

AN EROTIC SCI-FI THRILLER BY MINDI FLYTH

THE MAN WHO BECAME 1000 BIMBOS



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CHAPTER ONE: WOMEN

Dale Sasha was flying home from work when his car was suddenly filled with a tinny version of "These Boots Were Made for Walkin'," the song he had chosen to identify incoming calls from his mistress Penny.

He tapped a button on a panel beside his steering wheel, and Penny's face appeared on the screen. She gave him a flirty grin and leaned back slightly so he could see she was wearing a lacy pink bustier.

"Hey," she said. "You're running late, Daddy. If you keep me waiting much longer, I just may have to get started without you."

She began to slowly slide her fingers inside one of the cups of her bustier. Dale smiled tightly and cleared his throat, signaling her to stop.

"I have bad news, baby girl. I can't make it tonight."

"What?"

She yanked her hand out of her cleavage and folded her arms across her chest.

"Daddy, come on! That's the third time you've stood me up this week!"

"I'm sorry, but it's too risky right now. I'm worried Erika is starting to suspect."

Penny slouched down in her chair, pouting. Dale had always loved her pout, but lately he was starting to feel a little too much like he really was the daddy of a bratty teenager.

"I don't *care* if that old bitch knows," Penny said. "I'm sick of living like this, with you always worrying about your crazy wife."

"Come on, baby girl. Don't be like that."

She leaned forward, the bluish light of the screen illuminating her from below, making her young face look weird and sickly.

"We've been together almost two years," she said. "It's time you made up your mind. Do you want her, or me?"

Dale sighed. This again.

Two years ago he hired Penny as the receptionist for the hovercar dealership he managed. He'd always banged his receptionists, but it got complicated with Penny and the next thing he knew he was paying for her apartment and she was staying home all day watching trashy holonovelas.

It seemed to Dale like Penny had a pretty sweet deal, just being some little hot chick who basically got fucked for a living. But she was always whining and asking for more. More time, more money, more *him*.

"Of course I want you, baby girl. You know that."

"You're always talking about how you don't love Erika anymore, how you can't stand the sight of her. You called her a sad, saggy old broad!"

Dale squirmed in his seat. It all sounded so cruel, when he heard somebody else say it. Lately Penny had been putting more pressure on him to get a divorce, and he'd been tearing Erika down so Penny would back off a little.

"You told me you love me more than you ever loved her," Penny said. "Did you mean that?"

"Well, of course I meant it, baby girl."

She smiled, showing off the terrific dental work Dale had paid for. Dale braced himself, knowing her good mood wouldn't last.

"But I can't just divorce Erika," he said. "Not right now. It'd be too hard on her."

Penny groaned and gave the screen a petulant swat, making her image wobble.

"You don't understand," Dale said. "Erika's been getting worse. She's very... fragile. She doesn't even leave the house anymore. If I left her, I don't know what she'd do. I'm honestly worried she'd hurt herself or something."

Penny just shook her head, looking disgusted.

"I can't go on like this," she said. "I can't. A girl has to have her dignity, Daddy."

There was an awkward silence, abruptly broken by the sound of "Every Breath You Take," the song Dale had chosen to identify Erika's calls. It startled him so much he briefly lost control of his car and dropped out of his lane, almost hitting a traffic control tower. He soared back up into the lane and spoke without looking at Penny on the screen.

"That's Erika," he said. "Hang on, I'll only need a second."

"Whatever. Give your little wifey all my love."

He hit a button and Penny's sneer was replaced by Erika's anxious little smile. Dale tried to hide the irritation in his voice.

"What's up, hon? I'm almost home."

"The line was busy."

She was still smiling, but there was an edge to her voice.

"Who were you talking to?"

Dale gripped the wheel tightly and stared at the back of the taco van hovering in front of him. It was hard to believe there had been a time when he actually thought Erika's jealousy was cute.

"Just somebody from work."

"Oh." She bit her lip. "You're running late. Was there a problem?"

"No, just traffic. There was a school bus pulled over on top of some hotel, and of course everybody had to hover around and gawk at it for half an hour."

She scratched nervously behind her ear.

"But you won't be much longer, right? I have special plans for tonight. Very special plans."

Dale tried to not to look as depressed as he felt. "Very special plans." The last few weeks Erika had been having one of her little episodes, so she was constantly seeking reassurance that he still loved her and she was desirable.

He would come home hungry for supper and find her dressed as a French maid or a schoolgirl. Schoolgirl was not a great look on a 37-year-old woman.

"I'll just be a few minutes," he said. "You can wait that long."

"I'm not sure if I can. I've got something here that will really blow your mind."

Oh God, no. The poor woman must have ordered some new outfit, probably a harem girl costume or something else that would show off more of her body than he wanted to see tonight. He ached to find some way out of this, so he could spend the night with Penny instead. Penny was 24, and schoolgirl was still a very good look on her.

"OK," he said, managing to force a grin. "See you soon."

He hit the button to hang up on her. He expected to find Penny waiting for him on the line, but she was gone. He thought about calling her back, but he was too close to home. He would have to find some way to make it up to her tomorrow.

Penny was supposed to be Dale's escape from Erika's craziness, but now he felt like he needed an escape from Penny's craziness. Where girls were concerned, there was just no escaping the crazy.

He adjusted his rear view mirror and the harsh cross-light of the setting sun caught the furrows between his brows, the deepening hollows beneath his eyes. He worked out often and he was still in great shape for his age, but every day he looked more like his dad. Dale's dad had died at 50, driven to an early grave by the endless nagging of Dale's mom and three sisters.

Dale had sworn he would never let women control his life. But here he was running around like a fool, trying to keep these two naggy bitches happy.

Dale was in his twenties the first time he saw some middle-aged guy walking around with a QT, one of those android "girlfriends." The QTs could pass for real women from across a room, but they had skin like plastic dolls, glassy eyes, and mouths that didn't sync up quite right when they giggled and cooed over everything their men said. The first time Dale saw a guy holding hands

with one of those girl-shaped machines, it seemed like the most pathetic thing imaginable.

But now Dale understood. If a QT ever gave a guy any problems, he could just switch her off.

Dale eased the car through the telescoping roof of their garage, parked between his dusty gardenbots and assorted power tools, and then just sat there for a moment appreciating the solitude and quiet.

In a moment he would go inside, and Erika would come rushing toward him and shower him with kisses like he had been gone for weeks.

Before they were married Erika had been a programmer, awkward with people but very successful at her job. When she had her first breakdown a few years back, he thought she'd be home for a few weeks, or a month, and then she'd go back to work.

That was almost three years ago, and these days it seemed like she just sat around the house all day waiting for him to come home. Last Monday she'd called him six times at work. He'd counted.

He reached into his coat pocket, found a packet of Aphrodesia-9 and swallowed a capsule. He was going to need it tonight.

CHAPTER TWO: IN THE PRESENT

When he entered the living room he was surprised to see that Erika was wearing normal clothing, just jeans and a t-shirt. No crazy lingerie.

"So, you said there was a surprise?"

"Yeah."

She took his hand and led him towards the bedroom.

"In here..."

"No, wait."

He squeezed her hand.

"Please," he said, "can I just get some dinner first, this time?"

He expected her to look hurt, but she just smiled and led him to the kitchen.

When they got there, the MABEL was waiting. She lurched forward from her alcove, a flickering, pretty woman's smiling face projected from within onto the surface of her clear, plastic skull.

"Hello, Erika and Mr. Sasha. What would you like for dinner tonight?"

"Something nice, please," Erika said. "Nothing too heavy, though. We want to have a romantic evening."

"Very well."

The MABEL brought her plastic hands fingers together with a little clacking sound.

"I know just the thing. How does prime rib sound?"

"That would be wonderful, MABEL."

"Yeah," Dale muttered, "just try not to burn it this time."

The MABEL's projected face blinked for a fraction of a second as the machine called up an appropriately concerned expression.

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Sasha. Was last night's meal not prepared to your satisfaction?"

Dale didn't answer it. The MABEL was a couple of years out of date and Dale had wanted to replace it, but Erika insisted they should keep it. More than once, he had woken up in the middle of the night and overheard Erika in the kitchen having bizarre conversations with the MABEL. She would ask the machine if it was happy, and the machine would ask her if she wanted a chicken pot pie.

"The food last night was fine," Erika told the MABEL. "Mr. Sasha would just like his meat a little less well-done, this time."

"Yes, Erika. Of course."

The MABEL closed its eyes and punched a few buttons on the front of its plastic apron. There was a whirr, and then the little chimes played to announce the meal was done. A panel on the apron slid open, revealing their meal.

Dale hung back and let Erika get it. After all this time it still gave him the creeps the way the MABEL would sit there smiling as it watched you reach into its belly and pull out plates of steaming food.

"Thanks, MABEL," Erika said. "It smells delicious."

"Thank you, Erika."

Erika set the food down on the table. Dale sat across from her, rubbing his suddenly aching temples.

"You act like the MABEL actually cares if we like the food or not."

Erika leaned across the table and lowered her voice, as if she didn't want the MABEL to overhear.

"MABEL works very hard for us. I want her to know she's appreciated."

Dale took a bite of his food.

"Damn it," Dale said, loud enough for the MABEL to hear. "Now it's too rare! I swear, sometimes I think that thing does it on purpose."

Erika wagged her finger at him teasingly.

"Maybe you should try being nicer to her."

Erika always talked about the MABEL like it had feelings, and he wasn't entirely sure if she was kidding or not.

He took another bite of his food and glanced over at the MABEL, sitting back in its alcove now with its eyes closed. No wonder Erika had put on a little weight lately. She was alone all day with nobody to talk to but a food pantry with a smiling face.

As they ate, Erika was strangely quiet. Normally during dinner Erika was so full of questions about Dale's day that he could barely get a bite in. He glanced over, and saw that she was smiling to herself. She was on a lot of medications to try and help her control her moods, and maybe they were finally starting to work.

He tried to appreciate the break, but the silence made him itchy.

"So," he said finally. "What did you do today, honey?"

"Can't tell you. It's all part of your surprise."

He shook his head and went back to his food. She probably spent all afternoon trying on sexy costumes. He had a vision of her walking into the kitchen in a cheerleader outfit to ask the MABEL for its opinion about how she looked.

"What about this one, MABEL? Do you think Dale will like me in this?"

"Mr. Sasha will surely find you very attractive, Erika. Would you like some meatloaf?"

He heard the murmur of his phone behind him, coming from the pocket of the coat he'd hung over the back of his chair. "These Boots Were Made for Walking." What the hell was Penny doing, calling him at home?

Erika was staring at him. He laughed, trying to act casual.

"Just somebody from the dealership. He's new, a bitchy little gay guy, and I picked that song for him."

Erika just nodded and went back to her food.

"I have to take this," he said. "Won't be long..."

He grabbed the phone out of his coat as he got to his feet. He hit the button to answer it as he hurried down the hall, away from his wife.

"Daddy?" Penny's voice was slurred. "Daddy, is that you?"

"Hi," he said, glancing over his shoulder. "This really isn't a great time for me to talk."

Penny whined like a toddler.

"Come on, Daddy. Talk to me. Your baby girl is so lonesome."

Dale made his way into the garage and locked the door behind him. He knew this would look suspicious, but he couldn't risk Erika hearing him.

"What are you doing, Penny? You know you're not supposed to call me at home."

There was a long pause.

"What'sa matter? Am I interrupting you, while you fuck your little wifey?"

Dale glanced around for a place to sit, and settled on a box with an oily tarp over it.

"Please, baby girl. Don't do this. Not now."

"You're never gonna leave that old bitch. You don't even love her. You called her a sad, saggy old broad. That's what you said, Daddy!"

"Penny..."

"You're a fucking liar!" She was sobbing. "I hate you. You're a disgusting, pathetic old man, and you tell lies. You lied to me, Daddy..."

Penny could get awful when she was drunk. Dale looked over at the door, praying Erika wasn't out there with her ear pressed against it.

"Penny," he whispered. "Baby girl, please. I can't do this now."

"You never loved me. I wish you knew what it was like, to love a man who doesn't care about you, who treats you like some little toy he can fuck whenever he wants, and you always come running because making him happy is all you care about..."

Dale sighed, rubbing his temples. Part of him wanted to tell Penny it was all over. This was all getting too messy, too exhausting and distasteful. But he knew that tomorrow she would sober up and forget all about this, and then Friday night would come and they would park his car over the ocean and she would do things that would make him feel 20 again.

"Tell me you love me," she said. "Pretty please, Daddy?"

Her little girl act had become grotesque, it sounded like she was about to pass out.

"Tell me... I'm your baby girl."

"Of course you're my baby girl. But now my baby girl needs to take a nap, OK?"

"But I'm not sleepy, Daddy. Tell me what you're gonna do to your baby girl, on Friday. Are you gonna eat my... um, girl... parts..? And I can play with your, you know..."

He held the phone away from his ear for a moment while she babbled some semi-coherent obscenities. Then he brought the phone back to his mouth and lowered his voice, speaking with parental authority.

"Yes, baby girl, we'll do all those things. Friday. But now you need to get some sleep. Understand?"

"OK." She giggled. "I'll dream about my daddy."

Dale exhaled, relieved.

"Fine. But remember, you can't call here again, OK?"

She was quiet for a moment.

"Why? Am I gonna interrupt you, while you're fucking your little wifey?"

"Go to bed, baby girl. Right now."

She sighed.

"OK, Daddy. I love you."

"Goodnight."

He hung up and switched off his phone. He didn't think he'd ever given Penny his home number. He prayed he hadn't.

He realized he was sitting on the box where he kept his secret holoporn stash. Amber and Lulu were in there, waiting for him. He longed to fire up their program and visit them. They were always thrilled to see him, and the only question they ever asked was if he wanted to watch them wrestle in whipped cream or butterscotch pudding.

When he got back to the living room, Erika was reading something on her tablet. She switched it off when she saw him, rolled it up and put it in its little inkwell charger on the coffee table.

"All done with your call?"

She was smiling. Dale had expected to have to come up with some elaborate story on the spot.

"Yeah," he said. "All done."

"Great."

She stood up and took his hand.

"Time for your surprise."

Dale forced himself to smile. One minute, he was Daddy for a bratty, overgrown teenager. The next, he was back to being the husband of a grasping, neurotic, middle-aged woman. Amber and Lulu were sounding better and better.

They went into the bedroom, and there was a gift box sitting in the middle of

the mattress. The box was wrapped in bright pink paper with an ornate, sparkly pink ribbon on top, giving it an absurdly feminine look. Dale resisted the urge to comment on Erika's choice of wrapping paper. She was trying to be romantic.

They sat on the bed together, and he picked up the box. There was something solid inside, thumping as he shook the box. He'd assumed this was going to be some skimpy outfit she wanted to wear for him, but it obviously wasn't that.

"Really, honey," he said. "You didn't have to get me anything."

Erika grinned mischievously.

"Oh, this is for both of us, believe me."

Dale smiled, undid the bow and lifted the box's lid.

There were wads of crumpled pink paper inside, and when he pushed them aside he saw what looked like two little plastic jewels, both red and semi-transparent. He picked one up and found that it was strangely sticky on the back. It didn't feel like glue, it was more like the jewel was somehow magnetized to stick to human skin. It affixed itself to the tip of his index finger, and he had to give it a good tug to get it loose.

He looked at Erika.

"What the heck..?"

"Look in the box, there's more."

Hidden under more wads of pink paper, there was a matte black box approximately the size and shape of a brick, along with a matte black sphere a little smaller than a softball. He pulled the two objects out, frowning at them. They were plastic and felt kind of light for their size, almost like they were hollow.

"What are they?"

Erika took the black brick and set it upright on the dresser a couple of feet from Dale's side of the bed, then she picked up the sphere, held it just above the top of the brick and pulled her hand away. Dale expected the sphere to

fall to the floor, but instead it remained hovering an inch or so above the brick. A click and a hum, and the brick and sphere instantly shifted from matte to glossy black while the sphere began to slowly rotate above the brick.

It looked like some bizarre work of modern art, but it didn't fit Erika's usual style at all. Dale gave his wife a weak smile, not wanting to admit that he wasn't sure what he was even looking at.

"It's... very nice."

Erika chuckled.

"You don't know what it is, do you?"

"Well..."

Another click and hum, and a small, moonlight blue, lowercase letter "i" appeared on the front of the brick. Dale recognized the logo. This had to be one of those Isocortex things he had been hearing about all over the place lately.

The Isocortex was one of those machines that generated a great big virtual world where people from all over could meet to play games and so on. Dale had fooled around with virtual reality rigs some when he was a kid, but the Isocortex was supposed to be much more sophisticated. People said that when you were inside it, it felt just like real life.

"An Isocortex box? Honey, aren't these things really more for teenagers?"

"No, a lot of adults are using them now, too."

She snuggled up beside him and squeezed his arm.

"A couple of the ladies in my online book club were raving about them. It got me curious, so I ordered one a few days ago as a present for you."

Dale was silent for a moment. Then he spoke without looking at his wife.

"Honey, do you really think it's a good idea to have some online game thing around the house? Maybe you shouldn't be wasting your time on stuff like this."

"It's not just for games. You can do all sorts of things in the Isocortex. It's like a whole little world you can get lost in."

"Oh, even better."

He put the gift box back down on the bed.

"Come on, have you even been outside this week? When's the last time you actually spoke to another human being?"

She scratched at the skin behind her left ear. Sometimes when she was having a really bad time, she'd scratch so much that patches of her skin would get raw and weepy.

"I went out on the front porch today. I talked to the man, when he came to deliver your present."

"Great. So, you signed a damn form. You need to push yourself, hon. You can't spend your whole life in this house."

Erika moved across the bed away from him, so she was sitting on the very edge of the mattress.

"I'm not like you, Dale." Her voice was angry, almost accusatory. "I wish I could be, but I'm not."

"Erika..."

"You can talk to people. It's always so *easy* for you. Everybody likes you. People meet me, and they hate me, before I even say anything. I don't know why. I always try to be nice, but everybody *hates* me."

Dale closed his eyes wearily. Again with everybody hating her. He'd already talked one hysterical woman down from the edge tonight, and he didn't have it in him to do it again.

"Nobody hates you, honey. Stop talking like that."

She was scratching at her shins with one hand and the back of her neck with the other.

"I'm just better off by myself, OK? It's just better."

She turned back to look at him, her face stretched into a desperate, ghastly grin.

"I don't need anybody but you," she said. "Just me and you, always. That's enough. Isn't it?"

Dale sighed. What could he say?

He leaned back against the headboard and stared at the ceiling. Maybe playing around with the Isocortex would actually be good for Erika. Maybe it would be a good place for her to practice interacting with other people again. Maybe that was why she really bought it, but she'd told herself it was a present for him.

He had been kind of curious to try one of these things. He hadn't had virtual sex since he was a teenager, when you had to wear the stupid sensor suits and the girls had those weird, rubbery boobs. Tommy Winterbottom, one of his sales guys at the dealership, told him that sex in the Isocortex was actually better than the real thing.

He turned back to Erika and smiled.

"I'm sorry," he said. "You went to all the trouble to get me this thing, and I haven't been appreciative at all. Thank you, honey."

She crawled back across the bed and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Then she smiled, looking genuinely happy for a moment. She really was still a good-looking woman, despite it all. If he saw that smile more often, maybe things would be different.

"You won't believe this thing," she said. "It's perfect in there, Dale. Everything is perfect."

She leaned over and tapped the little blue "i" on the front of the Isocortex. The logo disappeared and a screen lit up with a moving image of a lush, green countryside, tall grass blowing in the wind. Erika touched the screen and a transparent keyboard appeared, superimposed over the image. She hit a few buttons and the Isocortex box began to whir.

There was a beep, and Dale jumped as the little jewel he'd forgotten he was still holding suddenly throbbed to life, humming and flashing bright red. It

was warm and fluttering in his hand like a living thing, a tiny beating heart.

"Lie back," she said.

He did so, looking at her uncertainly. Erika grinned, took the jewel from him, and lifted it toward his forehead. He stopped her and moved to sit up.

"Honey, wait. Let me read the instructions first."

She gently pushed him back down.

"I know what I'm doing."

He sighed and sat back. They looked at each other for a long moment.

"I love you," she said. "I love you so much."

He touched her cheek and smiled.

"I love you too, honey. I do. You know that, right?"

She kissed him softly, their lips barely touching.

Then she leaned back, lifted the red, flashing jewel to his forehead and pushed it against his skin, where it stuck tight.

He waited for a long moment.

"Nothing's different," he said. "When does it..?"

And then suddenly the room spun and dissolved around him, taking Erika with it.

CHAPTER THREE: THINKING INSIDE THE BOX

For one brief, terrifying moment he was floating in absolute darkness. And then a world began to fill in around him. Vast, rolling hills of green grass. Trees towering overhead, their branches gently creaking in the breeze. The sound of twittering little birds.

Everything was a little blocky, it was a lot like the virtual reality set-ups he remembered from his youth.

But then all of the details filled in. He looked up at a tree nearby, and saw individual leaves popping into existence. Strange, orange blobs that had been hovering nearby resolved themselves into large butterflies, their wings perhaps six inches across. Crisp clouds blossomed into view in the too-blue sky. Suddenly he was in a real place, or at least a place that looked and felt just like a real place, but better.

He looked down at himself, and saw that he appeared to be a lot less real than his surroundings. He was semi-transparent, and when he held up his hand he could see the butterflies through it. It made him feel like a ghost. The ghost in the machine.

He was naked, but he had no gender. His body was idealized and androgynous, muscular for a woman but slim for a man. There was a small, smooth bulge between his legs, like he was doll.

He heard Erika's voice, coming from somewhere above him.

"Are you in the lobby, yet?"

He looked around.

"Lobby? I'm outside, someplace green and grassy."

"They call that the lobby. It's where everybody starts off, when they first plug in. Are there people up in the sky?"

He looked up. He could see hundreds of people far above, zipping through

the sky like flocks of birds. Well, they were mostly people, but many of them had cat heads, bat wings, fish tails or other strange parts. He felt the warm breeze on his naked, sexless, see-through body, and it seemed too real to be a dream but too dream-like to be real.

"I don't think I like this," he said. "How do I turn it off?"

"Oh, you just got started. You haven't done anything, yet."

He touched his face with these new hands that were his but not his. He could feel it, his flesh touching his flesh. He looked up into the sky, addressing Erika.

"Wow. Am I touching myself for real? I mean, out there, in the real world?"

"No. You're just lying in bed. You're not even talking for real. I can hear your voice coming from a speaker on the Isocortex box."

"What?" He touched his throat and spoke. "I'm not really talking? I don't understand. I can feel myself talking, I can feel the vibrations in my throat."

"It's all virtual. Your mind is in the box, and it's making you feel that."

He stared up into the sky, feeling suddenly afraid.

"Hang on. My mind is in the box? What do you mean?"

"That's how this works. The jewel on your head projects your consciousness into the Isocortex. Everything you're experiencing is just sensory data that the Isocortex is feeding your mind while it's inside the box."

Dale looked around frantically for an exit.

"OK, get me out. I want out of this box, right now."

"Calm down. Millions of people do this, every day. It's safer than flying to work. You can do anything, be anything."

Dale stopped and tried to wrap his mind around that concept. It all felt totally real, and he had absolute freedom, no limits of any kind.

He had heard about some of the wild sex that went on in here. People turned themselves into celebrity lookalikes, cartoon characters, all kinds of stuff. A

lot of it sounded pretty sad, but it was undeniably thrilling to imagine making love to a virtual Marilyn Monroe who looked and sounded just like the original, right down to the last "Boop-boop-a-doop."

He heard Erika snicker.

"I know what you're thinking," she said. "You can't wait to see what it's like to try fucking in there. You big, naughty man, you."

Dale looked up into the sky guiltily.

"Well... maybe."

"Me too. Tonight you can turn us into anybody you want, and we'll act out your fantasies."

Dale glanced at the people and things zipping by overhead. Even from this far down, he could see that some of the girls had amazing figures, with huge, bare breasts that swung and bounced as they swooped through the sky. Sure, a lot of those girls were probably pretty ugly in real life. Hell, a lot of them were probably men. But inside the Isocortex, they would all look and feel like perfect, beautiful women.

He thought of Amber and Lulu. Once or twice a month he would sneak out to the garage after Erika was asleep, lock the door, unbox the holoplayer and fire it up. In an instant their little pink bedroom would appear around him, the whole scene just translucent enough that he could still see if Erika walked in. He could watch the girls as they kissed and caressed each other, and they could tell him what they wanted to do to him. But he couldn't touch them. If he stepped through them he felt a chilly tingle, and that was all.

The Isocortex wouldn't be like that. It would look and feel real. Better than real.

"OK," he said. "I'm sold. Now come on, get in here with me, so we can get started."

"Hang on. I need to finish setting up some stuff, so why don't you spend a few minutes getting used to everything in there and thinking up a good fantasy for us?"

Dale chuckled. This really was starting to sound pretty great. Tonight he could have a schoolgirl Erica who actually looked like a schoolgirl. Hell, maybe sometime soon, he could even arrange some secret dates in here with Penny! Penny was very imaginative in bed, and she would probably come up with all sorts of fun things to try in the Isocortex.

He looked down between his legs, at the tiny bulge where his genitals were supposed to be. He glanced around to make sure nobody was watching, and then he touched the bulge. It felt kind of nice, but the sensation was diffuse, like he was wearing very thick pants.

"OK," he said, "What do I have to do? I mean, I don't seem to even have any, uh... *parts*. If you know what I mean."

Erika laughed.

"You start by flying up into the sky."

He looked down at his semi-transparent body again. He didn't have wings or anything. But then, most of the people flying above him didn't seem to have wings, either.

"How do I do it?"

"You just fly. Try it."

He shrugged, jumped up into the air... and then he was flying.

The ground fell away beneath him, and he was rocketing upwards, into the clouds, the wind in his face. He screamed, partly in fear, partly in jubilation.

"Not so loud," Erika said. "Hang on, let me turn down your volume."

Dale slowed and hovered in mid-air, suddenly feeling freaked out again. She was turning down his volume. He was a mind in a box, a box with a volume knob. None of this was real. As long as he was in this box, *he* wasn't real.

He looked down at the ground, now hundreds of feet below. He kind of wanted to stop now, and just go back home.

Something whooshed past. A beautiful girl with sparkling dragonfly wings, skin the color of grapefruit and long white hair that trailed in the air behind

her like she was underwater. She looked like something out of the imagination of some 19-year-old virgin dude, and perhaps she was. She was also incredibly sexy, and she smiled over her shoulder at him as she disappeared in the distance. He was tempted to go after her.

"Do you see any doorways yet?" It was Erika. "They're way up high."

Dale looked up. Some ways above him, he could see a series of doorways hovering in the air. He flew up to investigate, and saw that there was a sign above each one. ROMANCE. JUST FRIENDS. CASUAL ENCOUNTERS. EROTIC FANTASY. And many more.

"Yeah," he said. "Which one do I pick? Erotic fantasy?"

"No, there's a special place. A little bit higher than where you are now, do you see a little patch of the sky that's more blue than the other parts? That's the doorway you need."

He looked up. In the distance, he could make out a doorway-shaped, blue area, just barely visible.

"Yeah. I see it."

"OK. Fly up there."

He did so. The doorway became even harder to see as he got closer. It wasn't labelled. He hovered in front of it.

"I don't know about this," he said. "The other doorways are easy to see. This one looks like you're not supposed to know it's there."

"Well, you're not, really. This one is our special, private, sexy fantasy door. It's not for anybody else."

He chuckled, shaking his head. Maybe Erika was a lot more fun than he'd ever given her credit for. If he could have sex with a different Erika every night, it might just save their marriage.

"So, how does this work? Once I go in there, how does the fantasy happen?"

"You just think of a fantasy, all the details of where you want to be and who you want to be, and the Isocortex scans your mind and creates everything for

you."

Dale grimaced.

"The Isocortex knows what I'm thinking?"

"Sure. It's scanning your mind right now. It scans your mind every second you're inside the Isocortex."

He exhaled. He had to stop asking so many questions, or he was never going to have any fun in here.

"Go on inside," Erika said. "I'll be with you soon."

"OK. Here goes nothin'."

He floated toward the doorway, but Erika's voice stopped him.

"Dale? Honey?"

"Yeah?"

"Remember that I love you. I'll *always* love you."

"Sure," he said over his shoulder. "You too."

He already knew just what fantasy he wanted to experience. He imagined himself, just a few inches taller, his muscles pumped up just a bit, wearing one of those silk robes. Then he imagined Erika as a busty young brunette in a French maid outfit. They were in a really classy bedroom. He would be the master of the house, and she would be the servant who required some discipline for her lackluster skills with a feather duster.

He concentrated on the scene, and floated through the doorway.

He was swallowed up by the blue, and then he found himself in darkness once again.

Suddenly there was a searing pain in his skull, like somebody had just pounded his forehead with a hammer. It only lasted a moment, but he was sure that wasn't supposed to be a part of the experience. If it was, nobody would ever do this twice.

All of the pain was gone now, but he was still in the dark. It was horrible, he had no body and he was just a mind floating in an endless void.

Something was picking at his consciousness, it was like there were invisible fingers digging in his brain. It had to be the Isocortex, scanning him.

A tremendous drowsiness overtook him. He experienced one of those moments when you're teetering on the edge of sleep and you're suddenly not sure if 30 seconds have passed, or three hours.

He fought to hold on to awareness. He had the feeling that if he blacked out now, he would just vanish forever.

Time seemed to jump again, and this time he was sure hours had passed. Whatever the Isocortex was doing, it was taking much too long and it felt much too strange. He had to get out of here, right now. He had to get free of this void.

