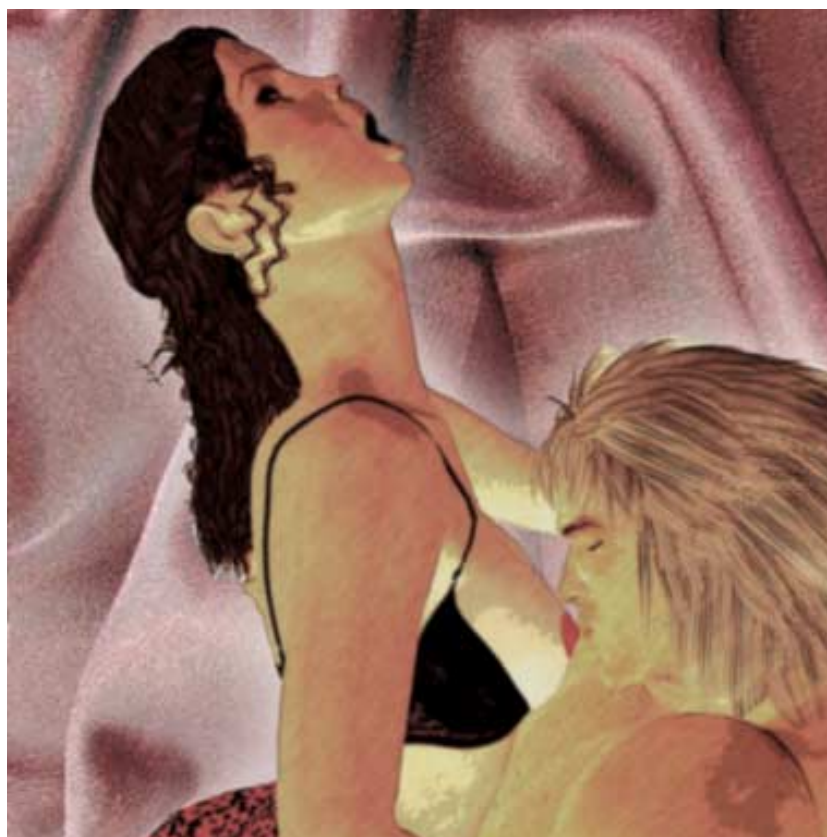




Reluctant Press

Soul Mate

Dee Dee Perri



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHAS

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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Soul Mate

By Dee Dee Perri

Chapter 1

Spending late Friday afternoon at Tuck's was a well-honored tradition at World International Corp. Middle management types began to leak out of the old Crenshaw Building, the current West Coast headquarters of WIC, well before the last hour of the work week to begin a spontaneous celebration marking the end of labor and the beginning of the weekend. At first, these fugitives from WIC came in ones and twos, mere heralds of an impending human migration. Cueing up at the crosswalk, the salarymen waited until the traffic signal approved their advancement before proceeding, in an orderly manner, across Fifth Avenue and into the cavernous mouth of what was reported to be the largest bar in central Los Angeles.

Within minutes, the trickle became a flood: men in suits of gray and black, dark blue and brown, tan and olive, a mass of humanity undistinguished by color except for the ubiquitous neckties that were more often red than yellow, or blue as opposed to green. A large part of this migration leaked away into cars and busses and trains but enough remained to form a substantial herd that filled up the sidewalk and then spilled out onto Fifth Avenue. This drab, colorless male herd took dominion over the wide avenue as they moved with the might of their numbers toward their objective: *Tuck's*.

"Kid I told you we should have left sooner," Jack growled into Chuck's ear. There was standing room only as he clung desperately to his half-foot of bar space and finally signaled successfully for a couple of draft beers.

"Huh?"

“I SAID...” Jack yelled and then stopped as the man to his left suddenly vacated his small patch of turf. Jack, with years of practice, deftly moved into the vacuum and thus was able for the first time that afternoon to settle into a comfortable position. Two frosty mugs of beer slid to a halt in front of him and Chuck as if on cue. “Here’s to another week done.” Jack hoisted his mug in salute but didn’t wait for the younger man’s reply. The beer was cold and wet. “I needed that,” he said, smacking his lips before licking off the foam that had gathered below his bulbous nose.

“Where are the women, huh? The babes?” said Chuck as he twisted to the right, then to the left, looking up and down the long, long bar. Then, turning to look over his shoulder, he stared out across the dark, crowded room. “Nothing but suits.”

Jack didn’t respond as he raised his mug to his lips once again. Same-old same-old, he thought. Every week, Chuck made the identical complaint. Oh, there were women here, a few. Dozens perhaps, but in this sea of males? But at his age — and he could count the months remaining before his well-deserved retirement — a transient sexual liaison, such as Chuck sought, was almost the last thing on his mind. Instead, Jack rolled his eyes and attended to his beer. The rutting urges had mostly slipped away, along with his youth.

Already the crowd had reached its peak. Like a wave rising up, towering above the sand, it could not last. Perhaps many men came here for a single, quick Friday beer, then left for wife and home and weekend pleasures. Perhaps it was the crowd itself, the congested mass that drove them away so quickly. Space that had been so dear five minutes earlier became slightly cheaper by the second.

“THERE!” shouted Chuck above the noise.

“Huh?” responded Jack as he sat down his newly-emptied mug and turned to look.

Chuck nodded and waved his mug high in the air. The signal was received and the reply was instant. “Bill and Doug,” he said as he turned and pushed through the crowd, waving his half-full mug of beer as if to ward off evil spirits. The mug, with its swirling beer threatening to slosh out, did its job as men in suits gave way to the liquid threat. Over his shoulder, Chuck crowed, “They gotta booth, for Christ sake. SEATS!”

~oOo~

Jack sat immobile, silent, isolated in this seething sea of humanity. Why did he come here? Week after week, month after month and year after year: Friday’s it was *always* Tuck’s! And all they ever did here was talk: Of work and women. Of work Jack had enough thank-you-very-much, and as to women, there was a hammering void every bit as empty as this bar was crowded. Truth? Women? It wasn’t about sexual gratification anymore. He was lonely to his very core. “Huh?” he said when he realized that everyone was looking at him.

