

**A NIGHTMARE OF DREAMS**  
(Tarot Card: The Wheel of Fortune)  
**Z. Sharon Glantz**

Doc felt that old familiar sensation creep beneath his skin. You are the enemy, a voice echoed in his head. You are here and now, another voice soothed. With the second voice came a warmth that circulated quickly through his body. The warmth became heat became fire became light became illumination. He stroked the calming Great Dane who moments before challenged him with a mouth full of teeth, muscles taut with tension, ears folded back and hair standing on end.

"If he's too much dog for you, give him to someone who can handle him," he politely sneered both at the voices in his head and the hysterical woman who absent-mindedly tore tissue, letting the pieces fall on the pristine floor of his consultation room.

"Can't you just give him tranquilizers?" she snapped back.

Here and now, the voice repeated. How he despised women like this. He knew their story. Upon divorce and a hefty settlement including a home with a large yard, they'd go out and purchase a cute, oversized puppy who they assumed would magically grow up as their symbiotic protector. However, lacking the power or willingness to train such an animal, their dog would grow up unmanageable. They would tolerate the wanton destruction until the dog destroyed something of real value. Then, they'd seek out a professional to "fix" their dog.

When he first opened his dog training (retraining) business, he found retraining the dogs was easy. He'd always loved dogs. His stint in Viet Nam honed his instincts around dangerous or violent behavior. He loved even the most vicious dog. In fact, the fiercer they were, the more he understood them. There were additional benefits to his

choice of business. Some of his female clients would be so thankful for their dog's obedience, they would do anything to keep seeing Doc -- seduce him, feed him, give him access to their attractive friends and their dogs.

Inevitably the relationships would become as unmanageable as the one between dog and owner, and Doc would end it. He still bruised from a previous liaison, making it easy to break his usual pattern with the woman before him -- for the moment, anyway.

"Let me take him for a couple of weeks. Then let's you and I work on ways you can learn to handle him."

"Thank you, Doc. I'd do just about anything to keep my little Dukee," she said as she danced provocatively towards the door.

"He's not so little -- remember that and you'll be off to a good start." She pouted and a single tear eased down her cheek as if on cue. "Duke and I will see you two weeks from today. At that time, I will ask you to attend a series of sessions so that you can avoid being overwhelmed by him in the future."

"I'm not so easily overwhelmed," she purred.

"Duke knows otherwise. I'll take good care of him. Goodbye." Feeling improperly dismissed, she sniffed, did a pirouette and made her exit. Doc let out the breath he didn't know he was holding. "Well, Duke, how about you and I get to know each other."

Doc was happiest while working with the dogs. He'd worked with so many a dog he could identify the exact moment bonding occurred, and the large masterful beasts would bend to his will.

The night before Duke's owner would return to more than likely undo all the work they'd accomplished, Doc lay wide awake late into the night. He was lonely again.

Actually, he was lonely a lot. He reminded himself that this always happened just after he finished retraining a dog and just before he started retraining the owner. Maybe that's why he got together with their owners -- to be with the dogs. He had a few close friends -- primarily his army buddies who lived all across the continent. He could call them at any time, but somehow the telephone seemed like a stupid way to communicate. He'd hang out at a few taverns, play pool, throw darts. Sometimes he'd meet someone, but for the most part, he wasn't all that sociable.

He thought about Duke. He thought about Duke's owner and the dance she had done for him. He imagined what other dance she might perform as he faded into sleep and . . .



Janette, Ricky, Arnie and Alice were responsible for various tasks for the summer concert series. One night they met at the bar across the street after a particularly grueling rehearsal. Alice thought Arnie's reputation as a dancer/choreographer made him a city treasure. Ricky, a lighting designer, had worked in the same places as Alice but she'd never met him outside the dark theater. He had always been a loud voice booming in the dark during technical rehearsals. All Alice knew about Janette was that she played piano and had recently relocated from halfway across the country to perform with the symphony. The foursome started meeting regularly. Alice liked her new friends.

One night, Arnie had complained that although he loved classical ballet, he longed to do the outrageous. Janette had confessed she'd written some very peculiar music. Ricky had nodded his head excitedly. After years and years of sewing for the opera, the ballet, the theater and anyone who could afford her, Alice desperately

wanted to graduate to designer.

Thus began the development of the performance piece, "Easel." As they had plotted and planned, Alice found herself in a new role. Each of the other artists had focused solely on their own contribution to the piece. Janette perfected her score. Arnie, who had also fallen in love with Janette, spent his time moving to her rhythms. Because Ricky stage managed the concert series, he had little time to do more than attend their meetings.

Alice wanted to think of herself to be a design genius, if only she had the opportunity and the money. She had already moved from seamstress to pattern maker and every now and then, a costume designer would consult with her on their designs. The fact that she rarely received program credit didn't bother her too much, or so she claimed. She would bide her time. Now she knew her time had finally come.

During the creating of "Easel" Alice was in bliss. Arnie managed to get a grant to pay for costumes and Alice had a head start on designing the piece because unlike the others, her major work on the concert series ended with its opening. At meetings when they'd find themselves conflicting over ideas or at a dead end, Alice would pull out a design ready to inspire progress. The costumes were the structure on which the piece hung. This made her feel very powerful.

They decided on a one-night performance venue that was part of a festival of new performance art. They figured this would lead into a longer run at either that theater or another. Alice sat alone during this performance since the others were busy bringing the piece to life. At the end of the performance, she took in the audience's excited applause, letting it gratify every cell in her body.

The four of them celebrated upon receipt of the invitation to perform a six-week run following the festival. They continued to rely on Alice to keep the group organized. Alice was over-stimulated, exhausted and in seventh heaven.

Her new role was larger than she thought. In her panic to accomplish each and every task, she alienated her fellow artists who she called friends. She didn't seem to notice that they shrunk away from her, bristling at her numerous agendas, memos, lists of decisions to be made, performance notes. But hadn't they asked her to be director/producer? Neither Janette or Arnie were equipped to do the job and Ricky, busy with other projects, didn't have the time. She knew they'd be thankful someday.

Alice wore a tuxedo of her own design to the first performance of their run. She basked in the glow of success as the performance proceeded. She knew that the glory of the show before her belonged to her. In her mind, she and she alone was "Easel." She should be proud and so she was. Janette and Arnie took their bows as she had shown them to maximize the effect of her courageous costumes.

Following the performance came the party. Alice humbly accepted praise as she seemingly floated throughout the night. She didn't notice that Janette and Arnie left early or that Ricky never showed up at all.

That night she flopped contentedly into bed. She floated into sleep and ...



Cynthia, Cyn to her friends, let her mind wander as she waited impatiently to be called.

Cyn had style and knew it. She could attract the eyes of everyone within her vicinity without saying a word. It wasn't only that she was attractive, she had charisma.

She could light up a room. She could also darken a room. The only one who witnessed this more than her ex-husband was her daughter. Lisa and the monthly checks were all that remained of the love that would last forever.

Cyn had struggled this past year following her divorce to get into "the business." One good commercial and she could tell her ex to go to hell for good. Lisa would just have to understand. Her ex had no idea the expense involved in raising a teenage daughter. He made plenty of money working those ridiculous hours. When did he even have time to spend it? She felt a pang in memory of the long evenings she waited for him to come home -- not that she lacked activity. But she needed more attention than he was willing to give. So did Lisa.

She startled when she heard her name. Without a second thought, she pressed her charisma button until a contagious smile spread across her face.

Fifteen minutes later she slumped in the seat of her car defeated. They said she was too old. Too old, she shuttered, I don't look a day over 25. She nearly hit a car during a lane change, responded to his honking horn with a honk of her own, swearing at the top of her lungs.

