The Doll Factory

A Novella?

By Maryanne Peters and Erin Halfelven

Prolog

The Filovirus changed everything. Oncogenic osteophagic filovirus stimulates the human body to consume bone.   It was not those who died early from calcium poisoning who truly suffered, but those who excreted the calcium and lived on in bodies destroyed by the disease.  For those rich enough there was a life offered by the Paladroid technology, but for those who could not afford that, life would be bedridden, cared for by family if available, and the health systems of the world were unable to cope with the cost of chronic incapacity.

The synthetic bodies were pioneered for those who could afford it.  The body you always wanted, directly linked to the nervous system, with the wasted body remaining now devoid of bone and capable of being sustained on a simple energy diet.  Paladroid had quickly become the most successful business on the planet.

Paladroid’s origins were more base.  The company had built sexbots – functioning love dolls.  It had taken time to throw off the name “The Doll Factory”.

Chapter 1

“According to my tablet your organics are all good, so your problem would have to be mechanical?”  Steve “Spark” Mountford knew his subject well.  Oliver Hackett was the chairman of Paladroid, and the walking talking advertisement for their latest technological advancement.

“That is why I am here and not in bio,” Oliver sneered with a smile.  “It’s this damn penis of mine.  It is still not right.  Why can’t you guys get it right?”  The smile persisted but Spark knew that the frustration would be genuine.

“You know that our controls systems are electrical, Boss,” he said.  “Genitals are vascular.  And with your organics do not produce enough blood pressure.  It may be that your penile hydraulic  fluid needs topping up.  I can do that.  Believe me we have spent a lot of time on this problem.  People want not only erections but ejaculations and insemination from organs that are essentially wasted away.”

“I am too old to be looking to spray my seed around, but with a body like this, at my age, I need to be able to lay a woman or two.”  Oliver was referring to the powerful athlete’s body that he had requested.  Like all of Paladroid’s customers seeking a full installation, he had specified that his face be a copy of his own, and his hair as thick as it had been when he was younger, but a distinguished grey.  But like many of them he had requested the body of a much younger man.  That could be done.

“You are still aging inside this artificial body, Boss”, said Spark.  The virus has still done its damage.  You may have to slow down.  Maybe Mrs. Hackett would be more accepting of the older and less capable Oliver?”

Only Spark could get away with such a comment – maybe a few others.  Oliver was alive, and thankful for that.  He had learned to accept things which he would never have before.  The Maribo virus had killed millions, but it destroyed the lives of many more.

A virus that attacks the bones of the human body, and a few other mammals that it affected.  For those who did not die they might live on immersed in fluid as a virtual blob, while their muscles wasted away to leave only skin and guts.

That was what Oliver faced when he was diagnosed.  But he was a man of drive and vision.  He saw the potential in Paladroid, even when it was in bankruptcy as a result of the “Sex Bomb Litigation”.  The AI was inferior.  That is what had caused the male androids to misfunction and kill and injure.  As a result, nobody would be buying a male sex doll from Paladroid.  But the female functioning dolls were way ahead of their competitors, and getting better.  In large part that was down to people like Spark.

So he called on Spark for special attention.

“Are you telling me to get another hobby?” he said.

“Or get one of our new models who doesn’t care if you are hard or not,” suggested Spark.

“They are not my thing - one that squeal when you tickle them.  I am sorry, but they need to have a real head on their shoulders.  Even the AI ones are not what I want.”

“Like most of our customers.  We have a crazy demand for the latest sex dolls, and thousands of people asking for when we can get one with a real brain.  Isn’t it crazy, we sit in here needing brains for our bodies and the protesters outside are screaming for bodies for the brains of their loved ones.”

“Yes, I saw them outside today,” said Oliver.  “It would be nice if everybody could have what I have – a synthetic body that my blob can live inside, but we are in business.  You know the price of this technology, Spark.  It is only available to the rich.  Why can’t everybody have it?   The answer is simple: Price.  And the value of the product needs to be preserved for those who have paid.  You cannot undersell.  You have to preserve our price point.  We make scholarships available for deserving applicants.  But we cannot give away our product.  I am sympathetic to all the protesters outside demanding just that, but we simply …”.

He looked at Spark as he spoke, but stopped when he realized that the engineer was not listening.  He could almost hear the cogs in his brain turning.  Business people like Oliver know the value of minds like these.  They know when to fall silent and let those minds soar.

But he had to ask: “What are you thinking about?”

“So if you cannot pay in money, the price to be paid in sacrifice must be high,” said Spark.  “What would people give away to be allowed to live?”

“You have lost me,” said Oliver.

“Turn problems into opportunities.  Basic engineering,” said Spark.  “We have people with brains and dying bodies, and we need brains if we want to take our original sex doll business to the next level.  We have synthetic bodies.  We now have thousands of successful installations like yours.  All we need is … a little relaxing of the minds in question.”

“Are you suggesting that we take women with advanced Filovirus and use them to provide intellect in sexbot bodies?”

“Not just women,” said Spark.  “We could use men too, if they are receptive.  In fact, men might be better.  They tend to be more promiscuous.  Perhaps more ready to agree to contract terms.”

“What man would agree to being a female sex doll, even if only for a period?”

“A desperate one, Boss.  We are talking life and death, after all”.

Chapter 2

Say what you like about me – a man faced with a horrifying death has few options.

My mother had taken me in my wheelchair to join the protests outside the Paladroid Head Office Building.  I could barely cope with it.  My body was so wasted by the bone rot virus that I could hardly breathe, but she wanted to show the big corporation our plight.

We all understood that the virus was not Paladroid’s creation.  It was just that they seemed to have the cure and it was only available if you could pay for it.  But the anger against the disease turned into general fury, and it was directed against them.

Somebody from the PR section came out and took some names.  She explained that Paladroid was assisting in securing State and Federal funding for a number of artificial bodies, but the technology could not be mass-produced.  The idea was that there might be a lottery for them.  She also said that Paladroid could offer “sponsored installations” under a charitable foundation it had formed, for people “of special value to the community”.  That would hardly include me.