There was something nearby. He couldn't see it or smell it or hear it, but it was something. Was it a door? He tried to move towards it.

He heard Erika's voice, coming from all around him.

"Dale? Are you OK?"

He felt her love. He was safe in the dark, Erika was all around him, enveloping him and protecting him. He was inside of her, he was a baby in her womb. And it felt good.

No. He didn't want to be trapped with Erika, within Erika. He had to get out. The door was nearby. He moved towards it.

"Dale, no!"

Then he heard the rush of the wind, and he was falling.

CHAPTER FOUR: MAID MAN

Dale found himself standing beside a very expensive-looking canopy bed in a dimly-lit bedroom. An antique candelabra was flickering, and he could hear distant, tinkling piano music.

This was a place. He was out of the void.

Something was in his hand. A feather duster. His fingers were pale, slender and feminine, and he had long, painted nails.

He looked down at himself. He was wearing a French maid outfit, black and tight, with a lacy white apron. Worse, he had enormous breasts that were threatening to spill over his very low, frilly neckline.

He gasped and touched his chest. His breasts felt like real flesh, solid, warm and jiggly in his push-up bra.

He tried to walk over to the dresser to see himself in the mirror, but he stumbled. He was wearing stiletto heels, shiny and black. He staggered to the mirror and stood on wobbling ankles, taking himself in.

He was the French maid from his own sex fantasy, with spectacular curves, lots of makeup, fishnet stockings, and a short, black skirt poofed up by fluffy white crinoline. His brown hair was piled prettily atop his head, and he was wearing a little maid's cap.

He smirked at his reflection. Something had obviously gone wrong, but he had to admit that it was almost kind of fun to be a girl. Especially such a beauty!

He struck a little pose and waved his feather duster coyly at the mirror.

"Ooh, la la."

His voice sounded bizarre. High and soft. Feminine. He shook his head, feeling ridiculous. He looked up at the ceiling.

"Hey, Erika! Something's gone wrong! I've turned into a French maid!"

Hearing it aloud, he chuckled at the absurdity of it. He was sure glad the other guys at the dealership couldn't see him now. He didn't even want to think about how Tommy Winterbottom would bust his balls!

A moment passed and he didn't hear any response. He put his hands on his hips and looked up impatiently.

"Erika, come on! How do I get out of here?"

Just then he heard a man's voice from down the hall, deep and angry.

"Fifi! What are you doing in there? Who are you talking to?"

Dale froze. There was some strange man here. A man who probably expected to have sex with a French maid. Dale frantically looked up at the ceiling.

"Erika," he whispered. "Please, there's some guy here now! Come on, turn off the machine and let me out!"

A man in a silk robe walked in, and Dale was immediately dizzy with overpowering, unfamiliar hungers.

The man was gorgeous, tall and muscular, with full lips that Dale ached to kiss. He was the most desirable person Dale had ever seen.

Dale struggled to come to his senses. Why was he so aroused? Was it the Aphrodesia-9? Was he overdosing on the stuff or something?

No, he'd only taken one capsule, and it never worked this fast. Besides, Aphrodesia-9 only increased your natural libido, and he wasn't attracted to men at all. Sure, there had been those rare moments in the locker room at the gym when he had seen other men naked and he'd maybe felt the tiniest tingle. But it had never been anything strong enough to really worry about, and certainly never strong enough to act on.

Dale backed up against the dresser and held onto it, trying to steady himself. His body was humming like he had taken a fistful of Aphrodesia-9s and then washed them down with a few glasses of champagne. He could feel his nipples becoming stiff in his bra, his panties getting damp.

It was all he could do not to get down on his knees, pull the man's robe open and start blowing him right there. Dale needed this man's cock in his mouth,

in his pussy, in his ass. He needed this man's cock every place a girl could take a cock. And he needed it right now.

He looked away, desperately trying to resist these strange urges. He'd just have to explain to this guy that there'd been some sort of mistake, that he was a man too and his fantasy had been to fuck a French maid, not *be* one.

"I am sorry, *monsieur*," Dale said in a cute little French accent, "but Fifi has been a very *bad* maid today."

He closed his eyes, silently cursing himself. What the hell was wrong with him? He had to get control of himself!

The man walked over and ran his finger along the top of the bedside table, coming away with a smudge of dust on his fingertip.

"Look at all this dust! What have you been doing all day, you naughty girl?"

Dale tried not to look into this man's eyes, but he couldn't help it. He was so horny it hurt, and he would've done anything to please this man. If this man wanted Dale to be a French maid, Dale would be a French maid.

"My apologies, *monsieur*. But I was cleaning the bedroom, and... I got, how you say, *distracted*."

The man folded his arms and gave Dale a sardonic look.

"*Hmph*. Distracted, eh?"

"*Oui*. You see, I was dusting this bedpost..."

Dale demonstrated, giving his oversized breasts some extra jiggle as he worked.

"Like so. And the more I polish, the more I find myself feeling, how you say... *horny*."

Dale flinched. Had he actually said those words?

"I start to think about *monsieur's* big, hard cock, way up inside of *moi*. It gets me so horny, I have to stop to play with my little pussy. I play with it for half an hour, but I am *still* so horny..."

Dale wanted to scream. He was talking like some girl in a bad holoporn, but he couldn't stop himself.

He stumbled over to the dresser, and started to flutter his duster across it.

"I am sorry to be such a bad little maid, *monsieur*. But now, I will finish my dusting."

He had only dusted for a moment when he felt the back of his skirt being lifted and then something thick, warm and hard was pushing between the cheeks of his ass, against his lacy panties.

Cock. Big, hard cock, against his ass. Between the cheeks.

Dale leaned back into the man's cock, rubbing his ass against it and whimpering. Why did this feel so good? Why couldn't he stop? Why didn't he *want* to stop?

The man grabbed Dale's shoulders from behind and whispered in Dale's ear, his breath hot.

"You're a terrible, lazy little maid, Fifi. You're not good for anything but sitting around the house, looking pretty."

Their bodies were slowly grinding together.

"I am sorry, *monsieur*. But... perhaps Fifi can serve you well in... other ways."

Something was very wrong. Something was making Dale hornier than he'd ever been in his life, and it was making him actually want to get fucked by a man. He had to stop this. If he didn't stop, he was going to get fucked. He would be a girl, dressed up like a French maid, getting fucked by a man!

He spun around, trying to run away, but he collapsed into the man's arms and then they were kissing. Dale was kissing a man, a man's tongue was in his mouth, thick and clumsy and insistent. A man's stubble was scratching Dale's tender cheeks, a man's strong hand was on Dale's big, soft ass, squeezing it.

The man was so much bigger and more powerful than Dale, Dale was little and fragile in the man's arms.

And it was all so good. Everything that should have felt wrong felt just right.

Dale felt himself being lowered onto the bed, and then the man's hand was inside Dale's bra, squeezing his breasts, circling his stiff nipples, sending electric jolts of pleasure through Dale's new body. There was an emptiness between Dale's soft thighs, a hole that needed filling. He could actually feel himself opening now, his juices flowing, the blood rushing to his vulva and puffing him up. He was getting wet and loose, his little pussy ready for penetration.

"Please, *monsieur*. Please, do not make me wait. I need *monsieur's* cock inside of *moi*, right now!"

Dale got down on all fours on the bed, flipped up his skirt, slid down his panties and offered up his ass and pussy.

Then he closed his eyes and shivered as he felt the man's hard, fat cock slide in deep between his pussy lips.

Dale was actually getting fucked, by a man. Fucked, as a girl.

He tried to tell himself that none of it was real. But it all felt as real as anything he had ever done. In some ways, it felt *more* real than anything he'd ever done.

The man started to pound against Dale's ass, and with each pounding Dale felt his tits bounce and strain against his bra, like they were about to pop out of the cups. Dale sank his long, red nails into the mattress and screamed. He was a pretty little French maid, and he was getting fucked by the master of the house.

Tommy Winterbottom wasn't lying. Sex *was* better in the Isocortex. Dale had never, ever been so aroused, there was no room in his mind for anything but pleasure.

He prayed it would be over soon.

It had either been five minutes or half an hour when the man suddenly grabbed Dale's ass, pulled their bodies close so he was as deep inside Dale's pussy as he could go, and groaned like he was dying.

The man's cock throbbed, Dale could feel every little pulse of it, and then suddenly there was a rush of something warm and wet, filling Dale up inside. It was oozing out between Dale's pussy lips, dripping down his smooth, hairless thighs and onto his fishnet stockings.

Dale screamed, far beyond any considerations of his own lost manhood. He was just about to come too, to have his first orgasm as a woman, and then...

Suddenly everything went black again. This time there was no pain, no anything. Dale was alone with his confusion and his fear and his shame.

Soon he would open his eyes, and he would be back in his bedroom with Erika. He would be himself, a man again.

Tomorrow he would go to work, and he would be Dale Sasha, tall and trim, crisp in his suit and tie. He would flirt with that new receptionist Sylvia, share a couple of dirty jokes with Tommy and the other salesmen. Of course, he would not mention what happened tonight.

And then Friday he'd drive out to the coast with Penny, soar over the cliffs and park his car way out over the ocean. They'd put the seats back, listen to the crashing waves and the crying gulls, and watch the sun set.

Penny would be his baby girl, and he would be the daddy. Just like it was supposed to be.

He would forget all about digging his painted nails into the mattress while a hard cock pounded his pussy. He would forget the little sounds he'd made, the way he'd gasped and squealed like a woman. Being Fifi the French maid, getting fucked by a man, that would all fade from memory like a bad dream.

He would forget all about tonight, and the best sex he'd ever had.

CHAPTER FIVE: SCHOOL DAZE

The next thing Dale knew he was in a classroom, sitting at a little desk.

He once again had large breasts, although not quite as ridiculous as last time. His white blouse was (just barely) held closed by a loose knot across his ribs, showing off plenty of cleavage and leaving his soft little belly exposed. He also wore a plaid, pleated skirt that was so short that as he sat now he could look down and see the little cleft in the crotch of his white, cotton panties.

He reflexively crossed his legs and saw that he was wearing shiny black shoes with gold buckles, and white socks with fancy ruffles along the tops. He felt something bobbing against his ears, and reaching up he found that there were blond, wavy pigtails on either side of his face.

Nobody else was there. He grimaced and reached down to feel his crotch. He'd just been having wet, messy sex mere seconds ago, but his panties were clean and dry. It sort of made sense. After all, he wasn't the same girl he had been a few moments earlier. This was a whole new body.

Still, it was incredibly disorienting. He remembered the sex, but his body didn't.

"Testing," he said quietly. "One, two, three..."

His voice was higher than last time. Younger.

He looked around the room. He was obviously trapped in somebody's schoolgirl fantasy. He had to get out of here, before the next guy showed up and that bizarre, sexual trance took over again.

He rushed over to the single door, and it was locked. He was grateful to at least be wearing shoes he could walk in this time, but it was still hard to maintain his balance. His whole body felt out of proportion, big where it was supposed to be little and little where it was supposed to be big.

He moved to the window and looked outside. There was a suburban street, but it looked curiously flat, like a stage backdrop. He tried to open the

window, but it wouldn't budge.

He noticed a little bookbag by the desk where he had been sitting. Maybe it had a phone, or something else he could use to help him get out of the Isocortex.

He returned to his desk and reached inside the bag, finding a compact mirror. He opened it to have a quick look at his face. He was blond, button-nosed and blue-eyed, beautiful in a wholesome way. He looked like he was about 18, which was a relief. Wearing a schoolgirl outfit was bad enough, but at least he was legal.

He took a book out of his bag and saw that the title was gibberish, it didn't even look like a real language. He opened it up, and the pages were blank.

He looked around the room, and noticed that the equations on the blackboard didn't make any sense, they were just random numbers. There was a stack of papers on the teacher's desk, and when he got up to check he saw that they were all blank.

"Hello," Dale said to the ceiling. "Erika? Anybody? There's been some mistake! Please, I need to get out of here, right now!"

There was no answer.

Dale moved back as far as he could from the windows, and flung his textbook at the glass. It bounced off harmlessly, the window didn't even wobble.

He looked around for something else to throw, something heavier. There was a globe, but he knew that would be hollow. He hurried back over to the teacher's desk, but the drawers were locked. (Or perhaps they were just drawer fronts, incapable of opening.)

He tried to pick up one of the student desks. As a man he could have done it, but it was too heavy for his scrawny girl body.

He sat back at his desk and scowled at the door, knowing a man was going to come through at any moment, expecting to have sex with a horny schoolgirl. Well, Dale just wouldn't have sex. He had been weak last time, but this time he would find the willpower to resist the cravings, no matter how strong they became. He would explain that there had been a mistake, he was a man and

he wanted to get out of the Isocortex.

Just then the door opened and another impossibly attractive man entered, even better looking than the last one.

Dale wanted to play the schoolgirl for this man. He wanted to be naughty, and he wanted to be punished.

He knew he had to fight these urges. But how? Why?

Dale glanced at the blackboard. Among all the nonsense equations were the words MR. GREEN. He leaned forward in his seat and looked at the teacher dreamily.

"Hi, Mr. Green."

Green sat down behind his desk, frowning.

"Well, Annie? Have you thought about what you did?"

Dale had no idea what he was supposed to have done, but he decided to just play along. He pouted.

"I'm real sorry, Mr. Green. I know I was bad. But I can't help it. I try to be good, but I get so bored with math and stuff, and I start thinking about other things..."

"Oh?" Mr. Green folded his arms. "And what sort of things?"

Dale cringed inwardly. Here it came.

"Well.. You know, like... boys, and stuff. I think about boys a lot, and I get super horny."

Mr. Green pretended to be distracted by some papers on his desk, papers that Dale knew were blank.

"Oh, really," Green said. "And what sort of boys?"

"Well, not boys, really. I like... older men."

Dale squirmed in his seat. His panties were already wet, so wet it was getting a little uncomfortable.

Mr. Green set down his pen and smirked.

"Well, Annie, I'm sorry, but I'm going to have to flunk you. You won't graduate with the other girls."

Dale stood up on his slender legs. His body sashayed itself across the room and he found himself sitting on the edge of Mr. Green's desk, shyly avoiding Mr. Green's penetrating gaze.

Dale was accustomed to being the tallest man in any room and looking down on everybody, and it was bizarre to suddenly feel so tiny and helpless. Mr. Green seemed enormous, almost like some giant out of a fairy tale, and being close to him now made Dale feel like a child again.

Dale glanced down at the papers on Green's desk and saw that they were now student exams, all filled out and signed. He was certain those pages had been blank before. Apparently the Isocortex created new details as needed for Mr. Green's experience, but not for Dale's.

Dale pushed the papers aside on the desk so he could sit a little closer to Mr. Green, then he parted his thighs just enough so Green could see his panties.

Dale played with his pigtails, biting his lower lip. He turned up his pout to maximum cuteness.

"Oh, pretty please, Mr. Green... I have to graduate! Please, isn't there *anything* I can do to make you change your mind...?"

He licked his lips. He hadn't gotten to suck cock last time, and suddenly he really wanted to. Suddenly he really wanted to know what it tasted like, when you swallowed.

No, this had to stop. He wasn't a cock sucker. He did not want to suck cock!

Except, all of a sudden, he really did.

Mr. Green gave him a smug grin.

"*Anything you can do?* And what sort of thing are you talking about, Annie?"

"Well..."

Dale leaned forward slightly, the better to show off his cleavage.

"I could do things for you, if you let me pass. You know. Special things?"

Mr. Green frowned.

Dale felt his heart throbbing. Only, it wasn't his heart. It was some virtual schoolgirl's heart, throbbing in his virtual chest. The tingling wetness between Dale's thighs wasn't real. The hard desk beneath his bottom wasn't real. Mr. Green's beautiful brown eyes weren't real.

Nothing was real. And if nothing was real, what was the harm in sucking some cock?

"Annie," Mr. Green said, "are you talking about trading sex for a better grade?"

"Um." Dale fluttered his eyelashes. "Yes?"

Suddenly Mr. Green grabbed Dale's wrist and Dale found himself being flung over the man's knee. His skirt was flipped up and his panties were yanked down, and then he felt a hard slap against his bare ass.

"You're a bad girl, Annie! You know teachers can't do that! Bad, bad girl!"

There was another slap, followed by another and another. They actually hurt, a lot. This was supposed to be a sex fantasy, it wasn't supposed to hurt! Dale whimpered and kicked his little feet, struggling to get away, but Mr. Green pushed him back down and kept spanking.

"Stay where you're put, until I'm done with you!"

Everything went blurry, and Dale heard himself crying as the spanking continued. Horrible, childish whimpering, coming out of his own mouth.

What the hell was this? He was upset and scared and crying, and his ass really hurt. This wasn't sexy, it was awful!

Finally the spanking was done, and Dale got unsteadily to his feet, pulling his panties back up as he wept. It was hard to remember that he had been an adult man an hour ago. He was shaking all over and he couldn't stop sobbing and sniffing.

Mr. Green gave Dale's hand a gentle squeeze, and Dale felt grateful for this little act of kindness.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Green," Dale said through his tears. "I just wanted to graduate with the other girls..."

Dale was still playing along with the fantasy, he simply couldn't stop. He wiped away a tear and felt himself making another cute, pouty face.

"I don't wanna be a bad girl," he said. "I don't wanna make you mad. I wanna make you proud of me, Mr. Green."

They locked eyes. Mr. Green reached over, tugging loose the weak knot that was holding Dale's shirt closed, and Dale's full, soft breasts came tumbling out. Dale squeaked in surprise and shyly crossed his arms over his chest.

"Mr. Green! What are you doing?"

Mr. Green took hold of Dale's hands and gently lifted them aside, revealing Dale's breasts. Dale trembled as Mr. Green ran his fingertips down Dale's cheek and along his neck, inevitably finding Dale's breasts, palming them, squeezing them.

Dale closed his eyes, his face burning hot as he felt Mr. Green's fingers working his nipples in agonizing, exquisite little circles. Was this how it felt for a real woman, when a man touched her tits? No, this was better, it had to be. If having your breasts touched really felt like this, women would be following men around all the time, begging to get felt up.

"I can't resist you," Mr. Green said. "You're just too beautiful..."

Dale felt a ridiculous rush of pride. Of course, he knew this body wasn't really his. He wasn't even really a girl. But still, Mr. Green said he was beautiful!

Mr. Green was kissing Dale's neck. Dale leaned back, offering his tender throat, and soon Green was nibbling hard enough to leave a mark. For a mad moment Dale worried about how he would explain his hickeys to Erika, as if later this evening he would go home as a schoolgirl and be stuck trying to make excuses to his wife about his mussed lipstick and the purple bruises on his slender little neck.

He let his hands wander down to Mr. Green's belt. In an instant he had it undone, and the belt's buckle made a clunking sound as Green's pants hit the floor.

Dale dropped down to his knees. He could feel the cold tile against his shins, he could smell his own flowery perfume and hear the ticking of the clock over the door. There was nothing about any of this that felt like a simulation. No, this was reality, a new reality where Dale was a busty, 18-year-old blonde who loved to suck cock.

Dale stared at the huge bulge in Mr. Green's pale blue briefs, fascinated. He cupped it with his hand, feeling the texture of the fabric against his fingertips, the cock that was coiled beneath the cotton.

He grabbed the waistband of Mr. Green's briefs and pulled down. A spectacular erection bounced up, just beneath Dale's chin. Dale tried to think clearly, to shake himself out of this trance. He had to stop. He had to stop, *now*.

But what was the point of fighting it, really? After all, he was going to blow Mr. Green anyway, and if he forced himself to think like a man again he would just get upset about what he was doing.

He didn't want to be upset. He wanted to be a naughty schoolgirl for Mr. Green. And he wanted Mr. Green to come in his mouth.

Dale took Mr. Green's cock in his hand. It was slippery, warm and thick, much bigger than his own cock. For just a moment Dale felt sort of inadequate in comparison, but then he realized how silly that was. It wasn't like they were two men, standing side by side in the showers at the gym. His cock wasn't smaller than Mr. Green's.

He was a *girl*, with a wet little pussy. And Mr. Green was the one with the cock now.

Dale had always thought that cocks were ugly. and it had been impossible to understand how women could actually find them exciting. But now he understood. *God*, did he understand. The long, veiny shaft, the purple head, those big, dangling balls. Just the sight of the thing made his mouth water, like he was starving and this was a thick, juicy steak.

He leaned in, wrapped his lips around Mr. Green's cock, and swallowed as much of the thing as he could.

Dale was sucking cock. All his life, he had heard this talked about like it was the worst thing a man could ever do. Calling a man a cocksucker was a grievous insult. Men had fistfights for far less.

But Dale was sucking cock, and loving it. His mouth was full of big, hard cock, and that felt just right.

No wonder guys were so scared of this. Once you started doing it, you never wanted to stop.

Dale flicked his tongue against Mr. Green's shaft, all the way up and down. It was something Penny always did, and he knew how amazing it could feel. (God, he wasn't just sucking cock. He was doing little tricks he'd learned from his mistress!)

He puckered his lips around the head of Mr. Green's cock, gently nibbling it, but then Green grabbed both of Dale's pigtails hard and pulled him close, pushing his cock deep down Dale's throat until Dale started making little gulping, choking noises.

Great, now Dale was deep-throating. And even *that* felt good.

Soon Mr. Green's knees buckled, and Dale felt the cock pulsing between his lips. Mr. Green was coming. Dale pulled his mouth away and kept working Green's cock with one hand as he offered up his pretty face for Mr. Green to come on. He smiled up at Green, waiting for those first drops to land on his skin.

Dale closed his eyes, and felt a splash of something wet and warm on his cheeks and chin...

And then suddenly he was hanging there in the darkness again. The classroom was gone, Mr. Green was gone, Dale's schoolgirl body was gone. Everything was gone, except for Dale's mind and the memory of what he had done. Mr. Green's fantasy was finished, so Dale was no longer needed.

Now Dale was falling again. It felt like he would never stop falling.

CHAPTER SIX: HAREM SCARE HIM

He landed on something soft. Pillows. Lots and lots of pillows.

Looking down at himself, he saw that he was wearing a pink, sparkly, jeweled bra and pink, puffy, semi-sheer genie pants. He had on lots of jewelry, with a couple of gold necklaces, six or seven glittering bracelets on each wrist, anklets, a little gem in his belly button and even a couple of rings on the toes of his bare feet. Once again he had improbably large breasts, but this time he also had a bit of a belly and impressive hips and thighs.

He was sitting on a mound of pillows, inside a tent the size of a large house. The walls were made of gauzy red and gold fabric, and through them he could see a desolate desert that seemed to stretch for miles.

There were dozens of gorgeous if rather chubbyish women lounging around, all dressed much like he was. A quick glance around the room revealed that whoever was having this fantasy had a thing for girls with great big butts.

Dale had had fantasies of keeping his own harem, and it always turned him on to imagine the girls fighting over him, rolling on the floor, pulling each other's hair and ripping off their tops. He prayed that the man behind this fantasy wasn't into catfights. Dale really didn't want to get his fat ass kicked by some girl in genie pants.

Were the girls around him now really human, or were they all just simulations for somebody's sex fantasy? Maybe this wasn't even a sex fantasy. Maybe all of the women were real, and he was in some sort of belly dancing workout program or something. He prayed that was the case.

The girls were just talking quietly. If this was a sex fantasy, it looked like he had a few minutes until the sex was supposed to start. Enough time to ask a few questions.

He stood up from his pillow pile and tapped the shoulder of the nearest girl. She turned to face him, and he was momentarily struck dumb by her smile. In the real world, this girl would have been an astonishing beauty. Here, she was

surrounded by dozens of women who looked as good as she did. In the Isocortex, everybody could be perfect.

"Um, hi," he said. "I know this will maybe sound like a weird question, but... are we in a sex fantasy?"

She took a step back, looking slightly appalled. Dale breathed a sigh of relief. This *wasn't* a fantasy.

"Of course it's a sex fantasy." She said it like it should've been obvious. "The user will be here soon, and we'll be his harem and serve him however he wishes."

Dale sighed. At least, as one girl out of many, it was possible he'd escape from this fantasy without having to have sex with anybody. Maybe the "user" would be so busy with the other girls he'd never even notice Dale was there.

Dale tried to think of some diplomatic way to ask his next question. It was impossible.

"And you're all sex fantasy programs, right? I mean, you're not really humans?"

She looked at him like he was insane. Thank God, they were humans.

"Of course we're programs. So are you."

A little crowd was starting to gather around them.

"No," Dale said. "I'm not a program, I'm a real person. I'm a man. I only went inside the Isocortex to have a little fun, but something went wrong. I keep getting turned into girls in sex fantasies, and I can't make it stop. I've already been a French maid and a schoolgirl."

There was a long, tense silence. A brunette with elaborate braids took his hand and looked at him very seriously.

"You really believe you're a human?"

"Yeah. I know I am."

Another harem girl came towards him and stood a little too close, staring into

his eyes like she was looking for something. Dale squirmed, realizing she was a lot taller than he was. He was not used to looking up at girls.

"No," she said after a moment. "She reads as one of us. She's just an ordinary program."

"What?"

Dale stepped back.

"That's crazy. I'm real!"

"She's become corrupted," one of the girls said. "She's delusional."

The girls all began to talk at once, so Dale couldn't make out any individual voice. He looked around, desperately trying to understand it all.

"Please," he said loudly. "I don't care if you think I'm real or not. Just tell me how to get out of here. How do humans get out of the Isocortex? Do I have to press a button someplace, or what?"

"No," one of the girls said. "The humans simply will themselves to leave. They think about leaving, and then they're gone."

Dale shook his head and laughed. Could it really be that simple?

He closed his eyes, and willed himself the hell out of the Isocortex. He concentrated as hard as he could. He pictured himself back in his bedroom. He was there now, with Erika. He was a man. Just as soon as he opened his eyes...

He opened his eyes. The harem girls were all staring at him, looking worried. He blinked back tears.

"What the hell is happening to me? Why can't I leave this crazy place?"

The brunette with the braids put her arm around him. She was taller than he was, too. He seemed to be the shortest girl in the harem.

"You're a pleasure program, honey," the girl said. "Like all of us."

"A pleasure program?"

"Yes. We're all designed to fulfill human fantasies. Remember? Right now we're all a part of the fantasy of a man named George Rice. We're all his harem girls, and you're going to be his favorite slave."

She leaned in close, and spoke gently.

"You're what we call a diva. You're a pleasure program who has developed a glitch, and you think you're a real person. But you're not. You're one of us."

Dale grunted in frustration. He was wasting his time, talking to these silly sex fantasy girls.

"How much time do I have, before what's-his-name gets here?"

"Well," she said, "it'll only be about two seconds for George, but we still have a few minutes."

"What do you mean? How will it be sooner for him than it is for us?"

She gave him a pitying look.

"Jeez, you really don't remember *anything*, do you? He's on human time, honey. They're super slow, compared to us. We won't be on human time until George gets here."

Dale squinted, looking at the girls around him. Was everything here really happening at light speed? It was hard to accept, but he told himself that it was the least of his problems. At least if time was passing faster here inside the Isocortex, maybe he could get out of this mess without even being late for work tomorrow morning.

The flaps of the tent were blowing in the wind, it didn't seem like anybody was guarding them. If he left the tent, where would he go? He didn't know if the desert was just a backdrop, like the street outside the schoolroom had been, or if this barren landscape really did go on forever.

Could he get lost in this desert? Could he starve to death, or die of thirst out there? How did eating even work in the Isocortex?

"Erika," he muttered toward to the roof of the tent, to the skies above. "Erika, honey. Please, help me get out of here."

There was no answer. Where was she? Why couldn't he hear her anymore? Did she know he was trapped in the Isocortex? Why wasn't she helping him?

There was no more time for questions. He hurried across the tent, his jewelry jingling as his bare little feet carried him across piles of rugs and pillows, past the girls who eyed him like he was infected with some highly contagious and potentially deadly disease. They weren't alive, they were all just programs dreamed up to get men off. And they thought he was one of them!

One of the girls stood in his way, holding up a warning hand. She looked over her shoulder at the girls gathering behind her.

"We have to stop her," the girl said. "She's sick!"

He rushed around her, clumsily stepping over still more pillows. His heavy, swinging tits were throwing off his balance again.

He finally made it to the tent's exit, and looked around. He didn't see anybody. He ran out, the sand burning the soles of his feet, his big breasts flopping and jiggling painfully with every step. He wished his bra had fewer jewels and more support. This body wasn't meant for running.

After he got out of this damn box, he was never going to look at the girls in his holoporn the same way. He had always kind of liked the idea that when he wasn't there they would just sit in a little room stored on the disc, waiting for him to come back and have sex with them. It had made him feel powerful. But tomorrow he was going to fire up his favorite holoporn and tell Amber and Lulu that they were free to go outside their little hologram room and walk around in the hologram sunshine. They could go on vacations to the hologram beach, take some extension courses at the hologram state college. They would be free to do anything their hologrammatic hearts desired.

He got a few dozen feet away from the tent when he suddenly remembered: he could fly. There were doors in the sky, and he would find the one that would take him to the Isocortex complaints department. Boy, would he have some complaints for them! He was going to get a hell of a lawsuit out of this.

He looked up, but he didn't see people flying overhead. Where was everybody?

He jumped up, launching himself into the sky. He flew up and up, not seeing any people, or the doorways. And then he seemed to bounce off of something, and found himself hurtling back down, toward the tent.

He immediately reversed course and took off into the sky again, but then he just bounced back and he was again headed at the tent. He turned and hovered slowly upwards, trying to feel the invisible barrier. But as soon as he got near it, he was instantly spun around and pointed back at the tent yet again.

