23rd Century Digital Girl Chapter 7 and 8

By Heel

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Two weeks later, Nicole was getting around on her crutches quite confidently. The pain in her pelvis was under control and she looked much better. Since the accident, we were very careful in bed. Most of the time, I just let her do what she wanted, but assisted her if she needed any help. She had limited mobility in her hips so we were forced to contrive new techniques. I was learning how to meet the requirements of her body, a body which had sustained 43 fractures. She was a great teacher. Sometimes, her joints would creak, announcing that I should be more careful. I these moments I started apologizing, but she just smiled shyly.

We began going out for dinner, and thanks to her crutches we were always able to find a seat. Nicole didn't want to be treated like a disabled, but nothing could prevent the unhealthy attention. Curious eyes were staring at her wherever we went.

That evening we had a nice dinner, then we decided to take a walk around downtown. Nicole was moving smoothly on her crutches, graciously swinging her legs. The heels of her pumps were clicking rhythmically on the sidewalk. I could see her calf muscles contracting and retracting under the black stockings.

"There will be a storm," she said.

I looked up at the star-freckled sky.

"I doubt it."

"I'm sure."

"How could you be sure?"

"My bones can predict the weather," she said and smiled.

"Do you feel pain right now?"

“I’m always in pain, Peter. Only the intensity is different. ”

“We can take a cab.”

She nodded. I was fumbling for my cell, when she stopped and moaned. She bent her left knee and her heel popped out of her shoe.

“Nicole!”

“I’m fine, I’m fine,” she said anxiously.

“But what….”

“My knee locked up.”

“What can we do?”

“We can’t change the weather, right?” she said and managed a nervous smile.

She swayed on her crutches, so I moved closer to her.

“I will call a doctor,” I said.

“No! Nothing can be done right now. Just take me home!”

I was informed that the cab will be here in 10 minutes. Meanwhile, Nicole was crutching toward a bench. Bent at the knee, her left leg seemed completely paralyzed. She was unable to put weight on it. Her shoe was dangling on her toes, and was about to slip off at any moment. Holding her hands, I helped her sit on the bench.

“Sorry for the inconveniences,” she muttered and looked at me with sad eyes,” It has been a wonderful evening…”

I kissed her temple, and sat beside her.

“What’s wrong with your knee?”

“My joint is artificial. There is a lubrication problem, especially when the weather is bad. My knee is programmed to lock up if the problem persists. Further problems can be avoided that way.”

The cab arrived just when the downpour started.

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Nicole’s knee didn’t get better so we went to the clinic for an examination. I waited in the corridor for over an hour, either pacing or sitting on a chair. Finally, the door creaked and she reappeared, a tiny figure on crutches. A doctor was talking to her, patting her shoulder reassuringly. She nodded, then looked at me, smiling self-consciously. Her left leg was put in a brace, her knee locked straight. Iron bars ran up the sides of her leg, and there were screws attached to the knee portion. Four straps were holding the brace in place. I also noticed that the back part of the brace was made of black material. Her pump was not on her foot. Some kind of rubber heel was fixed under her bare sole, strapped with elastic bands.

“Peter, please stop staring at me like that! Let’s go!” she said with exasperation.

“I’m sorry…I…”

“I know I look like a freak.”

“No, you look great! So, what does the doctor say?”

“My knee needs some rest.”

“Is that all?

“Yep,” she said and made her way to the elevator, clumsily dragging her braced leg.

As we entered the elevator she leaned on me, and looked up with those blue eyes.

“My body is so disappointing,” she muttered.

“I would not say so,” I said, wrapping my hands around her waist.

“You know what I mean.”

We went out of the hospital and headed toward the taxi stand. Nicole was walking slower than before, making funny half-circles with her braced leg. Her crutches didn’t seem to be helping much. She was virtually struggling.

“Let me help you!” I said.

“I don’t want to be carried like a baby. I have to cope with that.” she said decisively.

We neared a grocery store. A robot was standing by the entrance. It was about a meter tall, and had the nice color of a half- baked toast, soaked with butter. Its eyes were blue, wide-set, and slightly bulged. Red light was flickering restlessly on its head.

“Hi, I am Arthur. I am a domestic helper,” it said, turning to us.

The robots are not supposed to accost strangers so we were fairly surprised. Nicole stopped and giggled childishly, then introduced herself.

“You gait is unbalanced. There must be some problem,” the tin wise ass said.

“Where is your master?” I asked.

“She’s having coffee. Now she doesn’t need my company.”

“We don’t need your company too.”

“Are you her boyfriend?” the robot persisted.

“You definitely have bugs.”

“I am Arthur 342 build. No bugs detected… yet.”

I burst into laughter.

“I think I know what your problem is,” Arthur said.

“Shoot!” Nicole said and cocked her head to one side.

“Your left knee is not functioning properly.”

“You have a sharp eye, Arthur,” she replied.

“…and you are not dressed properly. You are supposed to wear two shoes.”

“Don’t you like me?” Nicole said flirtatiously.

“I am not supposed to show emotions.”

“I am jealous,” I interjected.

“Would you mind me helping you cross the street?” Arthur said, ignoring me.

“I’m not your master,” she said with a sad voice.

“I am programmed to assist people like you. My impulses are strong right now.”

“Let’s cross the street then,” she said.

I followed them, barely able to stop laughing.

“Thank you, Arthur. You were very kind to me.”

“Welcome,” The robot intoned,” I like the way your toes curl up as you walk,” it added.

Nicole blushed, and then we continued on our way.