



Reluctant Press

Forever Female

Dee Dee Perri



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C. PAGANE

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Forever Female

By Dee Dee Perri

Chapter 1

“My reality, your reality... they’re ah- *different* Dave. I mean they could be similar you know but... not identical- no way!”

Dave caught the Frisbee with a last moment twist and lunge to the left. He turned and prepared to spin it back to pal. “One stinking Psych course! Psychobabble... that’s all it is. You, me and that duck over there,” he paused and nodded toward the small pond to his right. Floating there in the bright noon sunlight, a wood duck was busily preening its feathers. “We’re all in the *same* reality.” Instead of tossing the Frisbee he shifted it to his left hand and advanced. His right hand coiled into a fist with his index finger now pointing and jerking as if hammering in his point. “*One reality!*”

Brandon stood his ground intellectually as well as physically. “Its Neuroscience- not Psychology and according to Dr. Hornsbee...”

“*Hornsbee!*” Spat Dave as if he’d found a bug on his tongue and then he rolled his eyes. “If you dropped Hornsbee off the top of the Psych building he’d still accelerate at 32 feet per second per second. Ditto you, me or... that *damned duck!*” He said now pointing at the creature that was beginning to paddle away from the two men. “I mean, if you first stuffed the duck in a paper bag or something...” His voice trailed off. “You know... accounting for aerodynamic lift and...”

“So how do you account for your Uncle Sid?”

“Damn! What does my Unk have to do with *anything* for cripes sake?”

“He’s Jewish and he thinks Adolph Hitler was the cat’s pajamas...”

“SO?” Dave was almost nose-to-nose with his friend now. A little color had bloomed in his cheeks. “You think *anybody* in our family isn’t embarrassed? Unk’s frigg’n crazy- *sick crazy! A Jewish Nazi for cripe’s sake!!!*”

“Does he think he’s crazy?”

“What has that to do with anything?”

“Everything! It’s like Dr. Hornsbee said. To your Uncle Sid, what he believes... makes sense, OK? It doesn’t matter what makes sense to you or me... in *his* reality. To him... he’s not crazy.”

“Maybe not to Unk,” Dave pulled back and turned toward the park bench in the shade. Brandon followed. “Maybe not *even* to *you* but to *everyone else...*” He left his sentence unfinished.

Brandon was waving his hands now as if it would help him make his point but the effort was wasted as Dave had already turned his back on Brandon and was stalking toward the bench. “Look! Say you got this *he* pig...” Brandon said as he rushed to catch up.

“Boar.”

“OK, yeah Dave. This boar. And he sees this *she* pig...”

“Sow.” Dave added as he flopped down on the bench and leaned back with a sour expression on his face.

“OK, OK! This boar sees this sow and like she’s just about the sexiest thing this he pig -ah boar has ever seen and...”

“Hold it right there, Brandon.” Dave growled, “OK so like I can’t *exactly* understand what this boar sees in that sow...”

“Dr. Hornsbee’s point- *exactly!*” Brandon concluded as he stood looking down at his friend.

“Doesn’t prove noth’n.” Muttered Dave. “I mean it’s *mostly* the same reality.”

“Mostly?” Said Brandon with a laugh as he sat down on the bench beside Dave. “How much *mostly*, huh? Ninety percent? Fifty?”

“For cripes sake, how would I know?” Dave twisted uncomfortably on the hard bench but it wasn’t the hardness of the bench that was bothering him.

“Right- *exactly!*” Brandon basked in his intellectual victory as Dave muttered under his breath for the next several seconds; he continued to squirm.

Brandon’s face lost its glow and slowly grew somber. “Ah- Dave?” He said after another ten seconds had passed. “How long have we known each other?”

Dave leaned back on the bench extending his legs out in a lazy sprawl and then shrugged, “Forever? Cripes sake- ah before first grade. What does that have to do with anything?”

“I remember playing in the sand box and you getting sand in your diapers.” Brandon laughed, “A lot of sand.”

“Diapers! No way man!” Dave looked uncomfortable, “Really?” He shrugged again. “Could be I guess- but *that* I don’t remember.” He looked at Brandon’s now somber face, “Point?”

Brandon wasn’t returning Dave’s gaze. In fact it was as if he were actively avoiding Dave’s eyes. His hands were on his lap tightly clasped as if he were under considerable tension. “I mean, like we’ve known each other forever. You know?” He paused but continued to avoid looking at Dave. Now he studied his hands as if he might find something there. Finally, “Close. I mean like we were brothers... better than brothers. OK? Better than me and my brother Steve... that asshole... anyhow like you *think* you know me, right?”

Now it was Dave’s turn to look tense. “Yeah. I mean, sure, I do, right?”

Brandon stood up as if to walk away. He was visibly shaken. His face was not just somber; it was now ashen, gray. “Dr. Hornsbee got me thinking...” He turned his back on his life long friend and with his head down he said in a strained voice, “Like there’s something I’ve never told *anybody*. Something about *my* reality. Oh God this is so... *difficult!*”

Dave stood up. “What?” he asked, his voice reflecting his rising tension. He more than half wished that whatever Brandon was going to say, that he wouldn’t. But no such luck he realized as he heard Brandon let out a long, tortured sigh.

