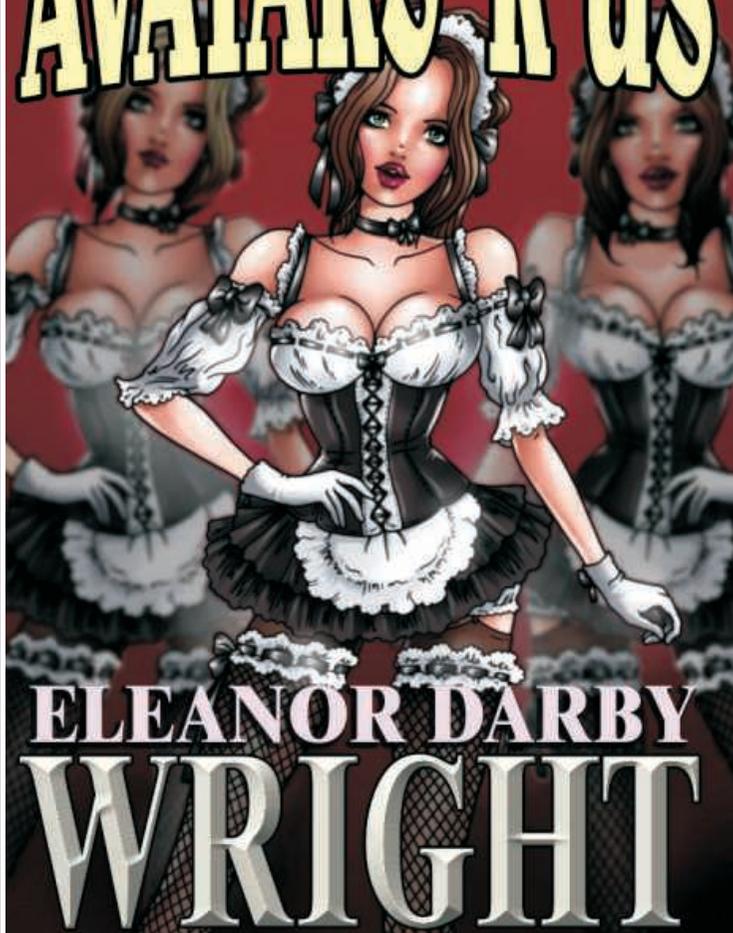


AVATARS 'R US



ELEANOR DARBY
WRIGHT

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AVATARS 'R US

by Eleanor Darby Wright

"No, I am not doing an avatar story," I, Mike Douglas, said angrily. My nose flared like my well-known namesake as I repeated it to Brandy Reid for the seventh or eighth time.

"Everyone is doing them," said my agent. "I can place stories anywhere with an avatar theme. You said you needed the money."

I scowled. "In a year's time, no-one will care any more," I said in exasperation. "The market will be saturated. In fact, it already is. It's just a fad, Brandy. The gamers have taken over. Avartech is swearing that they can give you the actual experience of being an alien on an alien world. Read all about it in *Science Futures!*"

I tossed the magazine across my kitchen table to Brandy. She picked it up and began to read the article on avatars with total absorption, I noticed.

"That one's kookier than anything else," I went on. "On the next page, you'll see that they put you in a tanning chamber." Brandy looked up sharply as I said that. Her eyes flashed blue as she stared at me, eyes like her dad's, I thought. "Well, it looks like it to me! You have to lie down with a sedative or something in you and they run these tapes at you while you're blinkered and out of it. Sensory deprivation is what it is. Dreams are what they're really selling. Very expensive dreams."

"I wonder if they can really do this," said Brandy slowly. She looked very thoughtful then and suddenly grinned. "You know, Mike," she said as I felt my hackles rising. I knew that grin of old and it always got me into trouble in some way.

"If you don't want to actually write an avatar story," Brandy said to me. "Why don't you write an exposé of this new avatar industry? It would probably sell as well as a puff piece anyway."

I looked at the pretty woman, her dark hair so beautiful and shiny as sat there, cocking her head to one side and trying to charm me with her lovely blue eyes. Brandy's father had been my first agent and editor. It had been a strong relationship. Jack Reid had guided me through my first novels to my glorious third. He had taught me how to write excerpts for magazines and had found projects for me to write about that supplemented the meager returns that I got from my first novel-writing.

"Most young novelists have to have second jobs," Jack had counselled me. "This will be yours. You're a

prolific writer, Mike, so write. I'll set up subjects, publications, and editors for you. You just write."

I had been successful as Jack got me to write under different pen names and in different styles. I had had the satisfaction of arguing with myself in different political magazines. Then, *A Moment in Time: Atlantis*, my glorious third, as Jack called it, had caught on in all kinds of markets and Jack had said that he could now retire on the proceeds of my work, most of it from the film retainer I was paid, his retirement secure.

Brandy had graduated from university, all bubbly and enthusiastic. I agreed that she could be my agent, rightly reckoning that she would maintain all her father's contacts. Such an excited, attractive young woman was bound then to get her foot in the door, perhaps of places that hadn't been interested in Michael R. Douglas's work before. And, if that didn't work out, there was always the new, untitled novel that I had almost finished that Paradise Press was panting for.

"Would you come with me and we can investigate this?" asked Brandy eagerly. "I'd love to try out this experience. Do you think it will really work as they say that it will?"

"Not a chance," I laughed.

Brandy looked very disappointed. "Well," she said, wrinkling her pretty nose at me. "It might give you some good material to write about."