Opening the door to her not-so-humble home, she smelled something burning. Dropping her purse, she ran into the smoking kitchen. Lisa and her girlfriend stopped laughing at the sight of her in the doorway. Lisa cringed as though preparing for a blow.

"We burnt the first batch," quietly admitted Lisa's friend, showing Cyn the blackened cookies.

"We're sorry, Mamá," whimpered Lisa, "I'll scrub the pan clean, I promise."

"It's a no stick pan, dear," Cyn spat. It was then she noticed the potholder. It had

charred streaks, and one corner looked burnt. "My pot holder," she screamed, "my brand new pot holder from The Kitchen Boutique. You've ruined it."

"I'm sorry, Mamá. It was an accident. It fell on the burner after I melted the butter. I'm sorry."

"It's only a stupid potholder," her friend whispered in Lisa's ear.

"It was designed by Deally Pimento. It's one of a kind," whined Cyn.

"A designer potholder?" Lisa cried with anguish that matched her mother, "I'll buy you another one. I've saved up some money and I can find you another Deally Pimento."

"That's all right dear. I suppose I can manage without it," sighed a dejected Cyn. "Just make sure you clean up this mess. I've had a long and horrendous day."

In actuality, it had only been the previous two hours that had been awful. Preceding her audition, Cyn enjoyed primping in preparation. At the salon, it was facial, hair dye and cut, manicure. She designed her own makeup. If her ex knew how much she socked away from selling the Puchki line, he'd limit his financial support for sure.

Cyn poured herself a glass of wine, sat back on the sofa and clicked on the television with the remote. It was either the news or re-runs of sit-coms. She had forgotten to pay the cable bill again. Since the news made her depressed and she still smarted from having been rejected by the casting directors for most of the sit-coms, she clicked off the television.

"Are you going to your class tonight?" Lisa asked politely.

"Are you finished in there? Where's your friend?"

"We cleaned up and she went home. Can I come with you to your class?"

"Lisa, we've been over this a hundred times. Mamá cannot fully concentrate and keep an eye on you at the same time. Check the freezer for dinner. I'm too tired to cook."

After Lisa left the room, Cyn thought about the scene she would perform at class. She and her scene partner had been rehearsing a scene from *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. Cyn thought Maggie was a sex-starved neurotic princess and had difficulty getting into character. The instructor, an ex-student of the late Lee Strasberg, had assigned them parts he felt would match their personalities. Cyn figured he must be attracted to her and cast her in a role that would make his blood boil. She couldn't believe his laughter when she said she wanted to do Brecht. Maybe she'd shop for a new acting teacher.

"What would you like to drink, Mamá?" Lisa asked as she carefully removed the steaming plastic plates from the microwave.

"I'll stick with what I have, dear," Cyn responded absently, "now be a good girl and let Mamá study her lines."

"I could help you. I could read Brick."

"How do you know who's in the scene?" Cyn snapped, genuinely shocked.

"We read Tennessee Williams in class last semester," Lisa defended.

"Thank you, but I'll manage." Cyn took three bites of the starchy glop before her and stood. "Guess I'd better fly. You have the number. Only call if it's a dire emergency."

"I know, I know. Have fun, Mamá."

"This is work, not fun. You behave yourself and clean up the kitchen," Cyn sniped as she made her exit. 14 year olds reading Tennessee Williams. I should ask her if she knows of a good scene for me, Cyn mused. Maybe she's read Brecht.



Cyn returned home late and a little drunk. Lisa was already asleep, or at least pretended asleep. Cyn had performed beautifully despite what her instructor said. She must have done well -- that handsome man who did soap operas asked her out after class. She had gulped down two gin and tonics to calm her nerves. Unfortunately, her nerves got so calm she forgot her head. Her last thoughts as she fell back into her soft bed were, I hope I behaved tonight. I must have -- I'm in my bed alone. Got to cut back on my drinking.

The dizziness behind her eyes faded as sleep washed over her and . . .



Jay sat back, waiting for his computer to recalculate the figures. He smiled to himself. He knew he could sell anything to anyone anytime. If charm didn't work, he'd apply his unique form of pressure. He could out-endure anyone. Resistance, ambivalence and uncertainty were challenges. He was restricted to the telephone and modem. His illness had escalated in recent years, and he couldn't trust himself out there in the world. He was safer at home. So was everyone else.

He'd been at what he imagined was the height of his career, buying and selling stocks and bonds and real estate when he snapped. The doctors said it was a combination of genetics, upbringing and a stressful lifestyle. It took him years to realize that the manic periods during the life of a manic depressive had severe consequences and were not enough to compensate for the depressive periods that followed. Now, he obediently took his meds and got regular checkups. Periodically, his own biochemistry would find ways around the balancing influences of the varying types of drugs he ingested. However, he'd only been institutionalized twice in the last year.

A few years previously when he did a stint in the St. Margerine Hospital, he met the depressive who he married. She worked as an accountant in a large firm, spending most of her spare time performing her wifely duties. Between the two of them they managed an admirable lifestyle. His wife begged Jay to let her take a leave of absence to have a child, but Jay insisted they couldn't afford it. The thought of her spending that much time at home horrified him.

He remembered psychotherapy with Dr. Bennett. What had seemed so important at the time rang insignificant to him now. His life was about management, not the search for inner truth. Besides, the process of therapy was irritating and got in the way of his life.

Last month, he got a tip from his friend at the hospital that a certain dying wealthy patient was about to liquidate his assets to pay to be frozen, searching for immortality through cryogenics. Jay talked his way to the heart of the wealthy man's soon-to-be widow, his only surviving family, making offers she would not refuse. He knew his business.

How many times had his friend advised him of these rare opportunities for financial enhancement? With the bonuses, his friend was afforded a lifestyle he could never have earned as a nurse. It was win-win all the way.

Jay perceived himself as innocent yet invincible. Most of those with whom he had done business -- the nurse included -- knew otherwise. In general Jay made people tired. For those who took care of him -- a prerequisite for becoming his lover -- his demands would gently increase until they became impossible. His lovers would barely escape with their personas intact. Jay called it abandonment. For those who confronted

him on his behavior -- a prerequisite for becoming his friend -- his denial dance would ultimately invoke rage. His friends barely escaped without killing him. Jay learned to limit his time with his supposed friends so as not to alienate them. However, he considered their behavior a different kind of abandonment. Those who he hurt with his uncanny and unconscious ability to dig deep beneath one's defenses and attack, for the most part, disappeared as soon as they could. Those who stuck around, he thought of as his flock, or his wife.

Jay's best relationships were those he made by modem. Some of these relationships were with other computer operators or other computers. Even though he typed like a fiend, he couldn't keep up with the thwarting pace of his mind. He had to remind himself that the slower pace made it easier to manage the manic beneath the surface.

Once he'd gotten the wheels turning on this latest venture of asset liquidation and acquisition, he moved through a series of networks until he made contact with the computer operator he knew as GOD -- some small town guy in Ohio with whom Jay had a relationship. Unlike those who believed Jay possessed an unethical arrogance, GOD was impressed by Jay's ability to make a deal. Jay had no rules and neither, it seemed, had GOD.

In the middle of GOD's transmission of congratulations, the electricity went out. The thunder and lightning awakened Jay to the probable reason of such an outage.

The phone rang. His wife would be home late again. Jay's watch read 9 p.m. and he figured it was hit-the-hay time anyway. He'd be up at 5 to juggle more options.

He took his meds, dosed himself with a few quaaludes and a long draught of

vodka. Within 15 minutes he turned off the reading light, passed out and . . .