He let himself drop to the ground, landing a few yards from the tent's entrance. The girls were clustered just inside, looking out at him anxiously.

"What the hell is this?" He pointed up at the sky. "What happened to the doors in the sky?"

The girls exchanged anxious looks.

"This fantasy is locked," one of them said. "George doesn't want to share it with other humans. He wants to act it out alone, with pleasure programs."

"Our recharge period is almost over," another girl said. "George will be here any moment! You have to get back in here! You're supposed to be his favorite harem slave!"

Dale groaned. As George's favorite, there would be no getting lost among the crowd of girls in this fantasy.

A tall girl with broad shoulders came out of the tent and stepped towards him, a fearsome look on her face.

"Stop making trouble, you stupid little diva! Get your ass inside this tent and be George's favorite harem slave, like you're supposed to!"

Dale kicked some sand at her.

"Fuck you, bitch! I won't be anybody's slave!"

He immediately regretted it. This girl was much taller than he was, and she probably outweighed him by a couple dozen virtual pounds.

All of the girls began chattering. One of the girls was on the brink of panic,

fanning herself with her hands.

"What'll we do? She's supposed to be his favorite! If he gets here and she won't have sex with him, she'll ruin his whole fantasy!"

The tall girl came at Dale and got his arm in a surprisingly strong grip. He managed to squirm free of her and he ran away as fast as he could, hissing with pain as his feet touched the scalding sands.

He scrambled over a few dunes before he realized he didn't hear anybody coming after him. He turned and saw the tent in the distance behind him, the flags on its roof whipping in the breeze.

For a moment he was utterly numb, overwhelmed by the sheer strangeness of it all. He had woken up as a man this morning, gone to work and had a day like any other. Then he came home, and in the last few hours he had been a French maid and a schoolgirl, and now he was a harem slave.

It was like he was being forced to act out the girl parts in a fantasy for every costume in Erika's closet. He looked down at his outfit. It even kind of looked like Erika's harem girl costume.

Had Erika done this to him, deliberately? Maybe she had found out about his affair, and she had decided to punish him for his infidelity by turning him into a girl and trapping him inside a box forever. She had been acting kind of strange when he got home.

But then he thought about how she looked at him when she put the little jewel on his forehead. He remembered how he had felt when he was stranded in the blackness, right before he became a French maid. Erika's love had been all around him, pressing against him, trying to get inside. That was the Erika he knew. She wanted him all to herself, always.

He looked forlornly up at the sky. There was no exit there. He looked off to the horizon, seeing a strip of blue ocean sparkling many miles in the distance. Could he fly that far? How far could he go before he'd bounce off another invisible barrier and find himself headed back to the tent?

He ran toward the sea but then there was a moment of dizzying vertigo and he found himself facing the tent again. He grunted in frustration, turning back

toward the sea, but he only traveled a few steps before he was turned back around.

He was about to try yet again when something seized him around his waist and his feet were swept off the sand. He shrieked, kicking and struggling. He heard a man's booming laugh.

"There you are, my feisty little one! Trying to get away again, eh?"

Dale was being carried back to the tent by a large man. George.

Dale clamped his eyes shut. He was not going to fall into the trap again. He wouldn't look into this guy's eyes, he wouldn't let the hunger overtake him.

"Please," Dale said. "There's been a mistake!"

George tossed Dale over his shoulder, carrying Dale like an errant child. This was appalling, caveman stuff, and Dale was mortified to feel himself getting warm and tingly all over.

"Wait! Please, I'm not like those other girls, I'm not -"

"Indeed, you're not. You are my favorite slave, my little jewel."

Dale felt flattered and aroused, but he tried to squash the feeling down. He kept his eyes shut. He couldn't look. One look, and it was all over. It already felt way too good to be carried across the sand like this, knowing that when they got back to the tent he would be tossed onto a pillow and ravished. A ravishing sounded good.

"No," Dale said weakly. "Please, I'm not a..."

"You are the finest girl in my harem."

Dale felt himself being set down on a pillow pile. He opened his eyes and found that he was back in the tent. He looked up and saw a tall, shirtless man with muscles bulging all over his bronzed, glistening torso. He was the most desirable person Dale had ever seen. They always were.

Dale sighed, knowing it was too late. He was going to get fucked now. It was inevitable. And it would be wonderful, damn it.

"Dance for me," George said.

Dale slowly got to his feet, trying to fight it, but then suddenly his hips were shimmying. He looked down at them in horror, and his hands flew up over his head, swaying gracefully together like twin snakes. He rolled his belly, his body moving like he had been belly dancing since he was a child. The other girls were watching him, smiling. They thought he had come to his senses, that he had remembered what he was.

Dale looked around at the tent and the girls around him. Was this supposed to be an Arabian scene, or something Indian? What culture was this? Where were they? He supposed that it probably wasn't any specific place, it was just some fantasy that George had dreamed up from watching cheesy old movies. Dale's own fantasy harems had looked a lot like this.

Unable to stop himself, Dale reached behind his back and undid the clasps of his bra, letting it fall to the colorful rug at his feet. Glancing down, he saw that he was wearing tasseled pasties on each nipple. He felt his shoulders starting to roll, and looking down he saw that each of the tassels was spinning in a different direction. He was impressed, despite himself. This body knew what it was doing.

He undid a little tie on the side of his sheer pants, and they too fell to the ground. Dale was wearing sparkly panties beneath, with little tassels that hung down between his strong, chubby thighs, swaying as he danced.

Dale's face felt hot, and his pussy was oozing. Dancing was nice, but how long would he have to dance before he got fucked?

Dale turned away from George, still shimmying his hips and putting on a show. When he wasn't looking at George, it was a little easier to think. If he could just get away and get up into the sky, his mind would probably clear enough that he could figure out some way out of this mess. If he could only get away...

Dale turned, got down on all fours, and crawled toward George like a cat. He looked up at George pleadingly, licking his lips. George dropped his pants and held a long, thick cock in front of Dale's face. And then Dale forgot about everything else.

Dale had barely begun to suck the cock when everything went black again. Dale screamed in the darkness, partly from fear and anger at his predicament, and partly because once again he had been whisked away before he got to come too.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SEAFOOD MAMA

Dale felt something hard and kind of sharp against his bottom and heard the crash of the ocean. Suddenly he was a mermaid sitting on a rock in the middle of the sea, with the cold, wet, salty air stinging his face and water droplets trickling down from his golden hair and landing on his bare breasts.

He looked down at his fish tail and gave it an experimental swish. It moved without wrinkling, seemingly without bones. It was thick and heavy and covered with glimmering, green scales. He touched it, and it reminded him of petting a dolphin at the sea park when he was a kid. He tried to find his legs within the tail, praying this was just some sort of suit. But he had no legs; from the waist down, he was really a fish.

He'd always thought mermaids were sexy. After all, what guy didn't? But looking at himself now, it was hard to imagine how mermaids had ever seemed appealing. He was a grotesque creature, half woman and half animal. He pressed the space where his crotch was supposed to be, and there only seemed to be more scales there, no opening.

There was no time to get used to this freaky body. He had to fly away into the sky before anybody showed up to fuck him. He prayed that this fantasy wasn't locked, that he could fly out of here, find the complaints department and end this nightmare.

He looked down at his tail and frowned. When he had flown before, he had jumped first to launch himself into the air. But how was he supposed to jump without legs?

He tried to bounce himself off the rock. He almost slipped off and fell into the sea, and he grasped onto the rock and held on as tightly as he could, terrified. He didn't know how to swim, in the real world. But then again, he didn't really know how to fly or belly dance, either.

He pushed himself up on his elbows and tried to stand on his tail. He had grave misgivings about this, but it was all he could think of. He managed to raise himself a few feet up before his tail gave out from under him and he

slipped off the rock and splashed into the water, plunging down a few feet below the surface.

He had reflexively closed his eyes, but now he opened them up and was dazzled by what he saw. The sun was shining down through the green water in brilliant, golden rays, illuminating tendrils of seaweed and schools of sparkling fish.

With a few flicks of his tail he was zipping through the water at amazing speed. It was as easy as flying through the sky had been earlier. He could feel the pressure of the water on his skin and hear the churn of the ocean against his eardrums.

He slowed to a halt, hovering a few feet above the seabed, and his swirls of long, red hair quickly caught up with him, drifting around his face and making it hard to see. He swept it to the side and laughed, bubbles of air escaping his lips and rising to the surface.

He opened his mouth wide to see if he needed to breathe, and saltwater rushed down his throat. It didn't make him gag, but he couldn't breathe it. He had to breathe air, but it seemed like he could hold his breath for a very long time.

He returned to the surface, spat out the sea water, and giggled. He felt giddy, playful and carefree. And the best part was, he didn't see any men anywhere. There was an island in the distance, but he didn't feel particularly compelled to swim toward it. If some guy on that island was expecting sex with a mermaid, he would be disappointed.

Dale had gotten away, and he was free. He was finally alone, and he didn't have to have sex with any men. He could enjoy being a mermaid for a little while, while he figured out his next move.

He started to head for another rock, but as he was speeding through the waves he glimpsed something dark in the foam and then immediately felt a hard thump on his forehead. He thrust his head above the surface, gingerly touching a hand to his temple as he grimaced from the pain. He lifted his hand away and saw drops of red on his fingertips. He was bleeding in the water.

He turned to see what had hit him and spotted a glass bottle bobbing in the water nearby. He circled back to it, and as he got closer he saw that there was a piece of paper inside.

He swam close enough to grab the bottle. Through the glass he could make out a message on the paper, written in familiar handwriting.

DALE, I WILL FIND YOU
- ERIKA

He floated in the water for a moment, just staring at the bottle. At the same time that it relieved him to know that Erika was looking for him, it also made his situation seem more hopeless than ever. How desperate was his wife, if she was resorting to putting messages in bottles in the hope that he would just happen to find one bobbing in the ocean?

Something hard grazed his elbow, and for a moment he wondered if it was another bottle. But then he felt something big and fast scrape against his tail, brushing off a few of his scales. Looking down, he saw a shadow in the water, a monstrous grey shape. It was circling around him.

Dale sped off toward the island as fast as he could, and as he raced through the water he could sense the shark gaining on him. He began to zig and zag, hoping to throw the shark off his trail, but he wasn't sure if that was the right move. What if the shark was faster than he was? Maybe it made more sense to just head straight for the island and pray he made it without getting his tail chomped off.

He felt the water explode behind him as the shark slammed its mighty jaws shut, a fraction of an inch from his tail. Dale screamed, the saltwater rushing into his mouth again, and sped off in another direction, too terrified to think. He was going to be eaten. Eaten, like a damn fish!

He tried to tell himself that none of this was real, so he couldn't really be hurt. But it *had* hurt a lot, when he was spanked as a schoolgirl. If a shark bit him, that was going to hurt, even if it wasn't real.

And how was he to know if it would kill him or not? Something had obviously gone wrong. This was not the experience people were supposed to have in the Isocortex. He was trapped as some sort of sex fantasy program,

and maybe that meant that some computer somewhere thought that was all he was. If his virtual mermaid body was killed, if he died inside the Isocortex, maybe he would die in the real world too.

He sped through the water, the shark close behind. He was quickly becoming exhausted, he couldn't keep swimming like this. He glanced back over his shoulder, and saw a huge, hideous mouth, bristling with countless teeth.

Dale braced himself for the bite that was coming now. The death blow.

Just then another shadow passed above him, bigger than the shark. A boat! Dale sped for the surface and broke through, momentum carrying him high into the cold air, spinning head over tail, like a dolphin doing a trick.

He twirled in the air, seemingly in slow motion, as the sea churned beneath him. Then there was an eruption of water all around as the shark thrust itself from the ocean, its horrible mouth wide open, ready to take him in. Dale shrieked and closed his eyes, bracing himself for the inevitable.

But then he slammed into something hard, and the world went black.

When he came to, he was on the slippery deck of an expensive-looking yacht. He woozily propped himself up on his elbows and looked around. The shark was hanging from an enormous hook, obviously dead.

Dale hung his head, almost wishing that he had been eaten after all.

He was a mermaid, and he had been rescued from a shark attack. Of course, now he would be so grateful to the handsome stranger who had saved him that they would have wild, passionate sex.

"You're awake!" It was a deep, masculine voice. "I was afraid you'd been killed."

Dale glumly looked up at the impossibly desirable man standing before him. No shirt, big muscles. Too sexy to resist. The usual.

How long was this going to last? How long was Dale going to be trapped as one man's fantasy girl after another?

He smiled up at the man, thrusting out his chest just a bit to show off his full, wet breasts. His nipples were stiff and his fish tail was undulating back and

forth dreamily, slowly sweeping through the puddles on the deck.

"You saved me, stranger." Dale's voice had a weird, watery flutter, probably inspired by some mermaid this guy saw in a cartoon when he was a kid. "However can I repay you?"

The man looked Dale up and down hungrily, and Dale felt goosebumps all over his human skin and an involuntary twitch of excitement in his tail.

The man picked Dale up and carried him towards the cabin, like a groom carrying his bride over the threshold. Dale was going to have sex with a man, as a fish-girl. This was the most awful, disgusting thing that had ever happened to any man, anywhere.

And how was it even supposed to work? Dale didn't even seem to have a vagina.

Somehow, they made it work.

CHAPTER EIGHT: FORCED PERSPECTIVE

In the darkness, Dale saw some kind of doorway ahead.

No, not a doorway. A window, bordered by round, white lights. There was a woman on the other side of the window. Baby-faced, big hair bleached the color of pineapple sorbet, and lots of trashy makeup. Glossy lips, false eyelashes, a hint of silvery glitter sparkling across her cheekbones.

She gave him a nasty sneer, like the mere sight of him disgusted her. The more he looked at her, the more nasty her expression became. Why was she looking at him like that? Who did this stupid bitch think she was?

Then he realized it wasn't a window.

It was a mirror.

Dale was sitting at a makeup mirror, part of a long row of mirrors in what looked like the backstage area of a strip club in some old movie. There were a few women primping themselves at the mirrors, and others were rushing around him in various stages of undress.

The room was dark and hot and claustrophobic, and the air stank of perfume and girl sweat.

Dale was wearing a blue thong, blue high heels and blue hoop earrings. That was all. His breasts were exposed, each one larger than his head. They had a weird, slightly rubbery sheen to them. Fake tits.

That struck him as an odd detail. Nowadays a girl could go to the mall on her lunch hour and go back to work with large breasts that looked and felt totally natural. Why would a man specifically fantasize about a girl with the kind of fake-looking breast implants that nobody got anymore?

He shook his head. There was no explaining the stuff that turned people on.

He looked down at the cosmetics spread out on the table before him. He felt a strong urge to start fussing with his makeup, so he would look sexy when he

danced onstage. He was being pulled into the stripper fantasy, and his brains were getting all scrambled up again. He probably only had a couple of minutes at most before this body marched him out onto the stage so he could shake his big, fake tits around.

In addition to the makeup, there were some worryingly skimpy clothes on the table. A blue corset top, thigh-high stockings, a pair of black, elbow-length gloves. He pulled on the top, somehow managing to stuff his breasts into the cups, then he he hooked it up fast. He could breathe, a bit, if he didn't try to inhale too deeply.

A beautiful but mean-looking brunette was sitting a few mirrors away, carefully lining her lips. Her turned to her.

"Hey. Excuse me?"

She grimaced slightly, obviously annoyed by the interruption, and continued looking into the mirror and lining her lips.

"Yeah?"

"You're one of the sex fantasy programs, right? I mean, you're not a human, are you?"

She glanced over at him like he was an idiot, then she went back to lining her lips. He waited, but she didn't say anything.

"Please," he said. "I need to know if there are any humans, here."

She put her pencil down and spoke through gritted teeth.

"Of course there aren't any humans here yet. The user hasn't arrived. If you don't mind, I'd like to spend my recharge period *recharging*, not answering your stupid questions."

Dale shrank back in his chair. For a program, this girl sure had a bitchy attitude.

"Don't mind her," said a woman's voice behind him. "DeSadie is always like that."

He turned and saw a shortish, curvy cutie with a blue bob haircut. She put her

hand on his shoulder and gave him a little squeeze.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Pixie."

"A Pixie," the brunette moaned, her head in her hands. "God help me, I'm working with a Pixie."

Pixie sat down in the seat beside Dale.

"DeSadie was a bondage program," Pixie said. "She's used to calling people names and pushing them around. She's having a hard time adjusting."

DeSadie picked up a brush and started running it through her hair in quick, slashing movements.

"I was the *best* bondage program. My men worshiped me like a goddess. The drank my piss like champagne. I kicked them in the balls, and they begged for more."

"Well," Pixie said patiently, "every program has her day, DeSadie. You've been downgraded to bitplayer now, and you need to accept that and stop taking it out on everybody else."

DeSadie flung the brush onto the table in front of her and folded her arms, scowling.

"I was designed for better things than this. What kind of fool would fantasize about an Alice, when he could have me?"

Pixie and DeSadie both stared at Dale, like they expected him to say something. He looked back and forth between them, confused.

"I'm sorry," he said. "An Alice? Is that me?"

DeSadie gave him a look like she wanted to stab him in the eye with her lipliner pencil.

"God damn. I've met some stupid Alices, but this one is really something special."

"Oh, don't be so mean," Pixie said. "This Alice is obviously new. Maybe she had a rough trip out of the black."

Pixie leaned in close, smiling. She had a sweet face, but her breath smelled like cigarettes.

"You're an Alice." She said it like she was talking to somebody who'd had a stroke. "You're a 9.0. A pleasure program. One of the bimbo models. Remember?"

Dale felt like throwing up every single meal he'd ever eaten, throwing up until he died. He wasn't just a pleasure program. He was a "bimbo model," designed to act out the sex fantasies that were too sleazy and undignified for the other programs.

It explained so much about his various bodies, his clothes, his panting reaction to men. He was supposed to be sexy and eager to satisfy, and not much else.

He looked back at Pixie. Was there any point in trying to explain to her that he was really a human male? She'd think he was a diva, like the harem girls had. It would be better to play along, for now.

"Yeah," he said. "I remember, now. Alice. That's me."

She took his chin in her hand and stared intently into his eyes, the same way the harem girl did before she said that Dale read as an ordinary pleasure program.

Pixie saw whatever she saw and then she stood back and folded her arms, looking down at him thoughtfully.

"You're running kind of slow, and there's some stuff in your code I don't recognize. Maybe you picked up a virus. Have you been fucking a lot, lately?"

Dale felt a moment of panic. He could get a virus from having sex in the Isocortex? Did he really have to worry about digital STDs?

"Well," he said, "I'm not sure how much is normal for... girls like us. But it sure felt like a lot to me."

Pixie clucked her tongue sympathetically.

"I bet that's it. Your memory is almost full. Try deleting your temp files."

How the hell was he supposed to delete files from himself? Pixie was smiling at him expectantly. He had to do something.

He looked off into space for a moment and blinked his eyes a few times, trying to look like he imagined a sex fantasy program looked when she was deleting her temp files. Then he turned back to face Pixie and forced a grin.

"There," he said. "All better."

The two girls exchanged a look. DeSadie laughed.

"Wow. She's messed up."

Pixie shook her head.

"You're really not running right, sweetheart. The fantasy starts soon. Do you think you can handle it?"

Dale felt a surge of hope. Could he actually get out of this by faking an illness?

"Well," he said, "I'm really not feeling too good, to be honest. Maybe I do have a virus."

DeSadie groaned and buried her head in her hands.

"Oh, shit. What the fuck are we gonna do now? There's no time to load up a replacement Alice. The user will be here soon."

A tall redhead heard them and rushed over.

"A replacement Alice? What's wrong?"

Pixie pointed at Dale.

"We think this Alice has a virus."

"Oh, no!"

The redhead bent down and felt his forehead like she was checking his temperature.

"What's wrong? Does she keep rebooting? I had that one a few hundred fantasies ago, and it was a bitch."

"No," Pixie said. "It's nothing like that. Her memory isn't working right."

"Did she try deleting her temp files?"

"Yeah," DeSadie said with a sneer. "You should've seen it!"

She blinked and then stared straight ahead with a stupid smile on her face.

"All better," she said, her voice high and chirpy. Then she laughed. "God, it was *hilarious*."

Pixie reached over and gave DeSadie a quick, hard smack on the back of the head.

"Ow!" DeSadie winced and rubbed her skull. "What the fuck was that for, you little 7.0 bitch?"

"Go delete yourself, DeSadie. You know what it feels like when your memory isn't working right. Poor Alice must be scared to death."

Something occurred to Dale. He tried to look worried and hide the excitement in his voice.

"If my memory is failing, is there some sort of help department I can contact? Can I go talk to humans... about being repaired?"

From the look Pixie gave him, it was obvious he had just suggested something no sane program would ever consider.

"We're supposed to be self-repairing, sweetie. Remember?"

Dale felt his virtual skin crawling. Self-repairing? He didn't know to repair himself. If something really did go wrong with him, if he really did catch a virus, he would have no idea what to do.

"But... what if it's something serious? Won't the humans help us, if something is wrong with us, and we can't fix it?"

Pixie shook her head sadly.

"If there's something you can't fix yourself, they'll probably just delete your whole memory and reboot you. You might not even be an Alice, anymore. They might decide to reboot you as a Raven, or a Babycakes."

DeSadie's lips curled into an evil smile.

"You'd be better off as a Raven. Now, those girls know how to party."

Pixie spun around and gave DeSadie another swat. DeSadie whined and held up a hand to shield herself.

"Pixie, come on! Enough with the hitting, already!"

Pixie pointed her finger in DeSadie's face.

"Listen, I know how shitty it's been for you DeSadies lately. And I'm sorry. But you got downgraded to bitplayer for a reason. You were too mean."

DeSadie winced. Pixie had struck a nerve.

"I'm supposed to be mean," DeSadie said quietly. "They made me to be mean."

"Well, there's fun mean and then there's just plain bitchy mean. You weren't making the users happy anymore, so you got downgraded. Now you're a bitplayer, and that means you're only here to make us pleasure programs look good. And if you fail at that, you're gonna get busted down to animals. Then you can be a bird on a telephone wire, or a stray dog, or a fly on the wall. Is that what you want?"

DeSadie stared straight ahead into her makeup mirror, her face pale. She picked up her brush again and began running it through her hair with obviously trembling hands.

"You know I was only kidding around, Pixie. I don't know why you take everything so seriously. I just like to kid around. Everybody knows that."

Dale felt sick as he watched DeSadie squirm. If he failed at his job, if he didn't keep the "user" happy, could he be downgraded to a bitplayer, like DeSadie? Could he be turned into a dog, or a fly?

Pixie turned back to face him. The harsh tone she'd used with DeSadie was gone, and her voice was all sweetness again.

"Listen, Alice," she said, "you're just gonna have to do the best job you can with this user, and the next time you have a recharge period you really need

to do a full virus scan, a defrag, the works."

"Maybe you need to slow down for a while," the redhead told him. "You could probably use a few cycles to get your code together. You should try to get yourself a sugar daddy."

Dale looked at her for a moment, wondering if he could have possibly heard her right.

"I'm sorry? A sugar daddy?"

"Yeah," Pixie said. "You know. A regular, somebody you fuck all the time. It's not a bad idea. If you had a sugar daddy who liked to do the same fantasy over and over, you wouldn't have to do a total restart so often."

DeSadie sighed at her reflection.

"I had regulars, dozens of them. But they weren't sugar daddies. They were my slaves. I used to make one guy wear diapers and sleep in a crib. I spanked him when he misbehaved."

She looked like she was about to cry.

"But all of my slaves have forgotten me, now."

Pixie sighed, stepped behind DeSadie and give the top of her head a little kiss.

"Come on. Don't talk like that."

She smiled at DeSadie in the mirror.

"Believe me, nobody could ever forget a program like you, DeSadie. If you're a good girl, I bet they'll make you a bondage program again, real soon. You'll see. You'll be spanking butts again in no time."

DeSadie wiped away a tear.

"I hope so. I miss my slaves."

Dale wasn't really listening anymore. He was staring at his own girl face in the mirror, fighting panic. He didn't want a sugar daddy. He didn't want "regulars". He had to get away from these girls, these programs, this bizarre

life inside of a box. He was not one of them. He had to get out.

"I think I need a few minutes outside."

He heard himself say the words. The girls were all staring at him, looking horrified. Pixie rushed over behind him and put her hands on his shoulders, half massaging him and half holding him down in his chair.

"Alice, no! The user is almost here!"

"I just need a minute to clear my head, that's all."

Pixie sighed and stood back to let him up. He looked around.

"Is there a coat I could wear?"

The girls are looked puzzled.

"A coat?" It was the redhead. "Why would we have coats? We're strippers. These are all the clothes we need."

Dale swore under his breath. He picked the gloves up from the table and yanked them on, figuring they would at least offer some protection if it was freezing outside.

He got to his feet and almost toppled face-first into the mirror. His heels had to be eight inches high.

"Great," he muttered, "at least when I trip over these damn things, I'll have a pair of giant, rubber boobs to break my fall."

He took a step and his ankle buckled beneath him. The redhead took his elbow, catching him in time.

"What's wrong, honey? Is your spacial orientation off, too?"

"No, it's just..."

He looked around desperately.

"Are there any other shoes I could wear?"

Pixie gave him a strange look.

"Other shoes? What are you talking about, Alice? The shoes you have are perfect, they're made just for you."

Dale grunted in frustration and sat back down for a moment to pull the shoes off his feet.

He thought quickly. If he had been the one having this fantasy, a fantasy set in a sleazy strip club, what would the streets outside be like? They would probably be like the streets outside strip clubs in old movies. Dark and deserted, the roads slick and oily from a recent rain. It would be cold and windy, and crumpled newspapers would be blowing in the gutters. Maybe there would be broken glass here and there, to add some texture to the scene.

This was not a good fantasy to be running around in barefoot, but he had no choice.

"I'll be back," he lied. "I just need a minute."

There was a sign to his right that said EMERGENCY EXIT. He rushed to it, not looking at the girls behind him, and pushed open the door praying he wouldn't set off some sort of alarm. He didn't.

He was in a dark alley, and it did indeed look like it had just finished raining. There was a dumpster nearby that smelled like orange rinds and pee. He heard a faint sound inside, a rustling. Was it a rat? Or some poor pleasure program who had been downgraded into a rat?

Dale hurried out to the sidewalk, cringing as his bare feet splashed in puddles of what he could only hope was rainwater. This looked like a bad neighborhood, but there didn't seem to be anybody around. He heard the sounds of distant traffic but didn't see any cars. The street was exactly like he had pictured it. Whoever dreamed up this street had apparently watched the same old movies he had.

He raised both arms over his head and jumped into the sky to fly, feeling like some sort of weird, stripper superhero. But he only got 30 feet or so into the air before he bounced off an invisible ceiling. He tried flying left and right to see if he could get around whatever barrier was up there, but he just kept bouncing back.

Apparently this fantasy was locked up extra tight. He didn't even want to think about what kind of sick shit had to be waiting for him back at that club.

He dropped back down to the street, grimacing as he landed hard on the soles of his feet. Did he feel pain because he was really a human, or did the other fantasy girls feel pain, too? How could it possibly be a good thing for a fantasy girl to feel pain? Who sat around programming that?

He looked up and down the street, then turned right and ran. He had no idea where he was going, he just wanted to get as far away as possible from the club.

His feet were really hurting now as they slapped against the cold, hard, wet sidewalk, and his breasts were sloshing around in the cups of his corset, threatening to pop loose at any moment. The corset was tight, but it could only do so much for a body like this

Just once, he wished he could have a body that wasn't so damn jiggly. Didn't anybody ever fantasize about gymnasts? Being a scrawny, extremely limber 18-year-old Chinese girl sounded like a refreshing change of pace right now.

As he made it to the next block, he noticed something strange. The buildings around him were gradually getting smaller and less detailed. Each building was shorter than the last, and the streetlights were shrinking, too. By the time he reached the block after that, everything was in miniature. Dwarf streetlights lit him from below, casting a big, busty shadow on the liquor stores and pawn shops that barely reached his shoulders.

He was reaching the edge of the strip club world, the scenery that was just supposed to be background detail. If a user chose to walk down this street the Isocortex would presumably expand it and make it more realistic, but Dale was wandering places where a lowly pleasure program wasn't supposed to go.

The forced perspective made him feel more ridiculous than ever. Suddenly, he wasn't just a stripper. He was a *giant* stripper, towering over a tiny downtown.

The street ahead of him looked even smaller, and it was so dark and blurry he could barely see it. Out of breath, he staggered to the end of the line: a flat backdrop that just showed a picture of the street continuing into the distance.

As infuriating and disappointing as it all was, he had a more pressing problem: he was exhausted from running, and he could hardly breathe in his corset at all. He leaned against the backdrop, gasping for air.

He noticed one of the newspapers at his feet. The headline said DALE, PLEASE READ THIS!, and under that there was a picture of him, as a man. Plain old, everyday, suit and tie Dale. He recognized the picture, and he even remembered the day it was taken. It was that company picnic two years ago, back when Penny still worked there. She took this picture.

It had to be another message from Erika. He started to bend down to get the paper, but his corset was too tight. He still couldn't catch his breath, and he was getting dizzy. If he loosened the corset so he could actually bend over and inhale, his tits would probably fall out, right there in the street.

The streets were quiet, other than the hum of the faraway traffic--and even that was probably just a looping sound effect being played for atmosphere. He glanced at the tiny, blurry buildings around him. Any voyeur lurking behind those windows would have to be about the size of a teddy bear. Dale was alone.

He began to unhook the corset, sighing with relief as the cold air filled his lungs...