Wow, what a rush, I thought to myself as I felt the leaves on my face and the hot sun beating down on me. I could actually feel the mud between my toes as I was

squelching forward after the hulking, half-naked humanoid in front of me.

I looked down to see if I had big, flat feet like the guy in front of me. I shouldn't have. What the f...? A flare of panic almost laid me on the floor of the forest in all the muck and grime. A mass of hair moved forward with me, almost covering my neck and face, as I looked down at the two protruding mounds on my chest. Then, the edge of the dress, I was wearing a dress (!), swirled forward about me, caressing my bare, hairless legs. I think I shrieked then, the sound emanating from me in some incredible high range that I knew that I had never used before.

Another man, a very strange looking man, daubed with green mud, appeared on the sort of trail we were following. "She's coming round now," the older man said then. "If she squeals like that again, Sebo, you'll have to gag her or use this on her." His hand made a huge fist then and he made a striking gesture before gliding back into the foliage and disappearing.

The tall, black-haired humanoid turned back to me and jerked on the rope that was connected to the bonds that tied my wrists together. I called him a humanoid because of his pointed ears and fanged teeth, his dark hair hanging in a braid down his back. He was daubed in yellow and green paint as well.

I thought you were supposed to have a tail, came into my mind, along with a hysterical laugh. I might have said it aloud as Sebo put a massive hand over my mouth and smiled at me.

I felt his rough hand touching me. I couldn't believe it. I almost jumped out of the dress that held the top of me so loosely. I could feel my skin and the heat and the wind. I could feel my long hair bobbing at my neck. I

could feel my breasts bouncing in front of me, completely unrestrained.

“No!” I screamed against the hand that held me and the man took it away from my mouth in alarm. I tasted some kind of spice, cinnamon and nutty, and then I was jerked forward on the rope. Suddenly, the big monster was pressing his face against mine and I realized that he was kissing me.

I recoiled in shock but the big man pulled on the rope. I was crushed against him, his hand caressing my breast as if I was truly a woman! I tried to push him away as he kissed me and wrestled with me as I began to kick, jerking my head away from his salty kisses. His tongue was forked as it slid over my lips and into my mouth.

I was screaming at him to get off me as I was dumped on the ground, the dress swirling this way and that about me, feeling so light and airy. Several men, just like the first I had seen, came silently out of the woods around us. They all had weapons in their hands and I felt terribly afraid then.

“Still want a wife from Ashen’s clan?” asked one man. “I told you that the quinna wouldn’t hold her all the way back to our tree. Their warriors will hear her if she continues to howl like that.”

“Ashen women always have had such pretty voices,” laughed another younger, slimmer, pointy-eared man.

“This isn’t me,” I gasped to these strange apparitions. I could smell them! They were rank and they wore cloths that didn’t cover all of their male appendages. Looking at me and following where my astonished eyes were looking, one of them eased out a most

impressive manhood. He began to play with himself until Sebo saw him and knocked him to the ground while the others howled with laughter.

"I didn't sign up for this, whatever this is! I'm not a woman!" I screamed at the air.

"You hear that, Sebo," said the third man, in a mocking tone. "Are you sure you want a wife who says that she isn't a woman?"

"I'm ..." not, I wanted to say, but I could only gurgle as a round ball was forced into my mouth and a dirty rag that smelled of sweat, horrible, dirty sweat was tied around my face. I struggled and the other men helped Sebo to gag me, fondling my legs and my breasts as they did it, making all kinds of weird, womanish feelings arise in me. My voice disappeared as I was hauled to my feet. No, I didn't have big feet like Sebo. I had small, delicate feet, women's feet, and my toenails were painted a gleaming red.

I tried to kick the man in front of me. I tried to scream the safe word that I had learned. A soft, dry voice in my mind said, "This is how you end the experience, Mr Douglas." Yes, that was me! That was me! I was Mike Douglas! I shuddered and felt the dress around me sway against my legs as I was led down the pathway. The breasts on my chest bobbed again. I couldn't walk properly unless I swung my rear. One of the men put his hands on me there and caressed my tush, making me squeak in terror until Sebo turned and booted the youngster away from me.

What was wrong with me? I actually did think, no, I felt, that I was here in this place, with mud on my feet and earrings, yes that it what was hurting my ears, dancing at my neck. I was some kind of native woman. A woman! What kind of perverted dream was this

Avartech inflicting on me? Was this because I hadn't listened well enough? My mouth hurt, really hurt, as I gargled and tried to say the safe word that would end this freaking, frightening experience. Gods in heaven, whatever kind of avatar existence was this? It seemed so horribly real and why was I a woman?

Sebo threw me over his shoulder, when I couldn't keep up. I almost fell off him, so sweaty and odorous was he. I felt him, his skin against mine, real skin. I felt my hair falling down all over my neck and face and I felt a necklace as well, hanging down from my neck.

"She stinks nearly as badly as you, Sebo," said one of the men as we came out of the swampy woods and I was set on my feet to walk on solid ground near to a river. I didn't saunter as they wanted me to. The one who had pressed on my tush began doing it again, making me sway like a woman in high heels. Any time I didn't do it, my dress was lifted and, as I tried to scamper away, my panties, yes, I was in panties of some sort, my panties were grabbed and pulled tightly against me.

