, along with a light-green, long-sleeved sweater and two-inch-heeled black sandals. Stumbling along, she wondering if she would learn to master a woman's walk during the final weeks of her transformation.

In her mind, Norma denied any acceptance of her fate, while she developed a certain fascination with her new image. Everyone gave her encouragement and compliments. Norman had never received so much attention. Only the threatened loss of IQ really disturbed Norma, but so far it had not happened. Today, Norma once again

got a high score on the IQ test administered by a nurse at Black Mountain Laboratories. Norma hoped to be one of the few men exempt from such unwanted side-effects of the transformation. In any case, Norma was required to study her secretary tutorial manual.

Thank goodness, Norma was going to participate with Dr. von Kemp in tests at her home this evening, before any loss of IQ might make such a meeting difficult or impossible.

* * *

Gretchen nervously watched as Dr. von Kemp set up his equipment in her living room. There were two metal crates with permanently-attached dollies. One contained a two-hundred-pound power supply, while the other contained a monitor, cabling, and four devices that looked much like miniature radar scanners. The devices were actually sophisticated field generators. As Dr. von Kemp stepped out a large square, moving some furniture to the side in the process, he placed one of the rotating generators at the center of each of the four sides.

Dr. von Kemp placed his monitor on the desk next to Norma's personal computer. Once the last cable had been connected, he threw a series of switches in sequence on the power supply. An image began to form in the monitor, and the field generator grids began to rotate.

"Please move to within the square," urged Dr. von Kemp, "while I calibrate my system."

Norma changed to a pair of low-heel brown pumps; then she walked toward the center of the square, where Gretchen was already standing. Dr. von Kemp's radical experiment was the culmination of a string of unusual days. Though she was officially a *gyned* male, she was, for all practical purposes, now leading a woman's life. She wore women's clothing all the time, especially since Gretchen had placed all of Norm's

clothing into storage. It was just as well, because Norm's clothing would not properly fit her anyway. *'When I look down, I see my nylon-clad legs, and my skirt resting on the back of my calves!'* she thought.

"Why do we look so strange?" wondered Gretchen, as she peered at the metallic, contrasted images of her and Norma that were surrounded by shimmering patterns of light.

"Are we peering into another universe?" asked Norma.

"Not yet," replied Dr. von Kemp. "So far, all I see are the normal electrical fields that surround everyone. I am hunting for a certain resonance...there, that could be it!"

The images of Norma and Gretchen, standing next to their sofa, resembled a poor black and white television image. However, a series of red dots and dashes, which looked much like a wire-frame diagram, surrounded and engulfed them.

"That is all very confusing," remarked Norma. "What does it mean?"

"I think I have established a weak link with the other universe," explained Dr. von Kemp confidently. Norma, you are linked with this image, which appears much like someone lying on a horizontal structure, such as a bed or a sofa."

"It almost looks like I'm sick in bed, at a hospital or something," observed Norma.

"Of course, that's it!" realized Dr. von Kemp as he clapped his hands together. "For the nexus to be stable, both of you can not be conscious at the same time. If your counterpart awakens, the link will be broken, and the nexus will dissolve. Think of the ramifications...the origins of dreams, maybe."

"Where am I?" asked Gretchen.

As Dr. von Kemp pointed at his monitor, he answered, "Mrs. Phillips, these lines intersect with this outline of a woman, your counterpart in the other universe. I seem to see several hazy, moving diffraction patterns: the images of others whose counterparts are not present in your living room. Many other weak lines appear to emanate from Norma's counter-image, indicating that she is truly at the nexus of the interaction

between the two universes."

"Where are you?" wondered Norma.

"My counterpart is not within the detection area," explained Dr. von Kemp. "Watch what happens when **we** plunge our hands within the square...."

Dr. von Kemp's right hand and arm moved across the screen of the monitor, followed by its red, intersecting wire-frame shadow. No matter what maneuver Dr. von Kemp performed, his counterpart closely matched it.

"This is awful," lamented Gretchen. "No wonder my poor Norma has been acting so strange; this strange other universe is a bad influence. Can't you do anything to stop this?"

