

# Hot Wheels



## Briana Vermont



A "Her TV" Novel



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# Hot Wheels

## Part 1

By Briana Vermont

### Chapter One Another Fine Mess

Danny Wheeler watched the action from the bench. Inline roller hockey was a fast-paced game, the puck shooting from one end of the concrete rink to the other in the blink of an eye. You had to be a great skater to keep up with that kind of action, and Danny was the best. He just wasn't a great hockey player. But he had worked his way up to second string on the Newton Iowa Newts. He hadn't actually played in a real game yet, but being second string meant he was invited on the current road trip. Seven cities in two weeks, more travelling than Danny had ever imagined!

Today's game was in Santa Editha, California, against the Santa Editha Legends. All the motels and bus travel were paid for, plus second-string players were given twenty dollars a day. It wasn't much, but

Danny wasn't in it for the money. He loved anything on wheels, and if he could get paid for skating he was all in!

The puck shot from one end to the other, with the mass of muscular men pursuing in an impenetrable pack. Danny was smaller than most players, but fast. He could picture himself at the front of the pack, first to the puck every time! His chance would come, and then he would show them what he could do.

Roller hockey was usually rough, but there were rules and most teams kept it clean. The chances of injury were fairly high, playing a fast game on a concrete surface. Some teams were rougher than others though, and Santa Editha was one of those. Danny had noticed one player in particular, with the name "Carter" on the back of his jersey, was the worst. He seemed to have no regard for the other players. Carter had sidelined one of The Newt's players, and gotten away with half a dozen serious rule violations. He seemed to have a way of knowing exactly when the referee was not watching so he could strike with impunity.

The plurality of pungent players skated past Danny's rinkside seat, so he had a perfect view of what happened next. As the referee was distracted by the action, Carter slipped his stick between the legs of a trailing player and twisted, sending the hapless skater sprawling.

Carter skated past his victim, joining the action as if nothing had happened. Play continued as the injured Newt picked himself up and limped over to the benches.

Danny watched Carter, skating through the pack, no care or guilt for taking such risks with other people's careers and lives! As long as the ref didn't catch him he was fine with what he had done. Danny's blood boiled with the thought.

"Wheeler? Wheeler, you asleep over there?"

Danny looked up, finally noticing that the coach was calling him.

"Yes coach?" he replied. "What do you want?"

“What do I want?” yelled back the coach. “I want a sexy woman who can’t keep her hands off me, but I’m not likely to get that am I? So maybe while we’re waiting for that to not happen, you could get out there and play the game!”

“Who, me?” asked Danny. “You want me in the game?”

“Unless I change my mind, so get out there while I’m still in a good mood!” the coach blustered.

“Yes sir!” Danny shouted as he jumped off the bench and onto the rink. Within a few strides he had caught up to the action, coming up behind the player named Carter. Danny used his short stature to his advantage; he could maneuver around, behind, under any of the larger players. Danny ducked around Carter and...

An elbow brought Danny’s participation in the game to a quick end.

\* \* \*

Danny awoke with a headache. It was the kind of headache that seemed to foretell your entire day, letting you know in advance that it really isn’t in your best interest to even open your eyes.

Danny could tell, even with his eyes closed, that the room was bright. Like, incredibly bright. Danny pulled a pillow over his face.

“Who left the blinds open?” he shouted to the empty room, hoping someone was there who could take pity on him and close the blinds. Except there was no one. He could tell, because there wasn’t a sound in the room.

Well, that wasn’t completely true. There was an infuriating, low, ‘beep, beep’ noise, at just the right frequency to make the headache pound into the backs of his eyeballs.

Danny tried to locate the source of the noise, still with his eyes closed, with the intent of finding a shoe or some other item in the room (still without opening

his eyes), and using said shoe (or other item) as a projectile to hopefully smash the source of the beeps into tiny pieces.