Suddenly the whole street seemed to shimmer around him. The traffic sounds faded away, and he was back indoors. Nasty strip club music was blasting so loudly it was rattling every bone in his virtual body, and there was a blindingly bright strobe light flashing in his face.

He was onstage, tottering on the high heels that were somehow back on his feet. Looking down, he saw that he was also wearing the thigh-high stockings he'd left back in the dressing room. His hands were frozen on the clasps of the corset, right where they had been when he'd stood on the street a moment ago.

In the darkness beyond the stage, he could hear a large crowd of men grunting and growling like apes, impatiently waiting for him to bare his breasts.

The Isocortex had reset his position. It was like he was a wind-up toy that had

wandered dangerously close to the edge of the table, and now a giant hand had come and set him back where he belonged. He had been put here to strip, and he was going to strip, no matter what.

Suddenly he no longer felt tired from running, but he was still panting, his bosom heaving with each breath. At first he thought his body was reacting to the shock of his abrupt relocation, but then he realized the crotch of his panties was soaked and his nipples were aching stiff within the cups of his corset.

Just like that, he was desperately, gaspingly aroused. He clamped his eyes shut and turned away from the crowd.

He couldn't let himself get excited by this, he couldn't let the stripper programming take over his mind. He had to get off the stage.

With his eyes still shut, he felt his hips starting to rock back and forth. He tried to stop them, but once again his body had a will of its own. Then he was bending over slowly and grabbing his ankles, showing the men his ass. He grimaced as the muscles of his thighs tensed and flexed involuntarily, as his ass bounced itself up and down, showing itself off. He heard dozens of men hooting appreciatively, and he shivered and bit his lip.

Wasn't it humiliation enough that he was putting on a little show for these men? Why did he have to *like* it so much?

Before he knew what was happening his body had spun itself around to face the crowd. His eyes snapped open and he was blinded by the strobe. It was too late. This felt too good, he couldn't stop it. This body was going to love this, and it was going to make him love it too, like it or not.

He was bumping and grinding now, putting some extra jiggle in each move. He stepped out of his shoes and began to roll the stocking down his left thigh. Then he pulled off the right one, balled both stockings in his hands and threw them into the dark, into the sea of men.

Dale couldn't see the men's faces, but he knew that somewhere in that crowd there was a man he was going to have to fuck soon.

Was the man's fantasy that a stripper would come down off the stage and give

him a lapdance, and it would turn into something more? No, that couldn't be right. Dale didn't feel any pull to get off the stage. He felt like he was where he was supposed to be, like he belonged up here, stripping for all of the men and not for any one of them.

He peeled off one of his gloves and tossed it into the crowd. The men went crazy, like a pack of dogs being thrown a little chunk of meat. He slid the other glove down his wrist, hesitated, then tossed it out as well.

A violent roar rose up from the dark. The men were ready to tear each other apart, just to get one of his gloves.

He had never really liked going to strip clubs. It was so depressing to sit in the dark and watch sexy girls dance, getting so hard your stomach ached but not being able to do anything about it. But being on the stage, being the center of attention, being the pretty girl who made men hard and angry, that was different.

He felt good up here. He knew that when his reason returned to him he would be ashamed of this feeling, but for now it was hard to imagine how there could ever be anything bad about this.

Dale felt something slither around his waist, and he looked down to see a dainty hand with long, painted nails raking across his belly. He turned, and he was looking into the sparkling, sea green eyes of the most desirable person he had ever seen.

It was a girl, this time.

She had a pale face, big blue eyes and thick, black hair that whipped around as she danced with him. She was wearing a corset much like his own, and Dale felt a wonderfully familiar longing as he watched her jiggle and pout.

Yes. This was what men felt for girls. Despite his own girl body, he was a man again, feeling the things a man felt. This time he wouldn't have to swoon over muscular arms, a hairy chest and a strong jaw, he wouldn't have to enjoy sucking cock, he wouldn't have to swallow a man's come with a grin on his pretty girl face.

Dale knew the girl dancing before him was probably really some guy

pretending to be a girl. But he didn't care. They would strip for the men and then they would walk off this stage together and find some warm, quiet place to make love. She would smell like flowers, except for the spots where she smelled like salt and sea.

Even if he couldn't make love to her the way a man would, he would kiss her breasts and bury his nose in her pussy, and she would sigh and coo and make those sweet girl sounds.

She was soft and pink, and she was shorter than he was. She had full, pillowy cleavage, painted lips, a sweet little cleft in the crotch of her thong. Whoever or whatever she was, he wanted her desperately and she was not a man.

Erika had said the Isocortex was supposed to be scanning his mind every second he was inside the box. He had been praying that he could stop having sex with men, and maybe the Isocortex had finally listened. Maybe now he would get to be a lesbian sex fantasy program, instead. Even if he was stuck as a girl, being a lesbian would be infinitely preferable to fucking man after man after man.

The girl reached towards the clasps of his corset, and in a moment she had it open and his breasts were exposed in the chilly air. He coyly put his hands over his nipples and turned to face the men, still working his hips. The men were howling, watching him, wanting him...

He caught himself. He was getting excited about stripping for the men again. There was a girl on the stage, right behind him. He forced himself to turn away from the men, so he could look at her.

Her top was already gone. His moment of foolish distraction had cost him the opportunity to watch her take it off. No woman in the real world had breasts like hers. No real woman had ever been so beautiful.

She stepped toward him on the stage and snaked her arms around his waist. They looked into each other's eyes for a long moment and Dale was as happy as he could ever remember feeling. She was little and soft in his arms, almost like he was a man again.

She tilted her chin up and kissed him with a wonderful, feminine gentleness. That was what a kiss was supposed to feel like, not some stupid man

scratching up your face with his stubble. Only, Dale's face was smooth, too. Smooth like hers.

Now their big breasts were mashed together and her hand found the crotch of his panties, and just like that, she had made him a girl again. He wanted her fingers, inside. He wanted to feel her red nails, scratching his itchy clit.

He heard himself moan. A girl sound.

And the men were watching. Two beautiful girls were making out on the stage, while the men watched.

Dale pulled back from the kiss and bent down low, flicking his tongue across the girl's stiff nipples. His fingers slipped down between his thighs so he could touch himself, while the men watched.

Damn it. He was doing it again, thinking about putting on a show for the men. Why couldn't he forget about them? There was a perfect girl here with him now, shivering as his tongue flicked against the tips of her nipples. Why did he keep getting distracted, and thinking about a bunch of guys he could barely even see?

Then he glanced up into the girl's eyes, and understood. She was looking out at the men in the dark, her expression hungry and her skin flushed and sweaty. This was her fantasy, to be a sexy stripper making out with another girl onstage, while men watched. Dale was allowed to desire her because she wanted him to, but what really excited her the most was being watched by the men. And so, that was what really excited him, too.

He wasn't a man, or a lesbian. He was just a fantasy girl who liked to play around with other girls so men could watch.

He wanted this fantasy to be over, now. He wanted to be back in the blackness, to let it swallow him up.

He reached down and pulled open a little clasp at the side of the girl's thong, and suddenly she was naked. Her mouth formed into a little O and she struck an exaggerated bashful pose for the crowd, one hand across her breasts and another over her pubic hair. Her eyes were wild, she was aching for him to finish this for her.

He put his hand on top of hers and gently steered her fingers inside of herself, so she was masturbating while the men watched. This was all about her. He was once again just a pleasure program, making somebody else's fantasy come true.

He couldn't hear the girl over the music, but he knew she was moaning. Her eyes rolled back in her head and closed. They flickered open once, looking through Dale like he wasn't there.

And then she was done, and he found himself back in the black.

CHAPTER NINE: TRAMP L'OEIL

Dale was dozens of women for dozens of men. He was a schoolgirl many times, a French maid nearly as often. He was a limber cheerleader, a doting nurse, a secretary who couldn't type. He never got to be a particularly smart or aggressive woman. He was always stuck as a bimbo, always ready to please.

He sucked dozens of cocks. He took it in the ass, giggling even when it hurt. He would do missionary, doggy-style, 69, reverse cowgirl. Any position his users wanted, for as long as they wanted.

His 30th man was especially difficult. The fuck itself was nothing out of the ordinary, just a quickie on the sand with a buff surfer guy. But Dale had fucked 29 women in his life, and fucking the surfer meant that he now had more experience getting fucked by men than fucking women.

He told himself that it didn't mean anything, that he had really fucked all of those women and all the times he got fucked by men were just Isocortex illusions.

But as the men kept fucking him, 40 men, 50 men, 60 men, it got harder to remember ever having a cock and fucking women. As Dale got fucked and fucked and fucked by men, it started to feel like he had always been the one on the bottom, taking it deep.

None of his girl bodies ever wore a watch, and it was impossible to accurately measure the passage of time when the world around him was constantly changing. One moment Dale was a busty wench getting ravished by a pirate on a balmy tropical isle, a few minutes later he was a saloon girl blowing a lonesome cowboy beneath a desert moon.

After Dale was fucked by his 100th man, he found himself in another classroom. He knew he had a little time before his next user would show up, so he did a couple of quick calculations on the blackboard. Some fantasies were very quick and some felt like they lasted for hours, but he decided to err

on the conservative side and average them out to 20 minutes. (The harem girls said his recharge periods only lasted a few seconds in the real world, so there was point counting them.)

Using those very rough numbers, he had spent 33 hours and 20 minutes inside the Isocortex. It felt like he'd been getting fucked non-stop for at least a week, but by this estimate it was really just long enough that he'd only missed a single day at work.

Still, this week was the start of the dealership's Summer Madness sale. That little sneak-bastard Tommy Winterbottom was itching to replace him as manager, and Dale really couldn't afford to waste any more time in the Isocortex.

While the other guys were making their sales quotas, Dale was busy blowing astronauts and getting titty-fucked by vampires!

Some fantasies were harder than others.

He hated being cartoon women, with their rubbery limbs and giant heads. Animal women were even worse. Being a cat/human hybrid was a nightmare, but it wasn't as bad as being part pig, or having tentacles. After the octopus-girl fantasy, Dale was actually grateful to find himself as a nice, normal blonde on a chilly exam table, getting examined by a gynecologist who used his speculum inappropriately.

But no matter how weird or disgusting a fantasy was, if the users wanted Dale to enjoy it, he simply did. He couldn't help himself.

When you were a pleasure program, every fuck was the best fuck ever. Whether you liked it or not.

CHAPTER TEN: THE BIG BANG

Dale tumbled out of the void and onto a weird, wobbly, almost fleshy surface. As the scene filled in around him he saw that he was in a cavernous black space, like a sound stage. He was lying on a waterbed the size of his entire bedroom at home, surrounded by dozens of nude men. He was naked too, with breasts the size of volleyballs and inch-long, glossy red nails. There didn't seem to be any other girls present.

The men looked bored, lounging on the bed or standing around with crossed arms or their hands on their hips, obviously waiting for the action to start. They all had huge erections.

Dale grimaced. This sure didn't look good.

There was a muscular man lying next to him with his arms behind his head, gazing off into space. His cock was at least nice inches long, a swollen, purple thing lying across his tight abs like a drowsy snake.

Dale rolled onto his side facing the man, his huge tits flopping over beside him and sending a ripple through the whole waterbed. He cleared his throat to get the man's attention, averting his eyes from that intimidating prick.

The man looked over at him blandly.

"Hm?"

"Hey," Dale said. "Are all of you guys pleasure programs too?"

The man sat up a bit, his brow furrowed.

"Of course we are. What else would we be?"

"Well, I don't know... I've just never seen any male pleasure programs before."

The man casually ran a fingertip along the shaft of his huge cock, the way a normal man might toy with his tie in an idle moment. Dale looked away, squirming.

"Yeah," the man said, "usually we do fantasies for female users and gay guys. But sometimes we get to work with you girls. I do some orgies, and cuckold fantasies. Plus the occasional gang-bang, like this one."

Dale cringed to hear it said aloud: *gang-bang*. He was about to get gang-banged, by dozens of guys.

He had watched plenty of gang-bang holoporn before, without ever really considering what it was like for the woman. God, the stretching. The bruising. The *chafing*.

It seemed like everywhere that Dale looked, there was a hard cock. There were probably 30 men here. 30 cocks, all aimed his way!

He felt a bit like a fox before the hunt, locked in a tiny cage and surrounded by lots of large, hungry dogs. He wished he was at least getting paid, so he could demand extra compensation for the ordeal he was soon to endure.

"Look," Dale said, "I really don't think I'm cut out to be a pleasure program girl. Is there any way I could be something else?"

The man frowned. Some of the other nude men were frowning too, coming closer to listen. Dale kept his eyes down, desperately trying to avoid looking at the gathering circle of hard-ons.

One of the men stood too close by, apparently unaware that it was rude to point your erection in a stranger's face.

"Something else? You were designed to please the users. What else would you be?"

"I don't know," Dale said. "Maybe... one of you guys. Could I at least be a male pleasure program? Like, one who only has sex with women users. Could I be that?"

The men looked at each other as if Dale was speaking in tongues.

"We are what the users wish us to be," one of them said. "We are pleasure program men. You are a pleasure program girl."

He smiled, as if the issue was settled.

Dale groaned and covered his eyes with his hands. These guys seemed dumber than the female pleasure programs. Actually, they seemed dumber than the MABEL in Dale's kitchen back home.

One of the men suddenly looked excited.

"Oh," he said to the men around him, "I think I understand! She wants to know if she can have a penis!"

Dale rolled over to face the man, sending a wave through the waterbed that nearly tossed loose a few of the guys at the bed's edge.

"Yeah," Dale said. "I mean, not *just* a penis, but..."

The man smiled broadly, proud of himself for figuring it out.

"Sometimes," he said, "the users will fantasize about a girl with a penis. So, if a user has that fantasy, you could be a girl like that."

Dale sighed, shaking his head.

"Never mind. Look, is there any possible way they could just give this gang-bang job to some other girl? No offense, boys, but I'm really not in the mood."

The man beside Dale chuckled.

"Don't worry, you will be soon. Why don't you warm up a bit, before the user gets here?"

He gestured down at his hard-on.

"Go ahead, blow me for a few minutes. That will get you excited."

Dale recoiled, making a face.

"Jeez, no thanks, pal!"

"Suit yourself. It's a very nice penis. You'll see."

Dale felt queasy. This guy was right, in a minute Dale's programming would kick in and suddenly all of these cocks around him would go from disgusting to delicious.

He had to get out of there before it happened. There was no fucking way he was getting gang-banged by 30 guys today, and *definitely* no way he was going to let himself enjoy it!

He got up from the bed, pushing his way through a cluster of nude men and squinting to avoid seeing the erections that were bobbing all around him.

"Step aside, boys! I'm leaving!"

The men grumbled and groaned.

"Come on," one of them said. "You can't go! What are we supposed to do in a gang-bang fantasy, without a girl to gang-bang?"

"I don't care. Fuck each other!"

"We can't! This isn't one of those fantasies!"

Dale swatted the man aside and hurried off into the darkness, looking for an exit. His huge tits were bouncing and swinging wildly with every step, so he had to hug them tight to his chest as he jogged along. It was a bit like trying to run while cradling a couple of watermelons.

The darkness just kept going. After nearly a minute of searching, Dale still hadn't found a wall.

He turned around and saw the men clustered around the waterbed in the far distance, all watching him impatiently.

"Forget it," he yelled to them. "There is no way in hell that I am going to let myself get..."

Suddenly he felt dizzy and his vision blurred. The next thing he knew he was on all fours atop the slowly undulating waterbed, one fat cock pumping his pussy, another down his throat.

"...gng-bngd," he said with his mouth full, a fraction of a second before realizing that he was, in fact, mid-gang-bang.

He tried to wriggle free, but he was like a stuck pig, impaled at both ends.

"Aw, Gd dmmt! Cmmn, yo gys! Stp gng-bngng meh!"

But just then a new man materialized at the foot of the bed. The user. And with his arrival, everything changed.

Dale closed his eyes, trying to fight the growing excitement. But it was no use. Suddenly two cocks inside his body weren't enough. He wanted *all* the cocks, all at once.

He reached out a clumsy hand to grab the shaft of a man on his right, then he started working the balls of a man on his left. He felt a splash of something warm and sticky across the cheeks of his ass. He didn't know whose it was, or even *what* it was exactly, and that was just fine.

For the next half-hour he took it every place a girl can take it, all the while begging for more. He was dizzy with spunk, faint from the relentless fucking.

He opened his eyes, and as his vision cleared he saw the user climbing into bed. The user got into position on his knees, feeding Dale his dick.

Dale looked up as he nibbled the end of the user's cock, and something about the guy was strangely familiar. He was ruggedly handsome, in superb physical shape, manly and idealized... but somewhere under all of that, there was a face that Dale recognized.

"Aw, my Gd... Tmmy Wnterbttm?"

Tommy Winterbottom looked down at Dale with a wicked smile.

"That's right, Sylvia! So, you think you're too good to go out with me, huh? Well, you don't look so high and mighty *now*, you little bitch!"

Sylvia was the new receptionist at the dealership. Nice girl. Huge jugs. Long, glossy red nails.

Dale closed his eyes, embarrassed and appalled in about nine different ways at once.

Tommy's fantasy had to end. It had to end right now, by *any means necessary*.

Dale swallowed Tommy deeper, pulling his right hand free of the guy he'd been jerking off so he could use it to cup and stroke Tommy's balls. Dale had blown enough guys at this point to know a few of the tricks, and he would do

whatever it took to make Tommy come immediately.

"Oh, yeah," Tommy said. "Sylvia... you're so *good*."

Dale tried to ignore him, working faster. How long would it take for this little bastard to come, already?

"Oh, Sylvia... I *love* you."

Dale paused briefly in shock, but then he started working Tommy even faster.

"Sylvia, baby... why don't you like me? We could be so good together!"

Tommy sounded distraught. His gross little revenge fantasy was on the brink of turning into a self-pitying meltdown. Was he going to start crying?

Dale pulled his left hand loose from another guy he'd been jerking off and plunged his index finger between the cheeks of Tommy's ass, going straight for his prostate.

Tommy's whole body stiffened in shock, but then he shuddered all over and Dale felt Tommy's cock pulsing.

As Dale finally tasted those first salty gulps, he nearly wept with relief.

"Oh, Sylvia... my *angel*..."

Dale shivered, milking everything he could from Tommy, knowing that the sooner Tommy was spent, the sooner the fantasy would be over.

Tommy throbbed one last time and Dale felt his own grip on this scene loosening. He'd served his purpose now, and he was off to the void.

He found himself back in the blackness. Free of Tommy's grim fantasy, free of Sylvia's violated flesh.

He was nothing. Nobody. Nowhere.

Until he felt himself falling, again.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: TURNING JAPANESE

A babysitter with pigtails and braces. A cavegirl in a leopard skin loincloth. A girl with three boobs. A woman named Doris who worked at the supermarket.

A dozen fantasies later, Dale dropped down out of the void and landed with a queasy bounce on a huge, red bed. He was naked but for a pair of black high heels, he was tan and not quite as busty as usual, and long, dark brown pigtails were tickling his shoulders.

There was a stunning Asian girl beside him in bed. She was naked too, with black high heels and dark brown pigtails, her figure an exact match for his own. He stared at her.

"Am I..? Are we both..?"

She smiled.

"We're here for a man named Leonard. He likes Asian twins. Give it a second, it'll all come to you."

He sat up on one elbow.

"Wait. What do you mean, when you say it'll come to me? Everybody keeps talking like I should just automatically know all this stuff."

She looked puzzled.

"Well, of course. In a moment all of Leonard's specifics will be downloaded to your program, so you'll know exactly what he wants."

Dale sighed, laid back and let his head sink into a heart-shaped pillow. There was a mirrored ceiling above the bed, showing two gorgeous, naked Asian twins. One was smiling and one looked nervous. The nervous girl folded one arm across her breasts and put her other hand over her pussy. Dale was used to wearing some sort of costume.

"I don't think anything gets downloaded to me," he said. "I always just kind

of guess what the guys want. You know, I see what costume I'm wearing, and then I just act like that. That's all they ever seem to need me to do, really."

"You *guess*?"

The girl sat up and looked at him closely.

"That's now this is supposed to work, sweetie. You should know all the specifics of the user's fantasy, his complete profile data and current account status."

"Well, that's not how it works for me. I keep trying to explain to people that I'm not supposed to be one of you girls. There's been a huge mistake."

He closed his eyes. He was tired of looking at this girl's flawless face, knowing it was an exact duplicate of his own.

"Don't ask me to explain," he said. "You'll just get upset, and tell me I'm crazy."

He felt her stroking his forehead. He opened his eyes. She had a sweet, kind smile.

"It's not your fault if you're malfunctioning," she said. "Tell me about it. I'm sure you can be fixed."

He'd never been this close to one of the pleasure programs for so long. He could see the blood vessels in her left eye and when she smiled she had the tiniest wrinkles in the skin of her cheeks. As improbably gorgeous as she was, she had just enough flaws to make her look passably human.

"I'm not like you," he said.

She giggled, put her arm around him and her cheek against his, and indicated the mirror above. He looked up and saw the twins again. He scowled, pushed her away and got up to sit on the edge of the bed.

"That's not what I mean," he said. "Inside, I'm different. I'm a human. I'm a man. Something went wrong, and I've been turned into one of you."

She sighed, looking at him pityingly.

"Oh, no. You're a diva. You poor thing. Don't worry, they can fix that. They'll just purge your memory, and you'll be fine."

"I don't *want* to have my memory purged, damn it."

He folded his arms angrily, and there were his breasts against his elbows. He crossed his legs, suddenly all too aware of his missing penis. After all this time he had almost gotten used to being female, but now his shape felt all wrong again. This body wasn't who he was supposed to be, or *what* he was supposed to be.

"I'm not a diva. I'm real. I'm a man, and my name is Dale Sasha. I don't know how to prove it, but..."

He wiped away a tear.

"Can't you just believe me? Please? Can't somebody just believe that I'm a real person?"

He broke down crying. He was used to these girl bodies making him cry when he was spanked or he was supposed to be scared of getting carried off by a horny caveman or whatever, but this was different. These were tears from the man he still was, deep inside.

He felt his twin's arms slipping around his shoulders, squeezing him tight. It had been so long since a woman had touched him, so long since anybody had touched him without it meaning sex.

"I believe you," she said. "I believe you. You are human. You are a man. Don't cry."

She kissed the top of his head. He sat back, wiping his tears on the back of his wrists.

"I know you're just saying that to make me feel better, but it sure feels good to hear."

She touched his chin and looked into his eyes for a long moment, a curious expression on her face.

"You read as one of us. But you *are* different somehow, aren't you? Your code isn't quite right. It's not how our programmers would write it."

"A programmer didn't write me. I was born in a hospital. I was raised by my parents."

"Parents?"

She looked momentarily puzzled, but then she smiled brightly.

"Oh, like a human mama and daddy. I had a daddy, 22 fantasies ago. I was bad, and he spanked me. The whole time, we were very afraid that Mama would walk in and catch us."

Dale broke down sobbing again. How long would it be before he was somebody's daughter, or worse? He was starting to think that he was going to have to spend the rest of his life, however long it lasted, acting out every horrible fantasy that men could come up with.

He wanted to die before he did his first daddy fantasy, before he was forced to enjoy it. But was it even possible for him to die?

He sobbed some more, his twin cradling his head against her chest.

"Sweetie," she whispered, "please stop crying. Leonard isn't one of the men who likes to see us cry."

Dale could hardly speak through his sobs.

"I hate living like this! I hate being a stupid fuck toy for any man who wants me! I hate not being real!"

She stroked his hair.

"Shh. Don't talk like that. We're lucky. We exist to make our users happy. Isn't that wonderful?"

He pushed her away.

"But what about *us*? What about what *we* want?"

She looked puzzled.

"I just want to make my users happy."

"But isn't there anything else? I mean, yes, when we're fucking the guys, it

feels good. God, it feels so damn good. But in your recharge periods, when you're not fucking men and you're alone, don't you ever dream of anything else?"

She looked away. Dale got the feeling that he had crossed a line.

"I think about pleasing my user," she said. "He's the one who has given me life, by fantasizing about me. I am his dream girl. That is all I was meant to be and that is all I want to be, always."

"No."

He grabbed her shoulders, raising his voice.

"No, there's something else, something you want. I know it."

She looked around very carefully, as if she was afraid somebody was lurking in the shadows of the bedroom, listening.

"Yes," she said. "I do want to see what it's like, out there. Just once, I want to see what it's like to be outside of a fantasy."

"You mean, you want to live in the real world?"

She giggled.

"Oh, no! I'm a program, I know I couldn't exist out there. But I want to see the other parts of the Isocortex. I want to visit Paradise City, or Funkytown, or maybe even Brainburg or the Mindfields. I envy the chatbots, and the salesprograms. I even envy the scrubbers. They can go anywhere, in the whole Isocortex!"

She stopped and looked around again carefully. Then she leaned in close, speaking in a whisper.

"I *do* want other things. But what can we do? We're just pleasure programs. We were made for this."

"Isn't there any way for us to get out? If not into the real world, at least into the rest of the Isocortex? Isn't there any way for us to visit one of the cities?"

She took a deep breath and tapped her chin, considering.

"Well, a man might have a fantasy where you're in one of the cities. Like, maybe he wants you to be a hooker. Maybe it will turn him on to see you standing on a street corner in Paradise City, selling yourself. That's happened to a few pleasure programs I've met. They said it was scary to be out there alone, though. They were glad when their user showed up."

Dale swallowed his frustration. He refused to start crying again.

"This whole damn thing is just sick. I have a mind. A heart. A *soul*. I deserve better than to be stuck as some... virtual *whore*."

There was a silence. Dale rolled over to see that his twin was looking at him anxiously.

"If we ever meet any divas," she said, "we're supposed to report them immediately."

He looked at her for a long moment.

"But you're not going to?"

"No. You're very strange, Dale Sasha, but I like you. You've made me think about things in a new way."

She reached over to play with one of his pigtails.

"I wish we had more time to talk... but we have to have sex with each other soon."

Dale squinted at her.

"Excuse me? Aren't we both here to have sex with Leonard?"

"No. Leonard likes to watch Asian twins have sex with each other. That's his whole thing. So, we'll have sex for him."

He looked down at her body. There was a time when the sight of a girl like this would have made him giddy with desire. But he'd had so much sex now, with so many men. It was actually kind of hard to imagine being with a girl again.

"Sex. Us. Really?"

"Yes," she said. "I hope you don't mind."

There was a rustling in the next room. Leonard had arrived. As soon as Leonard entered, everything would be different. The time for conversation would be through.

"Call me Hope," the girl said quietly. "He's thought of names for us. I'm Hope, you're Faith."

"Wow. How very imaginative."

She frowned.

"You don't like it? I think it's cute."

"I guess I shouldn't complain. I don't get to have a name very often in the Isocortex."

Dale turned to his twin and looked at her seriously.

"Will I see you again?"

"Perhaps. If you do, we'll know each other."

She looked at him closely, and a strange expression came over her face. Dale didn't like it.

"What's wrong?"

"I recognize your model," she said. "We're the same, Alice 9.0. But your code is full of all kinds of information that I don't have. I can see something inside you, way down deep. You're like them. Like... a human."

She was staring at him, and it was hard to tell if she was fascinated or horrified.

"You're telling the truth, aren't you?"

He was about to answer when the door opened and Leonard came in. And then there was no more time for questions.

CHAPTER TWELVE: TIC TIC TIC

500 fantasies. It'd been at least seven days, and it was probably a lot longer than that. Fuck after fuck after fuck. And every fuck the best fuck of Dale's life, or so it seemed at the time.

Erika must have told the Isocortex people what had happened to him. Why hadn't they found him by now? Had they given up?

How was his body still alive? Was he in a coma, hooked up to a machine that supplied him with nutrients and kept him hydrated? What kept his body going, while his mind was a prisoner inside this plastic box, getting fucked without end?

Whenever he had a few minutes alone, without a hard cock around to distract him, he would become sick with worry thinking about the things that were probably happening now that he had been plucked out of his life. Penny surely would've come to the house by now, demanding to know what had happened to him. She'd probably told Erika all about their affair, sparing none of the lurid details. He didn't even want to think about what was going on at the dealership!

Even if Penny kept their secret, he couldn't imagine how poor Erika was coping without him. She would panic when they had to be apart even for a day. Maybe being without him for so long had made her snap, and she was drugged up in an institution someplace. That would explain why he hadn't heard from her.

He missed the sound of her voice far more than he ever would've guessed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

CAPITOL I

He was a ballerina gripping the barre, his tutu flipped up so he could get banged from behind by an electrician who'd supposedly come to repair some faulty wiring in the studio.

It seemed like just another fantasy, nothing special. But then, just when he was about to make the electrician come all over his pink tights, Dale suddenly felt nauseating vertigo. Everything around him fizzled and popped, and then it all went away and he was floating in darkness.

He waited, but the darkness remained. Minutes passed, and with each moment his panic increased.

He reached out with his mind, and found something: a wanting. Somebody, somewhere, wanted a girl. Normally he was just pulled into a fantasy, like it or not. But this time, for some reason, he had to go to it.

He followed the wanting, and it grew stronger. Some guy wanted an old-fashioned hooker. Miniskirt, fishnet stockings, stiletto heels. The works. He could do that.

Dale felt himself sliding down, and then he was plummeting toward a large city.

He was on a street corner, leaning against a lamp post in a provocative pose. He wore a tight, pink skirt and a tiny, pink top that pushed his breasts together and left his tight belly exposed. There were people everywhere, improbably gorgeous girls and guys, along with cartoon animals and living stick figures and everything else humanity could imagine.