My mother gave them my details, but I had no great hope.  But as she explained to them, she had also been diagnosed with the virus, and being older she would likely go downhill fast.

But then a few days later, we were contacted by Paladroid and called in to visit their industrial complex on the outside of town.  We were met by three people: Their physician Andrew Scoggins, the head of engineering Steve Mountford, and their lawyer, the prim and proper Miss Bryce Cartwright-Castlereagh.

Dr. Scoggins had all of my medical records with my consent and he ran me through a brief physical examination to confirm that I was fit despite my condition.  He announced that I was a suitable candidate, and for the first time in a year, I was getting excited.

Steve explained how the artificial body works: My limp flesh would be hung on a skeleton made of composite materials and then artificial muscle would be layered on powered by a one year battery unit in my belly and controlled by my own nerves, and over that there would be artificial skin.  My face was already losing shape but he explained that a new skull could be formed modelled from images before the disease ravaged me.

Miss Cartwright-Castlereagh pointed out that they had still not offered me what I wanted.  She said that would mean my acceptance of the terms and conditions that she explained to us.

“This is experimental,” she said.  “And it is a commercial proposition.  You are not eligible for the charity of our foundation.  We are offering you a new body, but on the condition that you are bound to us for a period of time.  Our terms are rigorous, so we have determined that the best way to enforce them is to end your life as you, and create a new identity for you that is not human.”

I have to say that when I heard this I was not comfortable, and I could see that my mother felt the same way.  What she was saying was that this contract was so onerous that no court would enforce it, so I had to lose the right to sue.  I would effectively have no more rights than an android, despite the fact that I was a human being inside an android.

In answer to my uncertainty, she had a very simple response: “There is no deal without signing this contract.  Everything that we have told you today is deniable.  We want your mind for 10 years, or sooner if revenue targets are met, and after that we will release you.  That will be in the contract, and if you do not trust us to honor it then don’t sign.  But you are a young man.  After 10 years you will still have a lot of living to do.  Your organic body will age and eventually die, but after a usual life span.  Your body however, will remain youthful and active.”

I asked her what work I would be expected to do.

“We have no positions for young men at the moment,” she said.  “We have positions for young women, so we will be proposing that you accept a female body.  Don’t worry about the end of the contract.  We will replace the body with a copy of your pre-existing form at the end of the term.”

It seemed outrageous.  My mother said that no man could function in the body of a woman.  I have to say that I was simply silenced by the shock of it.

“Don’t be concerned about that,” Bryce said.  “We have the capacity to modify some behaviors to help you adapt to a new body.  We have developed these for our wealthy clients over time.  There is nothing that will affect your consciousness – just a few motor functions and skills added.  But as I have said, if any of this is unacceptable, the exits are clearly marked.”

She was smiling but there was a hardness in her that was unmistakable – almost murderous.

Officially dead.  An android without rights who might just get back to being human if they keep their word.  Working for them, or an android capable of being bought and sold by them.  My brain being fed with data and potentially controlled by Paladroid or any owner of my body.  Frankly the thought of being in the body of the opposite sex was the least of my worries.

Chapter 3

“Before she arrives, you had better just clue me in on this behavioral thing, just so I know what to expect,” said Oliver.  He was keen to meet “Katie”.  He knew the basic model from the catalogue, but the face would be unique, with slight modelling from the original face that the organics belonged to.

“You wanted to see how a male brain would perform in a female body, and Katie is coming to demonstrate this to you,” said Spark.  He was restraining his excitement.  The fact that this was evident pleased Oliver.  It was a sign of success.

“So is this brainwashing?  We don’t want liability.”

“You can decide that for yourself, but we just gave Katie some help with mannerisms and skills in hair and makeup and stuff like that.  We have some others like her, where we have had to become more … interventionist.  But Katie – well – decide for yourself.”

And as if it had been timed to perfection, there was a knock on the door, and Spark jumped over to open it.

Oliver had planned to stay seated.  This was an android after all.  Not like him.  His body was artificial but he was still him.  This person was a cyborg who belonged to the company.  Not human – at least in the legal sense.  But when she entered he found himself rising out of his chair, and trying not to let his jaw drop.

“Mr. Hackett,” she said in a perfect feminine voice.  She extended a perfect hand.  “So pleased to meet you at last,” she said.

He took the hand, not to shake it, but to look at it.  He then found himself placing it to his lips and looking up at her beautiful face as she did.

“Katie,” he said.  “You are a work of art.”

“I am,” she said.  “The artistry of Paladroid.”

“We have excelled ourselves,” he said.

“They did a pretty good job with you too, Sir, if I can say that.”  Which she had – flirtatiously perhaps.

“Please call me Oliver,” he said.  “Why don’t we sit in the lounge area, over here.”

“Happy to,” she said, crossing the room and sitting in one of the easy chairs rather than the couch that he appeared to be suggesting.  He would not sit beside her, but she made sure that he could see her legs in the dress that was business-like, but above the knee.

“You are in our sales division?”  He played the part of the concerned manager well.

“I am the demonstration model, as I am sure you know,” she said with a bluntness that both alarmed and pleased him.  “But I feel for people in the same position as me.  I want to make sure that our people preserve their humanity, as I hope you do.”

“Of course,” he said.  It was all he could say.  “But we are here to make profits.  It is contract that binds the recipients of our technology to pay with services, or with cash from services.  People such as yourself have valuable skills, but for those who do not … well, prostitution is the oldest profession so that say.  And it is legal.  And of course, the body being sold is not real.  It is just a sleeve, after all.”

“That is something I would like to discuss,” she said leaning forward.  She was disarmingly attractive, not because of the face and body he had admired from the first glance, but because of the obvious intelligence and drive.  He nodded his approval of her speaking frankly.

“Not all pain is physical.  Mental abuse is still abuse.  But we are noticing that the bodies are adapting to feel more pain.  I understand your body is artificial too.  Perhaps you can confirm it?”