Danny felt his way to the edge of the bed, as a first step in his shoe-finding expedition. Except his explorations were cut short as his arm became entangled in what he could only guess must have been an electrical cord. Some amount of thrashing was attempted, yet this had no effect in displacing the cord.

“Who is running electrical cords through my bed while I’m asleep?” Danny called out angrily to the empty room. And what kind of appliance did they have running in his room? A toaster? A coffee pot? A George Foreman Grill? What kind of trouble was he making for himself if he just ripped at the cord and sent the item at the other end flying through the room? Danny finally had enough incentive to open his eyes.

Danny looked around his room. ‘His’ meaning the room he was in, because in no other way could he consider it his. He had never seen this room before. Danny had no idea where he was.

The room had two beds, including his (with ‘his’ taking the same connotation as previously). The other was unoccupied, which for now seemed a good thing. Although you never know; another occupant to the room might have been able to give Danny some hint as to what was going on. Except the bed was empty and so not worth giving any further thought.

The room was painted a pale green; the sort of nauseating green that would offend the least sensitive person even without a pounding headache. There was a huge window on the wall closest to him, accounting for the bright daylight that still made it almost impossible to keep his eyes open, even given his current desire to see what he could in order to figure out what was going on.

Danny located the source of the ‘beep, beep’ noise. It was a large box on the bedside table beside him, the kind of box that cries out ‘medical equipment’ through not only its clinical beep-beep sounds, but also by way of the tiny screen with a green line blipping in time to the beeps. This box also turned out to

be the source of the electrical cords wrapped around Danny's arms and head, which turned out to be wires attaching him to the medical monitor. There also appeared to be a needle in his arm, attached to a tube, attached to a plastic bottle hanging off a poorly balanced coat rack on wobbly wheels.

"What the f..." Danny started to say, but was interrupted before he could complete the thought.

"Rise and shine!" shouted an impossibly cheerful woman in a nurse's uniform as she burst through the door. "Up and at 'em! Another day, a glorious day! Look at that sunshine! Mustn't sleep the whole day away! So how are we feeling today?"

"We?" Danny wondered aloud. "We are feeling very confused. And we have a splitting headache."

"Well, that's to be expected," the nurse told him as she placed the back of her hand on Danny's forehead. She was presumably seeing if he had a raised temperature, although Danny was fairly certain the box next to the bed could have told her that with much greater accuracy.

"Excuse me, but why should I expect to feel confused and have headaches?" Danny asked. When the nurse looked at him with the same expression his third grade teacher would use when she had no intention of answering his impertinent questions, he tried another approach.

"Where am I?"

The nurse held her no-impertinent-questions look long enough to be sure she wouldn't need it again before answering.

"You're in Santa Editha Memorial Hospital," she told him. "Your friends brought you in yesterday. You apparently received quite a blow to the head falling off a skateboard or some such activity."

"It was Roller Hockey," Danny corrected her as the memory came back to him.

"Just as bad, I'm sure!" the nurse admonished him, as she busied herself disconnecting Danny from the machine. She left the fluid drip in place, however.



“You say my friends brought me here?” Danny asked. “Are they still waiting?”

“No,” the nurse told him. “They brought you in and left. At any rate that was yesterday afternoon! They would be long gone anyway. Oh, but do you know? I believe they left you a note.”

Well, that was something. “Can I see it?” Danny asked.

“It would be at the nurses’ station, just down the hall. You can go and pick it up any time. Well I have to be moving along. I have other patients to see as you can imagine.”

“What should I do?” wondered Danny.

“Just relax. Your doctor will be here to speak with you in a couple of hours.”

The nurse left Danny to his still confused thoughts. “Wait here? A couple of hours? In an empty room with nothing to do and no one to speak to?” A couple of minutes of these thoughts swirling in his still pounding head prompted him to move.

“There’s a note from the team at the nurse’s station,” he managed to wedge into his swirling thoughts. “I should get up and get it.”