I couldn't scream then as I realized how tightly I was being pulled in the panties. They hardly cut into me because I didn't have a penis any more. There was nothing male about me at all. You said that I would enjoy this, I yelled silently to my facilitators. Would I soon be giving them a piece of my mind or what?! After all, sooner or later, these aliens would take the gag from me and I would shout out 'Brandy' at the top of my voice.

The old, cultured man had said to me, "Say your code word out loud and the program will fade all around you. Some people find that the most disappointing part of the experience, the coming back. You

should try, Mr Douglas, to stay under for as long as you can and let us awaken you. We will know when you are sleeping and we can slide you out of your experience easily. Well, anyway, enjoy yourself!"

This is not enjoying myself! I thundered at the Avartech 'facilitator', who had so unctuously told me to enjoy myself. I hadn't believed a word that he had said and yet, here it was, I was in a different world! This wasn't anything that I had wanted to construct. I certainly hadn't wanted to put myself in a woman's body!

There was a waterfall and a pool at the side of the path. I was cleaned by the simple expedient of being thrown into the pool. I was sure I would drown. My captor jumped in beside me, holding up my head. He was grinning as he wiped me all over with different leaves as I tried, with my hands still tied, to keep him away. My dress was soaked and Sebo got rid of the ripe-smelling thing by ripping it off me. I clutched at the breasts that were suddenly exposed, trying to cover them as the others laughed from the sides of the waterfall pool.

Then, Sebo did something even worse. He ripped off the panties from around me and my hands had to come down. That allowed him to start kissing me again as he put my hands onto his aroused manhood. I think I should call it that. It was huge and I could feel it! The skin was so soft and it was pulsing in my hands. Horrified, I pulled my hands away. Sebo grinned as he put his hand then onto my vagina and tickled me.

I convulsed at the feeling that leapt through me and tried to hit the big man. He must be enormous because I was a big man, when I am a man, as well, but, beside him, I was a little woman. He picked me up, kicking

and naked, and stood me on a rock, stepping back and laughing at me with his friends. I got a glimpse in the water of what I looked like, what they were laughing at.

Oh, frick, I wanted to scream again! I didn't know what to cover up at all. I looked like a woman of his humanoid race. I had pointed ears and bright red hair where Sebo's was black as his friends had been. I had a body that I would have admired on a woman, wide hips, narrow waist and breasts, big enough to shake and wobble as I was carried by Sebo as if I was a piece of furniture. My face seemed thinner and softer than his, as well, while my eyebrows were definitely slimmer and feminine.

Just using that word about myself made me shudder. Sebo saw the gesture and carried me back, my naked skin sliding over his, smelling of the leaves he had used on me. He reached into a pack he had laid on the side of the path.

Sebo pulled a white, womanly dress from the pack, decorated around the hem with embroidered flowers. He slid it over my head and then untied me enough to get it forcefully onto me, as I resisted, feeling it settle about my thighs and legs so softly as my hands were retied again.

"Your bridal dress," Sebo said to me with a grin, pulling me against him, kissing my gagged mouth very softly, gently, which was much worse than the forceful kisses he had taken from me before. "Tonight, at campfire, you will be my wife and Ashen will never get you back, sweet Shanalla."

I couldn't speak but I shook my head, my wet hair plastered to my face. Sebo laughed again as he picked me up to put me over his shoulder, lifting my dress,

yes it felt so like one, kissing me then where I had no panties to protect me. No man should kiss me there, I screamed silently, a hoarse, whistling breathing all that I could produce. It wasn't right, even if I was a woman. It wasn't right, as I had nothing there to stop him. And when he took the clitoris, yes, it must be that in his mouth and his tongue was slightly forked, Sebo raised such weird feelings in me, panic leading the way.

I did feel as if Sebo was kissing a phantom penis. I tried to wriggle myself away from his tongue that was making my insides turn cartwheels at the sensations I felt, as a man pleased me, so to speak, as he would have pleased any woman.

"Stop that," said the older man, materializing so silently from out of the bushes then. "She is your wife, Sebo, and not a slave. She has rights and does not have to take any man in any way he pleases."

"But we took her from Ashen," said Sebo then, in a deep, baritone voice.

"They allowed us to," said the older man. "Just as when we get back to the camp, Josilla will have been taken from us by the Carishee. When next we see my daughter, she will be a mother and a priestess of another clan. Just as Shanalla will be your wife, Sebo, and will renew our powers with the new blood she will gift to her children."

Me? The mother of a whole clan of these humanoid barbarians? I didn't care then about the fear that I was showing to everyone. All I could think was, Get me out of here! Get me out of here! Brandy, get me out of here!

But nothing happened as I learned to swing my tush as I walked down the riverbank to where there was a little encampment by the side of the river.

“Oh, Sebo,” said this tall, red-haired woman, who looked like me. “Why do you have your wife gagged? Isn’t she the one you selected to remove from the Ashen tree? You said that she was very pretty.” She fingered my hair then and grimaced.

“She screamed so loudly,” said one of the men who had emerged from the bushes beside us. “Even when Sebo stopped that, as Maker made him, she moved like a bushbear through the undergrowth. You must have heard her over here. We had quite a time getting her to move like a woman should.”

The woman snorted. “And you, Mabo, have had so much experience with women, that you know how a woman moves through the bush.”

“He has never seen me,” said a young, red-haired woman who came and stood by the older one. She smiled at the now mightily confused Mabo, who was looking down at the forest floor. I think he was flushing but it is hard to tell when a young man has painted his face.

“We will take her now and prepare her,” said the older woman, staying to argue and yell at the young man, who, she said, had been irresponsibly out on a raid for a new woman while the home tree had itself been raided.