“Inside.” Brandon stopped, half turned and looked over his shoulder at Dave. He could feel his cheeks burning. “Inside...” he started again but in doing so looked away once again, “I’m... not who you think I am.”

Dave hissed as he stood up and stepped back, “You’re... ah- Republican?” He said hoping to break the serious, frighteningly intense mood had come over his friend. Frankly if there was something *that* bad inside his friend... well he’d rather *not* know. What if Brandon were gay, huh? What then? What else could it be? Truth, Dave didn’t want to know. Like Brandon had said, they were close, real close but... what *if Brandon were gay?*

“Jesus H. Christ! Dave... I’m... *serious* OK?” He turned and glared at his friend.

A crooked smile twisted Dave’s lips but concern was obviously still etched on his features. “Sorry.” He shrugged in defeat as he realized that Brandon would not relent; that whatever horror he held inside was going to be shared with or without Dave’s permission. Man, he thought, guys just don’t *do* that sort of thing. “Shoot.”

Brandon’s eyes were bright as if he were on the very edge of tears, his face drawn, pale and tense, “I can... tell you can’t I Dave? Just between you and me. I mean nobody can *ever* know. Right? Absolutely *nobody!*” It was a rhetorical question. He didn’t wait for Dave to respond nor could he afford to. His courage was slipping rapidly away. “I’ve *felt* ever since I was a little kid... Jesus this is *impossible!*” He paused, bit his lower lip and then sucked in a deep breath of air and then he let it out in a burst. “I’m... a... *woman!*” A horrid quiet had descended. Dave’s face stood frozen. His smile wilted as his mouth dropped open. “Inside this male body... I mean.” Brandon’s mouth continued to gaped. “My...my soul is female. I,

the *real* me is... utterly, absolutely *female*.” Dave’s face became mobile: a look of utter horror that retreated to disgust and finally to alarmed confusion.

“DAVE!” Brandon cried as his friend abruptly staggered back and then spun around and *fled*. That was the only word that seemed to fit. Dave fled! The Frisbee fell unnoticed from Dave’s numb fingers to the sidewalk with a clatter.

~oOo~

“Mom. MOM! What do you mean *it’s all right?*” He was almost yelling into the phone. He held the receiver away in disbelief. “It’s not all right with Dad,” he heard her say, “but he’ll get over it. Over *what* Mom?” He rolled his eyes as his stomach threatened to come out of his mouth. Again he pulled the receiver away from his ear. She was sobbing now, nearly incoherent and then... his Dad had taken the phone away and in a voice thick with anger made it perfectly clear of how much he did *not* want to see Brandon at that moment.

The phone lay on his lap. His Dad was still screaming but it sounded more like an angry insect trapped inside the phone than something human. The most common word... *queer!* Brandon didn’t hang up nor could he until he heard the loud click and then silence. He tossed the phone back into his pocket. Part of him wanted to die, part of him wanted to murder Dave and both parts were horrified at how shitty everything had become just because he’d said the... *truth*. God knows Steve, his brother, would be having quite a yuck over this... Why had he told Dave? Dr. Hornsbee of course. He laughed but it was a sour sound, a parody of humor. Apparently not all realities were equal.

Suddenly his library cubicle door sprang open and there, in silhouette, stood Cindy. When it rains... it pours. “Cindy?”

She stumbled in and closed the door. Her makeup streaked, the mascara making crooked tracks down her cheeks and her eyes red and moist. “Tell me Dave’s full of doo-doo Brandon. I want to hear it from your own lips. You’re no... no... *homosexual*.” The word homosexual came out like one might have said CANCER or AIDS.

“No... I mean, of course not. Jesus Cindy! I... I mean we... you know.” Brandon threw up his hands in frustration. “He’s got it all- *wrong!*”

Hope bloomed in her eyes. “Really.” She approached closing the door behind her and then stopped. “All wrong?” She said, cocking her head slightly. But her lips were quivering and that was a bad sign.

“Yes. I mean like I’m decidedly not into men Cindy. I mean like... I find you terribly sexy and...”

“What about that *other part?*”

“What *other part?*” He felt his breath leave him like he’d been punched in the stomach.

“The woman... thingy inside.”

Brandon gasped out, breathlessly, “AH- Er- No. Nooono-”

And then she started to sob and then turned away with a jerk. In an instant she was opening the door again.

“Cindy!”

“All my *fucking* luck!” She swore without even bothering to turn around and face him. And Cindy never said *fuck*. As she stepped out into the large reading room, she finally turned and glared at Brandon. Through her sobs she snapped, fists clenched, “You never -sob- could -sob- *fucking* -sob- lie -sob- worth a hill of beans! -sob-”

BALAAM! The door and that part of Brandon’s life had... closed.

~oOo~

Even though Brandon had slipped home in the wee hours of the morning, he went into work extra early. It seemed better than facing Dad and Mom at breakfast though eventually *that* encounter would have to be faced. The good news was that he couldn’t take calls while on the floor and, until the department store opened at ten, other than Mr. Hall, his supervisor, the locked doors would surely keep the *world* at bay.