Danny sat up at the side of his bed, then stood. He was still attached to a hose, attached to a bottle, attached to a wobbly coat rack on wheels. After some consideration, Danny decided to take the entire Rube Goldberg contraption with him. As he approached the door to the hallway he also considered his state of undress. He was only wearing a thin cotton gown. He reached behind and felt bare skin.

“Just great,” he thought. Yet such was his need to take action that he pushed on into the hallway, bare-foot and wearing a backless mini-dress, pushing a bottle of water on a pole on wheels in front of him. He felt absurd as he finally reached the nurses’ station at the far end of the long hallway.

“Can I help you?” the nurse at the desk asked, after attempting every trick possible to avoid this responsibility.

“My name is Danny Wheeler,” Danny told her. “I was brought in yesterday. The nurse told me there was a message left for me.”

The nurse searched her desk until she found the small folded square of paper, and gave it to him. Danny unfolded it and read:

Danny,

We have reviewed your performance over the season. Although you are very enthusiastic, you are simply not up to the level of play expected from a regular member of The Newts. Sorry for the inconvenience, but we have a schedule to keep and so will be moving on to our next match this afternoon. Best of luck in your future.

It was signed by the coach.

Danny couldn't believe it! He was cut from the team? After only playing one game? Or more like three seconds of one game? He needed to catch up to the team and straighten this out. And then another thought struck him.

“They didn't leave anything else, did they?” Danny asked the nurse. “A bus ticket? Some money? The \$20 they owe me for yesterday? Another note saying where they're going next?”

“No, that's all I have for you,” the nurse told him. “Oh, but speaking of money! Your friends didn't fill out the part of the form for health insurance.”

“They... didn't?” Danny said slowly, seeing the possibility that this very bad situation could get even worse. “That's odd. I'm sure they just forgot. I have that in my room; I'll get it for you. Just curious, how much is the bill?”

The nurse turned to her computer screen. “Let's see. MRI, IV, monitoring, overnight stay in a private room comes to... \$5,011.97” she said, without flinching.

Danny tried to match her non-flinching with a non-flinch of his own. “\$5,011.97. And... insurance covers that?”

“Of course!” the nurse said with a laugh. “No one could afford it otherwise!”

Danny joined her for a good laugh. As the laughter faded he said, “Well, I’ll just go back to my room, and get you that insurance information.”

The nurse smiled as Danny turned and walked barefoot and bareback with his IV pole, back to his room. There he located his worldly possessions, which consisted of his roller blades, team jersey and shorts, got dressed, and slipped out a side door of the hospital.

## **Chapter Two Baby Steps**

Danny skated through the streets of Santa Editha, not really knowing where he was or where he was going. Using a combination of blind luck and vague directions from random people on the street, he managed to find his way back to the motel he and the team had stayed at the previous day. There he quickly discovered that the team was gone, with no note or anything else left with the management. They didn’t even leave his own bag of clothes and other belongings. Presumably they just grabbed up his stuff with everyone else’s and took it with them!

Danny’s wallet was in that bag. He had no clothes, no money, no ID. No way to contact the team, no way to get his stuff back, no way home. No job if he did manage to find his way home. Danny had nothing but his roller blades, so he went back to the streets.

No matter where you are in Santa Editha, you will soon find yourself at the boardwalk. The boardwalk is the focus of the town, and the main reason tourists flock to Santa Editha year round. The boardwalk stretches for a mile along the ocean, with waves and sandy beaches on one side, and a carnival-like atmosphere on the other. Shopping, games, roller coasters, a pirate ship, Frankenstein’s Castle; if it’s gaudy and loud you’ll find it on the boardwalk in Santa Editha. And the best way to see it all is on skates. When Danny found the boardwalk, he thought he just might have died and gone to heaven!

“Hey, I really like your shirt!”