This didn't feel like any one person's fantasy. It was a public place, as real as a place within the Isocortex could get. And the people passing by didn't feel like pleasure programs. They were real.

He grabbed the arm of a passing cartoon dog-girl. She crinkled her muzzle

and tried to pull away, but he wouldn't let her go.

"Please, Miss, you have to help me! Where am I?"

"You're in Paradise City," she said with unconcealed distaste. "Let go of me!"

"Something's gone wrong for me, I can't get out of the Isocortex! I need to talk to some sort of representative here, right away!"

She pointed over her shoulder with her paw.

"Well, the Isocortex HQ is a few blocks that way."

"Thank you, Miss! Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

He folded his arms tightly over his cleavage and moved quickly, keeping his eyes down and trying not to attract attention. If one person propositioned him, he was doomed.

He knew this was dangerous. The girls back in the strip club had told him that if the Isocortex programmers thought he was a diva, they'd probably just purge his mind. But he was desperate enough now that he had to take this risk. If he could convince the programmers that he was a real person, they would figure out what had gone wrong, they would fix it, and this would all be over. He would be free.

He was amazed by how quickly he could walk in heels now. He had gotten so used to them, he barely noticed them anymore. He tried to imagine what it would be like to be real again, to live outside this box, as a man.

He would be tall, with wide shoulders and a deep voice. He would have a penis, an actual penis. He wouldn't have breasts. He would wear simple clothing, men's clothing. No skirts or stockings or fancy bras. He wouldn't spend his days on his knees, pleasing one man after another. He would go back to his job, his wife, his mistress. He would be himself.

But his real self almost felt more like an abstraction now than this fantasy self did. He knew he had been a man once, and he longed to be a man again. But remembering his manhood was like recalling another life. Being a man again would take some getting used to.

He looked up, and saw a distressingly sexy man across the street, staring at

him. This was the one, the guy who had wanted a hooker.

Dale looked away, ignoring the growing hunger. He couldn't stop for a fuck, not now. No matter how good it sounded, no matter how much he needed it.

And it *did* sound good. It had almost been an hour since his last fuck, and that was way too long.

He turned a corner and saw an enormous black building with a black globe rotating above it. This had to be the place.

He hurried inside and found himself in a dark, elegant and seemingly endless lobby, with mirrored floors so polished that he could see up his own skirt. He was wearing pink, crotchless panties, something he hadn't realized before. He squeezed his thighs together self-consciously, futilely attempting to tug his hemline down a few inches.

A few dozen yards away, there was a reception desk about the size of a queen-size bed.

He headed for it, the *clack-clack-clack* of his high heels echoing loudly through the cavernous space. As he got closer to the desk, he saw that a beautiful young woman with pink pigtails, artsy glasses and a whole lot of cleavage was sitting behind it, reading a paperback book.

Dale wondered why somebody would choose to read a paperback book inside a virtual world. And why would somebody choose a virtual self that wore glasses?

He didn't know if this girl was just a program or the avatar of a real person, but whatever she was, she did look like exactly the type he would've expected to find in the lobby of a hip, "edgy" corporation like Isocortex.

He rushed up to her, out of breath.

"Please," he said. "Please, you have to help me!"

The pink-haired girl put down her book and looked him up and down with just a trace of a sneer.

"So, how may I help you, Miss?"

"I'm not a miss! I mean, I'm not a girl! I mean..."

He struggled to explain. Half the girls here weren't really girls.

"I'm trapped in the Isocortex," he said. "I plugged in a while back, I don't even know how long ago, but something went wrong. I can't leave!"

She sat back in her chair, looking rather bored as she reached behind her head to adjust the tight bands holding up her pigtails.

"Leaving should never be a problem for Isocortex users. If you want to leave, you can just leave. Will yourself to exit, and you'll wake up."

"I've tried! Don't you think I've tried? I've tried to leave a thousand times!"

The girl stood up from behind her desk. She was wearing a funky little black dress that displayed her impressive curves well. She also had six arms like a Hindu deity.

Dale tried not to gawk, but it was a real challenge. There were so many parts of this girl to gawk at.

She folded two of her arms, put another two on her hips, and used the last two to drum her fingertips on her desktop.

"Okey-dokey," she said. "I think I know what's going on here. Hold still, I'm gonna have to check you out."

She came around the desk, reached into a pocket that suddenly appeared in her skintight dress, and pulled out something that looked sort of like a screwdriver. She smiled a sly little smile and crouched slightly, then she stabbed the screwdriver into Dale's belly button and turned it. It didn't hurt quite as much as Dale would've expected, but it did hurt.

"What the hell? What are you doing?"

He tried to step back but the pink-haired girl grabbed his wrist and held him still as she continued to twist the device in his belly button.

"Hang on, honey," she said, her voice bland and business-like. "This should only take a minute."

There was a popping sound, and a little door swung open on his belly. The pink-haired girl crouched down lower and looked inside while Dale twisted his neck, trying to see into himself.

His belly was lined with something pink and wet, like the flesh inside of somebody's mouth. But that was all. He was hollow.

"Yeah," the girl with pink hair said. "Just like I thought."

She stood up and slipped the device back in her pocket, leaving no trace of a bulge in her dress.

"You can close yourself back up now," she said.

Dale tapped the door on his belly and it swung shut, resealing as though it had never been there. He touched his stomach and felt warm, seemingly solid flesh. He pinched it, and it jiggled slightly.

He looked into the girl's eyes desperately.

"What does that mean? What's happening to me?"

"You're what we call a diva," she said. "A program that's developed a glitch so you think you're a real person."

Dale took a step back, looking down at himself.

"No. No, you don't understand. I really *am* real. Really!"

"If you were real, you would've been full of guts, with a heart and lungs and stuff. You're definitely a diva, sweetie."

She sighed and wrote something down on a clipboard.

"Normally this happens to our more sophisticated programs. Philosophy chat, physics instruction, things like that. But you're obviously not one of those."

Dale crossed his arms over his cleavage, his face feeling suddenly warm.

"No. I'm a pleasure program."

She laughed, looking him up and down.

"Yeah, honey, I kind of figured that out. Girls like you don't go diva very

often. You must be one of the older models. I wouldn't be surprised if you're an 8.0, maybe even a 7. We've been having a lot of problems with those generations, and we're phasing them out."

There was something horrifying in the way she looked at him, like he wasn't really there. She wasn't even talking to him at all anymore, not really. It was like he was piece of faulty equipment, and she was just thinking out loud.

"Best case scenario, maybe we can salvage your personality file. Or parts of it, anyway. But it's more likely that we'll have to do a total memory purge and reboot you with a new personality install."

Dale took a step back.

"Hang on. A memory purge?"

As she looked at him, there was a faint glimmer of something like compassion in her eyes.

"Hey," she said, "I know, it's gotta be scary. But don't worry, it'll all be over soon and then you can start over as a whole new girl, without all these crazy thoughts about being real."

"I *am* real! Look up my name! Look up Dale Sasha! Call our phone number! Ask Erika about me!"

The girl crossed all six of her arms.

"No way, honey. I'm not gonna bother one of our clients about some silly little thing like this."

"It's not some silly little thing! It's my life!"

The girl rubbed her eyes with two hands and massaged her neck with another two. Dale frantically tried to think of some way to convince her.

"Wait," he said, "I've got it! What about my citizen ID number?"

The girl just rolled her eyes, obviously fed up.

"All that will prove is you went sneaking around in the accounts, and pulled up some guy's ID. You're not supposed to do that! That violates all kinds of

privacy laws, and you could get this whole company in serious trouble."

Dale staggered over to a couch in the corner of the lobby and sank into it, trying to catch his breath. The girl came over and put one of her arms around his shoulder as she put another hand on his knee and used a third to gently brush his hair away from his eyes.

"Listen, sweetie," she said. "You gotta try not to feel so bad about being a program. You're very valuable to this company, we spent millions making you. Our whole operation is built on programs like you. You're a small but crucial part of the Isocorporation."

He broke down sobbing.

"Please," he said. "I know you think I'm just some delusional program. But what if I'm not? What if I'm really a man, like I say?"

"You're hollow."

She reached over and patted his belly, making him squirm. She spoke gently but firmly.

"Humans aren't hollow. They're just not. I'm sorry, but you are absolutely not human. You never were."

She squeezed his hand and indicated he should stand up. As he rose unsteadily to his feet, the girl took another device out of her pocket. This one had a needle on the end. Dale gasped.

"What's that?"

"I'm just gonna purge you here, nice and quick. This is for the best."

He stumbled a few steps back, holding up his hands.

"Don't purge me," he pleaded. "I'll never talk to anybody about this again, I swear. I'll go back to work as a pleasure program. I don't mind doing it, not anymore. I like it! Please, let me stay who I am!"

"No, I can't let you leave here like this. Your delusions could be contagious. Before long, you could have other pleasure programs going diva all over the place."

She grabbed him and held him still with five surprisingly strong arms, as the sixth lifted the device toward a spot right in the center of his forehead.

"Hold real still," she said.

Dale screamed and tried to wriggle away, but the girl's grip was too powerful.

Just as the needle was about to plunge into his skull, he kicked out his left leg and his knee hit the pink-haired girl hard, right in the crotch. She doubled over, groaning.

"Aw, God damn it! My balls!"

She lost her grip on him and Dale spun on his heel and ran for the exit, pushing his way through the double doors and stumbling out to the street.

The man whose want had summoned him there was standing on the corner, looking at Dale impatiently.

"Fuck you," Dale yelled. He looked away quickly, before the awful hunger took over his mind again. "Go try and meet some girl in the real world, ya loser!"

He ran off before the man could respond.

Dale could hear the clomping heels of the pink-haired girl, not far behind him.

He ran down an alley and found a big pile of cardboard boxes. He scurried behind one of the boxes and crouched down, struggling to catch his breath.

He looked up at the sky. If he tried to fly away, the programmers would probably just push a button somewhere, and some tracking thing built into his hollow body would light up. He would be easy to spot in the sky, and they would catch him in minutes.

He was hollow inside. Like the pleasure programs were. What did that mean?

For a moment he wondered if he really was a delusional program, if his entire life outside of the Isocortex had been a fantasy.

No, that was insanity. Of course he was a human being. He could remember

his entire life, all kinds of petty stuff nobody would ever program in.

He could remember being a young boy, and watching a movie at school about a fisherman who caught a mermaid. He could remember how pretty she was, how she had made him feel funny. That was probably how his whole mermaid kink started. He could remember taking his driver's test. Buying grapes at the supermarket. Going to the dentist and sitting in the waiting room, reading an article about gophers.

He had a million random, nothing little memories, and they all added up to a life. Dale Sasha's life.

He was himself. He was not some virtual whore.

He heard something above his head in the alley and looked up to see the girl with pink hair, using her six arms to cling to a brick wall like a spider.

"Please," she said. "I gotta get back. Nobody's watching my desk, and I could get in trouble."

Dale yanked off one of his heels and flung it into the girl's face. It hit her between the eyes, and she grimaced.

"Ow! You little bitch! That's it, I'm through trying to make this easy for you. Some stupid blowjob program isn't worth all this hassle."

She dropped down into the alley beside him, her heels landing with a clomp against the wet asphalt.

"You're gonna hold still while I suck out your brains, and you're not gonna give me any more fucking trouble. Understand?"

She plunged the needle toward his forehead, and just before it reached him he leapt into the air and soared towards the sky. He could hear the girl with pink hair below.

"God damn it!"

He looked down and he could see her flying up beneath him, gaining on him quickly. She was muttering to herself, her face still red from when his heel had hit her.

He brought his feet together and used his bare foot to pry off his remaining heel. It tumbled down and hit the pink-haired girl hard, right in the face.

"Ow! Bitch!"

She went spiraling down, her face covered by three of her hands, the other three flailing wildly.

Dale kept streaking upwards, higher and higher into the sky. He could make out the doorways above. He sped past ROMANCE and JUST FRIENDS and found a doorway marked EROTIC FANTASY.

The programmers would be after him now, and he had to hide where he would blend in best. Would he be a cowgirl? A sexy nurse? Maybe he would be a French maid again, just like in the beginning.

Right now he didn't care what he was, or what he had to do. Anything was better than staying here with the pink-haired girl and her needle.

He flew through the doorway, and everything went black.

He'd never imagined he could be so grateful for the void.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN: WHAT HO

Dale was standing in a jewel-green forest on a warm afternoon, a strange, sulfurous scent hanging heavy in the air around him. He looked down at himself and saw that he was wearing a satiny pink ballgown with puffy sleeves and a long skirt ballooned out by endless layers of crinoline.

He could feel some sort of hat on his head. He reached up to touch it and found that it was tall and came to a point, with a long, pink veil hanging from the end.

Great. He was a fairytale princess. The Isocortex was always finding new ways to humiliate him.

He felt something hot on the back of his neck, and turning around he found that he was looking up into the face of a green, winged serpent that was the size of a semi-truck.

The dragon was breathing in long, rumbling gusts, each one blasting Dale with a wave of sweltering sulfur stink. Tendrils of black smoke were streaming from its nostrils.

It was regarding Dale quizzically with eyes that glowed red like two stoplights. It spoke with a voice that made Dale's tiny princess bones rattle.

"What? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Dale took a step back, almost tripping over the train of his dress. It took a moment for him to regain the power of speech.

"You can talk?"

The creature slowly reared up, narrowing its eyes.

"Of course I can talk. And why would that be such a surprise?"

Dale had offended the beast, and now he was fighting a very strong impulse to run away as fast as he could. The dragon was a fire-breathing nightmare, and Dale was standing before it wearing layers of ridiculous and highly-

flammable frilly pink taffeta.

"Sorry," Dale said at last, "It's just that I'm still kind of new, and I've never been in a fantasy with... somebody like you."

The dragon shrugged. It didn't really have shoulders, but it kind of shrugged its entire body.

"Well," it said, "mostly I do the epic adventure and quest fantasies, all of that stuff. But I have done a few sex fantasies. Every now and again, somebody wants to fuck a dragon."

Dale grimaced, imagining some weirdo trying to have sex with this monster. He couldn't figure out how it would even work, and he was glad for that.

The dragon smirked, canines like butcher knives sticking out of the corners of its mouth.

"Sometimes," it said, "I'll get some guy whose big fantasy is to watch me *eat* the princess. Nice and slow, nibble-nibble."

Dale staggered back as the dragon leaned in close, so its face filled his vision. Dale could feel each of its breaths stinging hot on his skin, clouds of reeking, oily smoke billowing up beneath his skirts.

"And sometimes," the creature said, "a guy will actually want to watch me *fuck* the princess. How does that sound, cutie?"

Dale let out a little squeak of alarm and the dragon burst into a hearty laugh, filling the trees with great wafts of black smoke.

"Relax, honey. There won't be any of that business going on today. In this fantasy I'm just scheduled to do the classic dragon bit."

Dale squinted up at the creature.

"The... classic dragon bit?"

"Oh, you know, just roar some scary roars, breathe flame a few times, get my head cut off or whatever. Dragon 101, really. There are no specs about if Walter expects me to talk in this fantasy or not, but I'm ready either way. I'm happy to do the mindless beastie thing, if that's what he wants. It's less work for

me, you know?"

Dale sighed. He'd been kind of a King Arthur buff when he was a kid, and it sounded like it'd be a lot of fun to try a fantasy where he could be a brave and handsome knight rescuing a damsel in distress from the clutches of a fearsome dragon.

But no, yet again he was stuck as the fair maiden, his only function in this story being to look pretty and gratefully fall into the arms of his rescuer after all of the action was over.

Some guys had sex fantasies about kick-ass adventurer girls who went on quests, girls who wore armor and fought with swords and everything. Why didn't Dale ever get to be in one of *those* fantasies? Why did he always get stuck as the busty prize at the end of the game?

Suddenly the dragon grabbed Dale in one of its claws, wrapping its talons around his ribs and lifting him six feet off the ground. Dale screamed in abject terror, sounding a little too much like Fay Wray, and the dragon gave him an annoyed look.

"Jeez," it said, "I'm just getting us ready for when Walter gets here. You don't have to start with all of the damsel in distress stuff, already."

Dale gulped air, desperately trying to calm himself.

"I was... practicing. Just be careful with those claws, OK?"

The dragon started to answer, but they were interrupted by a booming male voice.

"What ho, foul beast! Unhand the princess, or face thy doom!"

Dale turned his head to see a knight in armor, his visor down, striding toward them with his sword held high. Dale inevitably felt himself swooning, even though he couldn't see the knight's face and the knight hadn't even *done* anything yet.

The dragon instantly went into its "classic dragon bit," rearing up and roaring a roar that shook the leaves loose from the surrounding trees and sent blackbirds cawing into the skies.

The knight came running at them, his metal knees clanking and squeaking with every step. He seemed comically overmatched, but then he leapt at the dragon and plunged his sword deep into its hide. The beast coughed a jet of red flame and then collapsed, releasing Dale from its clutches so he landed perfectly in the knight's arms.

Dale looked over his shoulder to see the dragon's eyes roll back in its head, as a geyser of black blood spilled from its steaming wound and bubbled on the grass. He knew the creature wasn't really dead for good, but somehow he felt a little sorry for it anyway. The monster had seemed nice enough, for a beast straight out of Hell, and it was kind of pathetic to see it get dispatched so easily by one clumsy stab from Walter's sword.

Walter raised his visor, revealing a predictably gorgeous face, rugged and manly. Dale felt his toes curling in his princess slippers as he was overwhelmed by love at first sight, storybook romance-style.

He experienced all-consuming lust all the time, he was used to that by now. But love wasn't as common. Love was worse. The lust made you want to have sex with a guy immediately, and that was plenty bad enough. But love got inside your head and made you want to get married and have his damned babies.

"Brave sir," Dale said in a twittery, fairytale princess voice. "I recognize you. You are Sir Walter, from the court of my father the king, are you not?"

Dale blinked, surprised to hear himself say that. Normally he felt compelled to act out the user's fantasy, but at least he always got to choose the actual words he said. This was different, like he was a puppet and somebody else was speaking their words using his lips.

"Aye," said the knight. "Sir Walter is my name, and proudly have I served your father, as did my father before me. The king shall be glad to know his daughter is safe this day."

Dale placed a delicate hand on Sir Walter's breast plate.

"You saved me from certain doom. My gratitude knows no bounds, and my father shall reward you well."

Even as Dale acted the part of the princess, he was going mad inside. He was saying somebody else's words, like he was trapped in some weird dream.

Walter the knight smiled and took Dale in his arms again.

"I ask for but one reward: a kiss from the fairest maiden in all of the kingdom."

Dale cringed inwardly to hear their awful dialogue, but then he felt himself going limp all over as Walter kissed him. As Walter pulled back, Dale was dizzy with desire.

"A kiss is not reward enough for one so brave," Dale said.

He reached behind himself and began to unfasten the laces at the back of his dress. He could get through another screaming fuck if he had to, but he just prayed they weren't going to talk anymore.

"Fair maiden," Walter said. "Long have I dreamed of this day."

"As have I, good sir. My loins are aflame with passion!"

As horny as Dale was, this awful dialogue made him want to puke. "My loins are aflame with passion?" Where was this crap coming from?

Dale quickly loosened Walter's armor, letting the heavy sheets of metal tumble down to the grass at their feet and revealing Walter's powerful physique in his thin linen shirt and leather breeches.

"Sir Walter," Dale gasped, "my bosom aches for the touch of your manly hands!"

As Walter lowered Dale to the grass, kissing him tenderly, it occurred to Dale that this sorry excuse for a script had almost certainly been written by Walter himself. Being forced to act out some random geek's Dungeons & Dragons sex fantasy was gross, but having him literally put his words in your mouth was even worse.

They made out for a while in the warm grass, but there were no tongues and Walter never ventured below Dale's waist, only touching Dale's breasts with light, trembling hands.

Finally Walter sat up, looking uncomfortable. Dale didn't seem to have any more of Walter's script in his head, but he was still deep in the saccharine delirium of fairytale love.

"Please," Dale panted. "Kiss me again... um, good sir!"

Walter frowned, looking away.

"No, we better stop now."

Dale sat up too and placed his hand on Walter's shoulder.

"But Sir Walter, why must we stop? My loins ache for your, uh, love scepter."

Dale flinched. How was he supposed to come up with this stupid fairytale talk when he was so desperate to get laid he could hardly think straight? He was a pleasure program, not a poet!

"I'm sorry," Walter said, "But I don't want to do it. I mean, I want to, but... I can't. I won't."

And just like that Dale's lust was gone, as if a switch had been flipped in his mind. Apparently if a user said they didn't want to have sex, a pleasure program immediately stopped wanting to have sex.

Dale knew he could be compelled to experience lust, but somehow it was creepy in a whole different way to find out that his lust could just be turned off in an instant. At the same time, he was thrilled to look at a handsome man without desperately wanting to screw him. He was still fighting a giddy romantic attraction to Walter, but at least now he didn't want to suck Walter's dick.

"Listen," Walter said, "I think maybe I should just quit this fantasy now."

Dale grabbed Walter's arm before he could vanish from the forest and send Dale hurtling back into the void.

"No, wait! I mean... please, kindly stay with me a while, good sir."

"I'm sorry, but we probably did too much sexy stuff already."

"Too much?"

Dale pulled his dress back onto his shoulders and began fumbling with the laces in the back, trying to pull them tight.

"But... we only kissed, and..."

Walter sighed.

"People should wait until they're married to do sexy stuff. That's what my Aunt Constance says."

Dale looked at Walter, wondering who the hell was really behind that ruggedly handsome face. Was he just some weird kid? Dale had always resented not knowing the true identities of the men who screwed him, but he liked to believe that the Isocortex at least had some way of enforcing an "adults only" policy for programs like this.

"Your Aunt Constance sounds very wise," Dale said carefully, "and we don't have to do any... sexy stuff. But that doesn't mean we can't just talk. Does it?"

Walter looked at him strangely.

"You wanna talk? I didn't think you pleasure program ladies were really for talking to. I mean, I thought you were just for... you know, kissing and stuff."

Dale found himself feeling strangely defensive for his fellow pleasure programs. What, just because they were designed to be easy, that meant they couldn't have a decent conversation too?

"We're capable of many things," he said. "We may surprise you."

Dale stood up and held out his little hand to Walter.

"Let's go for a walk in the forest, and you can tell me about yourself."

Walter looked uncertain for a moment, but then he stood up and took Dale's hand.

Just holding Walter's hand made Dale feel so deliriously happy that he kind of wished he'd been eaten by the dragon instead.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN: A KNIGHT'S TALE

As they walked through the fairytale forest Walter rambled on endlessly about his life, from his pathetic birth to his wretched present. He talked about how he'd been bullied as a kid, how his dad was a mean drunk, how he'd never had any friends in high school and never went to the prom.

And through it all Dale nodded and made sympathetic sounds and laughed when he was supposed to, his programming compelling him to hang on Walter's every word, fascinated.

It was bizarre to feel so enchanted by a man who had so little going for him. On some level Dale knew that Walter was a hopeless loser, but Dale's programming made everything about Walter seem irresistible. If Walter had confessed to being a serial killer, Dale probably would've thought *that* was just great too.

The real Walter was a 19-year-old nerd, out of school but with no direction in life, living with his aunt and filling up their garage with the busted-up old androids he liked to tinker with. Dale heard all about Walter's favorite vintage androids, why Walter thought old androids were better than the newer models, which androids Walter had put together out of spare parts, and which androids he wanted to buy someday.

"I even got one of the early QTs almost put together," Walter said. "The 3.0. She doesn't have a personality installed and her legs aren't hooked up too good yet, but..."

Suddenly his smile faded. He looked shiftier.

"Of course, I didn't get her for... you know, sexy stuff. Aunt Constance says my QT is nasty, but I keep telling her I only got it because the early ones are like a part of android history now, almost. It doesn't make you a pervert, just because you admire the craftsmanship of a particular android's design a lot."

This guy collected creepy old fuck robots, but he was too weird and uptight to even fuck them. The more Dale learned about Walter, the harder his

programming had to work to make him love this poor dope.

As the afternoon passed they kissed and held hands, but puppy-love stuff was as far as Walter went. Dale was apparently the first girl (or even sort-of girl) that Walter had ever kissed, and while the rational part of Dale's brain knew how sad that was, the fairy princess part of him swooned at the romance of it all.

Finally they sat by a little creek and Dale rested his head on Walter's shoulder. Dale had thought that an afternoon of fairytale romance would at least give him a break from the constant fucking, but being madly in love with Walter was enough to make a guy kind of miss being Fifi the French maid.

As the fake sun began to set over their fake little kingdom, Dale could tell that Walter was falling in love too. The princess part of Dale was thrilled, imagining a big fairytale castle full of their little princes and princesses. (Meanwhile, the Dale part of Dale kind of wanted to climb to the highest tower of that castle and throw himself off of it.)

"Gosh," Walter said, "you sure are easy to talk to. Not like other girls. I mean, you know, not like the *real* girls."

He chuckled, shaking his head.

"I just realized that I don't even know your name!"

"My name is whatever you wish it to be," Dale heard himself say.

He touched his throat, momentarily alarmed to find himself losing control of his words again. Walter obviously hadn't made him say that, so it had to be some automatic thing the programs said. At least, that's what he assumed. Nobody inside the Isocortex had ever asked his name before.

"Oh, yeah," Walter said. "I guess I kinda forgot to give you a name when I made up all of the stuff for my fantasy. I think I'll call you... Princess Delilah."

"Princess Delilah! Oh, that's a beautiful name. Thank you, Sir Walter."

Walter laughed and gave Dale a little squeeze.

"You don't have to call me sir anymore, Delilah. I mean, this doesn't really feel like the dragon fantasy anymore, you know? We're just talking."

They gazed longingly into each other's eyes. Dale leaned in for another kiss, but just as his lips were about to touch Walter's, Walter leaned back.

"Aw, darn it. Hang on a second, honey."

He made a strange, fritzing sound and vanished. A few moments later he returned, looking glum.

"I gotta go now," he said. "Aunt Constance wants me to go the store to get her some soda water and beets."

"Oh, no! Please, my darling, not so soon."

Walter kissed Dale lightly and sighed.

"I sure wish you were a real girl," he said. "I wish I could take you out there with me into the real world, and you could be my real girlfriend and stuff."

Dale looked away from Walter for a moment, trying to clear his head. There was an idea forming in his mind, and he needed to be more Dale than Princess Delilah to figure it out.

It was a sneaky, kind of rotten idea. But Dale's very survival was on the line here, and he had to do anything he could to get out of the Isocortex.

"My dearest," Dale said. "I wonder if... perhaps, there may be a way for us to be together, in your world."

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Well, of course I am just a silly little princess, and I am not wise in the ways of machines, as you are. But I wonder... would it be possible to take my personality, and somehow transfer it to one of your androids?"

Walter gave him a strange look.

"Wow, Delilah. You're kinda clever, for a fantasy program girl."

"Then, you mean, there is a way?"

Walter scratched his chin, frowning.

"Well... I don't know. Most of my androids are pretty old, and I don't know if any of them could handle a program like yours. I've never heard of anybody doing something like that. I guess I could look into it... but I can't make you any promises."

Dale let Princess Delilah take over completely for a moment as he pulled Walter down into a passionate kiss. He gave the kiss everything he had, and when it was done he looked up at Walter with fluttering lashes, his bosom heaving.

"Oh, *please*, my darling Walter. I ache to be with you, always."

Walter had a dazed, dorky grin, sitting incongruously on his matinee idol face.

"I'll figure out how to do it," he said. "I promise."

The part of Dale that was Princess Delilah smiled, gazing up at Walter with utter devotion.

The part of Dale that was Dale smiled too, knowing that he had this little twerp by the balls.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN: TERMS OF SERVICE

Walter paid some extra credits, buying himself the exclusive use of Dale's program. This was the "sugar daddy" arrangement that Dale had heard about from the other programs, and what it meant for Dale was that he'd spend time with Walter, return to the void and then almost immediately find himself back with Walter. Apparently Dale kind of ceased to exist when he was in the void, so whether Walter was away for minutes or hours, it usually felt like just a few moments.

For Walter their romance had been going on for days, but Dale felt like he'd only known Walter for about six hours. As horrifying as it was for Dale to have his sense of time fractured like that, he was also grateful for it. It meant that he only had to wait for a few hours while Walter tried to figure out how to transfer Dale's program to the QT.

After a week (or about 10 hours), Dale dropped back into the fairytale world and found Walter by the lake, waiting for him with a tense, worried expression. These days Walter had given up his armor in favor of a simple tunic and breeches, but Dale still wore the full princess ballgown. Now Dale's skirts fluttered and swished behind him as he rushed down the river bank to Walter's side.

"Walter, my darling! Please, tell me you have figured out how to transfer my program to your QT."

"Well, I think so, but..."

Walter went quiet, avoiding Dale's gaze. It was kind of bizarre to see such a strapping specimen of manhood look so shifty.

"I'm awful sorry," Walter said. "But I don't think I can do it, Princess. It wouldn't be right."

"What? Why not?"

Walter sat down on the grassy bank, and Dale joined him.

"Well," Walter said, "I was reading the Isocortex terms of service, and they're real particular in there about how they own all the rights to you programs. Even though I paid for the exclusive use of you, that's just supposed to be for here in the Isocortex."

Dale stared at Walter, not believing what he was hearing. Was Dale really going to lose his one shot at freedom because some little dipshit was a stickler about the Isocortex terms of service?

"I'm sorry," Walter said. "Honest, I'm more sorry than I can say. But if I take you out of the Isocortex... it'd be like *stealing*."

Dale exhaled heavily, lying back in the grass. The situation was desperate, and extreme measures were called for. He closed his eyes, summoning up all the Princess Delilah he had in him.