Lycra heard someone turn on the shower as she snuggled next to the warm body beside her. She knew it was him because of the abundance of hair running down his back. She imagined he was more animal than man.

"Lycra, come be with me," a husky feminine voice called out. She tore herself away from the masculine warmth that breathed evenly beside her and headed for the shower. She was greeted by a warming spray and Sidra's heated embrace.

Beneath the warm greeting, Lycra felt Sidra's chill of rage. She was used to the many layers of feelings of those whom she loved. Especially the couples. She had met this particular couple only a month before when they cheerfully walked into her office.

After years of notoriety as a promoter of psychological or new age workshop leaders, she could afford to discriminate according to her own criteria. She preferred those clients who came with a small following and a book or tape already in public circulation. Sidra and Zandor had individual successful careers as psychotherapists and had recently decided to work together doing workshops on "How to Keep a Marriage in Love." Lycra smelled success and started designing their promotion campaign in her head even before they settled on a contract.

Those individuals or couples who led workshops on love were her favorites. She celebrated love in her every breath, channeled it into every task she performed. Love was the most important element in her life.

Whenever Lycra made a connection with someone -- anyone from those she represented to those she chatted with over vegetables -- she asked herself: Was there

a spark? Would it ignite a fire? If the answers to these questions were negative, she'd smile a winning smile and move on. If the answers were affirmative, she'd dance the dance until she came up against resistance. Then she would either back off or seek out inroads through their resistance. It would depend on the needs of the moment. How she loved to love. She felt tides of erotic energy move through her all the time.

Lycra had a few very close of friends. All of them were ex-lovers. She knew if she needed their support, she could rely on them to hold her close throughout the dark night. Usually when she reconnoitered with an old friend, she could count on meeting someone extraordinary. If that person was the friend of her friend, she'd find ways of meeting them away from her friend. If that person was the lover of her friend, she'd try to join their celebration of newly found lust. She knew there was enough love for everyone.

Sidra and Zandor had been reluctant to include her. She pointed out how threeness would take their theories of love and marriage a step further. She told them she had no expectation of something permanent with either of them individually or the two as a couple. She hoped they would see her as an adjunct, a bridge, a vehicle for transformation. They set aside an entire day for themselves. They laughed, they cried, they talked, they made love, they snuggled. It was a very satisfying day for Lycra. She left Sidra and Zandor, satisfied and spent. At home, she stripped off her clothes, took a quick inventory in the mirror and fell into bed. She lay in a groggy bliss and . . .

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. . . fell into a dream.

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Doc sat in the cart his dad had taken each day into the coal mine. It moved swiftly into the mountainside. The rocky walls were illuminated by a periodic lamp. He'd always wondered what the underground world that buried his father was like. Dad just assumed Doc would work in the mine. Doc didn't have the guts to tell Dad about his desire to work with animals, nor did he ever have to tell him. The war and a cave-in at the mine took care of that. As they glided along, Dad and his buddies laughed and talked. Even though their joy included him, it was as though Doc wasn't really there. Why not? This was only a dream. Sometimes he'd catch glimpses of people, places and things that held meaning for him projected on the walls of the tunnel. He relaxed as they glided deeper into the mine until . . .



Alice had read Lewis Carroll's books, but this was her first dream about them. Reading them had brought her tremendous joy. The rabbit hole was exactly as she had visualized the first time she read *Alice in Wonderland*. Usually, she suffered from acrophobia so badly she experienced vertigo when descending a staircase or ladder. In her dream, falling down the bottomless hole seemed perfectly natural. Usually, she panicked if she didn't know exactly where she was going. In her dream, she didn't. Why would she? This was only a dream. Sometimes she'd catch glimpses of people, places and things that held meaning for her projected on the walls of the hole. She relaxed as she fell deeper into the earth until . . .



Cynthia felt the roller coaster slowly progress up the steep incline. Unlike Lisa, she hated roller coasters. Until now. She could feel her excitement mounting. The green

glow from the roller coaster's enclosure illuminated the top. During those final few moments before descending, she recalled her horror on her first roller coaster ride. Her parents never let her ride one, so she was already 16 the first time. She'd never felt so out of control in her life. As her car hurtled down the slope, she felt more joy than she imagined possible. She laughed and cheered, taking in the flight. Why not? This was only a dream. Sometimes she'd catch glimpses of people, places and things that held meaning for her projected on the enclosing walls. She relaxed as she spiraled downward until . . .



Jay had fantasies about plugging directly into his computer operating system and traveling along networks to visit the user-friendly computers he had come to know. In his dream, he lived out his fantasy. It was better than *Tron*, better than anything he'd imagined. After passing data banks, programs or other operating systems, it got very dark. He knew he traversed a telephone cable. He envied artificial intelligence. Having battled long and hard with his emotional structure, the idea of intellect without emotion was most appealing. For the first time since before his break, he felt joy without being manic. Why not? This was only a dream. Sometimes he'd catch glimpses of people, places and things that held meaning for him projected on the walls of the cable. He relaxed as he moved deeper into the network until . . .



Lycra felt like she'd been shot out of a canon and now flowed quickly along an organic passageway. She knew she was surrounded by similar entities who struggled for survival. However, she also knew she need not struggle since her survival was

guaranteed. She propelled forward upon realizing where she was and where she was going. She recalled her first sexual experience and how she had wanted to talk to someone all about it. She went to her mother, a paranoid who used religious dogma to protect herself. She demanded they pray together. Now, as she swam along a vaginal canal, she experienced sexual intercourse from another point of view. Why not? This was only a dream. Sometimes she'd catch glimpses of people, places and things that held meaning for her projected on the vaginal contours. She relaxed as she was projected deeper towards the womb until . . .



. . . arriving safely within the walls of a great palace. They didn't recognize themselves, yet somehow, they knew all was right with the world -- at least all was right in this dream world.



Doc's first conscious thought is: Where did I get these tits? In his woman's body, he wraps fine thread around green wood that he shaped into a peace sign. He starts to giggle and twitter. The pregnant woman before him looks up from her work on the complex network she is weaving, reflects his moment of shock and surprise at being inside such a strange body, and joins in the laughter.

"What's so funny?" the woman in white inquires, interrupting her work with the herbs and oils. She too looks momentarily shaken. Before anyone can answer, a gong is heard.

"The King approaches," a herald announces. A bewildered man with a great white beard reaching over his protruding belly drops a green fungus at their feet.



"The sacred mistletoe grows high in the trees this year," he announces.

"A good omen," remarks the woman in white, looking as though the words came out of her mouth against her will.

"Come, husband," says the pregnant woman, "make your tree token."

Doc sees that the courtyard is filled with people making tree tokens. However, only the King, his Queen and the woman in white hold their shape for longer than moments. The others flicker in and out. He remembers getting flashes of events out of time after spending a long period in the jungle. Or maybe it was the acid.

"Your herbs, my King," intones the woman in white, bowing before handing him a cup of tea.

"What is it?" Doc whispers to the woman in white when the king walks away.

"It's from a recipe used only once a year. It appears on the tallest of the circle of stones long enough for me to combine the ingredients at which time it quickly fades both from the stone and from my memory."

Doc is surprised to find the explanation satisfies him. Usually, he has no stomach for mystical mumbo jumbo. His life had been far too real for such an indulgence.

"Doc, how are you progressing?" asks the Queen.

Before he can consider the ramifications of her calling him by name, he speaks: "I'm almost finished, Lady Jay." He decides against thinking all together. He never could abide dreams -- hallucinations, maybe, but dreams were the weirdest.

"I saw a nest, but I didn't see any spotted owls," says the Queen.