"Well," began Dr. von Kemp, as he pointed to a banded image at the bottom of his monitor's screen, "I do see some key frequencies, which seem to originate from the nexus. If might be able to set up some counter-signals which will interfere with the link. What do you think, Norma?"

"Will it reverse the transposition?" Norma asked cautiously.

"I do not know...I just do not know," admitted Dr. von Kemp.

"Do it!" cried Gretchen. "Let's bring all this nonsense to an end!"

"Wait a moment," urged Dr. von Kemp, "while I make a few adjustments. Activating interference...now!"

"Norma!" cried Gretchen, as her husband uttered a feminine moan, tottered, and then fell toward the floor. Gretchen caught her and then eased her to the carpet. "Please shut it off!" she urged, as the monitor's screen began to flash erratically.

CRITICAL MEASUREMENTS: NORMAL SPACE-TIME

Gretchen paced in the hall as Dr. von Kemp moved his two large metal crates into Norm's hospital room. Since the space was so cramped, everyone else had to leave the

room, as Dr. von Kemp set up his sophisticated equipment. Dr. Greer had the evening off, but Dr. Montgomery, Dr. Erhardt, and three nurses were there to assist. Dr. Montgomery was apprehensive about having an unorthodox apparatus in a room in his hospital, but Dr. Erhardt reassured him that he had great trust in Dr. von Kemp as a scientist.

Soon everyone was allowed to reenter Norm's room. Dr. von Kemp quickly described the configuration, including the massive power supply, the four field generators, and the special monitor. Once Norm's bed was moved to closer to the center of the room, Dr. von Kemp looked over the final configuration before powering up.

"Has he always looked like that?" asked Dr. von Kemp. "I would swear I was seeing a woman there in bed."

"Remember, when we first talked, I mentioned that my husband was having strange fantasies," reminded Gretchen. "Well, he has begun to change in reality, too!."

Dr. von Kemp looked at Dr. Erhardt, who returned a confirming nod. Satisfied, Dr. von Kemp flipped the switches on their side of the power supply in the proper sequence. The field generator grids began to rotate, at the same time that the first image appeared in the monitor.

"Do these confusing images mean anything?" asked Dr. Montgomery. "That scene is certainly not up to broadcast standards."

"A poor optical image, but a great microwave image," countered Dr. von Kemp. "These series of variable-length reddish dashes and dots form a type of wire-frame field image. Mrs. Phillips, I'm sure that woman over here is you. This other woman appears to be at the nexus of all the fields. As far-fetched as it may seem, I have to conclude that your husband's counterpart in the other universe is a woman."

"Probably not," deduced Gretchen; "I sure his counterpart has also undergone this bizarre, induced transformation!"

"Where are the rest of us?" asked Dr. Erhardt curiously.

"My counterpart is obviously out of the field, just as am I," replied Dr. von Kemp. But watch, as I run my right arm through my generated field."

"Fabulous," responded Dr. Erhardt. "You and your counterpart are synchronized, but where am I, and Dr. Montgomery?"

"I do not think you gentlemen are there," Dr. von Kemp deduced. "I would judge that Mr. and Mrs. Phillips are at home in the other universe, or, at least, they would be at my place."

"So this verifies what must be keeping my poor Norm in a coma and physically changing his body," lamented Gretchen. "Can't you do anything to shut this effect down?"

"Well," began Dr. von Kemp, as he pointed to the frequency display at the bottom of his monitor's screen, "I do see several key frequencies that seem to originate from the nexus. I might be able to set up some counter-signals that will jam the interface between the two universes. What do you think, Mrs. Phillips?"

"If it will give me Norman back, I say do it," she stated cautiously.

"I do not know...I really do not know," admitted Dr. von Kemp, who glanced at Dr. Erhardt.

"We have to rely on your judgment, because we are way beyond the realm of medical science," replied Dr. Erhardt.

"Please bring all this nonsense to an end!" cried Gretchen

"Wait, please, while I make a few adjustments," urged Dr. von Kemp. "Activating interference...now! Himmel, seh...look at the disruption in the monitor; it is working!"

