The Curmudgeon

by Altan

It started all very inauspiciously with the letter arriving in

her mailbox on a sunny June morning. Annette had returned from

her week-long cruise just the day before, feeling wonderfully

relaxed after the well-earned vacation. The letter bearing the

logo of MedServ, Inc. would be her next assignment.

As usual, the computer-generated form letter did not give many

details. Name Bill Wilder. An address on the other side of town.

Minimal statistics: male, 79 years old, 145 pounds. Curmudgeon.

Curmudgeon?

That is what it said, on the line reserved for comments by

previous nurses. Curmudgeon.

Annette looked at it again, frowning. The comment area was there

for nurses to leave a note to their successor, usually about

habits of the patient to watch out for, or tips on how to handle

them. Never before had she seen one with only a single word in

it. Curmudgeon. Strange.

Still frowning, she put the letter away and collected the next

batch of laundry. Yet all the time she kept thinking about the

strange comment. And what did it mean, exactly? She thought she

knew what the word meant, but kept wondering. By the time she got

back to her computer, she had to look it up.

The dictionary bookmark, www.m-w.com. Curmudgeon. \_A crusty,

ill-tempered, and usually old man.\_ That didn't help much.

Neither did further on-line searching. Recipes at

www.curmudgeon.com, random quotes at www.curmudgeon-online.com,

or even Captain Curmudgeon's Naturist Pages. That one at least

had a funny picture.

OK, so her next assignment was going to be a cranky old man. She

was sure she would be able to handle him.

\* \* \*

Annette had left in time, but there had been an accident and the

freeway had slowed to a crawl. In the end she arrived five

minutes late.

Nothing when she rang the bell. She tried again, longer, then

knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" she heard through the closed door.

"Annette Meyers, from MedServ, Inc."

"Who?"

Annette sighed. A lot of her patients didn't like strangers in

their house. It was always a challenge to gain their trust.

"The new nurse, sir. From MedServ, Inc."

The door opened at a crack, restrained by a chain. An old face

appeared in the crack.

"You are late. Show your ID."

She got the plastic ID card from her purse and held it for the

man to see. It wasn't old, and she had taken pains to keep the

same hairstyle. She had heard the stories about patients not

letting the nurse enter the house after a visit to the hair

salon.

The door closed, then opened further.

"Next time, be on time," the main said.

"I'm Annette," she introduced herself, extending her hand. He

ignored it.

"I'm very sorry I was late. There was an accident on the freeway.

It won't happen again."

"No more accidents on the freeway?"

Annette startled. He hadn't struck her as someone to make jokes.

Then she looked at his eyes and realized he wasn't joking at all.

"No more tardiness, sir. I will make sure to be on time."

"Good. Take off your shoes, then get started."

\* \* \*

The first few weeks passed by slowly. She called him Mr. Wilder,

he didn't call her anything. She realized he wasn't trying to be

rude, just more focused on himself and not interested in anyone

else. She took care of his medicines, checked his blood pressure,

made his bed, did the other little chores she was there to do. He

had a cleaning lady come in once a week for the heavier household

tasks but she helped him with the day-to-day work.

One day, while cleaning the breakfast table, she didn't realize

Mr. Wilder hadn't finished his coffee. The cup spilled all over

the front of her blouse when she picked it up.

"Shit!" she exclaimed.

Mr. Wilder looked up.

"Can't you even handle a cup of coffee?" he asked. She ignored

the question.

"I need to clean this before the stain sets," she told him. "Can

I please borrow an old shirt of yours? I'll iron it and bring it

back tomorrow."

He just nodded and went back to his crossword puzzle. Annette got

one of his shirts and went to the bathroom to inspect the damage.

"Oh shoot, it's all the way through the bra too," she sighed

after taking off the blouse. "Just my luck."

She took the bra off as well and started rinsing the clothes. The

coffee came off, but bra and blouse were soaking wet.

Annette shrugged as she put on Mr. Wilder's shirt. There wasn't

going to be another bra in the house, so she'd just have to do

without. Her breasts didn't really need any support and she often

went braless outside of work, but hadn't done that before on the

job.

The old man looked up when she came back in the living room.

"Time for your shots," she announced.

He stuck out his arm and looked up at her while she rolled up his

sleeve, but didn't say anything until the shots were done and she

was rolling down his sleeve again.

"Can you hand me my puzzle book please?" he asked. "It fell on

the floor."

She bent over and picked up the book.

"Thank you," he said.

He had never said "please" or "thank you" before. Annette

wondered about this sudden burst of civility.

The whole rest of the afternoon, Mr. Wilder was surprisingly

friendly. But the next day, when she returned his shirt, cleaned,

ironed and neatly folded, he was back to his old curmudgeonly

self.