"I not only saw a spotted owl," Doc says proudly, "she spoke to me."

"Ridiculous," responds the King, handing his empty cup to the woman in white.

"You made that up."

"I didn't, your highness" defends Doc.

"Doc, you are a handmaiden," reminds the King, "nothing more. Accept it and end your foolish talk."

"I spoke with a spotted owl," insists Doc.

"Must you fight even now?" begs the Queen. "Doc, I wish you'd stop provoking King Alice. And husband, your patronizing smugness is unseemly and beneath your station."

"I apologize, wife. We know Doc only says these things to get attention. I think she'd still rather be a priestess and wear white like you, Cyn. But, alas, you've rejected her already. Isn't that right, Doc?"

"My life will begin after you are dead. I weary of being your scapegoat," seethes Doc through gritted teeth.

"I don't blame you, Doc. Perhaps this will continue even in the afterlife," chortles the King.

"Gods, I hope not," Doc mumbles so that the King can't hear him.

Doc usually became unglued during a conflict he knew he couldn't win. He didn't hate fighting but he did hate losing. His mother had fought with his father. His mother had fought with his grandmother. He knew he was too often was known as a bully who beat down whoever was near him, especially when he was hurting. He joined the army as soon as he could to get out of the battle zone at home. In Viet Nam he learned that fighting meant death or worse. When he returned, he he'd walk away before he hurt somebody. Other times he'd hurt somebody. Women were the worst -- he'd never

physically hurt a woman. He didn't finish it by disappearing from their lives.

"My personality and frustrated ambition aside, your highness, I did in fact speak to the spotted owl," Doc implores, a way of communicating that is completely new to him.

"No doubt. It's easier to fight with you than for me to admit that I saw the river run with blood," bemoans the King. The women gasp and turn quickly away from the King. Everyone knew that anyone who saw the river run blood would soon die. They were all reminded about the events soon to come. "What did the spotted owl say, Doc?," continues the King, as though nothing terrible were going to happen to him.

"She wants me to place my tree token three branches on the branch beneath her nest."

"Why?" inquires the woman in white.

"To save the trees," explains Doc, as baffled as the woman in white at his response.

"Are we ready?" calls out the Queen. The changing crowd in the courtyard cheers. As they follow the procession through the gates into the grove of ancient redwoods, Douglas firs, Madrona's and every other type of tree he could imagine, Doc feels a surge of excitement. His instincts tell him to venture deep into the forest away from the other people. But he isn't working with his own instincts. Instead, he finds himself wanting to stay close to the community of people to whom he somehow feels connected. Community. He'd never been part of a community. His father's group of buddies wouldn't include him because he asked them too many questions they could not answer. His mother's friends smothered him to death if he stayed too close. He was

too much of a bully to have more than one or two friends his own age. In the army, he learned not to get too close. Grief was an indulgence he couldn't afford.

In the last few years, he moved around a lot. People got on his nerves if he was around them for very long. Some of those he met told them all about their family or community and suggested he find someone and settle down. He had trouble understanding how this could possibly help him.

"I'm here," a voice echoes. It is the voice of the owl.

Without knowing how he knows what to do, Doc squats and lifts to help a dipped branch underneath him lift him to the upper branches where the owl has built her nest. He places his token three branches below the nest filled with eggs. His skirts fly up around his head as the tree brings him safely back to earth. He lands to the laughter of all those who witnessed his descent. He blushes with self-consciousness at the village boys who snicker at him, smoothing down his skirts.

Doc joins the circle with the others who hung their tree tokens on a tree branch. He grabs the hand of the woman in white on the left and the King on the right. He and the King look at one another and smile. The King squeezes his hand affectionately. He feels his heart swell as though the anger they had shared brought them closer together. He'd never experienced the intimacy on the other side of ire.

They sing and dance to the trees until they have no voices left, barely able to rise from the earth. Doc contentedly follows the Queen to their quarters where he rubs her swelling feet.

"Ouch," she cries out.

"Is it time?" frets Doc, "shall I call Cyn?"

"No, it's only a kick," the Queen rubs her great belly. "He will be born at exactly the right time. Lycra, Lycra, my son to be. Please give me some peace so that I might rest. Good night, Doc," she says as she leaves to spend this final night with the King in their bed chamber.

Doc hears the kingdom preparing for bed echo down the palace halls. Usually, he hates sounds of other people once he is in bed and ready for sleep. Tonight, he welcomes the sounds as though they are part of him.

"Sleep well, little one," he murmurs to a kitten who curls up next to him, snoring loudly.

"Sleep well yourself," the kitten talks back.

Doc wonders where he'll wake up.



After a dreamless sleep, Alice wakes up back in the strange dream where she inhabits the body of a king. In waking life, she prided herself on being strong and fit. This body is obese and awkward. At least she has a penis. That was an interesting circumstance, one she had experimented with while out in the wood hunting mistletoe. She would never again underestimate the joys and needs of the male body. She got used to the facial hair that covered her face like a white fleece. That handmaiden had gotten under her skin. She was glad they made their peace, although that peace came with a sense of intimacy that surprised her.

Alice knows she has absolutely no control over her situation. Things seem to happen, and she plays her part. Who cast this thing? she ponders, wondering why she isn't playing the role of the pregnant queen sleeping beside her.

"Don't stare at me," snipes the pregnant Queen who comes awake as Alice lay watching.

Alice mumbles to herself as she stumbles out of bed and carefully performs her morning rituals -- rituals that accommodate this strange yet familiar body. This is only a dream, a theater of the mind, so go with the action, she reminds herself.

Alice and the Queen enter the large dining hall and happily share a meal with the rest of the kingdom. She looks at the tapestry that sections off part of the room. Rather than focus on the disturbing scene of a beheading depicted by the tapestry, she focusses on the treasures hidden behind it.

The people around her seem to appear and disappear at varying intervals. She might be talking with a page, find herself singing a song and then continue talking to the same page as though performing many scenes simultaneously. Her creative self loves the jumps. When she wishes for more continuity, she turns to one of the three women sitting closest to her.

The woman in white tells stories of past solstices. Alice nods. The Queen's handmaiden listens intently while attending them. She spends a great deal of time trying to make the Queen more comfortable. The Queen seems to change moods with every breath like a cosmic yo-yo. Pregnancy, Alice sighs, thankful to be in the male body that reaffirms her determination to skip the child-bearing experience of life.

"Ouch," cries the Queen.

"Is it time?" pipes the handmaiden.

"No, not yet," assures the woman in white.

Alice runs her oversized hand over the Queen's protruding abundance. "Lycra

will be born soon enough," she says out loud.

"Not soon enough for some of us, King," frowns the handmaiden and then gasps in remembrance of what is to come.

Alice laughs and raises her voice across the hall: "Rhythms, please."

The hall roars with excitement as drums, rattles, tambourines and other percussive instruments are handed out. The woman in white establishes a beat with her great drum. Alice expects the ensemble to be deafening. However, the complex intertwining rhythms are felt rather than heard.

Alice rises, moving with more dignity than grace, and yanks the string holding the tapestry. It falls to reveal a mountain of packages wrapped in anything flat -- leaves, woven silks and fabrics, parchment, fur, wood, sheet metal. She hears a communal gasp of awe as she proudly hands out the parcels.

Alice knows she has designed each and every gift by her own hand. Because time seems to happen simultaneously, she is able to give to more recipients than she'd imagined possible. A part of her longs to stop time and receive the thanks and attention of each giving. Instead, she has to be content with the act itself and after a time, recorded by an inner clock that does not reflect her actions, she feels exuberant. When the mountain diminishes and four gifts remain, she feels a deep satisfaction accompany her weariness.

