

Petticoat Refuge

Part 2



Elizabeth Anne Nelson



A "Her-TV" Novel



Reluctant Press TV/TS Publishers

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Pt. 2

by Elizabeth Anne Nelson

Chapter 4: Paul's Recovery

“What on earth is that?” Mrs. Belton exclaimed. She looked at the tall crate on the back of Doc’s wagon, noting that the sheriff was riding with him.

“A hospital chair,” Doc announced as he set the brakes and attached his horse to the kitchen hitching post. He dismounted from the wagon while the sheriff arose to help unload the wagon from his end. “Hoyden dropped by and told the sheriff that your patient was awake.”

“Well, I’ll send Hoyden to help you,” Mrs. Belton offered as the two men struggled with the crate. She went back into the house to find Hoyden whitewashing the basement walls.

With hammer in hand, Hoyden soon had the crate open and helped to remove a large wooden chair.

The wicker, high-backed hospital chair with arm rests and a foot rest had two large bicycle-type wheels and a set of smaller wheels supporting its frame. A fold-back tray designed like a toddler's high chair tray was for feeding. Judging by the straps at the waist, on the arm rests, and on the foot rest, the chair was designed more to be pushed by someone else than to be operated by the patient. The seat of the chair lifted to reveal a removable chamber pot.

Hoyden eyed the large chair with uncertainty as she observed, "It would be easier to carry the poor critter."

"You may have a point there," Doc responded with a laugh and pushed the chair into the kitchen. Between them they managed to make the back servants' stairs with the chair and soon they got to Paul's room, where he was sitting in bed sketching while Sarah watched.

"We brought you a chair to sit up in. Mrs. Belton has promised to build a ramp between the two stairways and soon you can use a regular bathroom."

"What, and give up all this wonderful hotel room service?" Paul joked, feeling the shaking uncertainties of his withdrawal.

"One can get spoiled by too much of a good thing," Mrs. Belton observed as she looked at the sketch. "Why, that is Bill Jefferson. He was one of our hands for a while."

"Well, one by one, I'm getting quite a portrait gallery," Sheriff Larson observed with satisfaction.

"I think that our patient needs a bit of rest," Doc said, taking the sketch pad away as he noticed Paul's

shaking hands. He said that the young man's arms had been shaven, no doubt when he had been bathed in bed by one of the ladies. "You been through this before?"

"Yes, when they took out the sniper's bullet they fed me opiates for weeks. Will it be worse this time?"

"Probably a week or so," Doc noted casually. "The newest medical word is that we cut the medication totally. No smaller doses to wean you from it."

He turned to Mrs. Belton and Sarah to explain that Paul was going to be very sick from withdrawal symptoms caused by denying him any more opiates.

"In a week, it might be a good idea to get him into the chair and get him someplace where he can breathe fresh air, like the upstairs porch. It's pretty close in here."

"It's a lot closer in a coffin," the sheriff observed. "I'm not sure that we can risk wheeling him out into plain view of the front road."

Doc shrugged and patted Paul on the head. "I'll leave you to the women and Hoyden. I've got other patients."

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"Well, Mrs. Belton, if you expect me to paint the kitchen porch, you will have to tell me where you want me to stick the luggage and crates you have stored there," Hoyden announced as she set her breakfast cup of coffee aside.

"Oh, my goodness! I have forgotten all about those things," Mrs. Belton exclaimed. "The luggage should be unpacked and the clothes cleaned if we intend to give them away to the annual charity clothes drive

this fall. And you can have one of the hands haul the book crates to the schoolhouse basement for now. Check with Miss Sawyer for the key to the schoolhouse.”

Mrs. Belton took a sip from her coffee cup. “Since I have volunteered to sit with Mrs. Pearson for the weekend, now that she has had her baby, I will expect that you, Sarah, will help Mrs. Wong with cleaning the clothes and things in the luggage of those unfortunate women.”

“Oh, mother,” Sarah complained, but seeing her mother’s frown she sighed. “Where shall we put them all after they are cleaned?”

“Well, there is the front bedroom where Paul is. It has a nice empty closet, lots of drawer space and that large divided wardrobe. I doubt that his few clothes will take up much space,” Mrs. Belton said with a smile. “Heaven only knows, he may amuse himself by trying their clothes on.”

“Mother,” Sarah protested, only to hear about Paul’s dressing as a southern belle for a Halloween Ball. She tried to picture the poor man in bed dressed in an elegant ball gown and wondered, “Do you think that he was all that beautiful? I think a man would look comical in a women’s dress.”