It was that pompous asshole that had fixed him with his eye. Bill, that is *Mr. William Barlow* now, was hardly more than a kid and yet, like the other youngsters at the table, Doug and Chuck, he'd recently passed Jack on the corporate ladder. In a few more months, these three, like so many before them, would climb up and out of Jack's life. "I said I think its *your* turn to obtain a pitcher of brew, Jackie."

"Oh... Sure Bill, er, Mr. Barlow. I'm on it."

A few minutes later, Jack was weaving through the crowd, inching closer to his goal but not there yet. He couldn't help but find the situation ironic. Trapped in a mass of humanity, he, Jack Swan, was dying of loneliness. A kind of existential void. His career had long ceased to matter but the idea that there was someone extra special out there, *a soul mate* still resonated with him. And here he was, starting the sixth decade of his life and *still nothing!* It was like a promise broken, right? For every garbage can a lid? For every man, there is a woman. God only knew he'd been patient. But now with middle-age wrapping up and old age looming before him, Jack twisted out of the way of a beer mug swung in his direction. The thought formed into a mental cry of frustration mixed with self pity: *I want a soul mate!*

And then it happened. A reflection off the mirror behind the bar, a woman, a vision of pure femininity, the kind of woman that caused Jack's breath to instantly stumble. And, just like Jack, she appeared to be attempting to plow through the mass of males that filled the room. Jack stopped and stared, something he used to do a lot, when he was younger, upon seeing a particularly attractive woman. Curiously, she stopped at the same instant and *returned* his stare. Jack, heart beating wildly, turned to locate her, twisting like a corkscrew in that maddening crowd, only to complete a full circle but, alas, to no avail. She was hidden from direct sight, a doe amongst the towering redwoods. His eyes swung back to the reflection in the mirror and their gazes met yet again! The blood hammered in Jack's ears; hope bloomed in his heart as it hadn't bloomed in decades. She was young, too young for the like's of him and *yet* she boldly held his gaze. No, she seemed to throw it back at him with the same hungry intensity that he felt. No shy wallflower this one. Could he dare to hope? Ridiculous! Some men grew dignified with age but he, Jack Swan, a loser in life, knew he'd only gotten *older*. And at that instant, the crowd stirred in the mindless manner that crowds have and she was again lost from view.

Her image was burned into Jack's consciousness. Dark, possibly Hispanic or Italian or Middle-Eastern. Raven black hair and widely-spaced, warm brown eyes under eye brows nearly as thick as his own. No beauty queen and certainly not a model but there was no question of her earthy feminine charms. This introspection lasted but for a small fraction of a second for the movement of the seething mass which had blocked his view of *her* just as quickly had expelled him from the herd. He slammed into the edge of his goal: the bar.

"You OK?" asked the bartender.

Like a fish out of water, Jack clutched the bar with both hands. His mouth opened and closed repeatedly, his eyes grew wide, then wider still. He heard nothing, saw nothing but the impossible image reflected back at him. *Her* full lips mimicked his every movement. Lush dark eyes, now wild with terror, lashed from side to side only to be drawn back to that impossible reflection. His hand reached up to touch his face and *she*, in perfect synchrony, did so as well.

“I SAID...” the bartender repeated himself, his voice attempting to climb above the noise, “ARE YOU OK, BUDDY?”

The bartender’s efforts at communication were wasted. It was but another sound in a universe that had suddenly grown entirely too complicated, too unknown for Jack as he now held up two improbably smooth, hairless hands before his eyes; the flesh the color of heavily-creamed coffee. The fingers were slender, the nails long and obviously painted — silver. The youthful reflection in the mirror did likewise.

The bartender leaned across the bar. “LIKE I SAID...”

“Huh?” Jack mumbled and looked up, seeing the bartender for the first time. He would have backed away, possibly fled, but the mass of men behind him formed a seething wall.

“What do you want, Mister?” the bartender said in a voice that was set at an *almost* normal volume now that he had Jack’s full attention.

“Want?” A giggle issued forth unexpectedly from between Jack’s now full, moist lips. There was insanity, madness in that sound. He was certain of the physical reality of the breasts that clung to his chest. Of the existence on his frame of skirt and nylons and high heels, there was no doubt. Nor was there any question as to the weight and movement of the hair that now bloomed from his head. “Want?” Jack repeated himself. His eyes were wide, insane. He turned and impulsively dove into the crowd from which he’d been so recently ejected.

“Whatever,” mumbled the bartender as the man disappeared. In a job like this, you met all kinds and *that* had been one of them.

~oOo~

Jack’s progress was a mindless journey without a goal. He had no plan, no purpose other than *escape* from the seething mass of humanity, to be alone to deal with the impossibility of his situation. He was mad, insane, right? But the crowd continued to thwart even this simple request. Bodies swayed apart only to suddenly crash together again. Movement seemed impossible. What had been a sea of ordinary men had become an army of giants, for even in these high heels, he, that is, she, was a small, insignificant creature. The fleshy reality of those breasts became all too evident as an elbow lashed out and crushed one flesh-filled cone flat against Jack’s chest. The pain was as immediate as it was novel. One shoe, of a pair of men’s size twelve, descended, carrying the better part of two hundred pounds down onto Jack’s right foot which was nearly unprotected being

as it was now encased in a woman's open-toed shoe of no substantial mass. The latter attack was, unexpectedly, a reprieve of sorts. Jack recoiled backward, twisting, while throwing out his arms to break his fall; the crowd parted as if Moses had shown up at the edge of the Red Sea.

"Oomph!" exploded Jack as his now-augmented backside took the brunt of the fall. "Phoo!" he gasped, the wind momentarily knocked out of him. He looked up at the sea of faces now staring down at him as if he'd just arrived from the moon. The tight skirt which had appeared with the body, now riding up to his waist, no longer thwarted his movements. He lunged, twisted, then began to crawl to safety. Where bodies had stood their ground, legs yielded grudgingly to Jack's determined head long crawl.

"Jackie?"

"Huh?" Jack twisted his head up, searching for the voice that emanated from above. He was still on his hands and knees. The nylons, ruptured at the point of contact, the knees to be exact, trailed a short raggedy nylon line behind him, while his thick black hair, fallen across his face, blocked his vision. His full, womanly rear end was now wrapped only in the nylon briefs. To put it simply, he was *not* Jack Swan in any sense of the concept. "Is that you Chuck?" he squeaked.