The King presents a grassy covered parcel to the handmaiden. The handmaiden tears away the grass to reveal a hand mirror carved in wood. It is simple, elegant, and unique. The handmaiden caresses the smooth wood and finds she can dip her fingers into the liquified mirror. Even when she turns it over, the fluid that caresses her fingers

does not spill. Lost in wonder, the handmaiden wanders to the other side of the hall.

Alice hands the woman in white a long parcel wrapped in leather. At the woman in white's touch, the leather reshapes itself into an ornately engraved scabbard. The woman in white chirps with delight as she pulls out the dagger and finds that as she extends her arm the dagger turns into a sword. She swings the sword at a loaf of bread, and it becomes a sharp cutting knife that cleanly slices the bread. The woman in white bows her head and serves bread to the King and Queen.

Alice offers the Queen a simple opaque jar. The Queen unscrews the top and looks inside to find it filled with a strange unscented powder. Alice takes her by the hand and awkwardly leads her outside. They hear the drums echo from the dining area.

"Call to what nourishes you," she tells the Queen. The Queen looks back at her confused. "Whether it be plant or animal, whether it nourishes the heart or the belly, call it, name it," encourages Alice.

"I crave strange things, my King," the Queen warns.

"No matter, name it," responds Alice.

"I want a dill pickle."

"Tap some powder on your forehead here," Alice instructs pointing to her third eye.

The Queen does as she is told. She reaches out to snatch a pickle out of the air in front of her and laughs.

"Macadamia nuts," she names as she presses the powder to her forehead. Nuts rain out of the sky. She laughs as she gathers a few and pops them into her mouth. Deer and squirrels come out of the forest to indulge in the treats. Thankful, one deer



nuzzles the King affectionately. Alice takes out her handkerchief and dabs at the blood streaming out of the deer's bloody nose where a macadamia landed.

After testing out a few other cravings, the Queen rests against a tree.

"Such a feast we will have to honor you, my King. I will make it so."

Alice feels her heart clench and release so quickly she hardly notices. She hands the final gift to her Queen.

"This birthing oil will burn throughout your labor. It will burn out when the child sees his first light." The Queen covets the small jar, tears streaming down her cheeks. Behind the solemnness of the exchange, Alice rejoices at the dynamic drama she enacts despite the pending climax and denouement in which she will not participate. She feels pangs of fear she cannot quite define. It is the same fear that made tears stream from the eyes of her Queen. This time she remembers the source of her fear. No matter. Alice has given freely without the need for recognition. She feels her heart clench and release again.

Today is as good a day as any to die, she mutters to herself.



Cyn had always hated herself in white. It made her look fat and she didn't go in for the let-me-save-your-life nursy look. Nonetheless, she feels pride in her white smock adorned only by the scabbard the King had given her.

This was the oddest dream she'd ever had. It felt like some strange surrealistic foreign film. She couldn't abide foreign films. The dream didn't feel like it was in English, had no subtitles, yet she knew the words.

The Queen has out done herself. The feast is magnificent, if not just the littlest bit

peculiar. Only she, the King, the Queen and her handmaiden seem to sit through each course. Everyone else seems to appear and disappear at random. Each course is from a different culture. The best part is that as she continues eating, she still has room for more.

Between courses, she talks and laughs with those around her. Everyone does. Except the King. She understands his pensive mood, although she's not quite sure what it is she understands.

Lazing after a most satisfying meal, she sees herself rise and address the kingdom. "Let the procession begin."

The instant silence is deafening as the people who fill the room make their exit. She follows the King through the large kitchen piled high with food crusted ceramic and out the door. The path leads them to the circle of stones. She presses her hand to her lips and then upon the tallest stone at the spot where the herbal recipe had once revealed itself.

The King sits on the flat stone at the center of the circle as Cyn moves around the inner perimeter. She carries a bouquet of heather, holly, cedar and the King's mistletoe, waving it through the air. The patterns she draws make sense to her even if she doesn't understand them. Upon the finish of her third rotation, she feels herself vibrate as she intones sounds she knows are words even if she doesn't know what they mean.

She finishes and looks up to see the light shimmer in the air contained by the stones. The kingdom circles around until they surround the stones.

Cyn moves opposite the tallest stone, bows, and turns around. She pulls out her

dagger, reaches out as it becomes a sword and slices a rectangle in the air before her. Singly, in couples or in families, the people come forth to meet the King. They hug him, kiss him, stare deeply into his eyes as they say their farewells.

Last to come are the Queen and her hand maiden. Cyn stands before the entrance holding an ornately carved staff, intoning the words to fill in the hole that has let so many move through.

She fills three goblets with wine. She, the Queen and her handmaiden perform a simple dance, bring the cups together and spill wine into their gaping mouths, splashing their clothing. Cyn takes a chunk of bread from the loaf and passes it around. The honey nut sweetness fills them all with warmth.

The Queen carefully sits stroking her bulk directly across from the handmaiden. Cyn is reminded of her pregnancy with Lisa. Awkward as she was, Cyn remembers feeling like the most important person in the world. She knew she was performing the most valuable act one could perform. She was surprised to find that even though she wanted to envy the Queen before her, she couldn't. Instead, she feels the joy of performing acts she knows to be larger than her own life. This is new to Cyn, and she realizes she fears the responsibility. At the same time, she knows she is willing to take it on and accept the consequences of her actions and decisions.

"What say you, King?" she asks with more compassion than she knew she possessed.

The King rises and sings the song of his life. It is a strange song. It is as though he sings her life rather than his own. She watches her life unfold from a distance. A knot releases in the pit of her stomach as she witnesses the scenarios of the woman she

knows from looking in the mirror. Whenever she has tried to envision her life, she' doesn't see herself as a person -- more of a spirit in search of humanity. The King's song helps her visualize the person that is she and she finds she is both impressed and appalled. She is relieved at being able to truly ask herself, what do I have to prove?

Before she can ponder further, the song ends. She sees the tears trickling down the faces of the other three before she feels the dampness on her own cheeks.

Without another thought she rises and moves to face the kneeling King. She is followed by the other two women. She pulls out the knife, slices the palms of she, the King, the Queen and her handmaiden. They let one drop of blood fall to the earth before clutching their hands together in a bloody embrace. As they pull away, she draws the knife into a sword. She presses the flat point on each of the King's shoulders before tapping his head.

Cyn moves to the side, drawing the sword above her head as it turns into an ax.. The ax swings and slices easily through the neck of the King. His blood splatters her white smock as she raises her voice in chorus with the entire kingdom. They mouth words she does not understand to the starry heavens. She wants to feel revulsion at what she has just done, but feels joy instead. Shimmering sparks of the circle they have created spiral up into the sky and out to the infinity of the universe, carrying with them the soul and spirit of the King.



Jay reawakens in his pregnant dream body walking along a snowy path. He had lost touch with this peculiar dream after the beheading. Much as he thought he should feel completely disgusted, he didn't. He clutches the small jar the King had given him as

he follows the bloody woman in white. His handmaiden skips behind him like an excited puppy. Behind her follows the rest of the kingdom.

Everything in this dream happens instantaneously, like he imagined occurred within the hardware of his computer. He hadn't recalled a dream for a very long time. His medication often interfered, keeping him in a chronic state of fatigue. He suspected this dream would be different.

Jay notices his usual mood shifts, but somehow they feel different in this pregnant body. He senses how his shifts strongly effect the life inside him. He knows he will either wake up soon or experience giving birth. He doesn't want to have children and thought he had convinced his wife that stopping the genetic strain that had produced his illness was a moral act. However, childbirth had always been a curiosity.