“There are some men who are quite pretty as women,” Mrs. Belton noted. “There is a very famous female impersonator out East called Julian Eltinge, who is absolutely believable. I saw his picture in Saturday Evening Post Magazine. Who knows? Our patient is petite enough.”

“Do you really think so, Mother?”

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Paul was swimming in a pool of warm red blood that moved like a slow whirlpool in a vast red river. The harder he tried to swim, the faster the blood swirled about him until he was gasping for breath.

Suddenly it was a lovely spring day in 1900. Paul delighted in the bicycle ride along the paved streets of the campus from his classroom building to his boarding house. Everywhere there was the scent of burning leaves while the spring roses and lilacs added their sweet aromas to the air. Dismounting, he locked the wheel into the bike rack and removed the bicycle clips that prevented his trouser cuffs from becoming entangled in the chain or gears. He had just entered Mrs. Turner's boarding house to be greeted by the curtsying maid, Cagney.

“Good afternoon, Professor Brown,” Cagney announced with a bright amused smile. She took his top coat and fedora hat, which she placed in the foyer closet before he stuck his umbrella into a nearby umbrella stand and placed his briefcase by the social table.

“And the top of the day to you, my fair maid,” he greeted her, picking up the bundle of letters from the silver tray on the social table to sort through it for his own mail.

“Oh, Paul, come join us, dearest,” Kathrine's excited voice called from the parlor. She arose from her chair to rush to his side and gave him a dutiful kiss on the cheek. He could smell the hint of floral perfume she wore. “I have a wonderful surprise for you!”

It was almost six months from that eventful Halloween Party, and her last “wonderful surprise.” In the parlor over the fireplace mantel hung a portrait, executed in pastels by Miss Donner from a photo-

graph, of the *Southern Belle* in her yellow ball gown. This conversation piece was a constant reminder to Paul of Katherine's last "wonderful surprise". Fortunately, his masculine pride had survived the ordeal; except for the portrait, the campus seemed to have forgotten the incident.

"Surprise?" he asked, returning the kiss. He half-if she had decided to accept his proposal. *It is about time*, he thought.

"The Faculty Drama Club is planning to compete in the Spring Drama Festival," Kathrine responded with feminine enthusiasm, leading him into the parlor. Mrs. Turner, the owner of his rooming house; Miss Donner, from the English Department; and Mrs. Fisher, from the Drama Department were taking afternoon tea. "Join us, dear, and we will tell you all about our wonderful plans."

"Just for a little while, ladies, I have some tests to grade before supper," he noted as he joined the ladies by taking a seat in an overstuffed chair and accepting a cup of tea from Mrs. Turner. Gingerly, he took a little sip of the hot tea, enjoying its orange scent in the midst of the floral perfumes and the fresh smell of Spring flowers that decorated the tea tray. Balancing his napkin, teacup and saucer, he picked up a little fudge brownie from the tea tray. "So what play are you going to stage?"

"The Importance of Being Earnest," Miss Donner exclaimed happily, only to bow her head in retreat from Katherine's frown. She added quietly, "A naughty little comedy by Oscar Wilde."

"Professor Jack Robertson has agreed to play Jack, one of the male leads. As you know, the girls consider him to be quite handsome," Mrs. Fisher offered eagerly, "with his Barrymore profile."

“Quite a catch,” Paul noted, using the feminine phrase with a wry smile. He set aside his tea things to stretch in the easy chair and arise. “Sounds great to me. Now, I have some tests to grade.”

“Oh, but Paul, there is so much more,” Katherine protested in frustration over his abrupt efforts to flee. “For instance, we have been looking for a talented, beautiful blonde to play the part of Miss Gwendolyn Fairfax, one of the female leads in the play. Who would you suggest?”

“Well,” Paul began, thinking of Mrs. Teasdale, when the Cheshire Cat smiles of the women before him sent a cold chill to the back of his neck. “Oh, no you don’t! No, never again!”

“What?” Katherine responded with a surprised look. She glanced towards the other ladies to exclaim, “Oh, what a wonderful idea! Our Paul can be Miss Fairfax!”

“Just like the Shakespearean stage, with a man playing a female part,” Mrs. Fisher agreed with enthusiastic delight. “It will be the hit of the festival!”