The young woman flipped up my dress then. “You’re not even wearing panties!” she cried at me. “What kind of woman did the Ashen sell us?”

I was becoming more bewildered by the moment as I was surrounded then by girls, girls of all ages, even some older than me. I had my dress removed and everyone seemed to want to touch me. It was the most unnerving experience of my life.

“Why can’t we release her?” asked one of the girls.

“Because she will run off for sure,” said the tall, red-haired girl, Masulla, who had bantered with the young man, Mabo, outside the tall, leafy hut I was in. Oh, so many, beautiful girls, and all with red hair.

I was to learn that it was a dye that girls wore in their hair, “because it is summer”, and that was all the explanation I was ever to receive.

A bath was prepared for me, a warm bath, a scented bath, and I had a hundred handmaidens, or so it seemed, who assisted me in getting out of the dress Sebo had put me in. There I was, completely naked, shivering in distress at it all, in front of all these girls who were washing my hair, scenting my body, painting my fingernails and toenails, and working on my face with brushes and sponges.

Yes, they seemed to see nothing wrong about washing my most intimate parts which made me writhe in the humiliation I was enduring. It only made the young girls laugh, however, and caress me even more, my breasts wobbling in their hands until I was thankfully draped in a drying cloth. Standing over the darkened water, even I could see how, yes, I must admit it, how womanly I had become. I could see that I was a woman in every respect.

“You won’t scream if we take off your gag?” asked Catulla, the woman who had taken me from the men.

I shook my head in the universal language of signs. The woman didn’t understand me at all. “Go and get another flask of quinna,” said Catulla then with a smile at me. I only had a few moments of gurgling as the gag was removed and then I blacked out again.

When I came to, I was walking around a circle of women, supported by Sebo's strong arm. Catulla, in a feathered headdress, was chanting. The women were all clicking in rhythm and their voices were raised as well. Opposite Catulla, the circle parted and grinning women pulled Sebo and me inside the ring.

"I welcome you as a daughter to the Merebo tree," Catulla intoned.

"Brrsh," I croaked and Catulla smiled at me.

While the women chanted again, Catulla whispered, "Don't try to talk, lovely Shanalla. We doused you with mesho, the snake medicine. It won't change your night but you will be most compliant for your new husband."

New husband! I couldn't turn my head. Yet, I could feel the sand beneath my feet. I could feel a dress again sweeping around my legs. My ears were numb as I felt the tickle of metallic objects on my neck, on my chest and on my bare arms and fingers. I couldn't lift my hands. I only seemed to move when Sebo's great, muscular arm about me made me move.

The chanting stopped then and Catulla lifted the scepter in her hand high and pronounced that, having broken the circle of the Merebo, Shanalla was now the wife of Sebo. She asked for our union to produce many new children for the tribe.

I tried to scream but all that came out of my mouth was more gibberish. Sebo swept his hands under me and carried me like a baby into a decorated tent followed by all the women. Many had gifts for me as I lay, writhing inside, as I couldn't get to my feet. One was a mirror that the woman held up to my face and

there I was, my ears pointed, my long red hair brushed around my shoulders and interwoven with flowers.

My eyebrows were arched and painted a reddish color as well and my lips had been reddened. I wore jade earrings and a jade necklace that shone on my pearly skin between my heaving breasts. My dress was greenish as well, casting a subtle hue on my body as it did upon Sebo, who was slipping out of his tanned vest, his muscles so defined in the dimmed room as the women retreated, giggling. I was left alone with a man whose intentions towards me were blindingly obvious.

“Grbrshtsebrsh,” came out of my mouth as I cowered back on the couch on which I had been lain, putting up my thin arms to keep the huge man off me. He whipped off his loin cloth and hauled me back into the center of the couch as I tried to slide off, hysteria sweeping over me. I could feel his warm hand on my wriggling legs, stilling me as he lay on top of me.

“Shanalla,” he breathed the name into my face, his breath so cold and minty sharp. Then his lips fell on mine as I had no strength to resist him. “From the moment I saw you in the bathing pool, I have wanted you. Yes, that was me whom you looked at in the ganyan tree. Your mother called me a bushbear, spying on your beauty. You saw me, didn’t you? And you said nothing because you wanted me, too.”

I gargled another reply, trying to tell him that I wasn’t this Shanalla. I had never seen him. I didn’t love him and I didn’t want him. Oh gods, I was trying to tell a rampant male that I wasn’t a woman, that I was a man like him, just as he was untying my dress! His mouth dropped onto the rutting breasts that I had that seemed to become rounder and so filled with desire at

the touch of his gentle hands and then his mouth on them.

Sebo eased the dress strap over my shaking arms and still I couldn't resist. He undressed me and ran his hands over my bracelets and then lovingly down my so feminine body. In terror and excitement, I knew that I would have been doing the same to a woman as I appeared to be, if I had the chance.

I had some sort of panties on about my wide, rounded hips. My new husband, oh, the tremors that went through me at that thought, eased them from me, caressing my trembling legs as he did so. Fire cascaded through me as I wondered if this was how a woman felt when a man had her. His hand went onto my womanhood and I shuddered as I felt that I was moist as I had felt in women before.

Sebo wasted no time in putting his manhood into me, lifting my arms about his neck and then his body caressed me. His lips covered mine as he gently but firmly made love to me, caressing my so overly heated skin as he did so, whispering the things to me that a man does to a lovely woman who is letting him make love to her.