He suddenly felt uncomfortable.  He was aware of increasing sensitivity.  He had mentioned it to Spark some time before.  He was an early installation.  There were changes.  The body was adapting - meaning his body inside the synthetic one.  For synthetic material cannot adapt - or can it?

“Paladroid has adopted a stance on legal advice that sees our contracted subjects lose their identity for the term of the contract,” said Oliver.  “But you are right - they still have human rights.  If you are talking about violence then they call the shots.  If over time the ability of their outer bodies to endure … discomfort has been reduced, then they may refuse.  I will ensure that this policy is well understood.  Was there anything else?”

Oliver now had the feeling that the meeting should end.  He was hoping that she would say no.  And yet having her in the same room was exciting him.

“Actually, I also want to talk about outright sales,” she said.  “People are offering to buy our people as if they were some sort of sentient sexbots.  Some may have been transferred out for all I know.  I have lost touch with a couple of the girls.”

“Well, as you know all installations under contract have the capacity to buy their installation for  Paladroid at full price - that is the same price that I paid for mine.  If one of your ladies finds a sponsor who pays us out then the contract is complete.  They will have their own terms with their sponsor.  We have no control over that.”

“And I have no idea as to where they are and whether they have truly agreed,” she said firmly.  “Oliver.  I know that the same brain feed that suddenly gave me the ability to sew last week can be used to reduce resistance.  I just want to make sure that others in my position are truly consenting to arrangements being made.”

“We still sell sexbots,” said Oliver.  “People still buy them.  People still buy inert dolls with just a few functions.  If people want real relationships then they need real people.  People like you.  People like me, living inside this body you see.  What would be the point in washing away the volition of a person?”

Chapter 4

I have always loved sex.  I am just one of those people, I guess.  I could never get enough.  Until I got sick it was just about all that I could think about.  But when you are sitting there turning to jelly, you are thinking that it will never happen again.  A body that is that incapable cannot even try to do it.  It seemed like I had no reason to live.

So, they told me that made me the perfect candidate.  Damien, the guy at Paladroid said: “How would you like to have all the sex that you can handle and a bit more, and live a full life.”  What is any guy going to say?

“Yes, please!”

I thought that free installations were only available to people with special skills or had done great deeds.  If you are rich and powerful you can buy the synthetic body, but for the rest of us just getting by, you have to be somebody very special.

Wait.  There is just one ‘but’ in the offer.  Just one.  They never mentioned it at the start, but before I signed it was in the disclosure documents.  The kind of sex you are going to be having is as a receiver, not a giver.  You are going to be lying back and taking some guys cock in your pussy.  The body you are going to be living in is a woman.  An attractive and sexy woman.

“The nerves of your penis will be linked to the pseudo-vagina,” said Damien.  “It will be like having sex.  It will engorge slightly - the absence of sufficient blood already has that effect - and then you will ejaculate into the vagina.”

Of course I told him that I did not have sex with guys, but he simply said they had no need for men, only women.

“The truth is that we are marketing you as artificial,” Damien explained.  “We did have a small market for male sexbots but due to technical problems, that demand has ceased.  We need women’s bodies with a brain, and any brain will do.  Are you in or out?”

If the other choice is slow death as a human slug, what are you going to say?

“Do it to me!”

It was not even forever, although ten years does sound like a long time.  One day I will get my life back, but at least I will have a life to be given back to me.  I have watched some people I know die of the Maribo virus - it is not a pretty sight.

I said that I could not be expected to behave like a woman.  Okay, I could lie back while some guy stuck his cock in my rubber hole, but the rest of the time I would not be female.  I would be me in a plastic chick.

“That wouldn’t be so desirable,” this guy Damien said.  “We will provide you with behavioral guidance directly to the brain.  Nothing to interventionist.  You will hardly notice it.  You will see the hairbrush or the lipstick and you will know what to do.”

The first time that happened it was weird.  I had only just got used to walking around with a huge set of tits hanging off my chest, and a jiggly butt back in behind.  Then I went up the mirror and I saw her face - my new face.  I was hot.

I had really long hair hanging down.  I just grabbed it and pulled it back, twisted it around and clipped it up, like I had done it every day of my life.  Implanted skills they called it.  I had a bunch.  Hair, makeup, even using the toilet.  It was all new to me, except that it wasn’t.

But if that was a shock, consider my first date.  I found myself strutting like a chick in heels I should have been falling off; I was flicking my hair, checking my handbag, delicately picking up my drink, just like the real thing.

But it was like riding a bike.  You get your balance and then you are just coasting.

“I have paid for sex,” the guy said to me.  “So let’s go upstairs.”

There was a part of me that felt uncertain, that first time.  But I figured that this was not my body being fucked, it was just a fake.  I was like holding the love doll steady while your buddy is donkey deep inside it.  I was thinking that the conversation had been familiar, it was just that I was on the other end.  The drink was nice, but when you have bone rot you get drunk a single shot.  I was thinking that I could lie back and take it.

I started to think about how many fucks I would have to receive to be released from my contract.  There might be a lot, but I was going to live.  I could endure.

But then he started to heave and he looked down at me and started fondling my tits, and he was saying: “Roxy, you are sooo fucking hot” and that made me feel good.  I guess I smiled.  Maybe I said something to encourage him and have him spill it and move on.

But then I felt something.  Maybe he was so deep that he was touching the nerves they talked about.  Maybe my limp penis deep inside the synthetic body gained a little volume.

I might have even let my surprise slip out.  Maybe: “Oh my God!  That feels good.  Yes, it does.  Go a little harder.”

And then … jizz time.  Him and me both.

And since then?  Well, as I said: I have always loved sex.  I am just one of those girls, I guess.

Chapter 5

“This is a very good example of why men make better women,” said Damien Traille.  “They have libido and are less inhibited.  We now have as many men as women inside our rental units.”

Oliver Hackett had requested the head of the rental division address the board.  He had a background in sales.  His presentation had included videos of several of the highest performing “escorts” in operation.  It was more than informative, it was titillating.