"Norm!" cried Gretchen, as her husband thrashed about in rapid spasms, crying out in a pained feminine voice, while his life-signs in the monitors dropped sharply. "Shut it down!" she ordered, as she rushed to Norm's side.

THE AWAKENING: NORMAL SPACE-TIME

Five days had passed. In the meantime, while the transformation progressed, Norm's vital signs continued to improve. Still, no one could explain why his coma persisted. After all, Dr. von Kemp had predicted the dissolution of the nexus, the area where Norm's body linked the two universes.

While at work, Gretchen checked with the hospital every hour. Dr. Erhardt was confident that Norm would reawaken at any moment. The final call was made at 2:30 P.M. Erratic flashes of energy were pulsing throughout Norm's brain. He frequently opened his eyes, though he was not conscious.

Gretchen listened over the phone to one of Norm's strange vocal comments. He was speaking a mixture of incoherent phrases, which included a government plot, the loss of his mind, and beauty and fashion tips. Putting all her assignments on hold, Gretchen rushed out of her office and drove to the hospital.

* * *

Norm awakened to see Gretchen hovering over him, while she gently held his hand. "Hi there, beautiful, but can you answer a question?"

"Anything, dear," she replied.

"Are you a secretary or a lawyer?" he asked.

"A lawyer, of course," she answered with a puzzled expression.

"Good, I'm back," he said as he tried to sit up. "But I'm not exactly normal, am I," he observed, as he noted the pitch of his voice, the weight of his chest, and the feelings in his groin. The transposition has been reversed, but not without effects. I guess you will have to call me Norma."

"It will be difficult, but I now I will have to adjust," admitted Gretchen. "You're awake, and that is all that matters," she said with a note of apprehension."

As Norma spied Dr. Greer, she added, "I like you better as a doctor than as a nurse. The other universe is not exactly fair." When she saw Dr. Erhardt, she continued, "I do not remember you."

"I'm Dr. Erhardt. I came here to watch you make history. I am so pleased to meet you," he said warmly; "you have made this the greatest moment in my life."

"Do I have to stay in this bed?" wondered Norma.

"I would be happy sign the check-out papers," said Dr. Montgomery eagerly. "The insurance company has been on our case for weeks now! I'll have a orderly fetch your clothes from storage."

"Oh," lamented Norma with a scowl, "Norm's clothing just will not do."

"What!" snapped Gretchen, as she tensed and then relaxed.

"You will have to used to my new look for a while," warned Norma. "It will pass, and I will return to being plain Norman. In the meantime, you will have to think of me more as your sister. I should start to revert sometime close to the baby's first birthday. Right now, I really need a big favor."

"Like what?" asked Gretchen reluctantly.

"I need a proper outfit. Let's see, the following should do: a green shirtdress, misses size 12, a pair of coordinated clip earrings, a black bra, size 38B, size 7 panties, size D pantyhose, a size 38 black slip...and, yes, one-and-a-half inch black pumps, size 11W, but no pointed toes, please ," recited Norma nonchalantly.

"You're joking, of course," said Gretchen with a frown.

"Gretchen, dear, there is humor here, but I am not joking," sighed Norma. "If I'm going to be a woman, I might as well look the part. I might add that your counterpart in the other universe took this much better than you, and she was just a secretary!"

"Oh, very well," Gretchen relented. "Repeat your list so that I can write it down. All I can say is that this had better work out!"

* * *

"There," squealed Norma as she turned about, glancing at her outfit in her room mirror while, at the same time, showing off to the others. "It's not a perfect fit, but it will do. I'll certainly attract less attention than wearing Norm's clothing," she added. With a snap of a finger, Norma indicated that there was one more detail. She borrowed the make-up pouch from Gretchen's purse; then she touched up her face the way she had done many times in the other universe.

"I realize that my looks will improve as my hair grows, but how is this?" asked Norma finally.

"Unbelievable," remarked Dr. Greer; "you look like an attractive woman. Never have I seen a patient spontaneously change into someone else!"

"Careful," Norma admonished; "I really have not changed. Only your perception of myself has changed. Remember that!" she added as she looked toward Gretchen.