The moon, although not quite full, illuminates his path. The snow cushions the sounds of his heavy footsteps. He startles at the cry of an owl who glides above him. He hears the wolves howl their harmony. Lost in reverie, he feels moisture run down his legs in a rush. He stops -- confused and fearful. "My water broke," he mumbles.

The handmaiden, already jumping with joy, shouts, "It's time, it's time."

The bloody woman in white leads them into a large barn. The kingdom follows them inside. While they make him a bed of hay Jay feels a stab of pain unlike anything he's felt before. After it passes and he prays the pain has gone away for good, he opens the jar and places it on the velvet covered table. Before he can spark the flint he feels another wave of pain spread across his mid-section. When it too finally passes, Jay lights the oil inside the jar and lets his handmaiden help him lay down in the bed of hay. He hears the voice of the bloody woman in white soothe him while instructing him to

breathe through pain that races through his body.

Time ceases to have meaning as Jay focusses on the bringing forth of life. Periodically he looks up at the jar of oil that continues to burn brightly. He senses the growing restlessness of those around him but pays it no mind.

At intervals that mean nothing to him he hears a male voice from his swollen belly. "Power on," it commands. Jay feels jolts of electricity flow through his body. "Software engage." He feels blood pumping, each breath taken, smells he doesn't recognize, makes loud sounds of pain he's never made before. Define parameters." He re-understands the body's need for sustenance, the desire to live, to grow, to love, to be. "Connect." Jay's awareness expand beyond his and he can hear the minds of everyone else in the room. He's surprised but not overwhelmed. "Collect data." He builds models in his mind to organize the information from the minds of those around him. "Assess." Jay would rather not, preferring to know facts, not ramifications. "Assess." Jay tries to focus on the data, but it keeps changing.

"I can't!" screams Jay.

"You will because you have no choice," says the bloody woman in white. "Push," she says gently. He looks up at her and in his peripheral vision, sees the flame from the jar winks out. "Push," the woman and the voice command with such intensity, all Jay can do is respond.

Jay feels a powerful earthquake erupt between his loins. He hears cheering and cries of delight as the bloody woman in white lifts the small being that had been housed in his body. The newborn's first cry fills him with a joy he has never known. He feels one last eruption from within as the afterbirth releases itself from his body. He lays back

relaxed, relieved that he can no longer hear the minds of others. He lets his consciousness float peacefully until he suddenly feels as though something was missing.

"Lycra? Where is Lycra?" he demands out loud.

"He's beautiful, your highness," exclaims his handmaiden.

At last, the bloody woman in white hands him the wrapped bundle.

Looking down at the new life he holds close to him, he coos: "Lycra, Lycra, you are now born. Welcome to the world, little man."



Lycra had always loved birthdays -- until this one.

The comfort of the warm soothing fluid in which she swims decreases and she becomes aware she has been living in the body of a Not-Self. All this time she thought she was the center of the universe. With the awareness of the Not-Self comes the need to be, to become, to understand Self. As she ponders, she senses her awareness twist, sending her into confusion while the walls of the greater body push her into unknown territory. She tries to resist and for a while, she succeeds. However, in doing so she becomes more aware of the stress her resistance is putting on the greater body.

She changes her mind, something she didn't know could happen until it did. She must move forward if she wants a Self of her own. She also senses the pain she causes the greater body with her resistance.

Lycra knew this was a very special dream, one she would always remember and carry with her. She had been a cesarian baby. She always thought it was because Mommy had been unable to dispel her panic long enough to let her arrive in her own

time.

Lycra feels a rush of air gust across the top of the caul that has protected her as she easily slips out of the greater body. Although she cannot see through her physical eyes, a third eye reveals the glint of metal piercing through the sac. A woman in red carefully cuts away the veil to the delight of the not-selves who stare at her.

As though handling a sacred shroud, the woman in red lays the caul on the velvet table that had once held a beacon of light that helped guide her through the greater body. The woman in red wraps the long cord attached to her naval around her right arm. The velvety fabric that warms her body provides some comfort but is not enough to satisfy her. She screams her frustration. One of the not-selves holds Lycra against her breast. Lycra doesn't like the smell of the handmaiden and screams. With relief, she feels the greater body circle her little one with loving arms. Silently, she is carried out into the sunlight to a grove of trees.

"I'm glad you're here, sweet thing," the greater body purrs into her ear. Lycra melts at the sound.

The queen is so different from my mother. Mommy had been much younger than the Queen when she gave Lycra life. Mommy was still a child herself. Lycra remembers crying, trying to communicate her needs, often to no avail. She remembers her Mommy crying with her. This frightened Lycra. Mommy wasn't supposed to cry. Mommy was all alone, except for Grandpa. Her father was long gone. Grandpa loved Lycra in a way different than Mommy.

"He's beautiful, Queen Jay. May I?" the handmaiden reaches out to hold her again. Lycra senses this and wails until her Queen Mother holds her, gently kisses her



head and hands her back to the stinky handmaiden. "You'll be fine, Lycra. I need to rest."

"It'll be all right, little prince," says the handmaiden. Lycra is not reassured and struggles in the woman's grasp.

Grandpa told Lycra his way of loving her was the most special way of loving there could ever be. He had touched her in ways that made her tingle all over. She marveled at the joy it brought him when she touched him back. His body was so very different. Grandpa had abused her, this she knew. They had put him in prison for loving her.

Lycra struggles harder against the handmaiden, wailing louder and fiercer. Yes, the handmaiden smells like Grandpa. Finally, the woman in red holds her and Lycra relaxes into her arms. Lycra giggles when the bloody woman in red raises her towards the sky.

"Behold the new life. Behold the wee little body, the microcosm of the greater body," they chant together.

Looking through her third, Lycra becomes aware of the greater greater body from which she comes and to which she will return. In her lifetime, she will embrace her individual sense of being and cultivate relationships between her Self and the not-selves.

"The whole is greater than the sum of the parts," intones the woman in red, "Each part seeks other parts to get closer to the sense of the whole. In their seeking, they find love and catch glimpses of the greater greater body."

Lycra slips into her first sleep.



Doc woke up refreshed. Last night I had the strangest dream I've ever dreamed before, he sung to himself. This was not a song he appreciated until this moment. It was one of those songs peaceniks sang at marches against a war that took the lives of many of his friends. Strange.

He hummed the tune as he prepared for the coming of Duke's owner. Fragments of his dream came back to him. Wandering onto the back porch to breathe in the new day and let Duke inside, he almost trips on a small package. No return address, his name, but no other address. Usually, he'd carefully test such a mystery before opening, but something told him not to bother. Under many layers of brown paper, he found the wooden hand mirror from his dream. The reflection of the handmaiden's face staring back at him didn't even shock him.

Doc left it on the back porch smiling to answer the insistent doorbell. Maybe he'd show Duke's lovely owner his feminine side.

He was surprised to see a man at the door.

"Yes?" he inquired cautiously.

"I'm here to work with Duke -- the Dane you--"

"You're not the owner who dropped him off."

"That would have been my wife."

Instead at growling at an intrusion, Duke came barreling out of the kitchen.

"Duke, hold," Doc commanded and Duke came to a quick halt and sat, awaiting his next command. "Duke, watch." Duke could barely hold back his excitement.

"Hey baby boy." The dog quietly whimpered.

"Duke, approach," Doc commanded. Duke trotted over to Brad, sniffed his crotch

and wagged his tail. "Duke, bananas." Duke leaped to Brad's shoulders and licked his face. Brad patted him affectionately.