Normally being assigned to straighten up in the lingerie department would have been a “treat”. This morning it was an annoying distraction. The frilly wisps of material that normally sang in his hands were now but a reminder of his present plight. He held up a slip and gave it a little shake before beginning to fold it back into the box from which it had been so rudely removed. He’d worn one much like this just last week. He tried to shove that image out of his mind even as he more gently nudged the slip back into its box.

The truth was *dressing up* made him feel worse rather than better. His shoulders, for example. Fairly ordinary for a guy, they seemed positively huge in a dress- like a football player in drag. He’d never *pass*, leastwise in the *real world*. In transvestite stories, and he’d read more than a few of them, the fem-male was always shockingly gorgeous and the clothes... the clothes always fit perfectly- *right!!!*

He jerked. The carefully folded slip spilled out and on to the floor. “Dave!”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to startle you.”

Blood was hammering in Brandon’s ears. Stuttering he said, “Ha-Ha-How’d you get in?”

“Cripes sake Brandon.” Dave nodded toward the clock on the wall. It was ten after ten. “I looked all over the place and then I saw you standing here... with that girly thing in your hands. You all right? I mean it was like there was nobody home. I mean, your face... blank.”

The hammering in Brandon’s ears hadn’t ended, in fact, it was growing louder. “How could you?” he hissed as his anger grew into something almost solid. “I...I

trusted you!” There was a bra in his hands now and he was twisting it as if it were Dave’s neck. Finally he threw the bra in Dave’s face and spun on his heels. He was ready to run. Run where? It didn’t matter.

“HEY!” Dave yelled and grabbed Brandon’s arm above the elbow. He tried to spin Brandon around but his effort simply triggered a tug of war.

“LET-GO-OF-ME!” Brandon yelled. Heads turned. Brandon’s supervisor poked his head around the corner and Dave had to let go.

“I can explain.” Dave muttered as he backed away.

“Yeah- right!” Brandon could feel the anger collapse inside. He nodded to his supervisor that all was OK and then through clenched teeth he growled, “Later-OK?”

Brandon picked up the bra and the slip and gave his supervisor a quick second look before returning to his work.

~oOo~

Dave pushed back the strand of black hair that had fallen across his right eye. Between him and Brandon stood two mugs of steaming coffee, potentially dangerous weapons. He grabbed his cup and held it to his mouth. Over the lip of the cup he watched Brandon’s eyes. “I swear I didn’t tell anyone...” Brandon’s pupils shrank to pin points and that was a bad sign. “OK, ok. I told... Betty.”

“Your girl friend?” Brandon’s eyes widened but his pupils remained small and dark.

Dave sipped and then carefully returned the cup to the table. He shrugged. “She knew I was upset about something. I didn’t really *tell* her, I mean I told her I had this... friend.”

“Jesus.” Swore Brandon, but softly under his breath.

“She wouldn’t let go, you know. She kept asking, probing. I mean it was like she, you know, thought I was talking about myself and...”

“And so you told her...”

“Yeah. Well enough I guess.”

“I don’t understand. I mean my folks know and Cindy...”

Dave blanched, “Cindy too?”

“Oh yeah.”

“Sorry.”

“But how?”

“Probably Steve.”

“My brother?”

“Yeah. Betty’s roommate’s been dating your brother. Bing, bang, boom. And if Steve knows...”

“Com’on, why Cindy?”

“Betty’s room mate is a Tri Delta, OK?”

“Ouch! Gabby right?” Muttered Brandon. “Cindy’s a triple D pledge, Christ! So much for me pledging the Sigma Nu’s now huh?”

Dave shrugged, “Yeah. Not damn likely now. Sorry.”

“Yeah.” Brandon fiddled with his cup for a few seconds and then looked hard at his friend. “Why did you like fucking run away when I told you, huh?”

“Cripes... I don’t know. It scared the shit out of me.”

“Go on.” Brandon raised an eyebrow as if questioning Dave’s veracity.

Dave pulled back and lowered his voice at the same time, “You are into men. I... I mean you’d have to be, right?”

“Oh Jesus Dave.” He grabbed his coffee cup in both hands to thwart the insipid quiver of his fingers. “It’s so much more complex than that. I am truly attracted to women, OK? I mean me and Cindy never had intercourse but it wasn’t my fault.”

“So you’re some kind of lesbian?”

“That’s real funny Dave. Quit trying to slap a label on my forehead! Look this *woman* thing is real but damn it- me, he thumped his chest, what you see is all guy. I mean if I were to have my druthers...” Dave’s face looked a bit pale. “You’re not going to run away again are you Dave?” Dave nodded no. “OK.” Continued Brandon. “I’d rather be *all* woman. And if I were, which I’m not, I’d be, as you said, into men. But I’m not, as you can see.” He shook his head slowly. “You don’t see, do you?”

“What about a sex change, huh?”