First legs and then a hand appeared in Jack's field of view. "What in the Hell are you doing down there? Hey guys!" Chuck called out as he bent over to help Jack to his feet. "Look at what the cat dragged in."

"So where's the beer, Jackie?" The second voice that floated down from above could only be Bill's.

Jack's struggle to regain his footing was made substantially more difficult by the absence of one shoe. Holding on to Chuck's arm, he balanced on one foot awkwardly for a moment. Then he removed the remaining shoe, a full three-inch stiletto. With an irate flick of his hand, he tossed that feminine article of footwear, that offense against nature and common sense, away where it went didn't matter. Suddenly he was once again on an even keel and in balance with gravity at least, if not anything else.

For Jack, time and space seemed to stand still. Bill, Doug and Chuck were looking at him. Surely they could *see*... "The *beer*, is that all you can say?" he said, alarm bells going off in his transformed head. Where in Hell was their reaction to his obvious transformation? If there had been any question as to the totality of his feminization, it was the absolute lack of any evidence of his external genitals under those tight-fitting panties. He grabbed at, and finally managed to retrieve, his errant skirt from above his waist. He roughly jerked the skirt into place, covering his altered groin. The adjustment itself took considerable twisting and tugging and turning. All the while, his three companions just looked on in what had to be mere idle amusement. Then, abruptly, Bill pushed his rotund figure out of the booth and with a voice filled with annoyance, said, "Same old Jackie. I guess when you need to get something done..." He left that comment hang in the air before disappearing into the crowd.

Jack stood there in a shock almost as great as the one he'd experienced at the bar. "Christ," said Doug. "Sit down before you fall down, Pops."

"Right," murmured Jack as he eased down and then jerked back as his unfamiliar breasts whacked the edge of the table top. Unabashedly, he took the more injured globe and massaged it briskly until the pain subsided. Still no reaction from his table mates. "You notice anything different about me?" There was an unpleasant whine in his voice that suggested just how close he was to losing it.

"No worse than usual," admitted Chuck with a laugh. "You needed to take that suit to the cleaners anyway."

Jack looked at the two of them for some sign — *anything!* Finally he couldn't help it. "Suit? I'm five foot tall, with tits the size of melons and you can't SEE THAT?"

Shock bloomed in their faces. "Man," concluded Doug, "you must have hit your head real hard, Sport."

"Yeah." said Chuck as concern grew and replaced the look of shock on his face.

"You know," began Doug, "there's this lawyer..."

"*Jesus H. Christ!*" exploded Jack as he extracted himself gingerly from the booth bench and staggered to his feet, breasts flailing, the long, thick black hair tumbling across his face once again. "I...I don't *believe* this is happening!"

"Hey, chill out," said Doug who now looked a tad concerned. As Jack staggered away, he called, "Jack...where are you going...? Man, what got into him?" he said, turning back to look at Chuck.

Chuck shrugged and his hands splayed out in a gesture of helplessness, "Not a clue."

~oOo~

The aftermath of the sunset bathed the parking lot in a riot of pinks and purples as Jack picked his way gingerly across the gravel. The nylons, torn at the knees, were now just tatters around his feet as the sharp pieces of stone bit the soles of his feet. From his handbag — now where did *that* come from, anyway? — he pulled out his car key. "Whatever!" he muttered to no one in particular as he pulled open the door and waited for the accumulated heat to escape. Finally, he swung his feminized butt in and... "Holy Shit!" he swore. "This is...ridiculous!" Indeed, he wasn't just a foot shorter, what height he had was now a lot more leg than body. He moved the seat forward to its max, then did likewise to the seat's elevation. "Great!" he muttered darkly. He was looking through the steering wheel, not over it. It was doable, yes, but just.

His initial shock and horror was gradually being replaced by the potential of the whole thing. OK, so he was female. He, ah, *she*, was both young and attractive; that had to be worth a lot, right? He muttered incoherently to himself as he awkwardly navigated his car toward home. For starters none of this was possible.

Forget about the transmutation of his body from male to female or the loss of at least twelve inches in height, or suddenly being twenty-thirty years younger or...*whatever*. His wardrobe, along with his handbag, just blinked into existence... *Right!* And then to add injury to insult, it would seem that absolutely no one except himself was aware of any of these transformations. No one!

The latter fact was sharply reinforced as he pulled into a parking slot at the rear of his apartment building. Mrs. Hobson, the manager's wife, hailed him from her small patio. "Evening, Mr. Swan."

"Evening, Ma'am." He nodded and continued toward the rear door of the building. His confusion only deepened. Gads, even that nosey old biddy hadn't noticed!

"Ah Mr. Swan?"

"Yes?" he said, jerking to a stop and slowly turning to face her. Perhaps she'd noticed something after all!

"Your shoes."

"Ma'am?"

"Where are your shoes?"

"Oh," he shrugged. "I guess I mislaid them somewhere."

"That's seems very... *odd*, Mr. Swan."

"Yes ma'am. It's been an *odd* sort of evening."

~oOo~

"Maybe Egyptian or Iranian," he mused as he stood before the mirror in the bathroom. In the stark lighting, the image was even more *real!* Ah, that was the right word: real. The brief snapshots taken from the mirror in the dim lighting of the bar had been somehow surreal, but this: She was both prettier and yet more ordinary, if that made any sense. More exotic but far from perfection; there were numerous humanizing flaws evident in this harsh light. The skin, nearly perfect in its rich cream coffee tones, had a few small blemishes near the corner of one lip and freckles, nearly invisible under the makeup but there nonetheless, rode along the ridge of high, almost too angular, cheeks and a tiny mole perched just to the right side of the right eye. Those almond-shaped, gorgeous, soul-capturing eyes were surely her best feature. And one could hardly ignore that proud — or should one say that *excessive* — nose. And short! One couldn't forget *short!* Everything had been displaced upward from Jack's point of view.

He cocked his head to the side. "Jewish? Armenian?" Like it mattered! One thick eyebrow arched up, drawing a question to the question; the movement itself, the dramatic arching of the brow flowed effortlessly as if it had been well practiced. Elegant! Imperial! The kind of woman that men came to on their knees. Or at least Jack would have, had he been but given the chance. And yet she was earthy...expressive." Which was to say, sexy. Oh yeah, there was no doubt about it. He found her...sexy.