The quinna drug must have begun to wear off as I trembled and tried to resist the man who was making love to me. I think that he was waiting for a reaction from me and then it came in a stupendous rush. I had feelings in my hands and legs. I had feelings inside my womanhood and my first instinct was to clutch at Sebo. It was the wrong move as he rolled with me in delight as I writhed beneath him. His kisses enveloped me. He was trembling as much as I was as I couldn't let go of his mouth. My whole body seemed to want to be

aroused by the man making love to me and I felt something arising in me.

Oh, great heavens, I was tingling all over and I was pushing against my husband, drawing him into me, teasing him with my breasts and an immense pleasure was warming every inch of me. My breathing was out of control! I was screaming as he came so warmly and in such a rush inside me and then I was coming as well, in a climax unlike anything I had ever felt before.

Passion swept over me as I kissed my husband fiercely and lifted my legs about him. He joyfully kept on and on, penetrating me deeply, kissing my jewelled ears, my scented neck and my long, gorgeous hair. He took my nipples in his mouth and my desire and passion crested in a surge of new euphoria and delight. I gave myself up to being a woman then, being enchanted by my loving husband.

My night was by no means over as I shuddered and began to come down from the incredible high I had been on. Sebo wanted more and I felt that I wanted to give it to him. My body wanted him, wanted his touch in my intimate places, wanted to be caressed at my hips and my breasts, wanted to tangle my hair in his face. My body loved it when he rolled me on top of him and begged me to make love to him. I was impaled on his manhood as I tantalized him and the surge of emotions swept over me again. I became frantic as I wiggled and caressed my husband in a frenzy of exploding passions that, in a quiet moment, my husband told me was an orgasm.

I was so shocked then as I trembled beside him, loving it when he turned me and rose over me again. Oh, how I co-operated with him then and how I gloried in being a woman. How I gloried in being Shanalla as my

husband teased me by spreading my hair over my breasts before he kissed them. When he finally flagged, I did for him what women have done for time immemorial to arouse a man. I cleaned his male member and then I went down on him. Oh, how he loved that! He became so huge and aroused that he scared me but then he lifted my legs about him, putting his huge manhood inside me. For a very long time, I was lost in female ecstasy that had me trying in every way to make my husband's climax endure so that my pleasure could reach a peak that no mere male could hope to attain.

I slept in my husband's arms and was awakened in fright by a smiling Catulla who announced that the sun was in the sky.

"Stop!" I said in panic as Catulla examined me, caressing my vagina while I lay in my smiling husband's arms. He reached over with his head to kiss my cheek, more tingles sweeping over me at that.

"Yes, she is a woman now," Catulla announced to the men and women crowding into the hut and grinning at me in my nudity.

"Have we made a baby, mother?" Sebo asked the woman. Everyone began to laugh and point at me, at my bare figure, my hair so dishevelled, as I tried to pull the thin sheet from Sebo's private parts to cover me.

"I should think by the noise the pair of you were making that it will be triplets at least," said Catulla. "The sun has moved above us, my son, and so we had to learn that you approve of your bride. I will send words of joy to Ashen now as we have already heard that Josilla pleases the Carishee. Now, do you wish to re-awaken your marriage lust for this girl or will you both face the day?"

A blush came over me when my husband held me and kissed me while Catulla and the cheering, laughing group with her left. My husband then proceeded to do to me what he had done the night before and I responded as I had the night before. It was another ecstatic union that I didn't want to end. My husband tried to oblige me but finally he had to roll from me and put on a breechcloth and stagger away from me to a bathing chamber.

I arose then, still quivering as the passion ebbed from me. I felt so alive, so wonderfully feminine and female as I shook my hair and my jangling earrings. It struck me in a rush then that I could talk as well. "Stop," I said with a smile to myself, touching the lovely womanhood I had and arching myself prettily against the greenish dress that had been left for me to wear.

"I wonder what sort of experience Brandy is having?" I said aloud, wondering if I could entice Sebo to come back to bed with me when he returned. Oh, I could go again with him, I knew, or maybe with one of his brothers if I, a mere woman, had tired him out.

The walls of the hut began to shimmer then. There was a roaring in my ears and a greyness came surging over me. I had a mask on my face and I clawed at it. I could hear voices. Someone in a panic was saying, "I've got the wrong one! Don't open the casket! Pump some more, goddammit! Give him more!"

"Here is your mummy, darling," said a soft, womanly voice. She raised it then to call to someone out of

the room. "She's in here, Mrs Burns. Catherine is in here!"

I was in a bed covered by a pink and white duvet. I was totally disoriented as I tried to sit up. There was a child's bedroom all around me. Worse, it was in a little girl's bedroom, and a doll was tucked into the bed beside me. My head was pounding as I looked around, trying to think.

"Sebo?" I said weakly as a tall, blonde woman came into the room and looked at the dark girl hovering near me in concern.

"She said she had a headache, Mrs Burns," said the dark girl. "I took her temperature and it's slightly raised. I gave her some aspirin but she wanted to sleep. She seemed very tired. But she was rolling around on the bed as if she was, well." The girl looked quite embarrassed then.

"Thank you, Anne," said the blonde woman, coming and sitting beside me then, looking down at me in concern. "We know those dreams, don't we, my darling," she said to me. She turned her head then to Anne. "I left your babysitting money on the kitchen table, Anne. I'll sit with Catherine for a while and see what is troubling her, if you don't mind. Can you see yourself out?"