"Tell him he's a good boy," Doc commanded.

"Good boy, Duke," Brad praised.

"Tell him off and sit." Brad did as he was told, and Duke sat on his foot.

"Do you train wives too?" Brad smiled and the two of them laughed.

Brad had gotten his wife the dog for protection because he spent long chunks of time on location. They talked movies, dogs, time spent in southeast Asia, time spent after returning to the World.

"Do you work with animals other than dogs?" Brad asked. Doc told him about his time with the circus and the zoo in which he worked with the cats, the elephants and the reptiles. The only people Doc had regaled with animal stories these past few years were those he bedded. Brad was a very different kind of audience.

Brad invited him to the opening of his latest film. He'd managed the stunt work, having promised his wife to give up doing it himself ever since he took a bad spill. At the party that followed, Brad introduced him to some of the "other crazies." A director friend of Brad's mentioned he was filming a piece in South Africa and asked if they could get together so he could pick his brain on animal habits. Brad slapped him on and back and said, "Welcome to Fantasyland, where all your dreams come true. If Dex wants to pick your brain, you've got a future in this business. If you want it."

Recognizing a friend in one another, Brad thanked him again for his work with Duke and invited him to a barbecue he was throwing the following weekend.

Doc wandered from room to room in shock. He opened the back door and saw

the now empty wooden hand mirror. Water remained where glass shards should have been. He touched his finger to a puddle of liquid and for a moment he was transported back to the grove of the trees, to where his tree ornament hung. He remembered how vulnerable he felt in the woman's body, not only because her life revolved the whims of a king. In the dream, he had felt great relief when the king was dead. But not like he did during war. This was a very different way of thinking.

Doc looked down at the mirror. The glass was back, reflected back to him his face. Although he couldn't articulate why, he looked different.



Alice woke with tears streamed down her cheeks and her nose dripped. Without a second thought she ran to her drafting table and started drawing every costume she could remember seeing in her dream before she was killed. So engrossed in her work, she didn't notice the day come and go and come again.

So much to do, so little time, she told herself, although she couldn't articulate why. Sketch after sketch was shaded, outlined, patterned and designed. She wrote outlined the story of her dream. Finally, bone weary, hand cramping, she stopped, unable to continue.

Alice jumped into the shower. Only mildly rejuvenated, Alice dressed to go out. Fully clothed, she drafted a letter to Arnie, Janette and Ricky, thanking them and dedicating her night's work to their future, among other details.

She didn't even notice that she locked her keys inside her apartment as she stepped out into the street. She walked a seemingly aimless path through familiar neighborhood haunts, places she had known all her life. She let the memories float

through her mind and smiled.

Standing across the street, she stared up at the theater that had acclaimed her work. If she were to be honest with herself – and she decided that would be a good thing at the moment – her collaborators were more like subjects who did her bidding. Yeah, she could be too bossy for her own good. She heard the car. A gun shot killed her instantly. The car drove on without stopping.

News of Alice's death had a tremendous impact on the box office at the theater. Arnie, Janette and Ricky were racked with guilt until they read Alice's letter to them.

In addition to asking their forgiveness for her arrogance, she told them she loved them, something she'd never told anyone. She also made it very clear what they were to do with her cremated remains. She left them her outlined script, along with the designs.

After the first read-through of the play they had written using Alice's outline, Arnie, Janette and Ricky clinked the three glasses of wine together in a toast to Alice. Passing the jar, each cast and crew member dipped their fingers into the powdery ash that was all that remained of Alice's physical being and pressed it to their third eyes, visualizing the piece at its completion. Ricky took the remaining powder to mix into the paint they would use on the designs for *The King is Dead ... Long Live the King*.

The success of the final production took cast and crew on a worldwide tour. Something urgent and organic brought audiences to their feet. A film maker taking a break in Paris from a shoot in South Africa saw it and went backstage to find out who had the film rights.



Cyn woke up rejuvenated without the slightest hint of a hangover. She vaguely remembered the dream, but quickly stored it away in her subconscious. She could hear Lisa in the kitchen. She bounced out of bed and gave her a big hug. Lisa surrendered to her touch hesitantly but happily.

"How was class? she asked tentatively.

"I stunk. I'm afraid I may never really make it as an actress," she replied without even feeling sorry for herself. Lisa watched her suspiciously.

"Mamá," she began hesitantly.

"What is it, dearest?"

"Dad wants to take me fishing with him next week."

Before Cyn could answer, the phone rang. It was her agent. The lead in a film had been hospitalized and they needed someone to stand in for her. The dialogue had been shot, but they still had some action shots to do. Cyn resembled the actor and they wanted her to catch a flight to South Africa next week.

Cyn took down as many details as she could, hung up and danced with Lisa around the kitchen table.

"Fishing with father, eh," she smiled at her daughter.

"Only if it's okay with you, Mamá."

"It's okay," she laughed. Lisa looked skeptical. "Did I ever tell you how much I loved your father once upon a time?"

"No. I know you hate him now."

"Maybe a little," Cyn said with a frown. "He's a good man in spite of himself, Lisa. He loves his work first and foremost, but when he wants to, he can be the dearest, most

loving man you ever knew. He loves you too. I hope you two have a wonderful time."

"You won't be mad if we do?" Lisa questioned. Cyn shook her head. "Are you sure?"

"I'm sure." Cyn couldn't remember the last time she could talk about her ex without getting angry. Lisa burst into tears and clutched her tightly. "It's all right, sweet girl. There's enough love to go around."

Cyn and Lisa departed for their adventures, excited with anticipation. When they returned, Cyn listened as Lisa regaled her with story after story of her fishing adventures.

After a time, Lisa suddenly became anxious. Cyn asked her what was wrong.

"You haven't told me a thing about South Africa," Lisa queried, expecting that Cyn's patience in letting her babble on resulted from her mother's preparations to darken the room.

"It was glorious." Cyn took her turn regaling stories of her hard work. "I won't get a major credit on the screen, but no matter. The best part was that I learned how to do makeup -- complex bizarre makeup. We had hours and hours of waiting, so I talked the makeup man into experimenting. We did stuff you wouldn't believe. I felt like an artiste. I'm afraid I'll need more practice, and you have the perfect face."

The phone rang. It was the director of the film, asking her to fly to Paris to see a performance he'd just seen. He wanted her to think about designing the makeup.

"Does that mean I'll spend more time with Daddy?" Lisa asked excitedly.

Cyn grinned and called her ex. For the first time in a long time they talked without fighting. Cyn knew why. Cyn's new income that would absolve him from further alimony

payments was only part of the reason. Cyn's ex admitted he was enjoying getting to know his daughter. Letting go of her hatred of her ex didn't help her like him, but it did help Lisa like her.

While she was packing, Lisa sat on her bed to keep her company.

"I was afraid to show you before, but daddy have me a present when we went fishing," Lisa confessed. She pulled out the familiar leather holder that held the magical knife from the King whom she had beheaded. Grief struck her. She looked up teary-eyed at her blossoming daughter.

"What is it Mamá? What's wrong?" Lisa prepared for the darkened onslaught that had yet to erupt since the night of the pot holder.

"You're growing up, dearest," Cyn quietly wept.

As if on cue, Cyn and Lisa witnessed the patch of red spreading across the crotch of Lisa's pants.

"Come, my little menarche. Let's clean you up," Cyn soothed the growing panic bursting from the girl becoming a woman. Lisa groaned.

"What is it?"

"I feel like a knife is slicing into me. Help me, Mamá."

"Relax, sweet woman. Let's see how we can ease those cramps."

They talked long into the night about love, sex, birth and the future.