Danny had been skating up and down the boardwalk all morning, seeing something new every time he turned around, when he was approached by a pretty young girl wearing a tiny yellow T-shirt over a bikini, with pink ‘quad’ skates. Quad skates are the traditional, four-wheel, two in the front and two in the back roller skates favored by girls for some reason.

“Oh hey, thanks!” Danny replied.

“What is that, a lizard?” the girl asked, pointing at the front of Danny’s shirt.

Danny pulled his shirt out to look at it, as if he had never seen it before.

“It’s a newt,” he informed her. “For the Newton Iowa Newts roller hockey team.”

“Wow, so cool!” the girl said enthusiastically. “Our team is the Legends. The shirts just have a big ‘L’ on them, which is pretty boring. But I would so buy one like this! Hey, if you like skating you should check this out.”

The girl handed Danny a flyer from the stack she was carrying. It read, ‘Roller Palace, Home of the Legends!’ across the top, and had photos of various skating activities on the front and a list of skating services on the back. As Danny read, the girl kept talking.

“Roller Palace is really the place to go if you’re into roller skating, or skate boarding. You should really check it out!”

“Yeah, I think I’ll do that,” Danny said as he read the flyer. This was the place where the team had played yesterday. Maybe someone there could at least tell him where his team had gone. There was a map on the back so he figured he could probably find the place.

“Be sure to tell them that Robin sent you!” the girl said. She took back the flyer and wrote ‘Robin’ with a big heart on it before giving it back to Danny with a smile, and then skated away.

“Hot girls on skates?” Danny said out loud as he watched Robin’s bikini-covered bottom skating away down the boardwalk. “Maybe I don’t want to go back to Newton!”

Danny tore his eyes away from Robin’s retreating behind, and followed the map to the Roller Palace. By the time he got there, Danny had convinced himself that what he really needed was a job, and where better than a roller rink? The first person he met suggested he should go inside and ask for Alex, the manager.

Inside the building was a small diner. Danny approached the girl behind the counter.

“Hi, I’m looking for Alex,” Danny said.

“That’s me,” the girl replied, not bothering to look up as she continued with her current task, that of polishing glassware.

“You’re the manager?” Danny said. “But, I thought you’d be a guy.” This remark got the girl’s attention and caused her to look up.

“Oh, so a girl can’t be a manager?” the girl, who was apparently Alex, said angrily.

“No, no!” Danny stammered. “That’s not what... I mean, a girl can be a manager, but a girl can’t be an Alex. Well, I guess you can, but...”

“Well, I’m glad that I have your permission to use my own name!” Alex yelled at him.

“No, see, I’m from Iowa...” Danny tried to explain.

“Oh, of course! That makes perfect sense,” Alex said sarcastically. “Of course there are no girls in Iowa named Alex, right?”

“Well, ugh, no, I don’t think there are,” Danny stammered. “At least, I never met... Look, can I start over? I’m looking for a j...”

“You’re Danny Wheeler, aren’t you?” the girl said, eyeing Danny suspiciously.

Danny tried to complete his previous sentence, but forgot what it was about. "That's right," he said instead. "How do you know that?"

"A cop was in here about an hour ago," Alex told him. "He asked if I'd seen you. Showed me your picture and everything. Nice disguise, by the way. Roller blades and an oversized jersey with a frog on the front and your name on the back!"

"Me?" Danny gulped. "A cop was looking for me? Why?"

"He didn't exactly say, but I got the impression you robbed a bank or something. Did you rob a bank?"

"No! Well, not a bank, I guess..." Danny told her hesitantly, remembering some of the details from earlier and trying to imagine them from a cop's perspective.

"Not a bank?" Alex pressed him. "But you robbed something? What was it?"

"A hospital," Danny admitted reluctantly.

"A hospital?" Alex said, and started to laugh. "How much money could you possibly get from robbing a hospital?"

Alex finished with her glassware, gave the counter a quick wipe, and skated into the back room (did I mention she was wearing pink roller skates?), a combination of kitchen and storage room with a small office roughly blocked off. As far as Danny knew they were still having a conversation and so he followed after her.

