

It's the Little Choices

Part Six

Commission – July 2021

It's girls' day! After a long, hard couple of weeks, it's high time we both get petted and spoiled and pampered to our hearts' content!

Pampered, heh. Well, part of me wishes Fiona would be getting pampered in quite a different sense. But you know, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither will my sweet little baby girl. Because even with those nightly hypnotic audio files, I'm guessing it's still going to take awhile until she can fully accept the Little side of her that's secretly longing to blossom into the open...

But back to the day's business.

"Hair first," I tell Fiona as we ease into the parking lot in front of the beauty salon. "I'm going for a balayage, you know, and I'm sure that's gonna take awhile to process and tone. Hope you don't mind having to wait a bit extra, hon?" But of course she shakes her frizzy auburn locks emphatically and flashes her sweet smile. "Nope, no worries! I brought plenty to keep me busy!"

She produces her small, colorful bag and waves it before me, and I'm momentarily lost in a wave of quasi-motherly sentiment. *Aww, just like a preschooler with her bright new backpack! Really, she ought to have snacks in there, and a sippy bottle, and maybe a fresh pull-up in case of an accident...* None of those things are in there, of course – but all the same I'm quite sure Stompy the elephant is, as well as her beloved Switch. All the things she needs to keep her happy and occupied...

And then too with motherly concern I can't help but notice Fiona's short nails, rough and bearing the unsightly marks of anxiety-fueled chewing. *Oh, dear. She's biting her nails again. I really ought to figure out a way to help her stop...*

But no need to dwell on that right now. And so I swallow my concern and flash her a grin as we both exit the car. "Well, look at Miss Prepared, hey? Now don't forget – we can also give *you* a new look while we're here!"

Indecisive sweetheart that she is, we've talked it over before and still not come to any decision. She likes the idea of a new look. Nah, she's fine with it as it is. Well, maybe a dye job wouldn't be half bad. No, the folks at work will make a big deal out of it, and she doesn't want that. Oh, but they do have such pretty colors...

And so I've finally decided to let fate – and maybe the hair stylists – settle the matter.

It's once we've got me settled into the chair and waiting for the first round of bleach to work its magic that I turn my attention back to Fiona, until now seated discreetly against the wall and absorbed in her little video console. "So, Fiona. Have you asked what they think you should do with your hair – you know, for a makeover?"

She blushes self-consciously and shakes her head, but my work is done. "Oh, really, you're thinking of a new look?" Mandy, my stylist, asks her brightly. "But you have such pretty hair already, hon!" Fiona's blushing deeper, reaching self-consciously up to her reddish frizz. "Well, I don't know. It-it's just so frizzy-" "Your natural color, right?" "All natural," I interject with a smile. "Virgin hair, right, Fiona?"

"Um- yeah, I guess so..." "Oh, but honey, it's so pretty! Honestly I wouldn't change the color one bit," Mandy gushes, twirling her comb energetically and tilting her head to look my partner over. "Now, if you *do* want a new look, though, I'm sure we'd be happy to work something up. It's pretty quiet today and I'm sure Annie'd love to take you on..." "Um, okay. Like, what would you recommend?" Fiona's voice is timid, but both Mandy and I can tell she's genuinely interested.

"Well, now, let's see. You've got that nice open forehead, decent length..." Mandy pursed her lips in thought, then lit up. "Oh, I know! Have you ever had bangs before? I just know they'd look super cute on you!" "Bangs...?" "And maybe trim a bit of length, and definitely some defrizzing. Oh, and then we could see about some curls or maybe even a braid..."

My work here is done. Fiona may be uncertain, true, but I can tell from the shy gleam in her eye as she hears Mandy ramble on that she's getting excited. And so, from my own chair I nod my foil-covered head gingerly and give the thumbs-up. "Why not, hon? It's not like it's dye, so even if you decide you don't want bangs after awhile, you can just tuck them back and no one will know..."