He struggled out of the short jacket that covered his/her silk blouse and then fingered the tiny buttons holding the blouse closed. Of course he had to do it. If not now, when? Still it felt awkward. He studied her, that is, *his* reflection. Here was definitely someone he could have fallen for big time. Stripping her down naked, touching and manipulating her flesh, would be like an act of rape! He would rather have worshipped her.

Confused, he just stood there, still fingering those tiny buttons that faced the wrong way. And then, as if by accident, one then another and then another button came free. The bra that was exposed to his eye for the first time was delightfully feminine. All white lace but lined in pale, pale pink satin. There was the swell of cleavage, the flesh smooth and utterly inviting in appearance and the unmistakable but subtle odor of powder or perhaps perfume that had escaped. If he still had a prick, it would have been responding by this time. Speaking of which, there was no gush of hot juices flowing between those legs though admittedly a slight tingle was noticeable, just a hint of sexual tension. This was turning out to be a bit more of an emotional experience than he was prepared to deal with at this exact moment. He turned and left the bathroom having accomplished almost nothing.

~oOo~

The rye whiskey was going down like Drano, which was to say that he might never ever drink this crap again. Like everything else, even his taste in booze had suffered a tremendous alteration. He poked those full lips with one of *her* fingernails like a dentist completing a sensitivity test before applying the drill. It was indeed numb. He sat the half-full water glass of booze down with admitted relief. It was now or never! The blouse already lay crumpled on the floor and he'd studied the mechanism by which the bra was held together sufficiently to know that he'd not fail in the effort. The clasp was hidden between the cups. That is, it was in the front. He pushed, pulled, then twisted. So much for his research. He growled and continued to fight the clasp.

"Oh!" he gasped as the bra came apart as if on its own accord and out they tumbled. A pair, of course. Almost twin cones; the right breast was slightly larger than its mate. And nipples: huge and the color of nutmeg. Freed of the bra's support, gravity pulled them down such that the breast "cones" had been transformed into tear drops, on the very edge of sweet perfection, Jack concluded. Experimentally, he cupped one warm, wiggly mass in each hand and drew then up as his fingers flicked across the exposed nipples.

The breasts were heavier than he'd expected and more elastic. The nipples were substantially less sensitive than he thought they would be. That was probably a male myth anyway. No shocking thrill erupted from those secondary "nipple cones" even as they grew slightly more erect and slightly less smooth. Female breasts! Nothing more and nothing less. He stood up to admire them from the mirror on his closet door. As he twisted and turned from side to side, the fleshy tear drops first swayed and then tugged against his chest muscles as the limits of

their movement were reached. The tactile impressions were, ah, charming? They certainly caught his attention.

He giggled. The booze was taking its toll now. His inhibitions were now nearly gone. There was a lot to be said in favor of being young and attractive, not that he'd ever been particularly attractive as a young man. The woman thing, well, that would take some getting used to all right, but why not? Life, his life, had been nothing to remember and now, with old age facing him, there was nothing to look forward to. He grabbed the top of the panties and pulled them down so that they formed a puddle about his ankle. With a slightly drunken kick, he was free of them.

A knot tightened in his gut. Perhaps Freud had been right about castration anxiety in the male. The obvious absence of prick and balls was still a shock in spite of all the mental preparation he'd gone through since his transformation at Tuck's. There was no shortage of hair to be sure. A thick mat of black pubic hair hid from view any evidence of female genitalia. His fingers sought the slit between his legs, only to discover the clitoris that lay above. Unlike the nipples which had been less sensitive than he'd expected, her, er, *his* clit was *extraordinarily* sensitive. The lightest touch was almost too intense. As he pulled his fingers away, in a delayed reaction, a sensual tingle, a sharp, vivid echo, grew, spread out and then became too diffuse to be sustained. Spreading from the clit...nipples wrinkled and elongated...something was happening in his as-yet-unexplored birth canal and then there was only the memory of that *feeling*. No, he was not drunk enough to push this further at the moment.

He staggered and fell back across his bed. His arms spayed out as if he'd been crucified. He closed those gorgeous almond-shaped eyes to shut out the glare of the ceiling light now directly overhead.

He would have fallen asleep, given the booze and the stress of the afternoon and evening just completed but an errant hand worked its way down over the gentle rise of *her* belly and through *her* thick foliage. The exploratory hand slid lightly, ever so lightly, over the ribbon of reactive flesh, then past that to hover over the lips of the opening to the birth canal? Vagina? Pussy? Only the slightest hint of moisture clung to the folds of flesh encountered. A finger from that adventurous, feral hand probed and made entrance — ever so slight of an entrance — *into* his... *whatever!* Jack jerked his hand back. It came away slightly wet and smelling of woman.

“EEEEeeee!” he screamed as he jerked up and curled away from the intruder who had mysteriously appeared in his bedroom. Jack's knees were now tucked in under his chin, his arms crossed over his legs and each of his hands now gripped the smooth, hairless womanized calf of the opposite leg, Jack, rolled into a defensive ball, was cowering against the headboard of his bed. “Whooo, who are...?” he stammered. The creature, for it could hardly be considered human, had the distorted body of a human baby, OK, that was a bit of a stretch. Short, undersized legs and arms encased in fat were attached to an equally chubby and flabby but significantly larger body: “baby-like,” OK? The bald head with infantile features, was, in contrast, oversized. Too big for the body, the monstrous globe was cer-

tainly far too big for the weak, scrawny neck to which it was attached. And the eyes were giant orbs of a watery blue. Throw in a pair of obviously inadequate, yet *apparently* functional wings covered in chicken feathers and... *it was a cherub!* OK, right! A *huge* cherub! About nine — no, make that ten — feet tall and weighing in at an easy quarter-ton except...the creature hovered an inch above the apartment floor and its head was but inches from the bedroom ceiling. Jack's mind spun out of control. "And how did you get in?" he said, blurting out a totally trivial question given the improbable nature of his uninvited giant guest.

White mist formed under the creature, and in a few moments it reclined on what had to be a cloud. A cloud? The oversized chubby face broke into a smile. And the latter wasn't a pretty sight, no sir! A row of triangular-shaped shark's teeth gleamed wickedly, then vanished behind the fat baby lips which had reformed into a less aggressive and more cherub-like smile. "Through the door, of course," it answered Jack's second question, the meaningless one, in a voice that matched its infantile features rather than its ponderous mass.