“Oh brother! Me? In a dress?” Brandon stopped and blushed. His voice had carried to the next table and heads had turned. He lowered his voice. “I’d rather be dead than look like that- OK?” He hissed in a whisper.

“I’m confused.” Muttered Dave.

“Yeah. That makes two of us. Christ I need more coffee.”

~oOo~

Dr. Hornsbee’s Introduction to Neuroscience was, for Brandon, the highlight of his week. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays and starting promptly at one o’clock, Dr. Hornsbee would enter the small hall and begin to lecture. It wasn’t that his lectures were so wonderfully presented, nor was the reading material all that easy to follow but the ideas... Brandon sat fascinated as multi-colored slides bloomed on the screen. Pictures of real brains in action. These were fMRI scans,

taken here at the college; the images were obtained from some of the students taking this very class only last week. The lecture was brought to a jarring halt by a hand waving impatiently.

“Yes Ms. Beckwith?” Dr. Hornsbee looked down over the top of his reading glasses perhaps to get a better view of the woman who’d interrupted his presentation. He called her Ms Beckwith but everyone in the room knew her better as “Gabby” and frankly never had anyone been more fittingly named.

Gabby uncoiled from her seat for she always stood when she asked a question, not that there was a man in the room that resented that gesture. She was the very epitome of a triple D in more ways than her mere membership in the sorority by the same name. Lush curves fitted over lush curves in a multi-layer dessert of feminine delight. “Doctor Hornsbee, y’all say that one can actually discriminate male from female using your little ol’ fMRI?”

“Yes Ms Beckwith.” He nodded, “With reasonable reliability.”

It was obvious she wasn’t done yet. “Well then, Doctor, what would the brain of a little ol’ trans-sex-y’all look like?”

Brandon realized to his horror that she was talking about him and then as if to remove any and all doubt as to the target of her interest, she turned and stared at him. Other heads turned and for a horrid moment it seemed as if everyone in the room, including Dr. Hornsbee, was looking at Brandon. To make matters worse, Brandon felt his cheeks burning. If he could he would have vanished in an instant.

“Ms. Beckwith.” The doctor stopped and cleared his throat. “That is an interesting ah- question and one for which I would like to have an answer but my dear, transsexuals, *true* transsexuals, correct, are quite ah- rare hum? Perhaps one in a thousand or perhaps fewer... hmmm? I would be ah- most interested to collect such ah- sample however to answer your question- yes? One might *reasonably* expect to see a female distribution in the neural pattern- correct? Assuming, of course that the biological sex of the subject were male. And why is that?”

Ms Beckwith wilted under his gaze. She had no idea and it was obvious.

“Anyone care to speculate? Hmmm?” Doctor Hornsbee let out a sigh. “Think about it, do your reading and... I’ll put a question like that on the final exam hmmm? Class- dismissed!” He barked.

The dismissal of the class had triggered a mass migration, a hurried flight for the door at the rear of the lecture hall. All the students were in motion, all except Brandon, of course. Instead of standing up, he slouched yet deeper into his seat. All the better to avoid what would be curious stares and worse- questions not that he’d entirely avoided the former as more than one classmate paused to give him the once over. Some looked with frank curiosity and others with facial expressions that ranged from pity to disgust. He lowered his eyes and tried to pretend that none of this was happening.

“Mr. Wilks?”

Brandon jerked. His eyes swung toward the elevated platform. "Dr. Hornsbee?"

The doctor wasn't even looking at Brandon as he gathered his notes and proceeded to load them into his brief case. "Sorry about that."

"Sir?"

"Ms Beckwith. She was simply... rude." Dr. Hornsbee finally looked up and held Brandon's gaze firmly in his own.

"Oh- ah- that's all right. Ah- thank you sir, I mean..." He stammered. He was now wishing that he had left with the rest of the class.

Dr. Hornsbee pulled his glasses down to the very tip of his nose and then flipped open a notebook that he'd just drawn from his brief case. "I see here that you *still* haven't participated in our little survey."

"Sir?"

"Roger."

"Doctor?" Said the graduate assistant. He was carrying a box of 2 X 2 slides from the projection room in the rear of the hall down to the lectern.

"See if you can schedule a fMRI for Mr. Wilks as soon as possible."

"Right."

"That *is* all right with you, isn't it Mr. Wilks?"

Brandon nodded. "Uh- yes, sir." He murmured as he died another small death.

~oOo~

"Roger." He said taking Brandon's hand and giving it a brief shake. "Hornsbee. Roger Hornsbee."

"Gosh... Professor Hornsbee's your Dad?"

Roger grinned. "Naw. My Uncle." He shrugged. "Had a bitch of a time getting into grad school last year. My real love is physics. Anyhow my Uncle said he'd take me under his wing for a while. Give me a chance to get some research experience and maybe a few publications. Couldn't hurt. Anyhow I'm not registered or nothing. Just helping out."

"Oh." Said Brandon.

"I really want to work with Dr. Price over in physics. Uncle Phil say's if I work out good here in the Psych department maybe that'll help me next year when I apply again."

"To get into the doctoral program in physics?"

"Yeah. Weird huh? Uncle Phil says that he and Price are working on the same issues just from different points of view."