“Are you getting many requests for purchases?” asked Oliver.  He was one who had watched without the need to readjust his pants under the board table.  He had an agenda.  Katie’s agenda, perhaps.

“We do evenings, overnights, weekends and extended periods of up to a week,” said Damien.  “That is company policy.  These are our employees.  Bonded employees for sure, but employees.”

“Let me put it another way,” said Oliver.  “How many or our ‘employees’ of this type have suddenly been able to buy out their installations?”

“I understand, Sir.  Yes, quite a few.”

“Do we have any idea what arrangements they have made with the … third party funding such purchases?”

Damien looked around the room for support before he ventured into a difficult area.  He asked: “Sir, if you are talking about Katie and her concerns, well technically she works for me.”

“Why is how a person can afford to buy out their contracts any concern of ours?”  The strident voice from down the table was Jack Tisner, one of the major shareholders.  “We are in business.  We sell installations to anyone who can afford it.  If they can raise money by selling their bodies or the souls, why should we give a damn.”

“We put them in this situation, Jack,” said Oliver.  “Katie is just reminding us that we should make sure that they understand and agree.  Some are vulnerable and too accepting, as we all know.”

“You mean pliant,” said Jack.  “Perhaps we should have programming render that Katie as pliant.”

“Jack, we don’t discuss that,” said Oliver firmly.  He had his hand on the minute taking machine suspending the recording, as the Chairman can.

“Keep your hand there and we can,” said Jack.  “We all know that buyers want pliant women.  We are in the love doll business, for God’s sake.  If you can’t switch them off, then you don’t want the going all shitty on you.  We can play with the brains that we have signed on.  We know we can.  We introduce feminine behaviors.  We eliminate rebellious behaviors.  Men want to hear the word yes - not the word no.”

There were two women sitting at the Board table opposite Jack Traille, but neither of them had any words at all, yes or no or anything else that might compromise their position on the Board of Paladroid.

“It’s off the record, so fix that Ollie, but our customers want passive women,” Jack added.

“Not all men want that, Jack,” said Oliver.  “Some men prefer their women to be more spirited.

“You mean like this Katie?  That unit is a troublemaker,” said Jack.  “I take it that there is a real woman inside her.  They always cause more trouble.”  He did not look across the table.  “Like Damien just said, men make better women.  They understand.”

“Yes, there is a real woman inside Katie,” said Oliver, but he knew that was only partially true.  The body inside Katie had once been Keith Hawthorne, but he was in the past now.  “Leave it to me to deal with her.”

Chapter 6

I joined the army straight out of high school.  I was looking for action.  I loved the feeling of adrenalin coursing through my veins in those days.  It was like a drug.  I could not get enough.

I went on operations.  I was always the first to volunteer.  The worlds This could be dangerous” were irresistible to me.  It was like facing death was a thrill.

I never thought about slow death.  I never thought about dying slowly in a puddle of your own liquified flesh.  For me death had to be instantaneous.  Lights out.  Over.

But wars don’t last forever, and after all the bloodletting the world faced the pandemics and a period of peace.  Nobody wanted to be killing each other when the diseases were killing us all.  Covid19, Covid22, Barcid23, Filovirus - they all hit.  Armies were disbanded or re-tasked to deal with unrest.

The new front line was in law enforcement.  The vaccine stealers, the radical anti-vaxers, the violent protests against authorities slow to act.  So I joined the local police force.  With my background I got front line positions.

I admit that I was not a great leader.  I was good at giving directions under combat but I tended to operate as a lone wolf.  I was my own man - that is what I was in those days.  Nobody was nagging me about not being promoted - I divorced her early in our relationship.  The army had given me an education that I ignored in high school - military history led to an interest in all history, but that does not equip you for behind the front line, and that was where I still wanted to be.

And then I got the virus.  I ignored all the early signs, and then I was kicking down a door and my leg broke.  Bone rot.  Filovirus.  Not death, but a death sentence, with years on death row, turning into jelly.

For a man like I was then, it was the worst thing in the world.  I would have taken torture, with the prospect of an end, rather than this.

But I am still alive.  My skills kept me alive.

Paladroid rescues just a few.  If you are a nuclear physicist, or a brain surgeon, or have a Nobel Peace Prize you are considered worthy.  Why me?

“Because we have a client, somebody associated with the company,” said Paladroid corporate counsel Miss Bryce Cartwright-Castlereagh.  “He is looking for a bodyguard.  Somebody unobtrusive.  Somebody who will stay with him.  Somebody who will stop a bullet for him.  He is not well liked.  It could be dangerous…”.

Stop right there.  Those words are enough.  I am in.  So I get a new body?  This body of mine that is falling apart will be hung inside a latex copy of myself?  Sounds good.  Where do I sign?

“It will be a woman’s body.  A Paladroid F323.  But we will be making modifications that will be useful to the task you will be undertaking.”

I may have said something about a female body not being suitable - that size and masculinity counts when the bullets are flying, but I did not argue hard.  You offer me life and that should be enough, but you offer me life and action - that is everything.

They put you under before you get “installed”.  It is a big operation.  They stretch out your boneless carcass inside the new body - toes to the toes, fingers to the fingers, lungs behind a composite diaphragm, your skull and jaws being replaced, even a cochlear implant to deal with the rotted bones of the ear.  And then you wake up in a new body.

They prepare you a bit.  They say that you will be disoriented.  Like parachuting into a tree and ending up upside down, I thought - something that had happened to me twice.

But I looked at those tiny hands, and then I saw the breasts on my chest and the hair tumbling over my face, and it was nothing like that.  I asked for a mirror.  We all do, they said.  I saw the new me.  They put something of your face in hers.  I could barely see it, but I knew they were my eyes.  Steely blue, but not squinting under a heavy brow, with a broken nose between them and lantern jaw beneath.  My eyes, but big in that small face, wide with surprise or maybe shock.  Pretty eyes.  A pretty face.

I have had a thousand what-the-fuck moments in my life, but this topped them all.  I still smile when I think about it.