Once more Fiona has a choice before her: to stay with her same old tame hairstyle, or to be brave and try a new look that we all know – though no one's saying it – is far more... youthful. Cute. Juvenile. And once more, just as I'd hoped, she blushes and nods in acquiescence.

And that's how, after an hour of intense work by the two stylists, I'm rewarded with perhaps the sweetest sight I could have hoped for today: my dear partner, blushing and stepping out of the chair with a brand-new set of bangs and her now-smooth hair brushed neatly back into twin, reddish

bunches on either side of her head.

Bangs... and pigtails, too. Oh, my word – she's looking adorable as hell, and yes, a good ten years younger than before. Which, at least to me, is the best thing that could have happened.

Okay, next best thing. Because actually the *real* best thing is seeing her catch sight of her reflection and lighting up with shy, genuine delight at what she sees.

This is such an amazing day!

Oh, sure – Liz's hair does take awhile to finish. But not only did I get to come along and watch – and play a bit more of my game while I wait – but I even got my own hair done, too! I mean, maybe I'll wake up tomorrow and absolutely hate it, sure. But right now, as we're headed out to get our favorite chicken sandwiches before the nail salon, I don't think I could be more pleased.

"It looks good, right?" I ask, for perhaps the tenth time since leaving. And Liz, darling that she is, smiles and gives me the same reassuring response. "Darling, you look incredible. I love the look for you, hon! It's just so *you*, you know?" And as I feel the unfamiliar tickle of the bangs on my forehead and glance once more at my reflection, I sigh with nervous happiness. *Change is good. This is good. Yes, I'm glad I did this.*

I try to channel more of the same spirit while we're eating. The sandwiches are amazing, after all, it's lovely sitting together in the car with Liz and munching away on them. Though I must admit, it becomes tougher to stay so buoyant and happy when I look down and catch sight of my bare fingernails, so dry and stubby in comparison with Liz's elegant ones. *My nails are so... short. Ugly. Rough.*

Worse still, I know exactly why they're that way.

"Hey, whatcha thinking about?" Liz interrupts my reverie, and I hastily flip my hand over and reach for some water. "Oh, nothing," I lie, hoping she hasn't picked up on my thoughts. But of course, like the mind reader she is, she's onto me regardless. "Thinking about a manicure? You're still down to go, right?"

"Umm, sure..." I trail off, then sigh. *No sense in keeping it bottled up.* "I'm just- I dunno. I don't

think my nails are in very good shape, you know." "Ohh..." Liz nods, then glances down and takes my hand gently in hers. "I see. Biting them again, hmm?"

"Well, yeah..." Dang it, why is it so embarrassing? Maybe it's because I know something not even Liz knows – that lately I've even found myself doing more than just biting them. But of course I can't tell her that. "I dunno. Nervous habit, I guess," I chuckle lamely, but she just smiles and shakes her head sympathetically. "Honey, it's okay! We all have a bad little habit or two, you know." She crumples her sandwich wrapper and tosses it in the bad before clearing her throat. "But of course I understand. You don't want to get a manicure and then end up biting it off..."

"Tell you what," she says, after a moment's silent reflection. "I really wouldn't want you to miss out on a manicure while I'm getting one, babe. It would feel, I dunno. Selfish." She laughs softly and goes on. "So why don't we say this? We'll both get our manicures this afternoon just how we like. And then, once we get home, we'll come up with a solution to help you stop biting them. Okay?"

Well, what can I say? I can't help that I want pretty nails too – though neither can I deny that left to myself, I know I'll end up biting them, no matter how pretty they are. And so, I find myself agreeing gratefully. "Okay, thanks, Liz. That- that sounds nice."

"Aww, that's a good girl," she smiles, patting my leg and planting a quick kiss on my cheek. And as I feel my cheeks flush, she tweaks my nose and settles back in her seat. "Now then, who's ready to go and get some awesome nails?"

(To be continued!)