"Its locked," mewed Jack. "The door, I mean."

The creature turned and looked as if through the wall. Then back came those huge eyes, "Not *that* door," it chirped in childlike tones.

"Oh..." replied Jack in a voice tinier still. "Whatever." After what Jack had been through the last eight hours, even the abrupt appearance of a *cherub* seemed...ah, reasonable.

The creature pulled itself up to sit upon its "cloud" like one might sit on a park bench, its huge head protruding partly *through* the dingy apartment ceiling. Its small, chubby legs dangled just above the worn carpet on the floor as it leaned slightly forward, eyes fixed upon Jack. "I'm here for BIG."

"Huh?"

"You know."

"Right," muttered Jack. "God? That's capital 'G', little 'o' and little 'd'. Like in omniscient, right?"

"Yeah. *Omnipotent, omnipresent* and last but not least, *omniscient*." The cherub laughed, showing those nasty teeth again. "*If* you believe the PR of course. BIG is good, *real* good at PR." The cherub giggled as if he — or was that she — had said something witty.

"Then he's not..."

"*HE?*" The cherub rolled its huge eyes before shaking its head and continuing. "Think about it. If BIG were all those omni-thingies, you think I'd be here cleaning up this mess? Come on, you're not completely stupid, are you mortal?" Jack started to respond to that challenge but the cherub was obviously not done. "As a programmer..."

"Programmer?" blurted out Jack as he continued to uncoil from his protective ball.

“Heaven,” said the cherub. “No knock on BIG, but BIG’s been working on that program for...well, literally forever, you know.”

“There’s no heaven then.”

The cherub looked concerned. The fat baby-like feature folded into a frown. “How did we get on *that* sorry topic anyway?” He/she/it looked concerned and a little confused and then its face brightened. “Oh yes, the reason I’m here: there’s a bug in the main system program, see? I mean it’s, like, obvious. One too many calls to one of a zillion subroutines, ah, somewhere...” Its voice trailed off. “BIG’s got a real weakness for subroutines...probably one of those existential ‘what is the meaning of life’ subs. Anyhow, your bottom is in one temporal-spatial dimension and your head in another. Figuratively speaking, of course.”

Jack nodded his head in apparent agreement but it was more of a reflexive action than anything else.

“So, if you think you’re having a tough time of it, think of poor Jillmmaaan-soqw.”

“Jillmmmmaaaa whatever?”

“Yeah. Sweet kid. A couple of million spatial-temporal dimensions over. Ready to get married, the whole nine yards and then what? Zap, male pattern baldness and, at eighty-two years, in her prime reproductive years, can you believe?”

“It...it hasn’t been all that easy on me either,” Jack interjected in a weak voice.

“Well frankly neither you nor Jillmmaaansoqw are *really* the issue, I mean in the *really* big picture. If that’s all it took, well, bing-bang-boom, you and her would just have never been. See? Anyhow the problem is that these two temporal-spatial continuum are leaking over, ah, interacting you see. Hell! All of reality is at risk.”

“Hell?” echoed Jack.

The cherub rolled his eyes. “Only a figure of speech, kid. The point is, if reality collapses, billions and billions of time lines will converge into a ghastly mess. A regular house of cards it is, *reality* I mean. Er, anyway, where was I?”

“The end of reality?” Jack said.

“Ah yessss,” hissed the cherub. “Thank you. End of *reality*. I can tell you *that* wouldn’t be good for BIG’s self confidence. No sir, not at all good.”

“Self...self-confidence?” sputtered Jack.

The cherub growled, “If BIG lost *confidence*... One quakes at the thought. Are we clear on this? *Nearly* Omnipotent, *nearly* omnipresent and, last but not least, *nearly* omniscient! Anyway, none of this is like, ah, personal, you know. I mean, it’s *not* about *you*. Trust me. A few useless lines of code, your erasure would not evoke even a twitch, a wiggle in the universe, understand.

“It...it matters to me,” whimpered Jack. “I mean my existence matters...” And in a very, very tiny voice he concluded, “...to me.”

“That’s rich, kid. Real rich.” The cherub laughed and those nasty teeth didn’t retract this time.

There was a lot about this creature’s attitude that was rubbing Jack the wrong way. Anger bloomed. His natural fear and trepidation retreated. “If I’m so damned unimportant...” he sputtered as his/her face turned crimson, “why bother telling me?”

“You don’t have to get cranky, mortal,” muttered the huge cherub. “Cause, like...” it stammered, “free will.” The cherub had spat out the phrase “free will” as if it had discovered cat shit on its tongue. The distaste lingered on in its infantile features.

“Huh?”

“You see, even in small programs there occurs some *potential* for uncertainty: instabilities, unexpected outcomes. You following me OK, youngster?” it continued without waiting for Jack’s response, the question was obviously rhetorical. “Like now, of course, though God knows this isn’t a small program. Well, infinite programs created infinite potential for uncertainty.”

“Free will?”

The cherub shuddered and grew even more wan. “Yeah, metaphorically speaking.”

“And...and you *need* my cooperation?”

“Just a tad, a wee bit.”

“Then what I do *does* matter!”

The cherub seemed somehow smaller, less intimidating now, almost...vulnerable. His huge, baby-like hand splayed open, palms up. “I need to run a patch in the program. Make a few changes here and there, OK? You know anything about programming? I didn’t think so,” he continued again without waiting for Jack’s reply. “Anyhow, I don’t expect to solve the problem instantly. I just want to keep the whole thing from going belly-up. A full system reset; now *that* nobody wants. And well, things could get a bit kinky...for a while.”

“And *this* isn’t?” Jack splayed his hands apart as if presenting his obviously female body for inspection.

“Naw, that’s nothing. Just a symptom. Anyhow I can’t *just* erase your code, kid, if I’m to find and fix the bug, see? I mean, if it can happen once, it can happen a zillion times and eventually produce something *really* nasty.”

“Right,” muttered Jack before shaking his head in confusion. “And? I mean, what do you need me to do?”