“We have made those changes to our standard sleeve that I mentioned,” said the engineer - the guy they called Spark.  “Armour in the back and the chest and the skull.  Metal reinforcing in the legs and arms and hyper contractive artificial musculature.  More armor and more strength.  I suggest just standard movements first, then we will run tests on those.”

Spark told me that 90% reach down to their groin when they get this first glimpse of themselves, but I didn’t.  I looked at my hands.  I imagined them holding a gun or a knife.  I was back in business.

The strangest thing for me was the behavorial implants.  Sure I had some acquired knowledge but I was fundamentally a physical person, so I immediately noticed that my head was full of added data.  Hairstyles and matching clothes and accessories.  I had one hairstyle and two types of clothing - dress uniform and combat gear.  But there was this stuff I could call upon.  Plus I found my arms and my legs had new default modes of operation.

Spark said that some people find these things hard to cope with, but with my background as a solder I knew about training and adapting.  I was trained without going through the course, and I was adapting to what my instant training taught me.

I kicked down a door a few days later on a training exercise.  Little girly me, wearing a pink dress and wedge sandals, with the hidden power in my legs and the unbreakable bones, I just kicked it down flat, right off the hinges.  Wow!

Then the next thing I know I am wearing a more professional looking outfit and I have put my hair up myself, in a French roll no less, and I am gliding into the office of Paladroid in my black heels.

‘This is Karl Heineman, your new boss,” said Spark.

I reached out a hand.  I would have shaken it firmly, but given that I was still working out the strength in my limbs I did not want to risk hurting this guy so I just put it out there.  He took and kissed it.  He gave me a look that I had never experienced before.  How could I?  I had never looked like I do now until just a week before that day.

I have to say that the whole experience left me confused and slightly giddy, which is not a word I think I have ever used before.

Chapter 7

She gasped.  She squeaked softly.  He could feel heat.  In the member that was supposed to be his penis he could feel it.  He came.  For the first time in years, a real orgasm.  A thundering, mind numbing explosion of pleasure.  He looked down at Katie.  She was smiling.  So was he.

“Oh my God,” he said.  He collapsed beside her.

“I told you it would work,” she said.  It was fiendishly simple - a length of wooden dowel rounded at both ends.  She had cut an incision at the base of the artificial penis and just before sex she had slid it in to the full length.  The idea was that it would give him the rigidity that the fluid could not, and the base end of the rod would pound away at the nub of his real penis deep inside him.

But it was not that.  Sex in an artificial body was like using a vibrator on your sex partner.  The whole act might bring you to climax - there might be a sad emission from that buried organ - but it was not sex.  What he just experienced was sex.

“I felt you,” he said.  “I felt your heat.  I felt your orgasm.”

“The “inhabitation” that Spark was talking about?  The inner body pushing nerves through the synthetic tissue.”  She stroked his face lovingly.  “I felt you too.”

“Female bodies do, I am told.  Even female bodies with non-females inside.  Something about getting inside and reaching closer to the organic core.  People who have had synthetic sleeves of both sexes say that the female one is the only one for sex.  I just accepted that, until just now.”

“I don’t think that I want a male body anymore,” she said, staring wistfully into the distance for a moment before looking back into his eyes.  “I just want to be with you, and have you inside me like that.  Yours is the only male body I need”

“Don’t you think it strange that you should feel this way?  You are a woman to me, but I am a man - inside and out.  How can you be attracted to me?  How can you love me?”

“You are a person,” she said.  “You are handsome; you are powerful; you have a good soul.  How could I not love you?”

He kissed her softly.

“I love the way you look at me,” she said.  “In my prior organic existence I never experienced that.  I never experienced any of the looks I get as an attractive woman.  I think that I understand now.  You become what you look like.  I have become a woman not because I look like a woman, but because others see me as one.”

I have never seen you any other way,” he said.

You are the only one whose look means anything to me.  In fact it means everything to me,” she said.

“Because I am looking at the real you.”

Their eyes were for each other.  Organic eyes in skulls made largely artificial by the installation.  True windows to the soul.  But she could see something fading in his eyes.

“Oliver, are you alright?”

“I will be fine in a minute,” he said.  “Just remember that inside this body you love there is an old man.  I maybe able to run and jump, and have sex, but inside … I won’t last forever.”

“Have your organics checked tomorrow,” she instructed him.  “I am not losing you.”

“Darling,” he said.  “We need to be realistic.  I need to to provide for you when I am gone.  I would not leave you subject to the contract with Paladroid.  I will pay it out tomorrow.  I want  you free of any obligation to the company.”

“Save you money, Oliver.  I work for the company.  I like my job.  But I do have just one request.”

“Name it,” he said.  But he had already resolved to settle her debt.

“I have somebody who I would like a body to be offered to.”

“A friend?”

“The opposite,” she said.  “The only modification would be to shield the residuary genitals from any sensation.  I don’t want him enjoying sex.  I want him sucking up and taking it.”

Chapter 8

Men like what I used to be, never have a thought for those we hurt.  Men like that, who think with their balls, just don’t think.

I said to her: “If your husband loves you, he will take you back.”

I was finished with her.  She had fallen for me hard.  I used to like that.  Then I had an ego that made that a thrill to match orgasm - the power to make a woman your at just a wink.  Never a thought for the turmoil going on inside her.

“He does love me, but I can never go back.  I love you!”

I remember looking at her with only one thought in my head: ‘You pathetic creature.  Get out of my way.  I need somebody new’.  I just turned away.

She killed herself that very day.  Worse than that, her death hardly registered.  I had somebody else.  I wanted this new woman and that was all I was concerned about.

Now it seems that her husband has got his ultimate revenge on me.

What perverse thinking is there behind Paladroid leaving just a trace of the appearance of the host in that beautiful artificial face.  I saw somebody vaguely familiar.  I asked her whether we had met before.

“There will be no place for shallow pick up lines once you sign this contract,” she said.  “And if you want to live you will have to get used to be on the receiving side - of that line and everything else you have been used to delivering.”