“Oh, Paul, you are just full of surprises,” Mrs. Turner chortled appreciatively of their little trap and the look of fearful anticipation on Paul’s face. “I’m certain that Mrs. Dutton will agree that it is a wonderful plan.” She paused after mentioning the college president’s name to look critically at Paul. “Our leading lady will have to stop eating sweets, and get back into a proper figure.”

“Of course, I forgot Mrs. Dutton,” Miss Donner observed with a knowing nod. “It is getting near the time that our contracts are renewed. I believe that Mrs. Dutton was talking to Katherine about your contract at the faculty tea.”

“Why should Katherine be talking to her about my contract?” Sensing that the trap had been sprung long before he entered the parlor, he turned to Kathrine. “Well, what did Mrs. Dutton say?”

“Well, it is only natural that I be concerned, with our forthcoming wedding and all,” Katherine responded with a little pout of disappointment. “She is quite pleased with how well you fit in with our women’s college faculty. Of course, she agrees that if you were to accept the role of Miss Fairfax in our little play, you would need considerable practice to be believable. The play is to be staged in two months.”

“Have you ladies ever thought of picking up the trade of being blackmailers? You are much too clever to be mere women,” Paul countered submissively as he sat back into the easy chair. In defeat, he accepted another cup of tea from Cagney.

“Mere women, indeed. What an awful thing to say,” Mrs. Fisher said with amused thoughtfulness. “We shall soon see what you think about being a ‘mere woman,’ Professor Brown.”

“Yes, indeed,” Katherine agreed, joining the other ladies in laughter. “You will learn a great deal about being a mere woman when next week you will begin your acting career, Mistress Brown.”

To Paul’s horror, Saturday and Sunday was dedicated to the creation of ‘Miss Gwendolyn Fairfax.’

First, there was the foul-smelling depilatory paste applied to his body from the neck down that left his skin bright pink and quite hairless.

Second, his longish brown hair, which had barely outgrown the results of his last experience in skirts, was bleached and dyed a soft golden blond. Mrs. Turner used a razor to remove his sideburns and give



a feminine shape to his hairline at the back of the neck.

Third, his little mustache was waxed away in a sea of tears while his eyebrows were reshaped into feminine arches. A pedicure was followed by a French manicure. Then his body was treated to lilac-scented powdering that left his skin with a creamy white feminine smoothness.

He was spared any fanatical efforts to corset his waist to twenty inches. But from Saturday morning until Monday morning he discovered that they were determined to recover a naturally suitable twenty-four inches!

By Monday morning the ladies were prepared to present `Miss Fairfax' to the campus world.

It all started with a curtsy Cagney drawing the drapes in Paul's room to announce the new day and the need for `Gwendolyn' to remove *her* nightgown and sleep corset so that Mrs. Turner could help *her* to dress for morning convocation.

"Miss James has brought a lovely new dress and hat for you to wear, Miss," she added with cheerful amusement while she set about opening the windows even further for the cool spring breezes. "It is absolutely perfect outside for a walk to the auditorium, and Miss James is waiting to have a light breakfast with you."

"The condemned man was treated to petticoats and breakfast before they hung him," Paul muttered. He turned back the covers enough to realize that it was more than cool in the room, despite the glare of the morning sun rising in a cold cloudless blue sky.

"Let me undo your laces, Miss," Cagney offered knowing that the tight corset over the flannel gown

could not easily be removed by poor Paul. After placing Paul's shaving gear by the steaming hot pitcher of water by a wash basin, she hastened to his side to untie the lacing enough so that he could release the steel eyelets in front.

She selected a fresh corset and lingerie for him while he set about to shave and wash up for the day. She was always quite amazed by how little facial hair he did have, for a man. In fact, she knew women who had a thicker little mustache than the one they had waxed off of him Saturday morning.

"I'll put your chemise, garter belt, hose and drawers upon the bed for you to put on while I fetch Mrs. Turner to help you with your new corset."

"New corset?" he asked anxiously, setting his straight razor aside. But seeing nothing to gain by further protest, he continued to shave what little there was.

When he finished this little chore he submissively slipped on the white satin garter belt and sat on the edge of his bed. There, he unrolled up each leg a white silken stocking until each was secured to the snaps on the belt. Seeing little choice, he modestly secured a sanitary napkin in place over his turgid sex, knowing the truth that the excitement of wearing feminine clothes was too much to control.

Once this shameful napkin was in place, he slipped on his satin chemise and crotchless satin drawers.

As if on cue, Mrs. Turner entered the bedroom carrying a long pink box, which she placed upon his bed while Cagney removed a white satin corset cover from the lingerie bureau.