Brandon looked confused.

“fMRI’s are the direct product of neural activity see.” Continued Roger. “Everybody agrees with that, OK? Now my Uncle believes that he’s studying the flow of information from neuron to neuron. A regular cluster fuck, if you know what I mean. Billions of individual neurons all active more or less at the same time. And, of course, it’s a principle of neuroscience that neurons are the basis of consciousness- you following me?”

“Yeah. Sure.”

“OK. Well Dr. Price is also looking at fMRI scans but the difference is he believes that consciousness actually arises in the complex electromagnetic field generated by all those billions of neurons.”

“I... I don’t see the difference.”

“My Uncle believes that consciousness *resides* in the brain, more specifically, in those billions of neurons and that the fMRI is only a *symptom* of that activity, OK? Dr. Price is arguing that those billions of neurons create a complex magnetic field, like a bunch of radio transmitters all broadcasting at once and it is the complex electromagnetic field *itself* that *is* consciousness. Big difference, see?”

“Kind’a.” Muttered Brandon. “What do I do?” He said with anxiety in his voice.

“Just lay there- perfectly still.”

“Is this going to hurt?”

“Nah. You’ll not feel a thing, OK? We’re just taking a series of electromagnetic snapshots. Truth, fMRIs *really* measure blood flow in the brain but... aw just lay still OK?”

“Whatever.” Mumbled Brandon as he felt the cart he was lying on roll forward and, in another moment, his head entered the cylinder. “Great.” He muttered. It was like being inside a large ping-pong ball with nothing to do but look at the smooth white surface an inch away from his eyes. Really, fucking great he concluded to himself.

~oOo~

“That should be some relief.” Said Dave. When Brandon didn’t respond, he continued, “I mean they said you had perfectly normal *male* brainwaves- right?”

“Kind’a. I guess.” Brandon had flopped back onto the old couch in Dave’s house with his feet up on the opposite arm. A beer sat balanced on his stomach. The truth was all that proved was that the fMRI wasn’t what it was cracked up to be. Blood flow for Christ sake! The certainty of his *feminine* core remained intact.

“Just some kind of Psychological thing.” Responded Dave. The way he said that made it sound like whatever Brandon had was just... a minor subjective glitch-like not *really* real.

“Tell that to my folks... and the rest of the world.”

“I’ll just tell ‘em it was a miss-understanding.”

Brandon groaned. “Was that a pun?”

Dave blanched. “Cripes sake no! Com’on guy, we can fix this, you know.”

Brandon sat up, almost spilling his beer, “You really think so?”

“Naturally... Piece of cake.”

“I’d appreciate that Dave.” He got this far off look in his eyes. It would be easier going back and living a lie again. Hell, it would have been a lot easier having kept his mouth shut in the first place! “And Cindy?”

“Who knows, maybe she’ll come around. Chicks kind’a dig men with a sensitive inner nature don’t they? Play your cards right and maybe you’ll get laid.”

“Yeah!” Said Brandon but his enthusiasm was utterly false. He’d still rather *be* Cindy than to *have* her.

“Beside,” Mumbled Dave, “this whole mess was my fault pal.”

Well there was more than a little truth in that concluded Brandon.

~oOo~

“Roger! What are you doing here?” Brandon looked at his watch, “Its after midnight.” He turned and called back to his mother who was coming out of the family room. “It’s OK, just a guy from school Mom.” She flashed him a look, after inspecting the visitor, unlike any she’d ever given him before today. It was one of those measured things like she might have given had Roger been a young female, that is, *before Brandon’s announcement of his sexual nature.*

She smiled. It was forced. “Can I get you two something?” She hesitated, “or would you rather be *alone*?” She added significantly.

It was like a knife in his chest. Brandon shook his head no and then turned back to his unexpected visitor.

“We got’ta talk,” said the pseudo-graduate student as he pushed Brandon aside and entered Brandon’s parent’s house. He acknowledged Brandon’s mother with a sharp negative nod of his head but nothing more until she left them alone. The fact that it was a long way from the college suggested that this visit represented something important. He spun on his heels and fixed Brandon with his eyes. “Showed Dr. Price your fMRI data.”

“Huh?”

“You know I had a bitch of a time getting that scan to stabilize. I mean like a real bitch. I mention that to Dr. Price and he got kind’a interested, you know?” When Brandon didn’t respond he continued. “Why don’t you close that door and ah- take a seat?” He looked around. “Any chance of getting some Java sport? This could be a long, long night.”

“What about your Uncle? He’s involved in this too, isn’t he?”

“Nah. This don’t concern him none. Leastwise I don’t think he’d understand.”

“Understand what?”

Roger stood a little straighter, taller. “Just about the most amazing discovery since fMRI were invented. Dr. Price thinks maybe the graduate admissions committee would reconsider my application after all.”

“Christ, what are you talking about?”

“Buddy you know why I had so much trouble getting your fMRI?”

“I assume I’ll learn eventually.” Muttered Brandon.

“’Cause there’s more than one field operating.”

“Ah- in English?”

“Yeah, well brew up some Java kid and I’ll try to explain.”