She said her name was Katie, but it clicked later - she had been Keith Hawthorne, the husband of that woman who killed herself.  My God, I can’t even remember her name.  But I remember her face now, just as I turned away.

I remember every time some bastard mounts me and fucks me hard.  That used to be me.  I am his sole attention when he is taking me to bed, perhaps he might even look at me while he pumps deep, but then when he is done he turns away like I did that day, and I see her face on the ceiling.

“You have the disease,” the doctor said. “Oncogenic osteophagic filovirus”.  O-O-F.”

“OOF,” I said. “It sounds like a punch in the gut.”

“That and more,” he agreed. “Tiny microscopic threads, smaller than bacteria. The virus has an affinity for bone cells. Normally these bone cells react in the presence of damaged bone. They eat it and the healing processes of the body replaces it.  But the infection turns these cells cancerous. They multiply when there is no need for them and some of them, being defective, get activated to eat bone. Instead of eating damaged bone, they eat healthy bone. And they don’t replace it”

I shuddered. I knew what he was talking about.  The Filovirus.  Bone rot.

He was not finished.  He coldly recited the medical literature almost as if I was not there: “The absence of bone can lead to heart failure from excess calcium in the blood is damaging to heart muscle, but more often patients die of asphyxiation because the bones no longer support the action of the diaphragm in breathing.”

I had heard the stories.  Human blobs in bags or barrels, dying slowly, suffocated by their own heavy flesh.

“And there is no cure?”  I had to ask, but I knew the answer.

He was giving it to me straight, in the cold way that doctors can when you ask them to.  I now wished that I hadn’t.

“No,” he said flatly.  “There are survival techniques but they are expensive.  But no cure.”

I contemplated suicide soon after that, when my legs collapsed.  But then I was contacted by Paladroid.

It seemed like a gift from God.  All I had to do was sign.  I would cease to exist for ten years.  I would become their property for all that time.  I would do what I had to do.

“I understand that you are supposed to be charming,” he said.  “So charm people.  But not women.  You have to switch it around.  You have to charm the money.  Don’t worry.  You won’t feel a thing.  Just lie back and think of living instead of dying.”

I could do that.  I could do anything - I would do anything - to survive.

Now here I am.  They gave me a new name.  I am Roxy.  I am a sentient sex doll.

Chapter 9

That morning she had joined Karl for coffee wearing the peignoir coat that he had bought for her.  He liked to buy her pretty things, and this garment over just a nightie showed off her breasts that needed no bra to stand out - synthetic boobs don’t droop.

“What do you have planned today, Karl,” she asked.  She had only just got used to calling him that.  “Sir” was normal, or “Boss” or “Chief” but Karl could not even approve of “Mr Heineman”.  He wanted her to call him Karl.

“Into the lion’s den today, Penny,” he said.  He had chosen the name.  Penelope.  It sounded classy and Penny sounded cute.  She needed to be both of those.  She needed to be there beside him at an evening soiree or caddying for him on the gold course.  Penelope one place, or Penny another..

“Oh goody,” she said.  “I love cats.”  What she did love was making him smile.  He was a serious man - a high achiever.  But he loved to laugh.  She knew that.

But above all she knew her job.  She knew because she had done it before.  Before he steps out she would look for those vantage points that a sniper would choose - height, field of fire, concealment, escape route.  Look for suspicious packages, vehicles, people.  Cover him when In doubt with her body, while keeping eyes out, a hand on him to reassure as well as maintain contact.

Karl could sense her skill.  She made him feel safe.  But he wanted her close for another reason.  He had not expected this.  He knew what he was getting.  An expert bodyguard - a man, but in the body of a woman.  But he got Penny instead.

“You look fantastic today,” he said, because she did.

“But I always look like this, Karl,” she said, because she did.  But you need to give me more information so I can choose my outfit, do my makeup and style my hair.”  Strangely, these things had become a joy.  It used to be that a working breech, a full magazine and a sharp knife was all that was needed to face the day, but she could have all those and matching shoes and bag.  It made her smile to think of it.

“There is a protest outside the plant I am visiting today,” he said.  “They are getting more strident.  But don’t expect me to not go.”

“I have given up advising you to hide,” she said.  “Can I tell you that I would be disappointed if you took my advice.”  She sipped her morning drink - sugar and roughage - just to feed her organics that were now just a fraction of her body mass.

“Can you be ready in an hour?” he said.

In 45 minutes she was at the car, talking to the driver and checking the emergency equipment.

They sat together in the back as they did.  She carried her bag on her lap.  It carried lipstick, mascara, a hairbrush and a light machine gun, plus field dressings and other items should Karl take a hit.  He was fragile. 100% organic body mass.  Perhaps being artificial and reinforced made her think this way.  Or perhaps she really did care about him.

She turned to Karl and smiled.  He smiled back.  They both knew it.

“Don’t get out of the limo until I come around,” she said.  “I know you”

He laughed, but gripped her hand to reassure her.  He trusted her.  He had to.

They could see the protesters in front, but the gate was clear.  She did notice a large van parked on a rise on the outside of the barrier fence on the right.  They went through the gate.  She looked at the faces waiting near the ramp to the main entrance.  She went through personnel files regularly.  If anybody stood out as new she hoped that she could pick them out.

The limo pulled up.  Karl waited as instructed.  She exited the vehicle, checking to building in front of her and then went around at the back, scanning the other direction.  She kept her eyes out as Karl stepped out of the car.  She moved between him and the vehicle as he went up the ramp clear of the cover of the armored limo.

She spotted it even before the first shot was fired.  The side of the van she had seen dropped down and there she saw two men with automatic rifles.  At this range her own weapons were useless.  She grabbed Karl and pulled him into a crouched run to the safety of the door.

Bullets sprayed the area and the crackle of the gunfire left the people greeting them scrambling for cover.  She saw one go down and knew for experience that he was dead.  There was only a few feet to go and they were inside.