On her way home, Annette kept wondering about the strange

behavior of the day before. Why had he been so friendly? What had

been different? She went over the whole afternoon in her mind.

Nothing had been out of the ordinary until she spilled the

coffee. What happened then?

She had taken her clothes to rinse, put on one of his shirts.

When she came back downstairs, it had been time for his shots.

Did he behave differently then? He had stretched out his arm, she

had bent over to clean the spot for the needle...

Would that be it? When she bent over, could he have had a peek at

her breasts? He might, she always left the top two buttons of a

shirt open.

Was that it?

\* \* \*

The next day, Annette started an experiment. She got up an hour

early, showered and had breakfast. Then she carefully went

through her wardrobe, checking all the shirts and blouses,

looking for one that looked decent but wasn't. She finally

settled on a low-cut white blouse. Whenever she wore that to

work, she was careful to combine it with the right bra, because

it was so open. This time, she wouldn't wear anything underneath.

She tried it out in front of the mirror. As long as she stood up

straight, there was no problem. Her breasts were outlined but,

firm as they were, the lack of a bra was hardly noticeable. When

she bent over, however, the fabric of the blouse would fall away

and her whole chest would be visible. Just the thought of

exposing herself like that made her shiver.

Looking at her breast hanging there, she had second thoughts. She

was a professional nurse, after all, not some kind of bimbo. She

could deal with her patients, even the difficult ones. She could

accept the grumpy Mr. Wilder the way he was and just do her job.

Then again, what was there to lose? Sure, she could do her job,

but it would be so much easier if she could do it in a nice

atmosphere. After all, anyone could be in a hurry and forget to

put on a bra, can't they? It had actually happened to her, in

college. She hadn't worn anything revealing, though, and probably

nobody had noticed. Somebody would notice today.

"Oh, what the heck," she mumbled to herself. Straightening up,

she put the other clothes back in the closet, picked up her

purse, and went to work.

The day was an immediate success. Mr. Wilder looked at her when

she came to his door and his eyes seemed to completely penetrate

the fabric of her blouse. She knew he was looking for the outline

of a bra, and not finding any.

"Good morning, Nurse Meyers," he greeted her, then stepped aside

to let her in.

"Good morning, Mr. Wilder," she answered, and stepped inside.

The first time she bent over, she caught him glancing away.

The second time, she had to pick up a pen that had rolled from

his table. She wondered how that happened.

The third time, she dropped a fork when emptying the dishwasher.

She took her time bending over, but kept her eyes on Mr. Wilder.

He was looking at her chest and didn't notice her staring back.

Only when she straightened up again did their eyes meet.

"You did that on purpose," he said.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"You're nicer this way."

For a second he was confused, then realized she was talking about

the lack of bra, not the dropped fork.

"Am I? I guess I am."

He thought it over for a moment.

"Am I that bad?" he asked.

"You're a curmudgeon."

"A cranky old man, eh? And now I'm not?"

"You're almost friendly now, saying please and thank you, and not

complaining."

"Oh."

Another few seconds, then he added, "I'm sorry. I know you're

just doing your job, and you're pretty good about it. God knows I

can tell, with all the different nurses I've had over the past

years.

"I shouldn't take out my misery on you. And I won't, anymore. You

won't have to dress like this for me to behave."

"Do you mind?"

"Mind? Hell, no. But I'll stop behaving like a spoiled child."

"Just tell me one thing," she asked. "Why does a peek at my tits

change you so much?"

His face saddened.

"I'm going on eighty," he said. "My wife died five years ago. We

had been married for almost fifty years, and I've never been with

another woman--not during our marriage, and not since. She grew

from young to middle aged to old, and she was the only woman I

would ever see naked.

"Don't misunderstand me, I'm not complaining. The reason I stayed

faithful to her all my life was, that I never believed anyone

else could measure up to her.

"But looking at a young woman's breast, it brings back memories.

Memories of passion, memories of desire, memories of a youth gone

by. It reminds me of all the good things we've had, the games we

played. My wife, she was a bit of an exhibitionist, you know.

Right up to the day she died."

"Ah," was all Annette could respond with, flustered as she was by

the revelation.

"And of course I'm a lecherous old goat who loves adoring a fresh

green leaf."

Annette couldn't help bursting out laughing.

From that day on, she took care selecting her clothes, sometimes

modest, sometimes revealing, always without a bra. Sometimes she

would take off her top halfway through the day and finish the

work topless. Mr. Wilder visibly enjoyed watching her. But he

kept his word and never complained again, whatever the clothes

were she wore.

When it came time for Annette to fill out the form for her

successor, she added one word to the comments.

Lecherous curmudgeon.

T H EE N D