REPERCUSSIONS: ALTERNATE SPACE-TIME

So far, Norma had astonished everyone by maintaining a high IQ. The link with the other universe had been severed, but she was sure that there was a residual effect, though memories of the other Norman-Norma had been all but forgotten. Life was exactly like it should be now, except for one gnawing problem.

Norma called Dr. von Kemp at work, but they said he was on special medical leave. There was no answer on his home telephone, so Norma left another message on his answering machine. She wondered why he did not return her calls, since the two of them had agreed to continue their research into the effects caused by the nexus.

It was time for Norma's next exam with a company nurse. She had gone through the procedure so many times that she was confident that she would continue to pass all

the relevant tests.

* * *

One of Norma's coworkers, a young mathematician named Bert Jeffers, was just leaving the company dispensary as she reached the door. It did not escape his notice how attractive she looked in her new red skirt-suit. No words were spoken. Bert gave her an approving glance, and Norma returned a smile with a seductive nod. Gretchen had said that she would allow Norma one romantic adventure, where the two of them would be single women, out for a night of dinner, dancing, and sex. Perhaps Bert could be her date on that night.

"There you are, Norma," acknowledged nurse Collins. "Your IQ test was great, but the blood test still indicates a lingering infection. It's probably related to your transformation."

"Not another shot!" scowled Norma.

"It won't hurt much. In a couple of more days, we'll have this thing licked. I think you are going to make medical history, as a rare *gyned* male with high intelligence!" said nurse Collins sincerely.

* * *

As she sat in a chair for her orientation class, Norma wondered what had happened. Last week, she was a high-paid, very smart physicist. Now, she was about to be introduced to her new life as a lowly secretary at the laboratory. She had finally reached Dr. von Kemp on the telephone, but he could not be any help; he was in the same situation as Norma. He had suddenly undergone spontaneous *gyning*, with a massive loss of intelligence. He cried as he told her he would be lucky to ever rise above

the status of a cleaning woman or maid. Norma cried too; it was so sad. Both Dr. von Kemp and Norma attributed their situation to fate, having forgotten any theories of a national conspiracy.

A middle-aged woman stepped up to the front of the room. She was impeccably made-up and dressed. Her hair looked freshly permed, as if she had just stepped out of a beauty parlor. She wore a yellow floral-print dress, which had a wide skirt and fell about two inches below her knees. Sheer hose, high-heeled black pumps, and a gold watch, a thin gold bracelet, and small gold earrings completed her look.

"Hello, I'm Erin Cummings, the supervisor of employee relations. I am also a permanently-*gyned* male; it's no big deal, but I do think my heritage makes me well-suited to my job. I am here today to welcome you to the secretarial pool at Black Mountain Laboratories. After undergoing a series of computer-aided evaluations next door, each of you will report to your new positions tomorrow. The better you perform, the better your new job and pay.

"I need to say something about our mixture here. Some of you are females, and some are *gyned* males. Unfortunately, sexism being what it is, the *gyned* males will be paid more. That is company policy, and I can't do anything about. Otherwise, you will all be treated as equal as possible, and will be expected to do your jobs properly and follow all company rules. We also discourage you, and especially you *gyned* males, from dating other company employees, which can create a disruptive work environment.

"While I'm talking about rules," she began as she walked to Norma's chair, "I want you to know that there is a dress code. You are all expected to dress and act like ladies. Unless the weather deems otherwise, a feminine dress, or blouse and skirt combination, is required. No plunging necklines are allowed, neither are hemlines above the knees. Pumps are required, with a minimum heel height of two inches. No excessive make-up is allowed. No professional suits are allowed either," she added as she pointed directly at Norma, who was wearing her red skirt-suit. Norma felt so embarrassed that she wanted

to cry.

"Now we will break for a half hour before evaluations begin," announced Erin finally. The ladies' room is five doors down the hallway to the right. Please be back and ready to begin promptly at 11:30 A.M. Thank you, and good luck!" she added somewhat insincerely.