“You? Oh.” The cherub stopped and looked stunned as if that particular question, *that question* had come completely out of left field. “I...I thought it was obvious: just don’t terminate yourself. You are *mortal*, mortal. Enough said? At this moment, you could bring down the whole system. The end of creation!”

“Jesus! Ah...*excuse the reference*. I mean...*shit...whatever!*” Jack’s face was as pale as milk, not an easy accomplishment considering how swarthy his complexion had become.

The cherub didn’t reply; indeed, it was like it had never been there. Jack was alone. He curled back into that protective ball. His eyes had a distant look. “This just isn’t happening...”

Chapter 2

“Chuck?”

“Hey.” Charles Norcraft blinked his bleary eyes. It was obvious he’d been asleep. As some small amount of consciousness surfaced, he brought his late night guest into focus. “You have any idea of what time it is, Jackie?” His voice was still thick with sleep.

Other than the hall light, the house was dark. “I...I need to talk to someone.”

“Good God!” mumbled Chuck sourly as he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

“You got that right,” whined Jack. “So, can I come in, huh?”

Chuck swore under his breath, “This better be life and death.” He stood aside, letting the obviously agitated man pass.

“I could kill for a cup of coffee. You got makings for coffee, don’t you?” Jack’s eyes pleaded. Then without waiting, he scurried into the kitchen. Had Chuck been able to see Jack as he “really” was, he would have been most pleased at the figure intruding into his kitchen. The loose cotton skirt swirled around coffee-cream thighs. Hair as black as the night flared and then trailed behind and above a trim waist and full hips.

But what Chuck saw was a fat, old, nearly bald coworker who, at well past midnight, had pushed the limits of hospitality to the breaking point. Hell, they weren’t even *really* friends. “Jackie? This have anything to do with what happened at Tuck’s?” Chuck was still trying to understand exactly why Jack was here making coffee, of all things, at this hour in *his* house. From the kitchen, amidst the clatter resulting from Jack’s attempt to brew coffee, the old man’s voice was audible but unintelligible. “Huh?” Chuck said as he entered the kitchen. “I didn’t catch that.” His irritation was plainly written on his face though Jack seemed oblivious to that fact.

“I said...” Jack held a cup of fresh ground coffee over the basket, then poured it in. “If I remember right, you were a Philosophy major in college, correct?”

“Jesus! You came here to talk about that?”

“Oh, trust me, it’s important, Chuck.”

“Sure,” said Chuck as he eased down onto a chair with a groan, dropping both elbows onto the table top. His face was quickly cradled between his hands. “Let’s

say if it isn't important, I'll just kill you and call us even, OK? And don't make me any coffee, I got an early morning golf game."

"If God were a computer programmer, what would constitute 'good'?"

"Huh?" He looked at Jack as if death could come in any second. "That tired old analogy?" He shrugged. "Piece of cake: the program runs. Order, predictability and the programmer is happy, OK? Good equals order."

"Kind of the basis of *Omnipotent*, *omnipresent* and, last but not least, *omniscient*, right?"

"Yeah sure, I guess."

"And evil?"

"Come on, Jack."

"Play along with me, OK? Evil would be..."

"The program doesn't run as expected...unexpected outcomes, unpredictability, chaos. Where are we going with this?"

Jack's face carried a serious expression. "Then I'm the very essence of evil."

"Jesus!" swore Chuck as he slammed his fist down on the kitchen table and then jerked up out of his chair. "Why don't you drink your coffee and then just...just GO." He turned as if to leave.

"Chuck, I was visited by God...well, an agent of God. A cherub to be exact."

Chuck stopped in his tracks and slowly turned. "So, old man, you want me to take you to the hospital, huh?" His eyes were big. He was fully awake now. "I...I think Gateway has an emergency psyche facility in Silver Lake. I have an Uncle who once worked at County and he said..."

"Damn it, Chuck, I'm not crazy!"

Chuck scratched the back of his neck for a moment. "Looks like a duck, sounds like a duck..."

"Will you listen, huh? It all started back at Tuck's this afternoon."

~oOo~

"That's quite a yarn," said Chuck while suppressing a yawn. He looked like death warmed over. Red rimmed eyes swept back to Jack's expectant face. "Let's see if I got it straight: You're now a sexy babe or rather you have the body of a sexy babe, ah, from another spatial dimension." He watched Jack's head jerk with approval. "OK, but nobody but *you* can see her...that is you as *her*."

"The cherub could," added Jack hopefully.

"Ri-i-i-ght!" agreed Chuck sarcastically. Then he chased an imaginary fly away from his face with a wave of his hand. It was as if he'd just chased away both the invisible babe and the huge cherub with the scary shark-like teeth with that simple motion. "The idea of God as a programmer, OK? At best, its a trivial

metaphor. The multiple temporal-spatial dimensions, those I can buy, but God as a programmer? Naw, too simplistic. Stupid, really.”

Jack blanched. It wasn't just the words that Chuck uttered, it was Chuck's demeanor that had grown increasingly more strident with each passing second. The clock over the stove now said one-twenty. It was time to leave. Indeed, it was well past time to leave. “Yeah. I guess. I mean, I really appreciate you, ah, taking the time...I mean at this hour...” Jack coiled, ready to get up from the kitchen table.

“One thing does bother me though, Jack.”

“Yeah?” Jack eased back down and crossed his arms. His breasts, still a novel concept, felt cold. He pulled his arms in tighter, covering them. The warmth he found comforting. “What?”

Chuck leaned back on his chair, balancing himself on the back two legs precariously, his chin nearly resting on his chest while he studied Jack's face. He pursed his lips before speaking. “Why me?”

“Huh?”

Chuck flung out a hand, palm open, in a casual wave toward Jack. “I mean, ever since you got here, I've had this *feeling*, you know?” His voice darkened further but he stammered to a halt and then finally finished. “Like you have some *other* reason to be here.”

Chuck's vague comment about another reason for being there hit Jack right between the eyes. It was obvious in that instant and yet *her desire* had been totally invisible to Jack just the moment before. The feeling of pleasant tension was now concentrated between Jack's legs. A kind of tingly anticipation that had grown as whiffs of man scent wafted across the table. The big, strong hand, still hanging in midair, seemed to hold promises that had never been obvious to Jack prior to that shocking microsecond. TRUTH? A buzz ran up and down Jack's spine as he realized that “old Chuck” had become miraculously *attractive*. He blushed as his heart skipped a beat.