The glass was bulletproof, the smash of the bullets turning it all white behind them, but they were in.  Still she led him behind a pillar.

“Are you hit?” she asked.

“No,” he said with a calm that both surprised and pleased her.  “But you are.”

“I am armored, Silly,” she grinned.  I felt at least a dozen bullets hitting my back.”

“No,” he said, his face pale, betraying his fear for her.  “It is coming through.  You’re bleeding.”

Chapter 10

I took the job at Paladroid with some reluctance.  At the time the company had the rather sordid reputation of supplying synthetic female partners used for sex.  As a physician I have no objection to such things - sex is a natural bodily function - but it was not something that needed any assistance from me.  In those days Paladroid built machines.

But we all had faced the scourge of OOF.  For surgeons on the front line, as I was, it was soul destroying.  Here was a disease that was everybody’s nightmare.  If you did not die quickly then you faced watching your body waste in a particularly awful way.  The errant osteophages can do their job very quickly, destroying the bone and leaving just flesh and organs.  Without movement muscle also wasted, so that all that was left was a bag of guts and the extremities like and empty wetsuit.

With a skeleton the crushing weight on the lungs would lead to suffocation, and the stomach and intestines were incapable of handling most food.  We came up with the idea of suspending what was left in fluid, while we sought answers.  But it was heart-breaking.  There was no cure.  The effects were irreversible.

The skull posed special problems.  That would collapse too, but we started to experiment with composite materials to insert under the skin in pieces, that could then bond together, and artificial jaws.  Which is how Paladroid entered the picture.

The heads and faces of the Paladroid units were the very best, and they were ready to help us work to build artificial bodies.  The well known Wall Street Tiger Jack Tisner became involved in recapitalizing Paladroid with money from the Heineman foundation, and he also brought in tech investor Oliver Hackett to manage the new business.

I worked closely with Oliver while working at the hospital.  It was Oliver who hired me and who backed my work.  We had to work quickly because Oliver himself had contracted the virus.  He was one of the early ones to receive a synthetic body built by Paladroid.

Oliver was in good health before his illness, but he was not a young man.  He had the energy and enthusiasm of a much younger man, so it is hardly surprising that he chose a younger body while retaining his face with some years on it.

“You need seniority to be taken seriously,” he told me.  I liked him - immensely.

I also worked on Katie, or rather the body of Keith Hawthorne, the body now inside Katie.  I was less than pleased with the idea of anybody inside what was effectively a living sex doll.  I felt that Oliver was uncomfortable too, but I gave in to his logic.

“We are saving lives, Andrew,” he said.  “For people who can’t afford it we are asking for a contract of service.  They use a body which is our property as a tool to make money for us, then they get to keep that body, or another of their choosing, in return.  It is the only way any of these sad dying people can afford the huge costs of this technology.”

I wanted to save lives.  Doctors know about the cost of treatment.  We know that some life saving techniques are only for the rich, but we hope that with time such remedies will become more widely available.

I took the job at Paladroid to save lives, and because I had faith in Oliver.  His death came as a huge shock to me.

He asked me to be there with him.

I had to cut away the synthetic flesh to get to his ailing body. I would have done this without anasthesia in the normal course, but the inhabitation phenomenon had made it necessary to drug him.  His nerves had somehow invaded the fabric of his synthetic flesh.

“I just need my hands free to marry my beloved Katie,” he said.  “Andrew, would you be a witness to that marriage?”

Such joy and such tragedy in a single moment.  Physicians are supposed to be scientific and unemotional, but who cannot be moved by death, and by a wedding.

In the vows where he said: “All my worldly goods” he made the point of adding in the words: “Including all my shares, options and rights in Paladroid”.  It meant little to me at the time.  She just smiled and a tear fell from her eye - tear ducts still function at the eyeball where just a trace of organic skin lies just beneath.

Maybe I shed a tear too.  It was a moment of pure love.  Others in the room could see it too.

“My life whether long or short …”.  We all knew that it would be measured in hours.  He just had some paperwork to do to give effect to his vows.  Then she kissed his plastic lips and I could see that he felt it.  It is still a mystery to science.  Then he died.

Katie wept and I held her.  I told her that he was a good man, because he was.  He wanted to save lives as I did.

“I want that too,” she said, choking back the tears to reveal a steel determination.  “Will you help me to do that.”

“If you promise to call me Andrew,” I said.

Chapter 11

Roxy fell to the floor.  The outer felt nothing because of the structure reserved for her, but the inner organics could still bruise and feel pain.  She felt it, along with the humiliation.

“What the fuck are you!” shouted Jack Tisner.  “Your model is supposed to be pliant!  I asked for pliant!  I demanded pilant!”

Roxy could see the evil in him.  She felt pliant.  If she was not subdued in some way she would not be now pulling herself only to her knees to remain submissive.  Bt she knew that what she was, was weak.  She was not like others she had heard of, built to take knocks, and deliver some.  She was a receptacle.  A plastic cum bucket.  How more worthless could she be?

“I am sorry, Sir.  Please give me another chance.  Please don’t hit me again.”  Pathetic.  She hated the words.  She had survived Filovirus now she needed to survive this.

“Get back on you feet and get my drink right this time,” Jack snapped back.

She walked back to the bar in his suite.  Her perfect but oversized breasts and butt wobbled as they were designed to do.  She was naked.  He was watching, checking pathetic erection for volume.  The violence had helped.

She picked up the broken glass by the bar.  Smaller shards were on the floor.  They would cut her feet but she would not feel them.  There was a new glass and all the bottles.  She had to get the measurements right.

“Pliant means doing what I say, Bitch,” shouted Jack behind her back.

It was done.  She turned and walked towards him.

“You have left that glass on the bar, you idiot!  That’s the broken glass!”

It was, and it opened his carotid artery at a stroke.

She picked up the phone by the bed and pushed the emergency code written on the panel, then she sat in the pool of blood and waited.

The police arrived first - two uniformed officers.  They had a housemaid open the door.  She stared at them blankly.