A NEW LIFE: NORMAL SPACE-TIME

People everywhere smiled as Norma walked down the hallway, wearing her green shirtdress, while holding the baby carrier to her chest. She was getting used to the turnabout situation, being the proud mother and homemaker, who was showing off her new baby. Since Gretchen made far more money than Norma, and since Norma could perform all the motherly functions, including nursing from her breasts, it had been decided that Norma should take maternity leave instead of Gretchen. Once Gretchen had been freed from her unwanted chores, she quit being hostile to Norma. For the first time in their lives, Norma and his wife carried on like best friends.

"Hello, I'm just stopping by," she at the door to Bob Hiller's office. "I'm showing off Anita Diane Phillips. But don't get too close; doctors say this gyning thing might be transmittable."

"I'm still astounded," admitted Bob. "I've passed you in the hallways without recognizing you. Tell me, can you answer the ultimate question?"

"Is it better to be a man or a woman? As Norma, I get a lot more attention and compliments. I can talk in a sweet, feminine tone or a cold masculine tone, or mix the two together. Women's clothing is slightly inconvenient, but it is very comfortable and stylish."

"How are you and Gretchen making out financially," wondered Bob.

"After I fended off the *Star* and the *National Enquirer*, I got a couple of legitimate

offers for my story. I also have a right to royalties from any medical advancements derived from my condition. Well, I've got to go; I have two more stops here before heading for Gretchen's office at *Mitchell and Swanson*."

"I'm so sorry for any inconvenience you've suffered," sighed Bob as he put his hand on her shoulder.

"I have no regrets; I'm having the time of my life," said Norma with a smile. "The other guys are probably dreading the next test, though."

"There won't be any until we finish making changes to the accelerator configuration. We never realized that such heavy, high-energy particles would be created, that they created enormous quantum-mechanical fluctuations," explained Bob.

"Bye, see you around," said Norma with soft, almost sultry voice.

Bob waved goodbye. "Unbelievable!" he whispered to himself.

CONVERGENCE

Norma pushed her baby, securely resting in her stroller, along the winding path in the park near her and Gretchen's residence. The path was slightly bumpy, being made of inlaid brick, but the large rubber wheels traversed it with ease.

It was warm and sunny day, with just a hint of a breeze, so Norma wore what Gretchen referred to as her *casual* outfit: a linen-look gold top with short, cuffed sleeves, tucked neatly into a narrow, black slitted skirt that had a wide black belt. She wore no hose, but her legs looked flattering without any covering. Of course, common sense dictated low-heeled sandals instead of heels for a long walk. As fantastic as her clothing looked, her hair was now even more striking; she had let it grow very long and had recently had it styled in one the popular spiral patterns.

It was a fun and frivolous way to spend an afternoon, while Gretchen slaved away at her office. Soon, it would be time to return home to get Anita ready for her nap before

starting dinner.

Normal heard a strange noise, so she looked upward. When she realized that the sky was blank, save for some thin clouds, she wondered to herself, *'What was that?'*

"Who said that? Where are you?" came a feminine-sounding reply, sounding as if it came from nowhere.

'You can hear what I think?' asked Norma, talking care to not vocalize her words.

"I'm hearing you think?" repeated the voice, which sounded familiar.

'This is weird! I'm Norma Phillips; who are you?' asked Norma.

"**I'm** Norma Phillips, and I **don't** like what you are doing!" objected the voice sternly.

'Where are you now, and what are you doing? Most important, what are you wearing?' asked Norma curiously.

"I'm at my desk, typing purchase orders for my Boss, Mr. Mason. I'm wearing a gold, short-sleeved top and a slitted black skirt. I am also wearing black pumps with two-inch heels; we have a dress code that I must follow. What are you wearing? Where are you?" asked (the alternate) Norma.

'I'm wearing the same outfit. If it fits you the way it fits me, you must get a lot of glances. Except, of course, I am wearing flat sandals, because I'm taking Anita for a walk in the park,' replied Norma.

"Anita is home with Gretchen. Who are you?" asked (the alternate) Norma again.

'I'm your counterpart in this universe. My Gretchen is at her office. Remember, the two universes are only parallel to a certain extent,' explained Norma.

"What are we talking about?" questioned (the alternate) Norma.

'This must be a reappearance of the nexus, but this time we are both conscious. Dr. von Kemp will be very interested in this development.' commented Norma.