Upon awakening, Jay opened his senses to the smells and contours of the woman beside him. Tenderly, he traced patterns of love along her soft skin. She murmured her pleasure and cuddled close to him. He felt his passion rise as he drew



her closer, stroking her hair, kissing her neck.

"My diaphragm is--"

"What do you say we make a baby?" Jay murmured lovingly into her ear.

"Do you mean it?"

Her question was lost in their heated embraces. When they lay contentedly holding one another, Jay stroked her stomach. His seed had taken. They could both feel it.

"Aren't you afraid our child will be -- you know," his wife asked tentatively.

"He'll manage if he must, just as I have, just as we both have," he said with more confidence than he expected to have.

They rattled around the kitchen touching each other periodically.

"Got work to do?" Jay asked.

"Mountains."

"Why don't you use my desk in the study. You're always complaining about your back aching after sitting on the couch. I'll be on my computer most of the day."

"Why are you so different today, Jay?" his wife asked a little frightened.

"I had this strange dream last night," he said and filled her in on every detail he could remember. "I woke up a new man--"

"--having spent the night as a woman. I'm not surprised," his wife snickered.

In Jay's study, his wife spread out her ledgers and computer printouts across his desk. Jay clicked away on his keyboard, hoping GOD would be online. The phone rang. It was his nurse contact. The man who wanted to preserve himself as an ice cube had died during the night and his widow was re-thinking the plan she and Jay had designed

for the future of her estate. Her husband had been in the middle of producing a film that was shooting in South Africa. She planned on going and taking her husband's place, since she'd helped him make most of the decisions it had taken to make him a success. She was ready for recognition. She wanted to talk to Jay upon her return, said she thought he was a sneaky slimy snake who showed the kind of savvy and shrewdness she needed to manage the empire she had inherited. Before ringing off, the nurse said the old guy had been so pleased with his care, he left the nurse a nice chunk of change. Jay congratulated him and didn't even demand a cut.

Looking at his monitor, he could see GOD trying to contact him – the message was in red so it was important. He responded in the code on which they'd agreed. GOD said he was changing his code name to GODDESS because he was tired of pretending she was a he. She'd only done it because most computer hackers were men or boys who wanted contact with same.

Jay guffawed and told GODDESS she was still his number one computer pal. To prove it, he typed to her an outline of his dream. GODDESS said it was a terrific story and encouraged him to publish it. Jay told her he had other priorities at present.

Months later his wife gave birth to baby Jessie. He had stayed with her throughout her labor, working with her, providing her with the strength he remembered getting from the bloody woman in white and the handmaiden throughout his labor. Jay continued to battle with his biochemistry but hadn't hit his wife and hadn't been institutionalized since the conception of their son.

A year later, Jay and his wife went to see the movie *The King is Dead ... Long Live the King* that his company produced. His wife watched her husband carefully,

recognizing the story enacted on the screen as the strange dream Jay had had that special night. Jay sat back, joyfully taking in the familiar images.

“What did you think?” his wife asked on the way home.

“Familiar, yes, but it stunk as a movie.” His wife sighed relief and giggled.

Online, when Jay mentioned seeing the movie, GODDESS admitted she had written the treatment based on a play she saw. “I’m not online every minute of every day,” she said defensively.

“Yes, and ever since your husband died you’ve become a producer.”

“When did you figure it out? It’s not like it’s part of your job to read the scripts of movies we’re producing.”

“I saw the original play,” said Jay. “No worries, GODDESS, but we can stop communicating on the dark web.”

“Good. I’m too busy to maintain my alter ego anyway.”

Jay didn’t have the heart to tell her how bad he thought the movie was but was relieved the GODDESS handle would be left behind. Besides, he liked his new job and his new boss, even if she wasn’t really a goddess.



Lycra rolled over, happy to awaken in her own bed by herself. She rocked herself back and forth, happy to be alive. She lazily got out of bed, recalling her dream. Recollections came in the form of feelings and sensations rather than pictures or words.

She got herself ready to greet those who would attend Sidra and Zandor's workshop. She got to the Sweetness and Light Center and set up. She was humming to herself when Sidra and Zandor arrived. They looked at her guiltily, unable to speak.

"What is it?" Lycra asked, concerned they had suddenly decided to divorce or some other catastrophe.

"We love you," Sidra started tentatively.

"But three's a crowd," Zandor announced.

"Including you was wonderful, but in the long run, it served to bring Zandor and I closer together rather than bring you closer to us," Sidra explained.

"We're very thankful to you for sharing with us, but we can't see including you in the intimacy sacred to us," Zandor continued.

Lycra saw pity creep into their eyes. It wasn't the first time. Other times she would rise above it all, or at least that was what she told herself as she made herself go numb. This time her lead feet wouldn't let her rise above anything. She gulped for air as she cried for something she could not name. Sidra and Zandor held her like a child, and she took in the nurturing as a child would. Weeping left her foggy as she performed the tasks of registration on automatic pilot. Usually when she felt bad, she felt bad both inside and out, drawing those around her into processing sessions to help her move through her feelings. This felt different. Any one of the open-hearted people attending the workshop would have gladly taken the time to listen to her and help her through her discomfort. But it wasn't necessary.

Lycra's dream birth had let her grow up, helped her quit looking for a healthy loving response from Grandpa, whose face she projected onto just about everyone to whom she was attracted. She had a life to manage and becoming an adult meant embracing a larger awareness rather than relinquishing her innocence.

She enjoyed flirting with the attendees but made no move to take one home.

Maybe another time. For now, she wanted to be with herself. She wanted to test her adulthood, enjoy the power she accepted, step back from interaction to look at the patterns of her life.

She continued promoting seminars on love, enjoying physical pleasure with some, but not as many as before. Nor was her approach the same. Previously a seductress going after who she wanted, she graduated to temptress, attracting who she wanted. In this way, she could more easily separate herself from the relationship shared.

Because of her priority shift, Lycra had more time to think about a workshop that had been brewing in the back of her mind over the years. In the past, she could catch only glimpses of how it would proceed and who would attend but struggled creating the overall structure. Since waking from her birth dream, she found she was more able to articulate details. Within less than a year, she was ready to promote her package, terrified and confident of success.

Sidra and Zandor sent a friend of theirs to the workshop. The friend complained to them that ever since she had lost her husband and took over his production career, everyone was at odds with one another and refused to find a way to work together. They complained that without her husband there was no focus, no inspiration and no film. The daily rushes lacked passion. Sidra and Zandor suggested that Lycra's workshop might be just what was needed. Perhaps she should fly Lycra out to Paris to lead a special workshop for the cast, crew and production executives. The friend, desperate and disparaging, took their advice.

Lycra could hardly believe how her life had changed. During her flight overseas,

she edited the workbook she wanted to accompany her workshop. She hoped she could find a decent printer to hook up to. She took a break and stumbled towards the rest room. The 777 was more like a cruise line than an airplane. Private compartments, dining areas, lounges. She got in line next to a handsome man she found attractive. She melted when she discovered it was mutual. He said his area in first class included a laser printer, would she care to interface.

Lycra was shocked to find out her traveling companion was headed for her workshop. He would edit the film. She asked him about the film but wasn't at all prepared for his response. The story was all too familiar, but she didn't tell him that.

"It's actually a story told to bring in the new year, so it's nothing new," he said.

This was both a relief and a surprise. Evidently, her dream was archetypal. No wonder she woke up the day after what started as a nightmare, feeling reborn.

As they landed, Lycra closed her eyes. Before her third eye she could see the flame dance the way it had during her birth dream. She felt her new friend grasp her hand in his. She smiled. All was right with the world. All was as it should be.