“You came in here swishing like an old queen,” he groaned. “I guess I'm not completely surprised. I mean I always thought you *might* be a Goddamned queer, you know, never married and all that but at least safely in the Goddamned-closet but...the nerve of it! Why in fucking hell did you come-on to *me*? HERE! NOW!” He ended in a yell.

“HUH!” Jack jerked to his feet, startled as Chuck's chair slammed back on to all four legs. But he was too late to completely avoid the blow that Chuck had swung at his jaw. The glancing blow only energized the panic that had already bloomed. As Jack fled into the night, he heard Chuck cursing. Apparently, he'd chosen to end his attack at the front door. Thank God!

A single word flared harshly into the cold night air out of Chuck's mouth: “FAGGOT!”



It was already Monday morning. The weekend had passed like a rock...a rock falling painfully on Jack's foot. Both Saturday and Sunday had been filled with confusion in every aspect of his existence. The invisible yet unavoidably material transformation of his body into the lush creature, Jillmmmm something (he couldn't remember exactly how the cherub had pronounced that alien name) had altered his mannerisms and that was a physical fact that had also been obvious to Chuck. The wider hips had shifted the angle of the joining of his legs, the redistributed mass of his butt and hips and thighs, in particular, altered his carriage. *She* walked with the full grace of a mature, well-endowed woman. *He*, however, with a body apparently male, wiggled and swayed in a manner that seemed pretentiously feminine, an affected, unnatural sway that must surely be manufactured. A queen indeed!

Naturally the facts of this appearance had to be calculated and were not directly experienced by Jack. Jack now saw and felt and knew only his young feminine soma. The ridiculousness of his mannerisms were entirely invisible, masked, as it were, in the very appropriateness of the movement to the body he actually experienced. And, of course, from the long, thick hair that created its own demands to the heavy globes that tugged insistently upon a more slender, less muscular chest, the redistribution of mass was not limited to his carriage. Arms held relaxed at his side resulted in his elbows tucked in rather than out and, while walking, the effect was even more dramatic, for the inward tuck of those elbow resulted in a slightly outward facing of his hands. On *him*, it was just another feminine affectation attached to an ugly old man.

Perhaps worst however were the psychological changes. The latter were dynamic, a continuing multidimensional process. That rude realization that he'd found Chuck attractive was no longer an isolated instant. Men, especially young, physically fit men, triggered feeling of a decidedly sexual nature. Sexual, yes, but *not* like the sexual urges women had triggered in Jack when he was young. His/her reactions were far more complex than those. For one thing, it wasn't just the visual impact of the body. Oh no. Attractive men moved with...confidence? They were strong yet potentially gentle? Not fully formed yet, these feminine dimensions seemed to be still unfolding and continued to be unexpected. It was very unsettling.

No, the weekend had decidedly not been kind to Jack as he stood there looking into his closet. He hesitated before his dark blue, nearly-new suit. It had cost him dearly and for all that, he had no desire to destroy it as he had the other items he'd touched. The plain white cotton T-shirt and jockey shorts he removed from the drawer only moments before had warped into a lacy half-cupped bra and matching panties at his touch. It was odd, but all the clothes he'd worn over the weekend had done the same thing. The problem was, once touched, they'd remained transformed. Slacks turned into skirts, socks into nylons. Eventually he'd have nothing left to wear and then what? Money didn't grow on trees, at least not for old men trapped near the bottom of the corporate structure.

His hand was still frozen in mid-reach as he flashed back to yesterday morning when he'd gone out to get the morning paper. He'd put on the same clothing he'd worn the night before. A short, tight denim skirt, all that remained of a pair of blue jeans, and a knit tank top that had once been a loose-fitting sweater. The look on his landlady's face! Oh, it was obvious what she'd seen: him, old man Swan, in women's clothing! He should of known, of course. The skirt and top had been almost impossible to put on, as if they had shrunk. Imagine if that had happened at work! All those years at WIC and *thisclose* to a comfortable retirement. He shuddered at the image. His hand changed course and selected an old brown suit. This one he wouldn't miss.

The material remained both wool and brown but that was all that remained recognizable for it was no longer a suit at all. It had become a kind of very proper and prim dress more appropriate for a young, virgin school teacher than a businessman attending a high-pressure meeting where a career, already tarnished, could be utterly destroyed. He pulled it toward his feminine body. As with the other garments, it looked like it would fit *her* perfectly. He held the dress to his neck. It fell away. The hem, he saw, would hang well below his knees. "*Whatever!*" he muttered as he tossed it to the bed and turned toward the bathroom.

~oOo~

"**EEEEeeee!**" Jack screamed, banging his head on the shower head, then falling in a heap. The towel, which he'd wrapped around his long thick black hair, gave way and in a moment, those gorgeous tresses began to do what they did so well: soak up a ton of water. Jack pulled himself up sputtering, groping for the valve and then, with a thunk, the water was off. The only sound of running water now was that leaking from the tangled mass of hair that clung to his back and chest. As he pulled the heavy black mat away from his eyes, he growled, "I hate it when you do that!" He made a clawing motion with an outstretched hand. "Can ya grab that towel for me?"

The cherub shrugged, then tossed the requested towel before easing its extensive bulk down on to the toilet seat; the fixture groaned but did not shatter. The cherub watched with a detached look as Jack began to dry off. While Jack was bent from the waist toweling off water from his smooth hairless legs, the long tangle of his hair hanging straight down drooling water, the cherub spoke. "It's done."

"Huh?" Jack jackknifed to the vertical, his heavy, wet hair lashed the shower stall door before yielding to gravity and falling in a tangled mass down Jack's slim back. "What do you mean *done*? Look at me, for Pete's sake!"

"No it's *done*. Trust me. Creation is safe." The cherub shrugged and then nodded toward Jack's transformed body. "*That* was never the issue."

"Maybe not to YOU..." hissed Jack as he began to roughly towel down that rebellious mass of heavy, wet hair.

"But it was not a perfect solution."

“You can say that again,” muttered Jack as he squeezed and pulled at those tresses. The towel had reached the point of saturation. He tossed it down and turned, looking for a dry one.

“Kid, kid. Like I said, it was never about *you*.” The cherub floated up and then *through* the bathroom wall, leaving Jack to finish his toilette.