"Sure, Mrs Burns," said the girl then with a smile. "I'll be here on Wednesday next at eight."

"Thank you, Anne!" called this woman who was leaning over me, smelling of roses. She kissed me on the lips and I wanted to react to her with passion as I had with Sebo, but it was only a butterfly kiss. Then she kissed my forehead, her necklace touching my face. I could see right down her clothes to her breasts.

“Don’t you have a hug for Mummy, Catherine?” the pretty, blonde woman asked me. I reached for her and my hand shocked me. It was a tiny hand, a child’s hand, worse, it was a little girl’s hand, the red paint starting to peel from my finger nails.

I think I screamed then. I wasn’t Shanalla any more! A wave of sadness swept over me and I felt a twinge between my legs as I thrashed in the little bed. Oh gods, I wasn’t Mike Douglas, either!

I was swept up in the arms of the woman who had said she was ‘Mummy’. Kisses rained down on my face and hair as I was held and hugged, the touch of her jacket so soft on my face, as I held on to her.

“You had another of your bad dreams,” said the woman then, holding me a little apart from her, concern in her blue, madeup eyes. “Were you an Indian princess about to be sacrificed this time, or hunting polar bears with your mother?”

There was a lilt of laughter in Mummy’s voice. “Tell you what, darling,” she said to me. “Why don’t we have milk and chocolate cookies and then we can play dress up in Mummy’s room? My little princess can be a ballerina and show me what she learned in class this morning, can’t she?”

I shivered as the duvet was drawn back and I looked at the pink nightie that I was wearing. As I swung my feet out of the bed, it ballooned airily about my legs, sending shocks and chills right through me. Mummy was bringing me a pink, frilly robe then that seemed to match the nightie I was wearing.

“I, I think that I w-would like a little brandy to drink,” I murmured to her.

Mummy smiled at me. "Oh, darling Catherine," she said, smiling merrily at me. "Could you taste or smell that on me? I only had the one after dinner to keep Roddy company. Really!"

Nothing was happening. Perhaps my cracked, dry voice wasn't working properly. Mummy picked me up and swirled me round in her arms as if she was dancing with me. I held on in fright as she kissed me then.

"My lovely, lovely daughter," Mummy said as I was carried through the doorway and down the stairs and then the urge came on me.

"I, I have to pee," I said to Mummy, who carried me into the bathroom, lifting me onto the throne, smiling at me as her warm hands went under my robe and nightie. She helped me to pull down my panties.

My eyes must have widened in shock as I realized how I was peeing into the toilet then. I had a penis! I was peeing like a boy as Mummy washed her hands and then, as I stopped, she came back, smiling at me, putting my panties back about me, not commenting at all at what her fingers touched as she manipulated my panties into place.

"Wash your hands and face, sweetie," Mummy said to me as she did so, smiling at me, a blonde, little girl, just like my mother, "while I brush those snags out of your hair."

I washed my hands, my mind stunned at the revelation I had just made. I didn't know what to say to this woman looming over me, smiling so brightly at me, brushing my long hair over my collar, putting pink barettes into it to keep it in place and, finally, a large pink ribbon to make it all hang down my back.

"There," said Mummy then. "It's my pretty, little Catherine again, isn't it?"

"I, I'm not a girl," I blurted out.

"Shush, darling, shush," said Mummy then, kneeling down in front of me then and looking at me so seriously. "Is that what Anne has been telling you? Oh, and I thought that I could trust her. Maybe I shall have to get another babysitter for Wednesday. What did she say to you?"

"I don't know," I whispered. "Nothing." A shiver went through me. How was I supposed to explain to this woman that I was a thirty-two year old man, a novelist, in the prime of my life as a man?

"Oh, this is an effect of the dream that you had?" said Mummy. "Do you want to share it with me?"

Mummy took my little hand in hers and led me into a white painted kitchen then where there was a pink-cushioned chair which she said was mine. I hastily tried to organize my thoughts as Mummy went on about my dancing class, how I was the prettiest one there in my tutu, the other mothers admiring me so. I had to go over with Susan, whoever she was, for play-time with her on Thursday as her cousins were visiting her. Both were boys and she needed some girl company, her mummy said.

"I'm a boy as well," I said as I shuddered in my pink nightie and robe.

"What is bringing this on?" asked Mummy then, sitting beside me. "This is not the dream, is it?"

"I, I don't pee like a girl!" was all I could think of to say, wondering what this woman would think if I launched into a typical Mike Douglas tirade at her.

“Oh, darling Catherine,” said Mummy, coming to me and hugging me to her breasts, smothering me as I wobbled and almost fell off my chair. “We’ve been through this, my darling. You do want to be a girl so much, don’t you?”

I was speechless as I stared at her.

“The drugs will block any boy development for you, darling,” Mummy went on. “You will be my little girl forever. But we do have to wait until you are past puberty before the doctors will operate on you. Only then can you have a boy friend like Mummy. I know it’s a long time, darling, but it will happen, Catherine. I promised you that, didn’t I? You will be a mummy some day and have a sweet, little daughter of your own, I promise you!”

I spluttered and gasped and babbled like a child, like a little girl, in fact.

“I don’t understand a word you are saying, darling,” said Mummy as a door bell sounded. “Just sit there and look pretty, Kate, while I see who that is,” she added, as she danced off out of the kitchen and down the hallway.