"I didn't rob it!" he said. "I got knocked out in the game yesterday and woke up there, and they told me I owed \$5000 so I left."

"That was you?" Alex laughed again as she busied herself by taking clean dishes from the dishwasher and stacking them on a shelf. "I saw that! Wow, Brett really sent you flying!"

Yes, hilarious," said Danny. "I'm glad you enjoyed it."

“So, you’re a fugitive. How interesting,” Alex said. “And now that we’ve figured out exactly who and what you are, what can I do for you Mr. Fugitive?”

“Well, I’m looking for a job,” Danny told her.

Alex began laughing again. “A job?” she managed to get out before laughing again. “I’m sorry, but the Kardashians were already here and they took all the \$5000 jobs!”

“I don’t expect you to pay me \$5000!” Danny said as he turned a bright shade of red. “I’ll just do whatever you need. You’ve got a whole skate park here. I’m good on skates, or skateboard. Anything with wheels, really.”

“People usually pay us to skate here,” Alex explained. “We usually don’t pay them.”

“Look, I’ll do anything,” Danny pleaded.

Alex look Danny over as if trying to figure out what he could possibly be used for. Nothing came to mind.

“Sorry but the only job I have right now is for a waitress. The new girl hasn’t shown up for like, the fifth time this month. Normally I’d ask Robin to fill in except she’s out on the boardwalk somewhere on flyer duty and I have no way of finding her.”

“Hey that’s perfect!” Danny said. “I can be your waiter.”

“I didn’t say wai-ter!” Alex explained. “I need a wai-tress!”

Alex set the dishes aside and walked over to a closet. She pulled out a hanger with a waitress uniform, including a pink skirt, white apron, and a leotard top, and showed it to Danny.

“This is a 1950s-style drive in restaurant. Nobody wants a guy delivering their food!” Alex held the outfit up in front of Danny. “But if you were to be my waitress? Hmm, this outfit looks like it would fit you. Cute, right? The leotard makes sure your shirrtail never pulls out of your skirt.”

Alex got the devil’s look in her eye, and shoved the uniform at Danny. “Hold this!” she told him, before

racing across the room and rummaging through a large box labeled 'Lost and Found'.

"Look here!" Alex called out to Danny. She pulled a plastic bag containing a wig out of the box and said, "We had a girl here last summer; she used to wear this wig to look more 50s. She would tie it in a ponytail, but I think you'd look better letting it down loose, over your shoulders.

"Let's see what else is in here. This old bra was left in one of the roller rink change rooms last month. Waitresses are required to wear a bra by state health regulation. Oh look, someone left a cosmetics bag behind, and yes! There's a lipstick and some eye makeup in it. Hopefully she didn't have pinkeye."

Alex shoved all the items into Danny's arms, and looked at him thoughtfully. "You know, you could actually be fixed up to look like a really cute girl. Your milkshake's gonna bring all the boys to the yard! Tell you what; if you put all this on, including the bra because it's the law, I will actually hire you as a waitress. What do you say?"

Danny looked disgusted at her, and Alex laughed. "I'm just joking! Don't be such a baby!"

Just then a bell tinkled, announcing someone entering the diner. Alex continued to laugh as she went to greet her customer. Danny went to follow her, but quickly ducked back as he saw who had come in.

"Sergeant Dillon!" Alex greeted the police officer. "We don't often see you twice in one morning. What can I do for you?"

"Hi Alex," the Sergeant greeted her. "I'm just wondering if you've seen that man I spoke to you about this morning."

"You were only here an hour ago," Alex said, evading his question. "What makes you think I would have seen him since then?"

"I showed his picture to Robin on the boardwalk and she recognized him," Sergeant Dillon explained. "She said she gave him a flyer, and thought he was coming right over here. Hey, is there someone in the back room?"