"I don't understand," said (the alternate) Norma. "Ever since my *gyning*, I've had trouble with all these scientific terms. I remember most of what happened, but I can't

comprehend it anymore."

'*Your IQ dropped?*' asked Norma with an apprehensive tone.

"It went way down, like a thick cloud covering my mind. I've been demoted to the secretarial pool. I'm not at the bottom, but this is not exactly a great job! I'm also stuck in this hot portable building. Even though I'm next to an open window, conditions are still terrible," lamented (the alternate) Norma.

'*Call your Dr. von Kemp; I'm sure that he can help you...and us!*' urged Norma.

"He spontaneously *gyned* and lost all his intelligence. I understand he works as a maid at a hotel now," said (the alternate) Norma, as she obviously struggled to form her sentences.

'*I don't like this at all,*' observed Norma; '*it's all too convenient. Did they give you strange shots or something?*'

"How do you have time for a walk in the park?" asked (the alternate) Norma, who began to understand what Norma was talking about.

'*Actually, I'm at my car. Anita is already back in her carrier, and I'm folding the stroller. Please, did they give you anything?*' asked Norma.

"I had some kind of infection, so they gave me antibiotics. I felt a lot better. I just wish I did not feel so stupid...having to work at such a stupid job," sighed (the alternate) Norma.

Norma shut the door and started her car. Now there was silence; she had lost contact with the other Norma. She shut off the motor, but it made no difference; then she switched the ignition back on and rolled down her power window. Realizing that the connection had been reestablished, she continued, '*This rapport only works if we're not fully enclosed. Listen Norma, my other self...we've go to work together so we can help each other.*'

"What do you mean?" asked (the alternate) Norma.

'*For one thing, you can give me a wealth of knowledge about your universe. It*

can even make me rich!" thought Norma excitedly.

"Make you rich...?" questioned (the alternate) Norma.

*'I'm going on **Oprah** next week. Men here simply do not **gyne**, so I'm a bit of a celebrity. Being a famous pseudo-woman celebrity is unusual, but I love it! Tomorrow, Gretchen and I are going to buy me a new outfit for my trip!'* informed Norma.

"If you are in another universe, what good is your money to me? Gretchen likes my gynyng, but even she is worried how we are going to manage our budget on two low salaries," commented (the alternate) Norma.

*'Listen, my sister: I'm not mentally impaired, so I can help you, as well as all the women and **gyned** males in your universe. I'm beyond all the tricks of your government,'* replied Norma with a devilish emphasis. *'So, what do you think?'*

"I don't really know...what to do about this," replied (the alternate) Norma. "I'll have to think about it."

* * *

Gretchen arrived home just after 5:30 P.M. She was dressed in a new brown skirt-suit. She felt obligated to uphold a sharp image even at home, because she now had extra competition from her own husband. Though she was used to living in a two-woman household, walking through the front door always felt like reentry into another world.

"Dinner's almost ready," announced Norma as she gave Gretchen a light peck.

"My, you look extra spiffy," commented Gretchen on the gold top and form-fitting black skirt. "But why the impish look? What have you been up to?"

"Nothing, really?" responded Norma coyly. "I talked with both Dr. von Kemp and Dr. Montgomery today. "Even though I am no longer at the nexus between the two universes, the accelerator created a widespread mingled field. Several hundred cases of

initial *gyning* have been reported!"

"Interesting, but is it really so amusing?" questioned Gretchen further.

"There's more," replied Norma; "something really great happened today!"

"Did you go out and get laid but some guy?" asked Gretchen in a scolding tone.

"How could you? You know I can tolerate anything but infidelity!"

"Relax," urged Norma, looking very demure, as she held Gretchen's hands.

"Today I reestablished contact with my counterpart in the other universe. We can talk to each other in our minds, so long as we are not enclosed."

Gretchen paused, as her expression changed from anger to curiosity. "But what does it mean?" she asked.

"That's what I will find out, but it should be interesting. There will be cross-contamination.... But come and sit down; it's time to dish up dinner," said Norma with a slightly devilish look. Norma realized that the adventure was only beginning. There were going to be many changes in her world and unexpectedly devastating changes to the governing order of the alternate world.