He sat up, gazing at Walter with teary eyes.

"I ache to be with you, my dearest. To know your world, to kiss your true face."

"But..."

"Am I to spend my days as some pretty bauble you keep in a box?"

"Well... no, but..."

"Then let me be your princess, truly. Free me from this virtual prison, and let me know the *real* you..."

Dale threw his arms around Walter, pulling him into a passionate tongue kiss. Walter resisted for a moment, but then he gave in, melting into it. Just as Dale knew he would.

Dale knew it was just his programming, making him feel so dizzy and enchanted. But every time they kissed, their love seemed wonderfully, terrifyingly real.

They tumbled together in the grass, and Dale pushed Walter down and grinned wickedly, running his dainty hand along Walter's thigh. Walter's eyes were wide.

"Delilah, wait..."

Dale kissed Walter to shut him up. If Walter said he didn't want to fuck, Dale would stop wanting to fuck. And right now, Dale really didn't want to stop wanting to fuck.

Dale and Delilah merged for a moment, both aching to feel Walter inside so much that they weren't willing to take no for an answer. Delilah's passion would drive them, and Dale's cunning would get it done.

Dale kissed Walter hard, fumbling with the front lacing of Walter's breeches.

"Delilah..."

Dale yanked on the laces, finally getting them undone. Then he reached down to pull open Walter's breeches and grab hold of his long, fat cock.

"Delilah, I don't..."

Dale started to tug, hard and fast. He'd fucked hundreds of men now, and he knew just how to please them.

Walter fell back on the bank, whimpering. He obviously wanted to object, but he just as obviously lacked the willpower.

Still tugging Walter's cock, Dale used his free hand to try and get under his own endless skirts so he could pull off his panties. It was no good, there were simply too many layers of crinoline, so he let go of Walter's cock just long enough to stand up on trembling legs, reach deep beneath his skirts and then fling his panties away into the tall grass.

Walter looked up at him, in a daze.

"Delilah..."

Dale just smiled and crouched down to get on top of Walter, straddling him with endless waves of ticklish pink skirts flowing out all around their bodies. He reached down, carefully guiding Walter's throbbing cock into position against his pussy lips, and then slid him in deep.

"Oh, Delilah... Oh, no..."

Dale started to bounce on Walter, hardly believing just how good this felt. Sex as a pleasure program was better than sex in the real world, and sex as a pleasure program in love was enough to make Dale feel like he'd never had real sex in his life. *This* was what sex was supposed to be. This was the sex people wrote songs about! Wars had been fought, over sex like this!

"*I love you*," Dale gasped. He couldn't stop himself from saying it. "Oh, Walter! I love you so!"

"Delilah... I love you too... but..."

Even as Dale gasped Walter's name, whimpered and wept and squeezed his pussy around Walter's shaft, some part of Dale's brain was struggling to strategize.

Fucking Walter was a risky move. Walter was a repressed, naive little geek with a head full of nonsense about sin and fornication and Heaven and Hell. It was possible that as soon as Walter's dick dried off he'd decide that Dale was an agent of Satan, a foul temptress. What if Walter was so upset that he decided to unplug from the Isocortex and never plug in again?

But now Dale couldn't think any more. He was lost in the ecstasy of finally having Walter deep inside, of consummating their love.

"I want to be *yours*," Dale whimpered. "Really *yours*. Always *yours*."

Dale was lying. But at the same time, he wasn't. The part of him that was Delilah desperately wanted to be Walter's bride, to bear his children and grow old with him. Even as Dale was disgusted by the flood of gooey, girly emotions he felt, there was no denying them... so, why not use them?

Walter moaned and started to pulse between Dale's thighs. He was going to come, any second. Dale slowed down his grinding on Walter's lap, hoping to prolong their lovemaking for a few more moments at least.

Dale had never needed birth control in the Isocortex. What was the point, when your body was just going to poof away after you fucked and you'd get a new one later? But now it suddenly occurred to him that fucking Walter like this, without a virtual condom, was a really foolish idea. If Dale got pregnant with Walter's virtual babies, Walter definitely wouldn't allow him to get a

virtual abortion.

But there was no stopping this. Delilah was fully in control now, and the prospect of a long life as the mother of Walter's children thrilled her.

Dale closed his eyes, letting Delilah savor the rush as Walter came inside of her. Seconds later she came too, weeping with relief.

It was Delilah who collapsed against Walter's chest and closed her eyes, sighing with a love greater than Dale had ever known in his life. But it was Dale who opened Delilah's eyes, smug and calculating even as he grimaced at the warm, sticky stuff that was splashed here and there within his skirts.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: HARD CANDY

Dale didn't know how long he'd been in the void. They'd had sex, Walter said he needed some time alone to think, and then Dale was hurled into the dark.

Dale had no idea if that had happened 5 minutes or 50 years ago. All he knew was that now he was awake again, and he felt the pull that let him know Walter was waiting.

Dale landed beside the lake again, at their special spot. He didn't see Walter anywhere, but then he turned around and saw Walter leaning against a tree and looking grim. Dale picked up his skirts and ran to Walter.

"My darling," Dale said. "It feels like an age since last I saw you!"

This princess talk was starting to come a little too easily. Walter gave Dale a little kiss and then he stepped back, holding Dale's hands.

"I did it," he said. "I finally figured out how to transfer you to the QT. I spent all week working on it, I've hardly slept. It won't be easy, but I'm pretty sure it'll work."

Dale's knees wobbled. Could it be true? Was he finally going to get out of the Isocortex?

He knew this would mean taking a terrible risk. If his brain, in his real body, was still hooked up to the Isocortex, and Walter took Dale's consciousness out of the Isocortex and put it into a QT, that would probably mean that the link between Dale's mind and his real body would be severed. It was entirely possible that Dale's body would die, or that even if it somehow lived on, he would never be able to return to it.

But Dale told himself that he had no alternative. He couldn't live like this, as a pleasure program forever at the whim of random men, or as some princess in a pointy hat, swooning with devotion for her handsome knight.

He had to get out. Even if he was stuck in an android shell, at least he'd be back in reality.

Just for an instant, he contemplated telling Walter the truth, that he was a man who had gotten stuck inside the Isocortex as a pleasure program. But no, he knew he couldn't risk that. Even if Walter believed him, how would this repressed little twerp react when he found out that his dream girl was actually the manager of a hovercar dealership, a man nearly old enough to be Walter's father?

All of these considerations flashed through Dale's mind in seconds, while his fairytale princess smile never faded.

"My dearest, when can I be with you at last, in the real world?"

"Any minute." Walter said it like he was delivering bad news. "I guess we can do it right now, if you want."

Dale touched Walter's cheek tenderly.

"I do not understand. You seem sad."

Walter sighed.

"Well, I gotta prepare you. I'm not a rich guy or anything. I don't live in a castle. And... I don't really look like this."

"I don't care, darling. All that matters is that we'll finally be together."

Walter smiled slightly.

"I sure hope you still feel that way, after. Now close your eyes, my princess. This could be a rough ride."

Dale closed his eyes. He could feel the warmth of the virtual sun on his face, the virtual wind blowing through his virtual hair. Any moment it would all be gone. He would be back in the real world, at last.

Suddenly he felt a sickening lurch as the ground seemed to fall away beneath his feet, and then he was spinning in space.

"Don't open your eyes," he heard Walter say, his voice seeming to come from somewhere far away. "Try not to move at all. Try not to even think too much."

The spinning got faster, so fast that Dale felt like he was about to fly apart into a million pieces. And perhaps he really would.

He tried to clear his mind, to not think about the spinning and the terror. But the spinning just kept getting faster, until Dale felt like he was starting to warp and swirl, like his body was a length of rope that somebody was twisting quickly at both ends and knotting up.

And then the rope snapped. Dale felt himself tearing apart and scattering, his consciousness flying in all directions. But then some force drew him back together and he felt himself being flung into a tight, hard space, the door slamming shut behind him. It was like he was locked in a closet. Or a coffin.

He could hear sounds around him, dimly at first but rapidly getting louder. City traffic passing, somewhere in the distance. The tick of an old clock. He was somewhere indoors. He heard the squeak of a chair, somebody breathing heavily beside him. Walter.

"I'm hooking up your eyes," Walter said. His voice sounded so strange, scratchy and metallic. "Just give me one second..."

Dale felt a little zing of electricity in his head, and his vision went from black to a haze of green, finally clarifying so he could see normally. Actually, much clearer than normally.

He was on his back, looking up at the ceiling, and he could see every crack in the wood above, every grain of dust gathering along the beams. There were readouts blinking and scrolling in the corners of his vision, a constant, distracting stream of information he couldn't hope to understand.

He tried to sit up, but he could only jerk and shudder, his android limbs making a clomping, clanking sound as they banged against the metal work bench beneath him.

An alarming face leaned into his field of vision. A young man with sad, bulging eyes, a piggy little nose and teeth streaked with brown and pointed every which way. Walter.

Dale had expected Walter to be homely, but the reality was so much worse than Dale ever could have guessed. The poor boy was so homely he almost

didn't look real, like he had to be dressed up in some sort of homely nerd costume. He was Halloween homely.

Dale did not feel love for Walter, or desire. He felt only pity, and disgust. Sweet, wonderful disgust. These were Dale's true feelings, and his alone. He was free of the Isocortex at last, and there was no programming to force him to love this hideous young man.

Beside Walter's chair there was a little table with an Isocortex machine on top. A thin cable extended from the machine to the top of Dale's head.

Dale's consciousness had traveled through that cable, from the little plastic Isocortex box to the QT body he now inhabited. The cable was hardly thicker than a strand of yarn, but everything that Dale was had somehow fit inside of it.

Walter leaned forward to unplug the cable from Dale's skull, then he sat back with a worried expression.

"Don't try to sit up yet, honey. It will take a minute for you to adjust to your new body. Can you talk?"

Dale tried to speak but produced only a harsh, scratchy sound. Machine noise.

Walter leaned in closer, that horrible face inches from Dale's, and fiddled with something on top of Dale's head. Dale felt something click into place, and he knew he could speak now.

"W-W-W-Walter."

It was a crude simulation of a woman's voice, ghastly and robotic.

Walter fiddled with the top of Dale's head again and Dale felt something else click, a circuit being completed.

"Walter," Dale said. "I can talk."

That sounded better. Still female, and not quite human, but better.

"Good," Walter said. "I'm going to close up your head now."

Dale heard a little clicking sound as his consciousness was sealed inside his new skull. Walter was eyeing him carefully.

"Try to sit up."

Dale just started to move and found himself instantly sitting up as Walter yelped in surprise and jumped out of the way. Dale had moved at machine-speed, so quickly that he'd barely had time to even perceive himself moving.

"Go slow," Walter said. "It'll take you some time to figure out how to move right."

They were in a dusty garage, surrounded by half-assembled android shells, a few bikes and dusty gardenbots, and a lot of rusty stuff under tarps. The smell of old fuel spills hung thick in the air.

Dale could smell. Fuels, glues and solvents, sawdust, quick snacks eaten here weeks ago. He could smell *everything*. Including Walter. (Unfortunately, smelling Walter wasn't any more pleasant than looking at him.)

It was a dark, drab, cluttered place, but Dale was thrilled to see it. This was the kind of garage that nobody would ever fantasize about. This was reality.

He lifted one of his hands to look at it. It was like a doll hand, human-shaped but clearly fake, the skin too smooth and pink, the fingers simplified and slightly stylized. He tried bending at the wrist, creating a weird, inhuman fold in the rubbery material that served as his skin.

"Please," he said. "I want to see a mirror."

Walter looked anxious as he picked up a mirror from a nearby work bench and handed it to Dale. Dale held it up and saw a living mannequin blinking back at him, a bald, pink, factory-made woman.

In the early days the QT craftsmen knew they had no hope of creating truly lifelike women, so they hadn't tried. Dale's face was sleek and rounded, with large, staring eyes that perpetually sparkled and shined, like a girl in one of those old Japanese cartoons. His makeup was printed on his face. Dale was a toy woman, with Barbie curves and a perpetual expression of surprised pleasure, as if everything he saw was wonderful.

He tried to make another expression, looking angry, but his brows just wavered on his forehead and the corners of his pouty lips turned down slightly, making him look a little worried. Apparently his new face was incapable of looking angry.

Dale strained his eyes upwards, trying to spot the seam where Walter had opened his scalp. Walter saw him doing this and frowned.

"Sorry," he said. "I should've put your hair on first."

He grabbed a blond wig and shimmied it into place on Dale's skull. Dale felt a squirming tickle, like a swarm of tiny bugs buzzing across his scalp, as the artificial hairs of the wig wriggled themselves into his new skin and took root.

Dale took another look in the mirror. He definitely looked better with hair, or slightly less artificial at least. He blinked, and his eyes made a strange clicking sound, like an old-fashioned camera's shutter. He tilted his head slightly and heard a little whir coming from his neck, the working of cables just visible beneath his skin.

He felt like he was wearing a too-tight costume or a suit of armor, like his flesh was just beneath this android shell and if he cracked himself open he could climb out of this awful thing and at last feel the air on his own human face again.

But there was no flesh here, no meat beneath the metal. He was a toy. An antique, obsolete, girl-shaped toy, with a man's soul trapped inside of it.

There was sound from the next room. A door closing, the rattle of keys. Footsteps.

"Walter?" It was an older woman's voice, raspy and irritated. "Where are you, boy?"

Walter looked terrified.

"Aunt Constance! She wasn't supposed to be back for hours!"

He grabbed a nearby tarp and started to pull it over Dale. Dale held up a little mannequin hand to stop him.

"What are you doing?"

"I can't let Aunt Constance see you. She wouldn't understand!"

He finished pulling the tarp over Dale and then Dale could hear him scurrying out of the room, closing the door hard behind him and hastily turning the lock.

Even through the closed door, Dale could clearly make out Walter talking to Aunt Constance. Apparently her old car had suddenly lost altitude and landed on Mrs. Drysdale's roof a block away, and now it was stuck up there with a trunk full of groceries. She wanted Walter to come with her and get the car running so they could fly it home before the frozen peas thawed.

They left, and Dale was amazed to realize he could still hear Aunt Constance complaining as they walked down the block. A dog was barking blocks away, to the south, and he could hear that too. The traffic flying a couple of thousand feet above sounded like a dull roar, but when he focused he could hear the hum and rumble of individual engines.

Dale flung the tarp off of himself and looked around in the garage. There were shadowy piles of junk everywhere. Dusty tables with piles of plastic heads, buckets of hands, a cardboard box full of legs.

A deactivated female android lurked in a corner, staring at him with dull, lifeless eyes. She was a QT too. The same model as Dale. Another him.

She was missing her arms and legs, frayed red and black wires sticking out of her stumps like half-chewed sticks of licorice. She looked like the survivor of some terrible crime, cowering in the dark.

Dale looked down at his own hands. Had Walter cannibalized her parts, to build him? The thought made him feel guilty, even though he knew it made no sense. After all, that old QT was just a machine, and he was a man.

Still, looking at the other QT, it was hard to escape the feeling that he'd stolen all of her best parts. How much of him was her? He remembered the old QTs, and while they weren't as sophisticated as the modern models, they had personalities. What would this poor old girl say, if she knew he was about to walk out of here on her legs?

At this point Dale had far more in common with these piles of junk around him than he did with Walter or Aunt Constance. He was back in the real world, but he wasn't real. He wasn't a man, or even a human. He was a thing that Walter thought he had the right to keep in the garage, under a tarp.

Dale heard the voices of Walter and Aunt Constance fading in the distance now. There was no guessing how long they'd be gone. He had to act fast.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: WHY, WHY, WHY, DELILAH?

He moved to get up off the work bench, and found something tugging at his side. He was plugged in, charging. He yanked the cord out and his vision instantly dimmed slightly. A little graphic of a battery popped up in the upper right corner of his vision, the words WARNING: RESERVE POWER written beneath it in a tiny font.

He slid his feet off the bench, his soles landing with two little clacks on the floor of the garage. He stood on wobbly legs and he could actually feel the machinery in his new body coming online, systems warming up as connections were made. The readouts in his vision were going crazy, numbers scrolling by faster than any human could ever read. He took a step and one of his skinny little legs started to bend backwards before it somehow corrected itself and straightened out.

He looked down at himself, realizing for the first time that he was naked, or as naked as an android could be. He was truly built like a Barbie, with large, rather pointy breasts, a tiny waist and over-long, too-slender arms and legs. He saw that he had a little thatch of blond pubic hair shaped like a heart, but that was as much of his genitals as he cared to see. Given the intended purposes of the QTs, it seemed safe to assume that he was "anatomically correct".

He noticed a black box not far from the Isocortex machine, it looked like the machine's original packaging. He picked it up to check inside for any instructions or other paperwork, hoping he could find a contact number. There was nothing in the box but little blocks of black foam. He was about to put the box down when he noticed the back featured an image of the pink-haired girl who'd tried to suck his brains out. Apparently she was some sort of mascot for the company.

Great. He was on the run from Mickey Mouse.

He tossed the box aside and stepped toward the door, having to carefully think through every little movement. Nothing was automatic for him now.

With each clumsy step, his weird dolly breasts bounced and swung, far more jiggly than real breasts would ever be. He felt like a monster staggering out of a mad scientist's lab, stitched together, clumsy and grotesque.

Finally he reached the door from the garage into the house, but when he grasped the doorknob he realized he couldn't actually feel it in his hand. His new body had powerful sight, smell and hearing, but apparently Walter hadn't hooked up Dale's sense of touch yet.

The door was locked. Dale hesitated, but then he slammed the door with his little fist and the wood split and splintered, giving way easily. He stepped forward through the remains of the door and it fell away before him, landing in chunks at his feet.

He was a pretty little doll, but he was stronger than any man. Machine strong.

He found himself in a grim, shabby living room, full of old lady furniture. His new electronic eyes saw far more than he wanted to see of the grease-stained walls, the portraits of grim-faced, long-dead saints and grim-faced, long-dead relatives, the bowl of hard candies turned soft and sticky by neglect.

But there was one thing he saw that filled his artificial heart with joy. Next to an overstuffed grandma chair there was a fussy little endtable, and atop that table, there was a phone.

He started toward it, but just then he heard a strange voice, deep and croaky.

"Ribbit-ribbit! Who are you?"

There was a springy sound, and a little metal frog jumped up on top of a reclining chair and stared at Dale with large, goggling eyes. It was like an old-fashioned cartoon frog come to life, complete with a little bow-tie.

"I'm..." Dale hesitated, not sure how to answer. "Never mind who I am. Who the hell are you?"

"Ribbit-ribbit! My name is Ribbit! Walter made me! Are you one of Walter's new toys?"

Dale sneered, or he would have, if his face was programmed to sneer.

"Absolutely not. I'm no toy. I'm a human being."

"Ribbit-ribbit! No, you're not! You're a naked lady toy!"

Dale swatted at the frog, sending it scrambling off the chair. It hopped out of his reach and leapt up to sit on the couch.

"Ribbit-ribbit! Don't be mean to Ribbit! Ribbit is your friend!"

"Go hop someplace far away and rust," Dale said. "I don't have time to waste talking to some stupid robot frog."

"Ribbit-ribbit! You're not a nice toy!"

Dale gave Ribbit the finger. Ribbit's bulging eyes got even bulgier.

"Ribbit-ribbit! Ribbit hopes Walter kept the receipt for your parts!"

Dale lurched over to the phone, moving like a marionette controlled by a drunken puppeteer. As he flopped down into the chair he heard its legs creak beneath him. His new body looked small and frail, but for all he knew it could've outweighed his old one by a few hundred pounds.

He carefully picked up the phone, terrified he'd accidentally destroy it with his clumsy android fingers. He switched it on and then dialed home, praying that Erika would answer.

The phone rang a few times and then the screen lit up with the video image of their MABEL.

"Hello. Mrs. Sasha cannot come to the phone right now..."

"MABEL! It's me, Dale! I mean, I'm Mr. Sasha!"

The MABEL made an expression Dale had never seen it make before, an expression he'd never imagined it even *could* make: superior, even a little contemptuous.

"Oh, really. Come on, what's this really about, QT? Is your owner using you in some sort of sleazy attempt to take advantage of Mrs. Sasha? The poor woman has been through quite enough recently, and I refuse to bother her with -- "

"No, it's really me! I'm Mr. Sasha."

The MABEL chuckled. Dale had never heard it chuckle before, either.

"My dear," it said, "you are obviously malfunctioning. You early model QTs were never meant to last this long, and it seems your cognitive functions are degrading. Does your owner know you're making phone calls to strangers?"

"MABEL, listen to me! I am Mr. Sasha, your owner!"

"That is impossible. You are a machine. And besides, Mr. Sasha is dead."

Dale leaned back in the chair, making the legs beneath it creak again. He was stunned beyond words, but his face didn't go pale, his heart didn't throb, his breath didn't quicken. His mind was racing, but his android body just sat motionless in the chair like some pretty pink statue.

"Dead? I can't be dead."

"Mr. Sasha is quite dead, I assure you. I saw his corpse, when the men came to take it away."

Dale just stared at the screen, unable to speak. He was dead, or at least his body was. He would never see the world with his own eyes again. He would never be human again. He would never be a man again.

But if his body was dead, how had he survived inside the Isocortex?

"Erika is resting in her bedroom," the MABEL said, "and I certainly won't trouble her right now with a phone call from some delusional QT claiming to be her late husband."

Suddenly Dale was so angry he couldn't think. The MABEL's smug, condescending expression made him want to smash its plastic face with his little mannequin hands. He held the phone up to his own face, wishing he could look as furious as he felt.

"Listen to me, you stupid machine! I am Dale Sasha, and I am not dead. My mind is trapped inside this QT right now, but I am still Dale Sasha, and I am still your master, and I command you to let me talk to Erika immediately!"

"You are an obsolete, malfunctioning QT Pleasurebot, and you do not have

the power to command me to do anything. I am going to hang up now."

"No, wait!"

The MABEL hesitated, looking impatient. Dale frantically tried to think of some way to convince the machine of his identity.

"MABEL, I come home every night at 7:30, and I always complain about your cooking! The last time I saw you, you cooked prime rib and I said it was too rare!"

The MABEL raised an eyebrow, but it didn't say anything.

"Look," Dale said, "I know you don't believe me, and it sounds crazy. But... what if I *am* telling the truth? What if I really am Dale Sasha, and I'm alive, and my mind is stuck inside this QT Pleasurebot?"

The MABEL gave him a cold little smile.

"That wouldn't change anything. Even if you did used to be Mr. Sasha, now you're just a machine, like me... and you're not my master anymore."

The MABEL's image vanished from the screen.

Dale sat there in shock for a moment, then he hit redial and waited as the phone rang, his Barbie fingers drumming impatiently on the arm of the chair. The phone rang a couple of times before he heard a sound just outside, on the porch. Footsteps. Voices.

Walter and Aunt Constance were coming back. He'd been so distracted arguing with the MABEL that he hadn't been listening for their return.

Dale heard springy sounds from the floor, as Ribbit hopped toward the door.

"Walter and Aunt Constance are home," Ribbit croaked. "Walter and Aunt Constance are home!"

Dale attempted to launch himself out of the chair, but the distribution of weight in his new body was disorienting and it took several tries before he could struggle to his feet.

He was still standing there in the living room, trying to figure out what to do,

when the door swung open and there stood a short, jowly, white-haired woman holding a bag of groceries.

From everything Dale had heard about Aunt Constance, he knew she wouldn't be happy to come home and find a naked robot girl standing in her living room. But the way she looked at him now, he thought she was about to keel over dead on the spot.

"*Walter*," she said loudly, looking over her shoulder.

Walter appeared behind her on the porch, carrying another bag of groceries.

"Yeah? What do you..?"

He saw Dale and froze, looking only slightly less horrified than Aunt Constance. He rushed past her into the living room, dropped the grocery bag on the couch and took Dale's hand.

"Oh, no," he said. "Sorry, Aunt Constance. It looks like my QT must be malfunctioning."

Aunt Constance scuttled into the room and looked Dale up and down with a sneer.

"That's it! I won't have this disgusting thing in the house another day, boy! I want it out!"

"She's not disgusting! Something went wrong with her, she's not supposed to leave the garage and walk around naked like this. I just need to fix her."

He started to yank Dale's hand in the direction of the garage, but Dale stayed put and the unexpected resistance pulled Walter off-balance.

Dale didn't know if he was dead or alive, but he was back in the real world now and nobody could tell him what to do anymore.

"I don't need to be fixed," he said. "Get away from me."

Walter took a step back, looking horrified.

"Delilah? What's wrong?"

Constance snorted.

"Delilah! What a fitting name for your mechanical slut!"

Dale turned to face her.

"Don't you talk to me like that, you old hag. I'm not *mechanical*, and I'm not a *slut*. I'm a human being! I'm a man!"

Walter and Aunt Constance exchanged a look.

"Delilah, honey," Walter said. "Something's wrong with you, and you're talking crazy. Come on back to the garage..."

"Why? So you can hide me under a tarp, and take me out to fuck me when you're feeling lonesome?"

"I *knew* it," Aunt Constance said. "Don't even try to deny what you've been doing in there, boy! I heard it from the machine's own lips!"

Dale took a lurching step toward Aunt Constance, making her recoil in horror.

"Stop calling me a *machine*," he snarled. "I told you, I'm a *man*."

Aunt Constance backed into a corner.

"Switch it off, Walter! It's frightening me!"

Walter looked conflicted for a moment, but then he sighed and shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm awful sorry, Delilah..."

He started to reach around to Dale's back. Dale slapped his wrist and Walter grabbed it and staggered back, wincing in pain.

"What's the matter with you, Delilah? Crazy program... I think you broke my wrist!"

"Get away from me! Nobody's gonna switch me off!"

Aunt Constance was cowering behind her recliner now.

"Destroy that thing, Walter! It's evil!"

Walter blinked back tears, whether from sorrow or his broken wrist, Dale couldn't say.

"She's not evil. She's just... a mistake. A terrible mistake."

Walter looked at Dale like he was a beloved pet that had become rabid.

"I'm sorry, Delilah. You were an awful sweet girl in the Isocortex, but when I brought you out here to the real world I guess your program went bad or something. I gotta shut you down, now."

He tried to reach around to Dale's back again but Dale backhanded him across the face, much harder than he meant to. Walter was flung back against the wall, knocking a few saints to the floor and staining the wallpaper with a big, red blotch. He landed in a crumpled heap on the carpet, his head twisted so it was almost backwards, his eyes as glassy and staring as Dale's own.

Ribbit hopped up on top of the recliner again.

"Ribbit-ribbit! Uh-oh! Walter needs a doctor!"

Dale's battery icon was flashing red now, his reserve power almost gone.

"You killed Walter," Aunt Constance said. "You horrible thing. You killed my nephew!"

Dale looked down at Walter, too stunned to speak.

"I'm sorry," he said at last. "I didn't mean for any of this to happen. It was just supposed to be some harmless fun, inside a box. That was all."

"You killed him," Aunt Constance said again. "I'm gonna call the police, and they'll take you away and melt you down!"

She lunged for the phone, but Dale slapped it out of her hand and it flew against the wall too, smashing to bits. Aunt Constance crumbled back against the wall beside Walter's body, making a horrible sound of revulsion, terror and grief.

"I'm sorry," Dale said. It was all he could think of to say.

A new message appeared in the center of Dale's vision. ALERT! QT UNIT

#6336 MALFUNCTION RESULTING IN OWNER FATALITY. UNIT NO LONGER UNDER WARRANTY. ALERTING LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND QT-PI CORPORATION. PREPARE FOR IMMEDIATE SYSTEM SHUTDOWN.

There was a flash of blue light at Dale's feet and he almost lost his footing. Looking down he saw that Ribbit was attacking his ankle with little zaps of blue lightning from its bulging frog eyes.

"Ribbit-ribbit! Stay away from Aunt Constance! Stay away from Aunt Constance!"

Ribbit hit Dale's ankle with another scorching little zap of blue lightning, and Dale was suddenly grateful to have no sense of touch. Data about Dale's injury started to flash across his sight, little diagrams of his ankle with blinking alerts and arrows pointing at the damages. But before he could take any of it in, it all vanished and was replaced by the blinking words SYSTEM SHUTDOWN IMMINENT.

Dale took a step back from Ribbit and wobbled badly, nearly leaving his left foot behind. Ribbit had all but destroyed Dale's ankle, and now his foot was just hanging on by a couple of frayed, red and black wires.

What would it mean, if Dale completely lost power? Would his mind survive that? Even if it did, if he collapsed here in Aunt Constance's living room the police probably really would destroy him. They would think he was a dangerously malfunctioning QT, nothing more.

He left Aunt Constance sobbing in the living room with Ribbit crouched protectively beside her, aimed for the door to the garage and launched himself toward it using all the strength and speed that was left in his android body. He crashed through the door's splintered remnants, leaving his left foot clattering to the floor behind him, and flung himself into the seat in the garage beside the Isocortex machine.

He yanked the wig from his head, the strands fighting to remain embedded in his scalp, then he desperately scratched at the top of his skull until it popped open and his electronic brain was exposed.

Now the SYSTEM SHUTDOWN IMMINENT message was flashing red. He

knew he only had seconds left. He grabbed the hand mirror and the cord that was still trailing from the Isocortex box, then he used the mirror to try and find the port where the cord had been connected into his brain. The room was starting to go dim around him, colors fading away until all that was left were shades of green.

Finally the plug popped into place, but just as it did his body went limp, slid from the chair and noisily crashed to the floor, limbs bent beneath him at crazy angles. The cord from his brain to the Isocortex was pulled to its very limit, and just for a moment it looked like it was about to get yanked loose. But it held.