“Mom?” Brandon called out. “Could you make us some coffee?”

~oOo~

“Anyhow, you know the Gulf stream that moves up the coast of America before swinging over to Europe is really a river moving *inside* another body of water- the Atlantic Ocean.”

“Yeah- kind’a. I guess.”

“Well the principle is ah- similar. Remember the fMRIs only an indirect measure of *probable* electromagnetic fields so there is some interpolation here but... well, you probably got this female electromagnetic pattern flowing along with the male. Anyhow, it should be about three dB down from the male pattern...”

“Three what?”

“Sorry that’s just technical talk, what it means is that its ah- about half as strong as the dominant pattern...”

“Male.”

“Right! Now where was I, oh yeah. Secondary patterns have been suspected for some time but according to Dr. Price, he’s never actual seen one...”

Brandon yawned, “Could you get me to the bottom line soon Roger.”

Roger glared and poured another cup of coffee for himself. “Dr. Price *can* suppress the electromagnetic field for a few minutes. I mean he’s already done that a number of times. Anyhow the subject just... blanks out. It’s like turning off their consciousness.”

“Like analgesics? Ether?”

“Right. It supports the notion that the field is itself the basis of consciousness but there are obviously other explanations as well.” He stopped and took a long breath, “What do you think would happen *if* Dr. Price suppressed your main electromagnetic field while leaving the secondary- female field still flowing hmmm?”

“Got me.” Said Brandon but he felt a queer excitement building. “He can really do that?”

“It’s called inverse filtering. He can pull down the primary field say, 60 dB. Mostly one just phase reverses the primary wave forms... ah- sorry I can see from your expression I must be speaking Greek. Ah- in short the answer is yes. And as to what would happen...” He paused. “You know *anything* about J.J. Gibson?”

“Who?”

“A psychologist- mid twentieth century and the *only* real field theorist the United States ever produced OK? You see most psychologists, like my Uncle think the brain processes information like a sloppy, bio-computer. Gibson believed that the perceiver and the so called world were really interactive *fields*.”

Brandon groaned, “I’m... too tired.”

“Right.” Growled Roger. “Try this on for size. If Drs. Price and Gibson are right, suppressing the main field while leaving the secondary field flowing... you would literally *be* in a new or at least a different *reality!*”

“Huh?”

“You mentioned that *woman inside*, well she *might be real*. And not just her personality...”

“Wait -a-minute, Roger, are you saying I would actually be... I mean *physically* her!”

“Com’on buddy what does reality mean if it isn’t *physical?*”

“That sounds... impossible.”

“Yeah so is consciousness as we know it but it’s all we got. Kid, reality isn’t about x-number of atoms distributed in an infinite space, you got’a think electromagnetic fields...”

Chapter 2

“How long is this going to take?” Brandon finished with a yawn. It was after two AM.

“A minute, maybe less. What ever you do, do not get out of this chair Mr. Wilks. Fact is, try to remain absolutely motionless if you can, OK?”

Brandon looked at the thin, Lincolnian figure. All Dr. Price needed was a beard and a stovepipe hat... “A minute? Only a minute?”

“Ah- but such a minute Mr. Wilks. To actually go where you’re about to go...”

“GO?” Brandon started to get up but Dr. Price’s hands, with a bit of help from Roger held him in place.

“Only a figure of speech Mr. Wilks. The Universe will be ninety-nine point nine-nine percent the same as this one but all so different...”

“How do you know that, doctor?” Whined Brandon.

“Ah-” He blanched, “Got me there Mr. Wilks. No one has been where you are going and for that I envy you.”

“Really?”

“Sit tight.” Said Dr. Price as he and Roger back peddled out of the test chamber. A gold screen that covered all six surfaces of the ‘electromagnetic isolation’ chamber would shield them - that is, Dr. Price and Roger. Any electromagnetic field events with wavelengths in excess of a tenth of a millimeter would be captured and drawn down the thick ground cable that was embedded deep in the earth under the physics building. And the latter accounted for nearly all the energy generated by the human brain. Did that mean the field was dangerous? That last possibility bothered Brandon... *a lot* as he watched them retreat to safety. What in the Hell had he gotten himself into anyway?

Seconds slipped by and these turned into minutes and *nothing* had happened. They’d told him to sit perfectly still and he had. Like playing ‘statute’ only this time it wasn’t a child’s game. But like the game, the very need to remain still kind’a ate at Brandon. The need to scratch his nose, to blink, to wet his lips, all these and more grew in intensity. *Still nothing!!* The phantom itch at the very tip of his nose grew ever more demanding. He’d never been very good a playing statute. Finally he could stand it no longer. He reached up to scratch but his hand and arm paused in mid-air.