“Hey!” said Mummy as she returned. “Look who’s here! It’s Susan!” Another blonde girl, in a velvet black dress came bouncing into the kitchen then, waving at me. She looked about five or six years old.

“Hi, Katie!” Susan said with a giggle. “I came over to play. Oh, you’re in your nightie. Mrs Burns, is Katie sick?”

“No, dear,” said my mother. Gosh, I suppose I have to call her that. She was taking the coat from Susan’s mother who looked at me in concern. “Catherine had a headache from watching too much television with the

babysitter, I think. She's just getting up from a lie-down and we were about to play dress-up! You know how Catherine loves that!

"Oh, can I be the shepherdess?" asked Susan eagerly.

"She's loved that dress," said Susan's mother then, "since we saw Katie in all her ringlets and high heels on Halloween. I really have to buy her a dress just like it, Marjorie. Wherever did you get it?"

"When Roddy took us to San Francisco on holiday," said Mummy with a smile, "there was this shop filled with all kinds of costumes for little girls. We had a ball in there. Catherine would have stayed in it all day. It's why we had to buy so many outfits for her."

"She's going to be an actress or a model, your daughter, Marge," said Susan's mother then as I shuddered and shivered in my nightie and tried to think what else I could do to get out of the predicament that I was in.

"Why don't you girls eat up the chocolate and drink your milk and then go and play dress-up?" said my mother. Oh, I mustn't start to thinking of her as that! I mustn't! "Then Pamela and I will come and make up our little girls! You can put on a show for us."

"Ooo!" giggled Susan. "Hurry up, Katie! I really, really do want to be Little Bo-Peep!"

"Mummy!" I said in a panic.

"Go on, darling," said Mummy then, as I had finished the cold milk in front of me. "Enjoy being a girl and we'll talk about the other thing later."

Susan's soft, girlish hand pulled on mine and I couldn't resist her. I don't mean that she enchanted me

or anything. I mean that I didn't have the strength in me. Me, a thirty plus man, I didn't have the strength to stop a little girl from pulling me from my padded chair, down the hallway, my nightie and robe swirling so enticingly about me and into what must be a little girl's playroom.

There were dolls everywhere but Susan knew where she wanted to go. She opened a closet door that seemed to lead into a roomful of dresses and chests of drawers. She marched right ahead of me and took down a long dress that rustled against her as she hung onto it.

"Here it is!" said Susan, clutching it to her. "You don't mind, Katie, do you, if I wear your dress. You have so many lovely ones!"

Susan was exactly right. I could be Snow White, Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty or a witch, a ballerina, a fairy or any kind of showgirl from the row of glittering costumes that hung there.

Susan had no qualms at all about changing out of her clothing, even to being nude in front of me. She put on tights, panties, even a padded, little bra that she took from the drawers in the closet, really another room attached to the one I had called a playroom. She started calling for her mummy then as she had me button and zip her into the lovely, shepherdess dress she wore.

Mummy and Susan's mother came laughing into the playroom. "See," chuckled Susan's mother. "I told you how much she loved that dress. Oh, darling, let's pick up all your clothes and put them on a chair."

“What’s the matter?” Mummy asked me then. “Why haven’t you changed as well, Katie? You’re usually the first one dressed!”

“I don’t want ...” to get dressed like a girl, I wanted to say, but Mummy cut me off and began to take off my robe from me then. My nightie followed as I tried to stop her but she was so much stronger than me. I trembled in fear that she would take off my panties then but she didn’t. But she did open a chest of drawers and bring out what must be a little girl’s corset, which she put on me.

I tried not to co-operate with her, but Mummy overrode all my objections. I thought that I would die when she put little pads into the front of the tight corset. There I was, with thrusting out breasts like a little woman. Mummy put stockings, real stockings, on me then and attached them to the corset.

A frilled evening dress with bare arms, no back and a low-cut front swept in front of me as Mummy sat me in her lap then and put high heels on my feet.

“Oh my, Katie,” said the other woman. “You look like a real grown up woman!”

“She’ll be even cuter when she has some of my make-up on,” said Mummy, taking me over to the mirror where I could see what a ‘cute’ little girl that I was. I tried to shake my curls as Mummy held my face firmly, frowning at me as she made my lips so red. My eyes were so bold with the dark lines about them and the extra lashes she put on me.

“If you take those off,” Mummy hissed at me as I had said that I would when she had finished, “you will get a good spanking tonight, young lady, do you hear me? Now, what’s got into you?” Good question, I

thought with a shudder. "You're being a really naughty little girl. Now, do your saucy walk for Pamela and Susan. You can do the song that you're going to do for the beauty contest. They will love it!"

Susan and her mother did. They didn't know that I, a little girl, was pretending that I was Shanalla and the man that I was singing about in my little girl voice was Sebo.

"Wow," said Mummy as I finished vamping my shocked audience, imagining that Sebo had me in his arms. I could feel his manhood prodding into me as I had felt it so much just hours before. "She's never done it like that before!"

"She'll be a sensation," predicted Susan's mother, smiling at me, while Susan was looking at me, green with jealousy. Not even the gift of my dress, which Mummy agreed with me that she could have along with all the undies that went with it, mollified her. I could see that she hated me because her mother said that I was the cutest little girl in town. It didn't stop her from taking the dress and the ringlet wig, however.

I had to kiss Susan goodbye at the door and wave bye to her mother as neighbors were passing. They wanted to come up and look at me. This older woman praised and praised me as I swayed against Mummy, the corset really hurting me as I swayed against her stockinged legs.