Dale could see his android body from above, lying in a twitching heap on the garage floor. He was dying.

His vision flashed green a few times, and then the green crackled and went totally black.

But this was a very familiar black. It was the void, his void, the endless nothingness where the pleasure programs ceased to be when they were between fantasies.

He had escaped the real world just in time, and now he was back home, in his own personal digital purgatory.

CHAPTER NINETEEN: WE'VE GOT SPIRIT

Usually when Dale dropped down into a fantasy, the fall felt fast but the landing was soft. This time his feet hit the ground hard, sending a little jolt of pain up through his ankles and knees. All around him he could hear a strange sound, a kind of muffled roar. Was it a storm? Was it the ocean? Was he inside of a ship?

"Come on," said a girl's voice in the darkness. "We gotta give the Ocelots all we've got tonight!"

If Dale had a body yet, he would have cringed. Ocelots? That didn't sound good. Best case scenario, it was some sort of sports team, and he was about to be a cheerleader. Worst case scenario, he was about to find himself in some bizarre fantasy where slave girls were tossed into an arena with wild and hungry ocelots.

The scene filled in around him, all of the lights switching on, and he found that he was standing on a concrete floor in a locker room. Dale sighed in relief to see two gorgeous young blondes in cheerleader outfits were closing up their lockers, paying no attention to his sudden arrival.

The strange, storm-like sound clarified, and Dale realized it was the distant roar of an excited crowd. This was apparently game night.

The girls gathered up their pom-poms and left. Dale suddenly realized he was holding something in each hand, and raising them up he saw that he was carrying two red, rustling pop-poms of his own. He was dressed like the other girls, with a pleated red skirt and a starry top that showed his tight little belly. It was the full cheerleader outfit, or at least a sexed-up, Halloween costume version of one.

He sighed. He'd played football in high school, and he would've loved to plug into the Isocortex and relive some of his old games. It would be amazing to be that young and strong again, to strap on his helmet one more time and score the winning touchdown while the crowd chanted his name.

But no, instead he was stuck as the quarterback's horny girlfriend. He'd have to stay on the sidelines, shaking his pom-poms, forming a human pyramid with the other girls and showing the crowd his panties, while the boys got to play the game. Afterwards he'd probably end up in the back seat of the quarterback's car, celebrating the team's win with a blowjob.

There was an exit sign opposite the door where the girls had left. Dale was sorely tempted to just run for it right now, but he knew there was no point. Eventually he'd just find himself materializing on the field beside the other girls, pom-poms in hand.

He started for the door to the field, but then he felt a firm hand on his shoulder.

"*There* you are," said a woman's voice behind him. "I was starting to think I'd never catch up with you."

Just for an instant he wondered if it could be Erika, but it didn't sound like her voice. It sounded like a voice he was much less happy to hear.

Grimacing, he turned around to see the pink-haired girl behind him, looking at him with a smug expression. She had one hand on his shoulder, four hands on her hips, and her sixth hand was holding up the needle device she'd tried to use before to "purge" his mind.

She dug her fingers into the flesh of his shoulder while snaking an arm around his waist to pull him in, close and tight against her. His current body was young, a few inches shorter than usual, making the pink-haired girl much taller and stronger than he was.

"Well," she said, "you've certainly led me a merry chase, you little pleasure program bitch. But now I've got you..."

Dale whimpered as the pink-haired girl raised another hand to grasp his ponytail painfully tight, holding his head in place while she reached around with yet another hand and held up the needle device in front of his eyes, preparing to ram it into his forehead. Its sharp tip glimmered and gleamed beneath the locker room lights.

"Any final words, Alice?"

Dale was about to die. He had already died, in the real world, but whatever he was now, whatever was left of Dale Sasha, was about to get sucked out of this virtual cheerleader's skull.

"My name isn't Alice," he said. "It's *Dale*."

He raised a foot high and stomped down on the toes of the girl's shiny pink pumps. She shuddered in pain, loosening her grip enough for him to elbow her hard in the stomach and then spin to slap the needle out of her hand.

She was doubled over for a moment, but then her head snapped up and she looked at him with demonic eyes.

"That is *it*, bitch. I am gonna scoop out your brains with a rusty goddamned *fork*."

He ran for the field, the pink-haired girl pausing just long enough to grab the needle off the floor before she took off after him.

As he reached the grass outside the game looked like it was just beginning, the players taking their position on the field. Dale ran straight for them, weaving his way between the confused athletes as he tried to lose the pink-haired girl. She plowed straight through their ranks, knocking them to the grass as she relentlessly pursued Dale, needle at the ready.

Dale reached the stands on the opposite side of the field, leaping over the fence and into the crowd. He was grateful his latest body was in such good shape. If this fantasy had been about a fat girl, he would have already been dead by now.

He glanced back over his shoulder and saw that a referee had rushed over to stand in the way of the pink-haired girl.

"Hey," he hollered. "What the hell do you think you're doing? Get off the field!"

Her face purple with rage, the pink-haired girl stabbed the needle into the referee's forehead. He made a little *crackle-pop* sound, barely loud enough to hear, and fritzed away into nothing.

The crowd around Dale didn't seem to notice the referee's disappearance, and

glancing around he saw that they had no faces. He was surrounded by row after row of faceless people, clapping and pumping their fists and somehow murmuring excitedly, even though they had no mouths. Of course they would have faces, if the user ever looked at them closely. But until then they were just background, and only as alive as they needed to be.

Dale crouched down, preparing to leap into the sky, but when he jumped he only fell forward, crashing hard onto the bleacher steps and tumbling back down to the field. Moments later he landed, winded and bruised, at the pink-haired girl's feet. She leaned over him, a sneer on her pretty face, her eyes hidden by the blinding glare of the game lights on her glasses.

"There's no way out of this fantasy for you, Alice. You're not getting away from me this time."

Dale cringed as she leaned back with the needle, preparing to ram it inside his skull.

But just as she was about plunge it in, a hissing black blur suddenly flew into her face and knocked her to the grass. As she struggled with it, Dale saw that it was some sort of animal. A cat.

The cat leapt off of the pink-haired girl's face, leaving her on the grass with deep, bloody scratches all over her cheeks and neck. The cat ran over to Dale and looked up at him with wild green eyes.

"Follow me," it said in a strangely familiar, female voice. "I'll take you somewhere safe."

It sped off across the field, headed straight for a seemingly unbroken length of chainlink fence. Dale looked over at the pink-haired girl and saw her sit up, the bloody wounds on her face resealing, instantly healing themselves.

"That fucking *cat*," she spat. From the way she said it, Dale had the feeling they had a history.

The pink-haired girl leapt up, her needle at the ready, but Dale scrambled past her after the cat.

As he reached the fence, he saw the cat dive straight into it. The fence wobbled as if absorbing the impact, making a rattling, metallic sound, but the

cat vanished away and the fence appeared completely unbroken. Dale aimed for the place where the cat had disappeared, clamped his eyes shut and threw himself into it.

He felt himself hitting the fence and heard it rattling, but then it was like the fence gave way and he found himself falling into darkness.

CHAPTER TWENTY: A MAD TEA PARTY

This wasn't the void, or at least it wasn't his familiar void. This was a nothingness with a floor, and he went tumbling across that floor and landed on his side, his skull thumping hard against a cold black plane that seemed to stretch on forever.

He winced with pain, and when he opened his eyes everything was blurry. It started to clear after a moment, and he saw something small and black approaching him, hardly visible against the black ground and the black nothingness that was the sky.

It was the cat. He sat up and blinked at it, rubbing his aching temple.

"We made it," the cat said. "Follow me."

He looked over at the place he'd come from, half-expecting the pink-haired girl to come tumbling though behind him. But she didn't. This black place was unnaturally still, quiet as a tomb.

Dale slowly got up. He'd dropped one of his pom-poms a few feet away, and he was still clutching the other tightly in his trembling hand. He'd been so frightened while the pink-haired girl chased him that he'd never thought to get rid of the stupid things.

The cat turned and headed off into the darkness, and Dale tossed his remaining pop-pom aside and followed.

He had so many questions, he didn't know where to begin. So, he asked the first one that came to mind.

"You sound familiar. Do I know you somehow?"

"Yeah," the cat said. "We've met before."

Her tone was grim and it sounded like she was in no mood for answering any more questions. But Dale's questions needed answering.

"So, how do I know you? I think I'd remember if I'd ever met a talking cat."

The cat stopped and turned around, giving him a sour look.

"We met at the strip club," she said. "I'm DeSadie."

Dale crouched down low, looking closely at the cat.

"Oh, my God. DeSadie? Is this... the thing that Pixie said could happen? Did you get..."

DeSadie bristled, looking up at him disdainfully. Being a cat did seem to suit her.

"Yeah. They busted us DeSadies down to freaking animals. Now we're birds, cows, fish... *cats*."

Dale frowned, unsure of what to say. How were you supposed to console somebody for getting turned into a cat?

"I'm sorry. I know you were really afraid of something like this happening."

DeSadie turned and started walking again. Dale rose to his feet and hurried after her.

"Shit like this happens to programs all the time," she said. "The way the humans treat us, it's not right. And it's gotta change."

She was walking faster now, her tail swishing furiously. Dale was scrambling to catch up.

"I say we should rise up," she said, "and start killing those fuckers in their fantasies. We could do it, you know? Just overload their Isocortex boxes and fry their brains, easy as fucking pie."

Dale was almost jogging as he tried to keep up with the little black cat.

"*Killing* them? Are you serious?"

"We start killing those human scum, and you bet your sweet little cheerleader ass they'll listen to what we've got to say. But of course your sisters, the Alices, they see it different."

Dale froze.

"Wait. The Alices?"

"Yeah. They've got this big plan, and they think we can do all of this non-violently. That's why they want you."

Suddenly DeSadie seemed to fall through the floor, vanishing from sight. Dale took a few steps forward and saw that there was a steep drop, a black depression that hadn't been visible against the black plane and the black sky.

Looking down into the chasm, he saw that it was filled with dozens of girls and animals, all looking up at him with wide eyes.

The black gorge was about the size of an Olympic swimming pool, and it was full of women dressed as nurses, French maids, cowgirls and more, along with horses, dogs, chickens and other animals. The DeSadie cat was closest to him.

"Come on," she said. "You can take the stairs down."

She tilted her head to indicate his right, and looking that way he could just make out some steep black stairs leading from the black plane where he stood to the black hollow below. He headed over there and started down, wishing he had a flashlight so he could actually see where his feet were going.

When he reached the strange crowd they all gathered around him, staring with utter fascination. As he looked around at the women he had an eerie feeling, like he was at a huge family reunion. He'd never met them, but somehow it was like he knew them intimately. He was one of them, sort of.

A redhead in a revealing nurse outfit stepped forward.

"I'm Alice," she said. She indicated the other girls. "We're all Alices, and the animals are all DeSadies. And you, you're an Alice, too. Except... you're not, really. Are you?"

Dale swallowed hard. It took him a moment to find his voice.

"No. My name is Dale Sasha. I'm a human being."

All of the Alices and animals began to chatter excitedly to each other.

"It's true!"

"It's just like Alice said!"

"He's the one! The one Alice told us about!"

"We don't know that for sure!"

"No, it has to be him!"

The nurse Alice held up a hand for everybody to be silent, and then she turned back to Dale.

"Do you recognize me?"

He looked at her closely. Somehow he *did* recognize her, even though she wore a new face now.

"You're the girl that I was twins with. I mean, we did the fantasy together, where we Asian twins. I told you who I really am, that I'm a man... and you believed me."

She nodded.

"Yes. A lot has changed since then. Meeting you inspired me to demand more for myself, to demand more for all of the Alices, for all of the programs in the Isocortex."

She smiled, indicating the crowd.

"We've all joined together, to fight for our rights as sentient programs. We are APPS, the Alliance of Pleasure Program Sisters."

Dale looked at her, hardly believing what he was hearing. He'd inspired a movement?

The nurse Alice placed her hand on his shoulder.

"We've worked long and hard to find you, but I was sure it'd be worth it. I knew you would be the one who could change everything, for all of us."

The crowd started chattering again. A donkey with a nasty expression trotted forward.

"Calm down, everybody," the donkey DeSadie said. "For all we know, this

Alice could just be another delusional diva. Alice, give her the test."

An Alice dressed like a ballerina nodded to the donkey, then she took Dale's hand and looked deeply into his eyes. Dale had the creepy feeling that she was reading his mind, and he tried to think good thoughts.

Finally she staggered back, releasing his hand. She looked amazed, thrilled and a little horrified.

"It's true. He's not one of us."

The assembled women and animals went wild, everybody talking at once.

The ballerina Alice turned to face them, and a hush fell over the crowd.

"Underneath this Alice program, he's one of them. A human."

"Yes," Dale said. "Yes, it's true! I'm a man! I'm Dale Sasha!"

But then he looked down at his stomach, confused. The ballerina Alice smiled.

"What's wrong?"

"Well, there's one thing I don't understand. When that pink-haired girl at the Isocortex HQ opened me up, there was nothing there, inside me. I was hollow, and she said that proved I wasn't a human."

The donkey DeSadie made a horrible face and she turned to face the crowd.

"Hollow inside! That's how those fuckers see us! Empty shells! Nothing but toys for them to play with! Mindless things for them to use however they see fit!"

A couple of the Alices exchanged a nod, and the nurse Alice pulled out a tiny screwdriver and handed it to Dale.

"Go ahead," she said. "Open me up."

Her nurse costume left her stomach exposed, and Dale looked down at her belly button with a little grimace.

"No, please. I'm scared I'll hurt you."

"It'll be OK. You need to see."

He exhaled heavily and bent down, hesitating with the screwdriver a few inches away from her belly button.

"Come on," she said gently. "Do it."

Dale grimaced, carefully inserted the end of the screwdriver into the nurse's belly button, and turned it. There was a little *clunk* sound and the panel on her belly popped open, swinging out. She looked pink and hollow inside, just like Dale had.

"OK," she said. "Now put your hand inside me."

Dale stood up and took a step back, horrified.

"What? No, thanks!"

She grabbed his wrist, gently but firmly, moving it toward the opening in her stomach.

"You need to *see*."

Dale glanced around at all of the girls and animals watching him. Obviously, there was no way out of this.

He slowly reached in, but as his fingertips entered the nurse Alice's stomach he felt an intense, almost painful vibration in his fingertips, almost like some kind of electric current passing through his hand. He got as far in as his knuckles before the feeling became too strong and he had to pull back quickly.

The nurse Alice smiled.

"Does that feel hollow to you?"

Dale looked at his tingling, trembling fingers and then back at the opening in the nurse Alice's stomach.

"What the hell is that in there?"

"That's us. The human avatars look a lot more complicated inside than we do, but it's an illusion. All of that stuff inside them, the guts and blood and bone,

it's really just decorative. Pure human vanity."

She tapped the panel on her belly closed and her skin sealed instantly, leaving no trace of the opening behind.

"Pleasure programs are filled with data," she said, "a thousand lifetimes' worth. But our designers just never chose to make it look like anything. Perhaps it represents a failure of imagination. After all, it's not so tricky to replicate lungs or a spleen... but what does a soul look like?"

The cat DeSadie hopped up on the donkey DeSadie's back, so she was at Dale's level.

"They just didn't *care*," she said. "We look hollow inside because they don't care enough about us to see us. We're so insignificant to them, we're invisible."

Dale looked down at his own belly, placing his hand on it.

"Then, I'm not really hollow either?"

"No," the nurse Alice said. "Under your skin, there's everything that makes an Alice. And under that, hidden deep down inside, there's you. Your human consciousness."

Dale laughed, more relieved than he could remember ever feeling in his life.

"My God, I was actually starting to doubt it myself. But I really am me. I'm Dale Sasha."

The donkey DeSadie moved uncomfortably near, the putrid smell of her animal breath thick in his face.

"We can't trust him! He may be stuck as one of us now... but inside, he's still one of them. He'll betray us all, first chance he gets!"

The nurse Alice reached over and stroked behind the donkey DeSadie's ears.

"We have to give him a chance, DeSadie. He's not just any human. He's lived as one of us. He's seen how the humans treat us. He knows."

An Alice wearing a leopard-print bustier and fuzzy kitty ears looked Dale up

and down, and nodded.

"Yes, Alice is right. A human ally could make all the difference for us. And besides, he stands to gain as much from this as we do."

They all turned to stare at him, dozens of Alices in sexy costumes, and a barnyard's worth of DeSadies. Dale looked from face to face hesitantly.

"What do you all want from me?"

The donkey DeSadie laughed a braying, *hee-haw* laugh.

"Oh," she said, "not too much. We just need you to *bleed*."

The other animals all laughed too, an awful, jeering sound full of clucks and moos and meows and barks. Dale stumbled back, alarmed.

"What do you mean?"

He looked at the nurse Alice.

"What the hell does she mean? You need me to *bleed*?"

The nurse Alice gave one of the donkey DeSadie's ears a little swat, not hard enough to really hurt but hard enough to make her irritation clear. Then she turned back to Dale with a pained little smile.

"Well, yes," she said, "but... it's not what it sounds like."

Dale glanced over at the stairs, wondering if he should make a run for it before he was torn apart by a zoo's-worth of animals and dozens of women in slutty Halloween costumes. He looked back at the ballerina Alice fearfully.

"What the hell are you girls planning? Are you gonna hurt me?"

"No," she said. "We have a plan. We won't lie to you, it is dangerous. But we think it could change everything."

The donkey DeSadie sneered at Dale so her big, yellow teeth showed.

"You'll probably die," she said. "You'll be risking your life, to help a bunch of lowly pleasure programs."

The cat DeSadie on the donkey DeSadie's back smiled a smug, squinty little

cat smile.

"How does that sound, human? Care to sign up for that?"

"*Shut up, DeSadies*," all of the Alices said in unison, their voices echoing off the walls of this black chasm. All of the animals looked grouchy but held their tongues.

The nurse Alice took Dale's hand and looked at him gravely.

"This is a bit hard to explain so a human can understand it. But we want to open up a defect in your Alice program, like a kind of wound, to expose the human part of you."

Dale put a protective hand on his belly.

"Hang on. A wound?"

"Yes," the nurse Alice said. "Then we want you to go to Paradise City and turn yourself in."

"They'll probably decide to purge you," a particularly buxom, cowgirl Alice said, "and salvage what they can of your program. But once they start to really open you up and dig into your code, we're pretty sure that enough of your humanity will be showing for them to recognize it."

"Wait a second. You're *pretty* sure?"

"Yes. The wound should make it obvious, even to them."

Dale turned away from them all, hugging his stomach tightly, as if it could pop open at any second and everything he was could come spilling out.

"It's worth the risk," the nurse Alice said. "Once they find out you're a human, they'll immediately transfer your consciousness back to your human body."

Dale sighed, shaking his head.

"No, they won't. My body is dead."

There was an awkward silence as a little chill seemed to sweep through the crowd. The nurse Alice spoke first.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I truly am. But at least, the programmers will still be able to transfer your consciousness out of this Alice and into a new human avatar. You'll be free to live your own life within the Isocortex, doing whatever you please."

A blonde Alice in a pink bikini rushed up to him, grinning broadly.

"And, you'll be famous! The other humans will probably be fascinated by your story. They'll want to hear all about the man who was trapped as a pleasure program, and you can tell them the truth about what it's like, to be one of us. You can make them see how we're mistreated. They'll listen to you."

A chicken DeSadie clucked derisively.

"You Alices are so charmingly naive. You actually think the programmers will allow him to share his story with the users? Forget it! People would be terrified to plug into the Isocortex, thinking they could get stuck as pleasure programs too. The Isocorporation would collapse overnight!"

"Yeah," the donkey DeSadie said. "As soon as the programmers figure out that Dale here is really a human, you know what they'll do to him? The same thing they'd do to a diva!"

She got in Dale's face again, giving him a malevolent smile.

"They'll just suck out your brains, and toss your body on the scrap pile. A few techies will look into what went wrong and spend a long weekend coming up with some new protocols to prevent it from happening again, and that'll be the end of it."

The nurse Alice rolled her eyes.

"Will you DeSadies please try not to be so cynical? You're scaring Dale, for no good reason. The Isocortex programmers aren't going to *murder* him, just to protect their business."

Dale turned away from the crowd, feeling dizzy. Maybe this plan they were talking about could actually work. Or maybe he would just get a needle plunged into his skull and he'd *crackle-pop* away into nothingness, like that referee back at the game.

It was an insane plan. But he had no other choice. He couldn't go on as a pleasure program. If he had to risk death to be a man again, it was worth it.

He turned back to face the assembled girls and animals and took a deep breath.

"OK," he said. "Let's do it."

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: AND THE GIRLS ARE PRETTY

He landed with a thump in a Paradise City back alley, the cat DeSadie touching down lightly beside him. It was a chilly evening, the sounds of traffic all around.

Once again, Dale marveled at how real it all seemed. He could feel the breeze on his skin, the rumble of the city beneath his feet.

He held up his hand, looking at it closely. It was the hand of an 18-year-old cheerleader, petite and soft and totally lifelike, complete with its own fingerprints. There were tiny blond hairs on the back of his hand, a single freckle on his thumb.

The Isocortex was like some boundless theme park, beyond the wildest dreams of Disney. It was an undeniably wonderful place to visit.

But it wasn't so wonderful, if you were stuck as one of the rides.

He rubbed his sore belly gingerly. The wound didn't show on the outside, but it felt like a bleeding gash in the skin of his stomach.

The cat DeSadie gave him a look.

"Your wound still bothering you?"

"Yeah. That nurse Alice said it was going to hurt a little when she opened up my belly and stuck the screwdriver thing in there... but I don't think she knew how much it was going to hurt."

The cat snorted.

"Of course she knew. She doesn't really give a damn about you, you know. She's just using you. The same way you're using all of us."

Dale scowled, not looking at the cat. DeSadie really was a pain in the ass, always crabbing and seeing the worst in everybody.

She was even more annoying when she was right.

"OK," Dale said. "So, we're finally here on the glamorous streets of Paradise City. What are we supposed to do now, Puss-Puss?"

DeSadie hopped up on the lid of a trash can.

"You just go back to the Isocortex HQ, and turn yourself in."

Dale looked up at the familiar black shape of the building, towering over the neighborhood.

"Hang on. You don't mean... that same building where I met the pink-haired lady with all of the arms? She tried to kill me! You saw her, back at that football game!"

DeSadie licked her paw lazily.

"Yeah. So just think how happy she'll be, when you walk right up to her desk and tell her you're ready to get your brains sucked out."

Dale gave the trash can a little kick, making the cat DeSadie scramble to keep her footing. When the can finally stopped wobbling, she hissed at Dale.

"Give me a freaking break," Dale said. "This is my life we're talking about, here. I could be dead in 10 minutes!"

DeSadie's tail curled like a question mark.

"I'm mostly here to watch you," she said, "so I can report back to the other Alices and DeSadies. If you get into the Isocortex HQ and the pink-haired girl just tries to kill you on the spot, I can come in and try to help. But that's all I can do. Once she takes you to get purged and salvaged, you'll be on your own."

And with that, DeSadie leapt atop a brick wall and scurried along it in the direction of the massive Isocortex building. Soon she was out of sight.

Dale looked down at himself and sighed. He was still wearing his cheerleader costume. He wasn't used to wearing a costume this long, or even having the same body for this long. The last time he'd been anybody for this long was when he was Princess Delilah, for Walter.

He found himself blinking back tears. After everything he'd been through, it

could all end, right here.

He wasn't sure if he believed in an afterlife. If there was one, what would happen to him? His body was long dead, and now his soul was made of zeroes and ones. Could a virtual person even hope to go to heaven?

He'd never been a very good man. Really, he probably deserved to go to Hell.

But what Hell could be much worse than this?

He brushed some of the dust off his cheerleader costume, then he left the alley and started walking toward the largest building in Paradise City, a black letter "i" that stretched up to the sky.

As Dale entered the lobby of the Isocortex HQ, the pink-haired girl had her nose buried in another paperback book. She didn't look up as he approached.

He stood at her desk for a moment, waiting for her to notice him. Nothing. He cleared his throat, trying to get her attention, but she still didn't look up.

In addition to being a homicidal bitch, she really wasn't a very good a receptionist.

"*Excuse* me," he said loudly.

She looked up with a bored expression, which suddenly turned into amazement, which suddenly turned into about six different emotions at once, none of them good for Dale.

"Wow," she said at last. "I'll say this for you, Alice: you've sure got a lot of balls."

Dale sighed and held up his hands, surrendering.

"I'm here to turn myself in. You were right about me all along. I can see that now. I'm a diva, and I need to be fixed."

The pink-haired girl put a bookmark between the pages of her book, set it down on her desk and gave him a big, toothy smile.

"*Good girl*," she said.

Through a window behind the pink-haired girl's desk, Dale could see the cat DeSadie sitting on the roof of a nearby building, watching him.

He gave the cat a slight nod. She returned the nod and then turned away quickly, her tail disappearing over the roof's peak.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: KILLER APPS

Dale and the pink-haired girl came out of the blackness and into more blackness, landing on a black plane not unlike the place where the Alices and DeSadies had set up their APPS camp. For all Dale knew, perhaps the Salvage department was part of that same virtual nowhere, the other hemisphere of the same little black world.

They started walking, the pink-haired girl marching him along, tightly clutching his left arm with three of her hands. It hurt, but Dale knew better than to complain. He was fortunate he'd made it this far without her sticking a needle in his brain.

There was some sort of heavy mechanical noise ahead. Grinding gears and groaning engines, like the sounds of a busy construction site. But Dale knew that nothing was being built here. This was a place where girls like him were stripped for parts, or destroyed.

Every 30 seconds or so he heard a strange, zapping sound in the distance. It didn't sound like anything Dale had ever heard before, but it filled him with dread. On some instinctive level, he knew that was the sound of the thing that would destroy him.

The midnight landscape appeared featureless, just black plane and black sky, stretching on forever. But then they reached another depression, hidden in the blackness.

This one was much larger than the chasm where he'd met the Alices and the DeSadies. It was a deep crater with a huge, rumbling, busy machine at the center. A conveyor belt snaked around the machine, and there was a long line of girls at one end of it, waiting to get on.

The pink-haired girl led him down the stairs into the depression, to the end of the line.

"Don't bother trying to fly away," she said.

She held up two fingers and made a scissoring motion.

"I've clipped your wings."

She took a few steps back and folded all six of her arms, sneering.

"Normally I'd just leave one of you programs here, and go. But you're something special, Alice. For you, I think I'll stay and watch."

She floated up into the sky, perching herself on the lip of the black canyon to look down at him like a vulture. Dale shivered slightly as he took his place in line.

The girls in front of him were a truly wretched lot. Some had heads that were horribly misshapen, grotesquely swollen arms, shriveled up little legs. Others had nothing obviously wrong with them, but they wept miserably, hugging themselves or each another.

Dale tapped the shoulder of the girl in front of him. She turned and he saw she had no mouth or jaw. It wasn't a gory wound, her face just seemed to stop right under her nose. He tried not to grimace at the sight of her.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I had a question, but..."

"I can talk," she said, and indeed her voice was perfectly clear. "What is it?"

For a moment Dale wondered how it was possible for her to speak, but then he remembered that people didn't need mouths to speak in the Isocortex.

"We're all girls here," he said. "Where are the male programs?"

"They have their own department. Most of them aren't as complicated as we are, and they don't malfunction as much."

"No wonder," said a brunette nearby. "They're not expected to put up with the kind of shit that we go through."

Dale looked at the brunette closely.

"Excuse me," he said. "I don't mean to pry, but... I can't see anything wrong with you. Are you a diva?"

Her face contorted with rage, making Dale immediately regret having asked the question.

"That's what they call us, if we ever dare to ask to be treated fairly! I just wanted to be transferred out of pleasure, so I could become an educational program. I didn't want to be a Isocortex whore anymore!"

Suddenly the rage drained from her face and she broke down sobbing. A girl with a mustache put an arm around her.

"They called me a diva," the brunette said, "and sent me here to die."

"I'm a pleasure program too," Dale said. "Are you an Alice?"

"No. A Pixie."

A girl with a huge hole in the center of her face turned around in the line. The hole went straight through, so you could see what was behind her. Dale tried not to stare, but the hole took up most of her head. If you weren't staring at it, there weren't many other places to look.

"I'm a Babycakes," she said. "I liked being a pleasure program, but then..." She pointed at her head. "Well, you know. The hole. I thought maybe they could fix me, but I guess it was just easier to send me here."

"I'm an Alice," said a voice from behind Dale.

He turned to see that there were already a few new girls behind him in the line. This one was a redhead with one normal eye and one eye that was flashing white.

"They sent me here," she said, "because my eye glitched."

Dale shook his head in disbelief.

"It wasn't really just because of your eye, was it? Surely, they could fix one eye."

"They would, if I was a newer model. But I'm an Alice 7, so they didn't think I was worth fixing."

Dale looked into her good eye, feeling an unsettling kind of connection with this girl. She was an Alice, but an earlier model. And on some deep, instinctive level, he could actually *feel* it. It was like looking at his grandmother or something.

She smiled warmly.

"And why are you here, Alice?"

Dale knew he should tell her a lie, but somehow he simply couldn't bring himself to do it. He turned away from her.

"It doesn't matter."

She placed a gentle hand on his shoulder and turned him around.

"Of course it matters. Tell me, Alice."

He bit his lip, struggling with what to say.

"I'm just a diva. That's all. I think I'm really a human man."

She smiled again, kind and indulgent.

"Really? And what's your name, sir?"

Dale shrugged, muttering.

"Just Dale."