This wasn’t Kansas anymore! His mind burbled, his head spun and his breath caught in his... *her* throat? It was all of a single cloth, seamless and perfect. No transition, indeed perhaps *she’d* been here for minutes. *SHE!!!* Brandon’s mind grappled or at least tried to grapple with the impossible certainty of that fact. A dozen fleshy details, mostly unseen, became instantly obvious even before his eyes could devour the image of the woman-girl hand and forearm that had sprung from his-her lap. His-her bicep had collided with what had to be a womanly breast that clung to his-her chest. A point of ultra sensitive tissue was driven against and then across the inside of his white shirt. The harsh starched cotton, felt more like sandpaper than cloth to that sensitive...*nipple?*

He hadn’t had time to digest any of these impressions for in the next instant every fleshy nuance of *her* was gone or rather, it was his familiar *male* hand and arm that hung before his eyes. The transition had been as seamless as the beginning, which was to say utterly invisible. Like a child that had lost its favorite toy, Brandon felt despair. The experience had been so... brief as to suggest that it hadn’t happened at all and then Dr. Price loomed over him. “Sir?”

“You moved Mr. Wilks. I wasn’t able to hold the signal.” He scrunched his eyebrows together, “You OK?”

Brandon nodded speechless.

“And?”

Now Roger appeared from the control room. “What was it like?” He bubbled, excitedly but pulled up short at Dr. Price’s frown. “Sorry.” He mumbled.

Dr. Price looked down at Brandon. “As Mr. Hornsbee said, what was it like?”

“I was... *her*.” Said Brandon, his eyes big and his face flushed. “I was really *her*.”

~oOo~

“Well say something!” Cried out Brandon and then he immediately spoke into the phone again but more softly, “You’re still awake aren’t you Dave?” It was almost five o’clock in the morning but Brandon hadn’t been able to sleep. He’d needed to talk to someone, to share his experience, even though Dr. Price had been quite firm. “Tell no one.” That didn’t include Dave, right?

“Unbelievable.” Muttered Dave. Whatever trace of sleepiness had vanished from his voice. “What did you look like... I mean *her*... ah-.”

Brandon felt relief. Dave had been listening after all. “Gosh, I don’t know. Dr. Price ran the procedure three times, OK, so it wasn’t a fluke. But I had to remain perfectly still and that...” He remembered the second run. That time he’d had the foresight to position his eyes so as to be able to see his new body. There was no doubt that he... she had breasts- no doubt at all! With the shirt un-buttoned, twin, brown-capped cones had thrust out from his-her smaller, hairless chest. Having never seen breasts from that perspective before it was impossible to judge their size. Surely they weren’t particularly large but then they were most definitely sweet never-too-much-to-be-touched delights. And just out of reach. He’d tried, of course, to touch them. His mind still rang with the momentary, transient tactile novelty of his hand on soft woman breast flesh *and* the experience of *being touched!* Breasts, his... her breasts. But again that slight movement had... terminated the experience.

“Could they ah- see you? You know, like *that*.”

“Who? Oh you mean Dr. Price and Roger. Ah- no. What I mean is they couldn’t actually *see* my physical transformation. It’s a little hard to explain.” He waited but Dave remained silent. “You’d have to be *inside* the field to see the...”

“So none of this is really ah- real then.”

“You still *don’t* understand, do you Dave?” Brandon growled in frustration. “If you can’t see something then... it isn’t real, right?”

“Yeah. Kind’a. I mean if it’s all *just* in your head...” He let his sentence trail off. And then he began again. “Just what did this professor see huh?”

“Oh.” Brandon felt a grin break across his lips, “Ah- nothing. I mean absolutely nothing.”

“Huh?”

“I... just... *disappeared*.”

“Wow!”

“Yeah. That’s what Dr. Price said.”

“Now *that’s* interesting!”

“Whatever.” Mumbled Brandon as he rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. Leave it to Dave to ignore the important and fixate on the trivial. “Apparently it confirms Dr. Gibson’s theory of perceptual reality.”

“Who?”

“Oh never mind Dave. I’ll explain it to you when I figure it out myself, ok? I mean like we’d have to share the same electromagnetic continuum or something.”

“What?”

“Good night, Dave,” Brandon yawned and then terminated the connection.

~oOo~

Brandon was like a junkie trying to get his next fix. After a couple hours of sleep he called in sick at work and raced over to the lab. He could have saved himself the effort. The place was locked up tight. No Dr. Price, ditto Roger. He was beside himself.

He did eventually go to work that morning though he stumbled through his obligations like a zombie. He skipped lunch and headed back to the laboratory- still no Doctor Price. The time for his English class came and went. He was simply too distracted to leave. Where in the Hell were they?

“Morning or should I say afternoon?”

“Huh?” Brandon spun around. Relief filled his heart. “Roger, ah- hi.”

Roger nudged him aside, spun the combination lock on the door and then began to thumb in the code.

Brandon missed the first number but easily caught the last four: 1-8-4-5. He was smart enough to look away when Roger turned and faced him.

“Dr. Price and I didn’t leave until after seven this morning.” He said with some pride.

“Oh?”

“Just that your disappearing trick alone confirms that we’re at the edge of confirming an utterly new conceptualization of the nature of reality.” He shrugged, “Well that’s what he said.”

“Gosh.”

“Yeah.” Roger turned and checked out Brandon carefully. “No ill effects?”