"She's not shy," said Mummy as the older woman and her friend wanted to hug me while I tried to back away. So I was slobbered over by two old Grandmothers as a van came cruising up the driveway.



“Roddy!” said Mummy as the old biddies thought it was fun to swish me in my dress and make me walk for them in high heels.

“Sorry, but I had to bring him with me,” Roddy was saying to Mummy. “Alicia just took off and told me to do with him what I wanted.”

“I don’t have room ...” Mummy said.

“He can sleep in Catherine’s playroom,” Roddy said and then he saw me. “Oh wow, what have you been doing to your daughter, Marge? She looks like she’s a teenager already!”

“Let’s not talk about it out here,” said Mummy then, aware of the grannies watching her. “Bring Brian in with you.”

A young boy in a football outfit, looking much like I had looked at the same age, clambered out of the other side of the van then.

“She just walked away from the game and left him,” said Roddy, a man as old as I am.

Mummy held my hand and danced with me down the path and up the stairs. I had to hold on to my dress then and at the top she swirled me around and around, almost making me giddy.

“I can see your panties and your stockings,” said this grinning boy, being urged up the steps by the man behind him.

“Brian!” snapped his father. “You be nice to Catherine. Some day, who knows, she might be your sister!”

Brian’s face clouded and I thought he was going to hit me. I knew that I wasn’t strong, not as Catherine. I had to cling to Mummy then to protect me. That, at least, made Brian look pretty pleased with himself.

Mummy didn’t change me. No, she made me put on an apron and help her to prepare a meal for the

men. I shivered as I was excluded from that gender. Brian went off to the bathroom to change.

"I always keep a change of clothes, pyjamas as well, in the van for him," said Roddy, caressing my mother.

"Roddy, I'm cooking!" protested Mummy. "If you want to do any canoodling, do it to Catherine. She hasn't had a good day today."

I tried to get away but the man turned it into a hide and seek game, picking me up, as I was squealing and beating at him with my little, puny fists. "Oh, girl, what did I do to deserve this?" asked Roddy then, hugging me to him, immobilizing my arms completely. His face was only inches from mine. I suppose he was good-looking. Mummy was smiling at me then, as she tasted something she had cooked. She actually laughed when Roddy kissed me on my lipsticked mouth.

Oh, for a moment, I thought that I was Shanalla and it was Sebo kissing me. I closed my eyes and kissed him back. For a moment I was a woman kissing her man and he was loving it as much as me.

"Dad!" cut in Brian's voice and Roddy pulled away from me. When I opened my eyes, my lipstick was all over his mouth.

"You, you ..." Roddy spluttered. "What has got into this girl, Marjorie? Has she been in one too many of these beauty contests you keep entering her in? She kissed me then as if she was a woman!"

"I told you," said Mummy, wiping her hands on her apron. "Catherine is in a funny mood today. She had an afternoon nap and had some bad dreams. Here, Kate, show Brian where he can make up a bed in your playroom."

Mummy wanted to talk to Roddy about me. I could tell. Roddy still held me and was smiling at me, pushing my hair back behind my long earrings. "I swear, Catherine Burns," he said heartily, "that every time I see you, that you are prettier than you were the time before."

"So kiss me again," I whispered to him and leaned my head forward to kiss him. Roddy dropped me onto my high heels like a hot potato. My dress caught up in his belt and so my slip, my stockings and corset, and my panties were exposed to Brian again who snorted and stalked off by himself to the playroom.

"Go and play with Brian for a while," said Roddy then, patting me on my rear, stinging me a little. Well, he had something to talk to Mummy about, didn't he? Maybe she would believe me now when I told her about me being some kind of weird avatar of Catherine Burns, who wasn't her daughter, by the way, and should be her son.

"This is such a girlie room," snarled Brian when I went to play with him, my hands behind my back, my skirts swirling so airily about me.

What do little girls say to boys when they have to play with them? "Would you like to play Barbie with me?" I asked him coyly and, as I expected, he looked totally revolted. Get used to it, kid, I thought. You gave me a moment of terror back there and this is payback. Oh yes, I could get used to be a little girl and teasing bully boys, I thought. I had many lessons from my own childhood that I could draw on to even the score between Brian and Catherine.

"Your lipstick is smeared," said Brian truculently then.

“Your daddy is a nice kisser,” I said to him with a smile. “You should let him kiss you at night on the lips.” I guessed that the football player in him was a macho kid, just as I had tried to be at his age. “You would enjoy it.”

“You’d be the girl to know, wouldn’t you?” sneered Brian.

“What is that supposed to mean, Brian?” I asked him, keeping my arms behind me as I advanced on him. Yes, it was a lot of fun being a little girl. Particularly, a little girl with a mind like mine. This poor kid wasn’t going to know what had hit him when I was finished with him.

“You’re the girl that enters all those beauty contests, aren’t you?” asked Brian, probably not realizing that he was backing away slowly from me. “I heard you actually won some. What are you, Miss Congenital, or something?”

“Congeniality,” I said to him with a smile. “It means that I am nice to everybody, even those who try to be miserable to me.”

“I’m not ...” Brian said.

“Are too,” I cut across his words.

“I am not ...” Brian tried again.

“Are too, are too, are too,” I countered, smiling prettily as I could at him.

“Do you really have things on your chest,” Brian asked me nervously then as I had moved right up close to him as you can’t go further than the wall, can you? “Or is that just padding?” He actually went to poke me and hastily withdrew his finger at the last moment.