~oOo~

“You’re still here!” exclaimed Jack when he finally emerged from the bathroom. He walked gingerly around the cherub floating in midair and picked up what had once been a pair of jockey shorts and which were now a pair of panties, now too small to wear comfortably. He threw the lacy underwear down in disgust. If he didn’t put them on immediately, they simply become too small for his invisible but physical male body. Scratch one brown suit, he realized. “At least you could fix *that!*” he growled as he pulled out another pair of jockey shorts and pulled them up. These fit, of course, even as they turned a bright nylon red and tightened around Jack’s generous behind. “Another couple of days and I’ll be forced to go around buck naked.”

The naked cherub shrugged. It was obvious that clothing was not a significant issue to that entity. “The interactions between dimensions, the leaking over if you will, is fixed.”

“Great,” muttered Jack but there was no sincerity in his voice.

“So, now all I have to do is locate the bug now isolated in this program loop. Unfortunately, I’ll be trapped here in this mundane spatial-temporal dimension until...”

“You mean, I’ll continue to have the pleasure of your company.”

It was the cherub’s turn to groan. A most decidedly self-pitying sound. “Yeah. Even it takes forever. BIG wants it fixed and you’re the only lead I have.” He rolled his eyes. “Trust me kid, it’s going to be harder on me than you. BIG is a perfectionist!”

Jack watched his last T-shirt transform into a bra. This one had the clasp in the back. He was studying how he was going to manage *that* particular challenge when the fat angel interrupted his thoughts with an outburst.

“Yesss,” hissed the cherub in delight. “That’s IT!”

“Huh?”

“Depressed, unhappy. Mortals are, by definition, miserable creatures, right Jack?”

“Ah, not really. I mean, not *all* the time.”

The cherub pointed a pudgy finger in Jack’s direction. “But Friday? Sometime say just before *it* happened?”

“You mean, what was my frame of mind? Yeah, I guess I was a little down. Point?”

“About what?”

Jack blushed. “That’s...personal.”

“I knew it!” clucked the angel, delighted with itself. It looked expectantly. “Come on kid, the sooner we solve this problem, the sooner I can... I mean you can get on with life, right?”

“I’m not completely stupid,” growled Jack.

“What’s that supposed to mean, kid?”

“Like if I help you, you’ll just leave.”

“So?”

“What I mean...” stammered Jack, “how do I know you’ll fix things up for me? When you’re done.”

“Point made, mortal. OK, to show you I’m on the up and up...” The cherub let out a long sigh as he pulled out what could have been a Palm Pilot, hit a few keys. “You want your old body. There!”

“There what?” Jack looked shocked. His body was morphing, extending up and out as old male muscle and fat mass replaced the softer young woman flesh. The heavy drag of wet hair vanished as the male pattern baldness reasserted itself. “You mean you could have just fixed things with a mere poke at that?” He pointed in the direction of the machine which had already disappeared and then grabbed the foot board of the bed in the next instant as his center of gravity shifted upward. A familiar pair of balls bloomed in the panties as a penis — *his penis* — rapidly formed from the female flesh of the clitoris, then fought against the nylon prison surrounding it.

The cherub, with a dismissive wave of his hand, said, “Can we get back to business?”

Wide-eyed, Jack gaped. “S...S...Sure.” The breasts collapsed, sagged pendulous, then retreated as brown hair began to poke out of Jack’s flesh. The latter was in the process of bleaching to a paler white.

“Your state of mind just before the *event*.”

Jack remained speechless, breathless, as the metamorphosis drew to a close. “Ah...” he muttered as he stared at the hand he held in front of his face. The hairs growing on his knuckles were familiar. The feeling of both loss and relief competed for his attention. “Sorry, what was that?” he said. The existence of the cherub had, for a few moments, fallen off the table of Jack’s awareness. “This is a lot...better,” Jack concluded as he pulled the panties down around his knees and scratched as his balls...*his balls!*

“Are you done groping yourself, kid? Listen to me. It’s *important*.”

“Uh huh. Yeah.” He turned and checked out his backside to be sure this was no partial fix. He felt relieved but also pissed. There was no doubt in Jack’s mind

now that the events of the weekend could have been avoided. “OK. Yeah, I was feeling, you know, a little down, I guess.” He looked at the fat angel but the creature just stared; its expectant expression was growing sour. “OK, you’re going to laugh.” Still no response. “I was ... *lonely*.”

“What? Lonely? There were hundreds of mortals at that drinking establishment.”

“Yeah, but I mean my whole life...”

“Go on,” the angel said now with some renewed excitement.

“No one special. I mean...”

“Like...”

“You know.”

“Sorry kid, hormones and sexual reproduction aren’t my thing.”

“That *special someone* that will make your life, er, *my* life complete.”

“Hmm. So, let me get this straight. You were sexually frustrated...blocked reproductive drives and...” The cherub’s tone was superior and all-knowing.

Jack groaned. It was obvious that the angel knew nothing about human nature. It wasn’t about sex, it was the absence of *love*. “Whatever.”

~oOo~

Over the brief weekend, Jack had almost forgotten just how old and ugly he’d become in the last decade or so. His eyes were mere slits as his eye lids drooped thicker and heavier with each passing year. There were at least three other things that continued to grow over the course of one’s life, he mused, as he examined his massively thick eyebrows, his now bulbous nose and his hairy, elephantine ears. And why hair on the ears for Pete’s sake? Maybe to compensate for the lack of hair on top of the head?

Youth was wasted on the young, realized Jack as he took the stairs rather than chance meeting Chuck on the elevator. His feet hurt, his knees hurt and he was gasping for breath by the second flight of stairs. His heart hammered from the effort as he pushed open the door that lead into the main hallway on the third floor. There was one excellent compensation for this avenue of approach, aside from avoiding Chuck that is. He’d pass by Bill’s personal secretary and that was some serious compensation. He was sure those tits couldn’t be natural but, well, the view was still extraordinary.

“Sally. My, you look positively radiant this morning,” He wheezed and stared down upon a shelf of woman flesh. It was times like this that the old male rutting urge could still be tickled into life. And her office, a tiny indentation cut from the main hallway, was delightfully far from the elevator. A few moments spent here would ensure his avoidance of Chuck, at least for the morning.