“He’s dead,” said one of the police to the other.  “There is no surviving this blood loss.  Forget an ambulance.  I will call the Crime Scene guys.  Maybe we should cuff the whore?’

Roxy opened her mouth: “I am the property of Paladroid,” she said in a monotone.

“Fuck, its a robot,” said the second cop.  “Maybe just leave it.  These units are passive.  Call Paladroid do you think?”

They made the calls.  The Paladroid emergency call centre called Katie.

“Good evening Mrs. Hackett.  You asked to be called about any malfunction of the unit called Roxy?  Well we got a big one tonight.  The big one.”

She made her way to the hotel.  The body of Jack Tisner had been removed, but the scene photographer was still photographing.  Roxy sat in the same spot staring blankly.

“Has she said anything?” Katie asked the room.

“It has been saying ‘I am the property of Paladroid’ over and over,” somebody said, making a point of using the word it.

Katie knelt down to closely look into the open eyes, blinking slowly but regularly.

“Are you happy now,” Roxy whispered.

“It has gone to far,” whispered Katie back..  “I will fix this.  Just do what you are doing.”

“Are you from Paladroid?”  A woman had entered the room.  Clearly police although not in uniform.

“Yes,” said Katie.  “This is one of our units.”

“I thought programmed units weren’t capable of this kind of thing,” the detective said.  “This unit will have to be destroyed.  We could not find the off switch but wanted to preserve any recorded memory, so we waited for you.”

“Yes, we should be able to retrieve the memory to find out what happened here,” said Katie.  “I our unit is responsible we will remove its power supply and deliver it to you for destruction.”

“And take the corporate consequences,” the detective added with a sneer.

“Well actually, if the victim is Jack Tisner then I know him,” said Katie. “He is a shareholder.”

“Do you need help with that thing?”

“No, thanks, she is mobile.”  She had brought a pocket poncho to cover Roxy, who rose and followed her out.

“What now?” said Roxy when the elevators had closed.

“We need to get you out of that body.  We have to deliver it to the police with a depowered android inside it.  Which means that we need to get a new body.  It will be top of the line.”

“Please make it a female one,” said Roxy.  “Men are pigs.”

Chapter 12

I was down for a while after Oliver died.  I did not think that it was possible to love a person that much, and the fact that I was who I was makes it even harder to understand.

I remember when Andy exposed his organic arm to deliver the drugs, and apart from the eyes and the tongue, I caught a glimpse of the real human being.  It was pale and flimsy, and pathetic.  But you cannot unsee things.  It made me think that I must look like that inside.  I prefer to think of him as the tall strong man he appeared to be.  He was that man, just as I am the woman who now sits in his chair.

I got out of my funk by throwing myself into work.  It was his work, but as I was right alongside him I did it on my assistant’s salary until they could find a replacement.  It was only a matter of time I thought, but then who should come to see me but Karl Heineman.

Right beside him was Penelope.  I remembered her from the day she was installed with the body of the ex-soldier and ex-SWAT officer.  She thanked me at the end of her trials for my input.  She thanked me again when I was with Andrew at her bedside, after her had repaired her leg and Spark had repaired her body.  Organics are so vulnerable, but hers are strong.

“Penelope has suggested to me that I support you taking a seat on the Board and a position on the executive,” said Karl.  Penelope’s hand was on his shoulder, not guarding him but approving of him.  She was more than a bodyguard now, and I could see it.

I had not thought of it, and I told him so.

“This company needs to go in a new direction, and with my shares and the shares you now control, I can get you in a position of influence, but we still need a chunk of shares to force real change.”  Karl seemed genuine.  Penelope confirmed that to me afterwards.

I said that I had an idea.  I suggested even before I took on my new position I had somebody in mind to assist me - somebody who had seen all that was wrong with Paladroid but also all the good it could do.

She was not Roxy any more, but Rachel.  As far as the company was concerned, Roxy was just a mindless mechanical doll, much as Jack had treated her.  She had been destroyed.  Rachel was a different model - not as curvy, not with all those blonde curls and big lips.  She could be my older sister but a little darker, but just as pretty - her body slim and shaped, her bearing urbane and sophisticated.

I asked her to go with Bryce (Cartwright-Castlereagh) to visit the manager of Jack’s estate to persuade them not to sue.  Bryce is good at her job, but I felt that Mark Tisner might respond to Rachel’s charm.  Some things never change in a person.

By all accounts Bryce did was she does well: “More litigation will damage the firm, share values will drop and you will become poorer as a result.  It may even lead us open to a takeover at a rock bottom price, and all those potential gains will be lost.  Is that really what you want.”

Rachel chipped in: “If it was your father sitting here and you were dead from what was just an accident, then he would probably sue himself and the consequences can be damned.  But I am guessing that you are made of different stuff.  Not as impetuous or bad tempered.  You strike me as a man of refinement and intellect.”

Who better than a ex-man to know the buttons that can be pushed.  Mark invited her out to dinner.  He is recently divorced and has children so he is happy enough that Rachel it externally artificial and will remain youthful and vigorous for as long as she lives.

Mark is on board with our plan.  We have to look forward to life after Filovirus and that means building the largest possible customer base of people who know our products and trust them.

That means that Paladoid now provides its technology to the masses.  We have lost some profit that is true, but there are many more people out there who can say: “I owe my life to Paladroid!”

I do.  So does Penny.  So does Rachel.

Epilog

The vaccine again OOF has proved effective preventing new cases.  The target is now to stabilize those debilitated by the disease long enough to be able to receive and be installed into the generic bodies being made generally available by Paladroid to victims of the awful disease.

There is still a demand for Paladriod sex products, but with the termination of contracts the only units available are robotic, but with much improved interactivity.

Of the males who signed contracts very few have elected to be reinstalled with male bodies, in particular where there is a risk that inhabitation will be terminated.

And there is still demand by some healthy to be installed into female artificial bodies.  This cannot be done unless the bodies are rendered boneless by deliberate infection with OOF.  Rumor exists that for the rich such infection and an installation, are available on the black market.

The End

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