Nurse a Grudge

This goddess deserves a little tender loving caregiver

June 1, 1999 By River Huston

In my heyday down at the dungeon, my nurse paraphernalia was always a sure crowd pleaser. It consisted of a little white uniform with patent leather thigh-high boots, blood-pressure cuff and rectal thermometer. Whether I was Nurse Ratched or Florence Nightingale, men seemed to crave the special attention that only a medical professional can give.

Now it's me on the business end of the stethoscope, but I haven't been as lucky as my old fans. I did have a nice nurse of my own not too long ago, like a girlfriend. In between meds and infusions we'd dish. But one day we were gabbing a little too much, and when she pulled out my IV, she stuck herself.

Oops.

A sort of restrained hysteria settled over the room. You might have experienced this yourself when the condom broke, or if you've ever gotten a manicure when a cuticle was cut too deep and you turned into Julia Childs on *Saturday Night Live* bleeding all over the braised duck.

When these things happen, there is a set progression of emotions, starting with everyone's favorite— denial. "It was just a little stick," my (soon to be former) friend the nurse said, frantically searching for the bleach. Then panic: "I'll be all right. Right?" Disbelief: "I never did this before." And finally, blame, as she glared at me as if it were my fault.

While she made her way through the stages, I was busy putting myself through hell. I felt awful. So I figured it was just punishment when she left and the agency sent me Bill.

For some, "Nurse Bill" might conjure up visions of a muscular hunk of man in a tight white T-shirt and form-hugging chinos. Think again. Besides being tremendously annoying, Bill looked like a pelican. He was the kind of guy who invited Jehovah's Witnesses in for coffee and bored *them* to death. They at least could decline—I was a captive audience tethered to an IV pole.

Bill had a gift for making bad days even worse. He could be *so* irritating. I'd be rushing off to the airport for an overbooked flight to Los Angeles with a seat in the middle of row 56 in front of the bathroom on, and I'd have a column deadline before I left, and my agent would've just interrupted

me to say that since AIDS is “over” no one wants to hear me lecture about it anymore, and, hey, just in time, I’d get my period. Bill would be standing there, ready to give me an IV dead-arm, and saying in that condescending kindergarten-teacher tone of his, “Are we having a crappy day?” Shoot me and get it over with, I’d think.

So to prove that I can take destiny in my own hands, I fired him. When I called the personnel lady at the agency, she sympathized—she hides every time Bill comes in the office—and asked me what I was looking for in a nurse. Since I have been recuperating in bed a lot—and, let’s face it, this goddess has let herself go a bit—I thought it would be good to have a sexy nurse. Someone who can help to resuscitate my erotic side.

The proper uniform is important. I know it’s home care, but I still need the allure of starched whites. I would like her to be a seasoned professional, firm and confident in all her moves. Maybe she can tell me a story as she sticks in the IV.

Ooh, I can almost smell her skin right now—sweet and soft as she leans over to take my pulse. The time flies as she sits in a chair close to my side, reading *The Nation*, crossing and uncrossing her legs. She asks in her beautiful voice if I am doing OK. Of course I am. Finally it is time to take out the IV. Her sure touch tells me she has done this before, and I feel only the slightest pressure. Then she bandages me up, tucks me in and gives me a little kiss on the forehead.

Since this is our first encounter, we keep it pretty tame. Next time she might show up in a latex nursing uniform and lie in bed beside me as she pushes the plunger in. It is *very* important to make the best of the bonds that arise between patient and caregiver, no?

Now that Bill is gone, I have reserved the spot next to my bed for the right nurse who makes the cut of my casting-couch auditions. As long as I’m lying down, I may as well dream a little.

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