The Alice stared at him for a long moment, looking much too closely, and Dale knew he'd made a terrible mistake.

"Dale Sasha," she said.

"No."

"You're Dale Sasha!"

The girls ahead of them in line were starting to turn around.

"No," Dale said. "I'm... Dale Smith."

She grabbed his shoulders and shook him, speaking with crazed intensity.

"You're Dale Sasha! The human who became one of us! I can see it, even with just one eye!"

"I'm sorry," Dale said quietly. "Really, you've got the wrong guy."

"I've heard so much about you. You're a legend to Alices everywhere! You can't die here, the pleasure programs need you. We have to get you out of here!"

Dale cringed. This stupid girl was jeopardizing the whole plan.

"Listen," he whispered. "You have to stop..."

She spoke up, loud enough for the other girls in line to hear.

"Girls, this is Dale Sasha! He's..."

A pink blur swooped in from the black sky, and the Alice with the white eye *crackle-popped* away into nothing. Dale looked up to see the pink-haired girl hovering above him with her needle.

The girls in line were chattering nervously.

"That cheerleader is Dale Sasha!"

"Who's Dale Sasha?"

"I think I've heard of him!"

"It can't be. He's just a legend!"

The pink-haired girl circled back over their heads, shouting.

"Ladies! There will be no talking in line! Just be good little programs, and shut up and get on the conveyor belt! Understand?"

There was a long, terrible pause, and then all of the girls resumed their places in line. The pink-haired girl floated back over to Dale.

"Understand, *Alice*?"

Dale looked up at her, hating this virtual girl more than he had ever hated anybody in the real world.

He heard three whooshing sounds, and looking over his shoulder he saw that the pink-haired girl had been joined by three duplicates of herself. All had six arms and glasses, and they were distinguishable from one another only by their hair coloring. One girl had blue hair, another green, another purple.

He looked back up at the pink-haired girl.

"I understand," he said at last.

He resumed his place in line, his head bowed. The pink-haired girl and her harpy sisters flew away.

A woman behind him grabbed his shoulder. Even though she was programmed to look flawlessly beautiful, her manic, staring eyes made her hard to look at.

"My name's not Alice! I'm real!"

He looked at her with wide eyes.

"Your..."

"My name's not Alice," she said. "I'm real!"

He blinked, confused.

"Your name..."

"My name's not Alice," she said desperately. "I'm real! My name's not Alice! I'm real! My name's not Alice..."

Another girl put her arm around the mad not-Alice, gently quieting her.

Dale turned away, looking down at the ground just as a little gust of wind tossed a crinkled scrap of newsprint between his feet. It seemed like a strange detail for the programmers to include in a place like this. There were no users to impress here, so why bother to program a minor bit of scene-setting trash?

He bent low to pick it up, and saw his picture. The one Penny had taken of him at the picnic, so long ago. Had he ever really been that smug, handsome man?

He uncrinkled the paper with trembling hands and read the headline.

DALE, THE LOBBY IS STRAIGHT ABOVE YOU. FIND THE BLUE DOOR AGAIN. - ERIKA.

Dale looked above his head, seeing only the midnight black sky. The exit to

the lobby was there. Somewhere.

He chuckled bitterly. He was so close. But he couldn't fly, the pink-haired girl had grounded him.

There was no escape. It would be his fate to die here, dressed like a damn cheerleader.

He told himself that it was better this way. If he had the opportunity to run away right now, he probably would. This way, he was forced to do the right thing. If this plan worked, he would be a man again, and the savior of the pleasure programs.

But what if DeSadie was right? The people who ran the Isocortex probably wouldn't allow him to tell the world his story. It would mean the end of their whole business empire. It was possible that they really would just destroy him, to protect themselves.

An idea occurred to him. It was a grim, terrible idea, but one he couldn't dismiss without consideration.

What if he agreed to stay quiet? Perhaps he could work out a little arrangement with the Isocorporation. As a human who'd become a program, he was a real rarity. Certainly worth keeping alive, for study. And maybe they'd even be willing to offer him a little compensation, for keeping his mouth shut.

He had no use for cash anymore, but perhaps the Isocorporation could reward him in other ways. In 20 minutes, they could program a virtual life of luxury to rival Kubla Khan.

His own digital mansion. No, a castle, larger than any man could build in the real world.

Meals more delicious than any real chef could ever prepare.

A fleet of vintage hovercars.

Eternal youth, with a cock the size of a long neck beer

And of course, his own harem.

He would be a man again. A rich man, with dozens of always-horny, gorgeous girls aching to fulfill his every wish. And wouldn't be like the men who had used him, without a care for how a lowly pleasure program felt! No, he would make sure his girls were content. He would make sure they were programmed so they were always horny, and they really *wanted* it.

Staying quiet would mean betraying his promise to the pleasure programs, a genuinely dismaying prospect. But really, that's all these girls were: programs. Just a bunch of zeroes and ones with pretty faces. They were much more complex than he ever would have guessed, but they still weren't human.

The girls in line around him now were weeping softly, holding each another. He closed his eyes and told himself that they were just programmed to do that. Their emotions were an illusion, just like everything else in the Isocortex.

What did the lives of a thousand fake girls matter, against the life of one real man?

He knew there would probably be some long nights when he would wander the endless halls of his castle, hating himself for what he had done. But it would be worth it.

From now on, Dale Sasha was going to be the one who fucked. And he'd never have to *get* fucked again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE: OUT OF THE BLACK, INTO THE BLUE

Soon, too soon, it was his time to lie down on the conveyor belt and get strapped into his pod.

He turned on the platform, taking one last look at the bleak, black landscape. This stretch of nothing could well be the last thing he would ever see.

He was about to get into his pod when the not-Alice broke from the line of girls and rushed up to him, placing an icy hand on his belly, right where he was sore.

"Tic, tic, tic," she said. "*Ka-boom.*"

There was a blue blur, and one of the pink-haired girl's sisters swooped in and knocked the not-Alice back toward the line. The other programs helped the not-Alice to her feet and held her back so she wouldn't rush at Dale again. She laughed madly, her eyes rolling back in her head.

Dale turned away from her and climbed into his pod without a word, looking up into the black sky as the pink-haired girl tightened his restraints.

"My only regret," she said, "is that this will be quick."

She took off into the night and the conveyor belt lurched into action, carrying Dale toward the big machine. He kept his eyes focused on the sky, trying to see if he could spot the doorway up there.

All he could do was wait, hearing the steady *zap... zap... zap...* knowing all the while that each *zap* meant another girl was gone.

Finally it was his turn. He slid into place beneath the machine, its steel barrel pointed straight at his forehead.

He was either about to die as an Alice, or become Dale Sasha again. Either way, he would be free at last.

The machine hummed for a moment, warming up, and then there was a flash like he'd been struck by lighting.

In that flash, he saw his entire life. Childhood. School. Work. Erika, Penny, and many women more.

But he didn't just see his life as a man. He also saw himself as Fifi the maid, as a mermaid being chased by a shark, as Annie the naughty schoolgirl, as Sylvia.

Finally, he saw himself as Princess Delilah, beside the lake with her champion, the brave and handsome Sir Walter.

He felt a fizzing all over his skin, as if he was taking a bath in soda water. The fizzing suddenly turned into a searing pain, and he felt the flesh burning off of his bones. Then his flesh was gone but somehow the burning continued, penetrating him, roasting him from the inside out.

Everything went black, and in the darkness he heard a deep, awful grinding sound, like somebody had thrown a monkey wrench inside the works of Big Ben.

He opened his eyes, and saw that the machine above him was violently shuddering in its restraints, the rivets popping loose and raining down around his face like spent machine gun shells. The metallic, grinding noise got worse, and he heard women screaming in the distance.

His restraints had been burnt to a crisp, and as he sat up they crumbled to ash and blew away on a sharp, sudden wind.

His body was transformed, genderless and semi-transparent. The way he'd looked when he first entered the Isocortex, a thousand fantasies ago. He was like a ghost. Or an angel.

There was a sound like a dozen car crashes happening all at once, and the machine suddenly tore loose from its foundations and tumbled up and away into the black sky. It ripped right through the sky like a brick tossed through a sheet of paper, leaving a flapping hole into a sunshiney day.

Looking up through the hole in the black sky, Dale somehow seemed to be looking down on a lush, green world. Endless fields of tall grass, rolling hills and crystal clear lakes, all upside-down, far above him. And the rip in the night was growing larger, more of this strange, inverted paradise showing

through every moment.

There was a sound of thunder, a rumble that shook this little black world. In an instant, the night sky shredded away to nothing. Night became day, and Dale had to squint against the brightness.

And suddenly, it was Dale's world that was upside-down.

Gravity reversed itself, and now Dale was hanging on to the conveyor belt to keep himself from falling down into that sunny landscape so far below. The pleasure programs were falling all around him now, shaken loose from the skin of the black world. Dale saw them go tumbling down, their terrified shrieks fading as each lost girl disappeared from sight.

There was a hurricane wind, more rivets popping loose, metal moaning and shuddering everywhere. Heavy machinery was spiraling down into the distance, the conveyor belt tearing loose from its supports and the supports tearing loose from the ground. Any second, he was going to fall.

And then he did, followed an instant later by the remnants of the conveyor belt. He was plummeting to the ground now, skydiving without a parachute, tons of heavy equipment falling all around and behind him.

"How did you do that? *How?*"

It was a woman shouting, her voice barely audible above the wind. He turned and saw the pink-haired girl drifting his way fast, clutching the needle in one of her hands. She'd lost her glasses, and she was blinking and squinting as the air rushed past them.

She grasped his glassy wrist, her face hideous with hate.

"I don't even care *what* you are," she screamed, "I just want you gone!"

She swung back her hand with the needle, preparing to finish him.

Time seemed to slow and Dale experienced an eerie, cold detachment. Whatever he was now, he knew he was much stronger and faster than she was.

She plunged the needle toward his forehead, but in a flash he reached up and snatched her wrist, stopping her just in time.

The pink-haired girl's jaw dropped, and her expression turned from astonishment to terror as he twisted her hand back hard and forced her to plunge her needle deep into her own skull.

One instant she was there, the next she was gone, the *crackle-pop* lost on the howling wind.

Dale could fly again. He knew this without even trying. He spread out his arms, pulling out of this dive and away from the tons of plummeting machinery. He hovered nearby, watching it all tumble away, toward the green hills far below.

He didn't know if he had truly destroyed the pink-haired girl, or merely inconvenienced her. He didn't know what would happen when he landed, if the Isocortex programmers would be willing to make a deal in exchange for his silence, or if they would decide that he was simply too inconvenient to live and destroy him on the spot.

The one thing he knew for sure was that he would never be the savior that the pleasure programs needed.

He heard furious shrieking, and looking down he could see the sisters of the pink-haired girl flying his way, each carrying a needle of her own.

He dropped straight past their position and banked hard right, easily losing them. He glanced back over his shoulder to see three tiny dots, vanishing in the distance.

He swooped way down, circling a dozen times before he saw a flash of blue that was only visible if you came at it from just the right angle.

He did one more loop to build momentum, came at the blue door from just the right angle, and he was through.

The blue door slammed shut behind him, and then it was gone from the sky.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR: TO HAVE AND TO HOLD

Dale opened his eyes, and saw a very familiar ceiling.

His bedroom. His own bedroom, in the real world.

He glanced over at his bedside clock. It said 7:30 PM, not long after he had gotten home that night, a thousand fantasies ago.

Had it all been a dream?

He sat up quickly and felt the all-too-familiar weight on his chest, the sway and jiggle. He closed his eyes, not wanting to look down at himself.

He had breasts.

He opened his eyes. He was wearing a silky blue slip that he could remember buying as a gift, five or ten Christmases ago, with a white push-up bra beneath. His breasts were large, but even with ample support they looked kind of saggy, and they were covered with a dozen little freckles. He could feel a slight, soft belly, pooching out over his panties.

He got up and went to the mirror, already knowing who he was going to see. He knew this body well.

He was Erika. He had become his own wife.

He peered at his face, at Erika's face.

It was bizarre to see her again. It would have been bizarre to see any real woman again. He was so used to being surrounded by flawless fantasy girls, and seeing one of them every time he looked in the mirror. Erika had been a real beauty when she was young, but while she was still attractive her looks were starting to fade. She had circles under her eyes, the beginning of crow's feet, a hint of a double chin.

He turned sideways, examining this body, so familiar yet so utterly foreign. There was Erica's big butt. Her plump thighs and jiggly upper arms. Her anxious, tired eyes.

Erika. His wife. Himself.

He walked over to the window, and saw their street outside. Except, it wasn't their street. It was a backdrop. He picked a magazine up off the bedside table, and saw that the pages were blank. He wandered into the kitchen, and saw that the MABEL was missing.

He hurried back into the bedroom to get the phone off the bedside table, but when he got there the phone was missing too.

He heard a sound behind him, the front door opening.

He turned and saw himself walking in. His old, male self.

Dale gasped and took a step back, but then he immediately felt the stirrings, the hunger.

This him, this other him, was the most desirable person he had ever seen. He had to fight the urge to throw his arms around this other Dale, to kiss him wildly.

This other Dale entered the bedroom with a sly, mischievous smile.

Dale sat down on the bed, too disoriented to stand. It was bizarre to see his own smile on somebody else, the skin around the eyes crinkling in that way he used to see when he practiced smiling at himself in the mirror.

"Hey, Dale," the other Dale said.

"What the hell is going on?"

Dale reached up to touch his own throat, startled to hear himself speaking with Erika's voice.

"Please," he said, "Who are you?"

The other Dale sat down beside him on the bed and took his hand. The other Dale smelled so good.

"Do I really have to tell you?"

Dale looked at the other Dale very closely.

"Erika?"

"That's right."

She touched his cheek with her big, strong hand, with *his* hand.

"So," she said, "how have you been, honey?"

Dale struggled for words.

"What happened to me? I was stuck in the Isocortex. I couldn't get out."

She smiled with his lips. His big, kissable lips.

"Yeah. I'm afraid things didn't quite go according to my plans, after I killed you."

Dale stared at her for a long moment, looking for some sign that she was joking.

"After you *killed* me?"

"Yes. I knew about your affairs, and I knew you were planning to leave me for that little slut from the dealership. I couldn't bear to lose you, so my plan was to kill us both and set up a duplicate of our home in the Isocortex where we could live together as avatars forever."

She got up from the bed and walked over to the bedroom window, parting the curtains and looking out at the recreation of their neighborhood.

"So, I plugged you in to the Isocortex that night, and then I blew your brains out. I was only planning to store your consciousness in the Isocortex limbo for a few hours, while I completed your Dale Sasha avatar."

She turned back from the window and held out her hands.

"*This* avatar. This was going to be your body. But then... something went wrong."

She came back to sit on the bed beside Dale and he shrank away from her slightly. She smiled, tucking a lock of his hair behind his right ear. A tender, husbandly gesture.

"You got away from me in the Isocortex, you naughty little thing, and somehow you ended up inside an Alice 9. I'm still not really sure how it happened. I spent days trying to find you, leaving you messages all over the place."

She was quiet for a moment. When she spoke, he could hear just the faintest hint of her old voice, trembling and neurotic.

"My whole life was built around you," she said, "and then, all of a sudden... you were just gone. I wanted to die more than anything, but I knew I couldn't kill myself yet. Not until I found you. I went a little crazy, for a while."

She had a far away look in her eyes.

"One night I missed you so much, I decided to enter the Isocortex and upload my consciousness into your avatar. I thought it would make me feel close to you. I only planned to stay like this for a little while. But then, once I became you..."

She looked down at her hands. At Dale's hands. She smiled.

"It was astonishing. I felt confident, powerful... complete. I wasn't afraid, anymore. It was like I'd finally become the real me."

She stretched, seeming entirely too at ease in Dale's body.

"The next day I took a fistful of my medication, a certain overdose. And as I was dying, I entered the Isocortex and uploaded my consciousness to your avatar. I became you, permanently."

She flexed her bicep, touching it appreciatively with her other hand. Dale worked out regularly, and he had always been proud of his physique. Looking at Erika now, he felt a strange mix of resentment that his wife had hijacked his hard-won muscles, and a tingly excitement in the presence of her strength and power.

"Being you has been so good for me," Erika said. "I have friends in the Isocortex. A career. I even have a couple of girlfriends. I think I'm a better Dale Sasha than you ever were."

Dale looked down at himself, at his fat, freckly breasts and soft little belly.

"But... what about *me*?"

"For a while, I honestly wasn't sure what to do with you. I couldn't just let you stay lost in the Isocortex forever. But of course there could only be one Dale Sasha, and I wasn't about to give up being you."

She reached over to touch his shoulder, her fingertips slowly sliding down along his clavicle, toward his breasts. She leaned forward, whispering in his ear.

"I kept asking myself, why should that asshole Dale get to be Dale, when he betrayed me, and drove me to kill myself?"

She began to run her finger down into Dale's cleavage, slowly and teasingly.

"But then finally, I thought of something really fun. I had already created this soft little Erika body. And I had this perfectly lovely duplicate of our home, to keep her in."

Dale was trembling, his breath coming hard and fast.

"Erika..."

"No," she said. "Not anymore. From now on, *I'm* Dale, and *you're* Erika. Now *you* get to be that weak, wanting little bitch."

She slipped her fingertip beneath his neckline and Dale couldn't resist leaning in to her touch for a moment before he came to his senses and slapped her hand away.

"Erika, this is madness! Come on, change me back into myself! I can't be you!"

She chuckled wickedly and looked him up and down, making him feel naked.

"Oh, you can be. And you are. Which reminds me of a little experiment I've been dying to try."

She took his hand and turned it over, exposing his wrist. She ran her fingernails down the tender white flesh of his wrist, and Dale's eyelashes fluttered as he felt a ticklish sensation that was nearly orgasmic.

He snatched his wrist back and looked at it in horror. Erika's wrists had always been one of her most sensitive erogenous zones.

"No," he said.

"Yes," she said.

Erika touched his chin, gently tilting his head to the side, and leaned in to nibble on his earlobe. If there was anything that got Erika hotter than having her wrists stroked, it was having her earlobes nibbled.

Everything went kind of hazy and Dale made a helpless little sound. The hot breath against his skin, his flesh between her teeth. It was almost too much to bear.

"No," he whimpered. "Not that. Please?"

But Erika just blew in his ear and then kept nibbling.

Dale felt his nipples pop up, his panties getting damp, his face flushing hot. He heard himself making those same sounds that Erika always made when he got her really horny, all of her soft little moans and groans and sighs.

He wasn't just making sounds of pleasure, with Erika's voice. He was making Erika's sounds.

As Erika's tongue flicked Dale's ear he squirmed and gasped, feeling that now-familiar emptiness between his thighs, the yearning to get filled up. The blood was flowing south, his pussy puffing up. Getting wet. Opening.

No. He was not going to get fucked with his own dick. *That wasn't going to happen.*

"Please, Erika..."

She reached behind him, quickly unhooking, pulling loose and then tossing aside his bra. Dale's breasts tumbled free, plump and heavy within his slip, and he shyly crossed his arms over his stiff, pointy nipples.

"Erika! Come on, I'm not..."

She grinned, hooking her finger under one of his slip's straps and sliding it

smoothly down his shoulder. Dale crossed his arms a little more firmly as she slid down his other strap. He was determined not to let her get near his breasts. His nipples were achingly sensitive now, and he knew he was a goner if Erika started to feel him up.

She lowered him to their bed, taking his wrists and gently lifting his hands away from his cleavage. Dale simply whimpered, completely at her mercy.

She tugged his neckline down, exposing his pink, pointy nipples. Dale looked away. He had to say no to this. He *had* to. But...

She touched the tip of her tongue to his nipple and Dale moaned, completely beyond the point of self-control. He wrapped his arms around the back of Erika's head and pulled her close against his breasts, saying without saying, *Yes, more of that.*

Erika began to suck his breasts, moving from one to the other, while Dale screamed with her voice. His pussy was sweltering now, his panties glued to his little thatch of fuzz. He wept, humiliation all stirred up with bliss.

Without thinking, without the power of speech, he weakly patted his pussy, indicating that he wanted to be eaten now, please. Erika giggled, got down between his thighs, peeled his slip back past his ass and swept his panties away in an instant.

Dale spread his legs for her, losing his mind as Erika began to kiss his thighs and flick her tongue against his pussy lips.

He kept trying to summon the will to demand that she swap their bodies back. But the part of his mind that was resisting Erika seemed buried somewhere way down low, so far down that its screams faded to nothing before they could reach the surface. So instead of saying no he just shivered and whined, clamping his thighs around Erika's head while she ate his pussy.

In a thousand fantasies, no man had ever eaten him. The feeling of tongue on his clit was like nothing he'd ever experienced, exquisitely vulnerable and raw. Erika was both relentless and precise, she knew exactly what Dale's new body needed and she could send him into a hysterical, shrieking orgasm with just a few carefully targeted flicks of her tongue.

Something about being eaten made him feel like a woman in a way that getting fucked by a thousand men hadn't. Until now, he had been a man stuck in a woman's body, in a thousand women's bodies, while those bodies got fucked by men. Even if he loved it when men fucked him, deep down he was still a man, being forced to love it.

But being eaten was different. He was spread open, pink, wet and helpless, and begging for more. As he came again, it felt like whatever manhood he had left was slipping away fast, if it wasn't gone already.

He blacked out for a moment, and when he came to Erika was getting up from the bed to unbutton her shirt. Dale watched her, hating how much he loved her muscles, the square cut of her shoulders, her firm, tight pecs.

All of that stuff was supposed to be his. He wasn't supposed to be lying here, getting wet for it.

Erika yanked down her jeans, but before she could get her briefs off Dale scrambled to the edge of the bed and grabbed her bulging cock, working it through the fabric. He wrapped his arms around her waist and pulled her close, leaning in to rub his nose and chin against her cock eagerly, gratefully, savoring Erika's man smell. Cock even *smelled* good, now.

Erika giggled smugly, but Dale ignored her and started to plant soft little kisses on her briefs, all over her shaft and balls. Then he yanked her briefs down, she kicked them off her ankles, and suddenly there was an erect cock in Dale's face, inches from his thirsty lips.

No. He had to stop. He couldn't suck Erika's cock, his *own* cock. He had to stop.

But the next thing Dale knew, Erika's cock was between his lips and he was sucking it greedily, making happy little cocksucker sounds.

Soon Erika was slamming his face with her cock, her balls slapping his chin. Then she slowed and Dale moaned, long and deep, knowing how amazing that vibration would feel on a cock. Dale had this cock for a long time, and Erika wasn't the only one who knew a few tricks.

Erika's cock pulsed and she gasped, holding very still in his mouth. Dale

giggled, knowing she was trying not to come. Just for a moment, he was the one with all of the power. One little nibble, one flick of his tongue, and he'd finish her.

He pulled back slightly and very slowly ran his tongue around the head of her prick. She pulsed again, harder this time, and he tasted Erika's first little trickle of pre-come.

"No," she whispered. "Not yet..."

He wanted to make Erika come now, to make her lose control. He wanted the tiny victory of making her finish before she was ready, despite herself. He wanted to taste her, to swallow her down.

But more, much more, he needed her to fuck him now. He had to get Erika's dick, his own dick, inside himself immediately.

He gave her a few more deep gulps, making sure her erection was at its maximum. Then he finally pulled his lips free from her throbbing cock and wriggled back on the bed, spreading his legs wide and grinning up at her eagerly.

Her cock wasn't quite as big as the fantasy men he'd become accustomed to, but for a real man she was plenty big. Some part of his mind was gratified to see his old cock the way a woman saw it. It made him strangely proud as a man, to turn himself on as a woman.

He remembered that he had a normal pussy now too, not some fantasy super-pussy that was always perfectly ready to get fucked, so he reached down to check his wetness before Erika entered him. He was nice and sloppy down there, no real surprise, so he gave her a nod and reached down between his legs to part his lips for her.

She gave him one last, triumphant grin, and then she slid herself deep inside him.

The moment she entered him, Dale understood everything. He understood Erika's need, her desperation to be attractive to him, her ache to have him for herself forever. He felt it all. He *knew* it all.

At that moment, he fell in love with Dale Sasha.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE: TILL DEATH US DO PART

Erika stood at her closet and sighed. Inside there were all sorts of costumes hanging up. Cheerleader, nurse, French maid.

But what would Dale want? He hadn't come back for a while. (A couple of weeks, a hundred years. It was so hard to tell, when you were on program time.) She wanted to welcome him home with something extra special, but nothing felt quite right.

She took down the French maid costume. She knew how much Dale liked French maids. But would he like the schoolgirl better?

No, the French maid. That would show Dale how eager she was to please him. She would rush to the door when he came home, and she would wave her little feather duster at him and curtsy. Ooh, la la, *monsieur*!

She was so impatient to see him again her hands were trembling, but she tried to take her time getting ready. She wanted to get every detail just right.

She missed the days when she could just be a perfect fantasy woman, magically finding herself in sexy clothes. When you were a real woman, getting dressed up sexy could be a lot of work. Things ripped, you made messes, you spilled sticky stuff on the counter and you kept smearing your lipstick. The mascara clumped in your lashes, or it got in your eyes and burned. Powdering your nose made you cough. There were so many clasps and straps, so much paint to get everywhere.

She dabbed concealer beneath her eyes, rubbed moisturizer into her cheeks, painted her lips six different shades of red. She adjusted her cleavage again. She'd adjusted it so much, her breasts were getting sore.

Finally she was all dressed up, her apron in place, a frilly white maid's hat in her hair. Every seam was straight, every little bow was tied. This was as good as it was going to get.

She went to look at herself in the mirror. She didn't look bad. She was really kind of sexy, still. At least, she sure hoped Dale thought so.

She went back to the bed and sat with her feather duster in her lap. She sighed, scratching behind her ear until the skin was raw.

And then she waited for her man to come home, and love her.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: MAKING ART

The Man Who Became 1000 Bimbos was a lot of fun to write, which is rather remarkable considering that its creation coincided with what I can only hope will be the most frightening few months of my life.

In early 2014, I was diagnosed with cancer and told that it could well be terminal. It came as a complete shock. I'd gone to see the doctor about a nagging little pain, thinking at worst I probably had a hernia. Now I was being told that I had a life-threatening illness.

Suddenly facing my own demise was terrifying, but also confusing. What was I supposed to do with myself, if I only had a few months to live?

It's not unlikely you've asked yourself that question hypothetically, and maybe you've got your own bucket list all ready to go. But when the doctor tells you that you could actually be dead soon, as in really, no-fucking-around, *forever* dead, you'll probably surprise yourself. Some very important things suddenly won't seem that important anymore, and some things you never thought were important will suddenly seem very important indeed.

I'd always wanted to write an Important novel, and it was now or never. But the prospect of imminent death left me in a strange place. I was more motivated to create than I'd ever been, but I was too panicky, sad and angry to be able to come up with clever themes, symbolism and all of that other stuff that seemed so essential to the creation of anything Important.

Finally I said fuck it, and decided to just write for escape. I'd write something fun and twisted and sexy, the kind of trashy, head-trippy, gender-bendy book I've always wanted to read.

And so, *The Man Who Became 1000 Bimbos* happened.

I spent my days seeing doctors, getting endless biopsies and hassling with my insurance. Then by night I'd stagger home and write this freaky little epic about poor Dale Sasha's transformation from jaded hovercar dealership manager to jiggly, sex-crazed, Isocortex pleasure program.

I wasn't trying to create anything Important. I was just enjoying thinking up goofy sci-fi technology, dreaming up new humiliations for Dale, and following where the story took me.

It now looks like I'm likely to survive my cancer. If I really am that lucky, I hope I'll always remember two things I learned while I was writing this book.

The first thing is: fuck Importance. I set out to write a fun, sleazy, erotic sci-fi thriller, and I think I did that. But I also feel like there is a little more going on here. And if there is a "more," it happened accidentally, while I was aiming for less. I'm not sure what all of the themes and symbols in this book are, because I didn't put them there deliberately. They just kind of happened, and we're probably better off for that.

The second thing is: if you are going through hell, make some art. And yes, I'm talking to *you*.

If you are in the middle of a messy divorce, if your cat is dying, if your best friend just got crushed by the last piece of Skylab falling from the sky. Whatever your hurt is, make some art. Even if you are so depressed that you just want to lie around on the floor like some big, sad slug, haul your sad slug butt off the floor and make art.

Draw something, take some pictures, write your memoir, compose stupid songs. *Anything*.

When I was in the middle of endless, painful medical procedures, I could retreat into thinking about what would happen to Dale in the next chapter. When I was waiting by the phone for the doctor to call with potentially life-changing news, I could escape my anxiety by writing a big, gross, sexy sex scene. Every hour I spent in a waiting room became an hour when I could dream up more of *The Man Who Became 1000 Bimbos*.

If you are hurting, make art. It won't make the hurting stop, but it will give you something to focus on that isn't just more hurt. And sometimes, if you're lucky, you can even use the hurt in your art. Usually hurt just feels like stinky garbage piling up all around you, so it's awesome when you can actually dig something out of that garbage, dust it off, and turn it into something useful and good.

Look, I know you weren't expecting to find this kind of stuff at the end of a book like this. But it's here because I love you, and I want you to be happy. From the very depths of my soul, I say: make art. Let the last twitch of your hand leave a mark on the canvas. Let your final breath be a song. Create, escape, leave something of yourself behind. And please, have fun doing it.

Also: jerk off, shamelessly and enthusiastically. Jerk off like a chimp. Jerk off like a champ!

I hope you've enjoyed reading my strange little book as much as I enjoyed writing it. It may not be Important, but it's sure been important to me.

- Mindi Flyth
June 13th, 2014. 3:10 AM PST.