“Nah.” He said as he followed Roger inside the lab. He cast a hungry gaze toward the door where the experimental chamber was. He was consciously trying to appear calm and just *interested* but if the truth were to be known he could hardly wait to start again.

“Good.” Roger nodded. “Matt wanted me to ask.”

“Matt?”

“Sure.” Roger grinned, “Dr. Price and me...” He interlocked two fingers together, “regular pals now that I brought him this close to a Nobel Prize.”

“Are we going to get started, soon?”

“Started? Whatever gave you that idea... Oh.” He said looking at Brandon thoughtfully. “You ah- really liked that huh?”

Brandon just nodded.

“You are a curiosity kid.” He said scratching his head. “Me. If that happened to yours truly, I’d be scared shitless.” He scrunched up his nose, “So what Gabby said yesterday about you being a transsexual...”

“I don’t know anything about transsexuals Roger.” Brandon looked pensive. “What I do know is that last night I felt... like things were right, you know... a terrible wrong made right...ah”

Roger let out a small sigh, “Ok, ok I can kind’a dig that.” He looked around and then back at Brandon. “Truth? Matt wants you here full time. And I mean full time in the lab. Like he expects you to put your whole life on hold, you know? Classes, work, whatever, you following me kid? Everything got to take a back seat to this project.” Roger stared at Brandon’s face for a moment. Brandon looked as if he’d just won a million dollars as he vigorously shook his head yes- whatever concluded Roger. Each to his own! And then he nodded for Brandon to follow him into the control room. “Damn, Matt- ah Dr. Price was as excited as a kitten with a ball of yarn this morning. Anyhow...” He stopped and pointed at a workbench on which lay a crumpled mass of ultra fine wires. Brandon just stared. “That,” continued Roger, “Is Matt’s latest brain child.”

Brandon just stared and then shrugged his shoulders to confirm the obvious; he had no idea what he was looking at.

“The transponders that Matt used to suppress your dominant electromagnetic pattern were mounted in the ring around you last night. You follow?”

“Uh-huh.” Responded Brandon though he had no idea of what a transponder was.

“Anyhow.” Roger continued. His voice had become more stilted, like a bad actor trying to sound like a rocket scientist without knowing what his lines actually meant. “By attaching the transponders directly to your head...” He nodded significantly toward the mass of wires on the workbench. “You will be free to move ah- the spatial-temporal relation between transponder and the cerebral ah- transmitter will be invariant thus avoiding the problems imposed by the inverse square law...” He stopped in mid-delivery. “Ah- Dr. Price.”

The tall, thin man pulled his fleshless lips back into a smile as he leaned against the doorframe. “And the resultant temporal ambiguities hmmm? Please continue Mr. Hornsbee, you’re doing so well.”

Roger’s face reddened noticeably. “I was just saying...”

The Lincolnian figure pushed pass the two young men and picked up the ‘apparatus’. “Go on Roger.”

Now flustered, Roger simply stammered. “Invariant...” And then he gaped like a fish out of water, helpless and more than a little embarrassed.

“Ah-yes.” Added Dr. Price when it became obvious that Roger wasn’t going to continue. “Or to put it simply Mr. Wilks, you will be free to move without disrupting the signal.” He raised his eyebrows significantly. “But *small* movements-hmm? The head harness must remain precisely in place.”

Brandon’s eyes widened, “You’ll be able to see me?”

“And you- us,” He waved his hands in the air as if to explain, “eventually. All of that is still in the future, of course. Eventually we’ll conduct the test perhaps in the conference room in the front of the lab hmmm?” He raised his eyebrows as if he were about to make a significant statement. “No electromagnetic isolation chamber. The point is, if reality is an interaction of electromagnetic fields Mr. Wilks, we will see you as you ah... are in that electromagnetic ambiance. Or at least that would seem to be potentially the case hmmm?”

Brandon nodded as if he understood but his face was more honest. Whatever! It didn’t matter except that *she* would be free and not just for a frozen moment. “The *real* me.”

“Ah- yes.” It was obvious that Dr. Price was a bit uncomfortable with the idea that the *real* Brandon was a female. Truth? Both were real of course. “But this experiment does contain some significant *dangers*.”

“Dangers?” Echoed Rodger.

Dr. Price scrunched up his face in deep thought. “Yes. And we will not rush into that second phase, the critical phase hmmm?” He held out the wire mesh grid as if to place it on Brandon’s head. “The next session will *still* be in the isolation booth. That is,” He paused significantly, “If you are still willing Mr. Wilks.”

Brandon beamed, “Oh yes sir!”

~oOo~

Ten minutes but it felt like ten hours to Roger as he sat looking through the fine gold mesh that covered the window into the seemingly empty isolation chamber. Brandon was in there all right; the latter fact was clearly obvious when the fiberglass chair abruptly reappeared in the center of the otherwise empty room. “Wow! You see that Matt?”

The scientist was sitting behind Roger with his back turned away from the chamber as he stared at the pair of cathode ray tubes upon which strings of numbers scrolled. He stabbed at the screen of one of the monitors with his index finger, “He stood up, right? You can see the chair now?”

“Uh-huh.”