



Reality

By

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Reality dictates that certain things cannot happen.

Example: The supernatural has been found to be only make-believe; the occurrence of which is either prevented by logic, or by its being illegal.

1. The definition of 'illegal' means: Irrefutably against the laws of nature or against the laws of humanity as set forth by man.

Thereby:

Life, in general, does not become complicated through no fault of your own; it will always have something to do with something you did.

As always; there are exceptions to this rule.

“My bicycle is broken.” (Concerned masculine voice stating an observation.)

“I know.” (Sympathetic feminine voice showing understanding.)

Sheldon turned and looked at the stray dog he’d rescued for no known reason the day before. She was a large ratty looking female Collie; the same type of dog that used to save little Timmy every time he fell down the well.

“You didn’t just talk... did you?”

It was more of a statement than a question, because Sheldon knew... logically... that dogs could not talk. Sasha, which is what he decided to name her, yipped at him and then sat panting like every other dog he’d known in his life.

“I didn’t think so,” he mumbled, turning back to his racing bicycle which was leaning against the wall in the hallway.

The day before, Sheldon was in a Triathlon. He made it through the swimming and the running somewhere in the middle of the pack. That positioning only lasted until he got to his bike. Biking was him and he was biking; he took off as if he was motor driven. Even the media knew he was the man to watch when it came to the cycling.

He’d soon pulled into first position and was oblivious to everything except the road exactly in front of him. His mind was thinking of only one thing; the need to press on as hard as he could. Three quarters of the way through this portion of the race, however, his accident happened.

Reality dictates that: the laws of gravity are irrefutable.

As it happened, a keg of beer from a distributor’s delivery truck came loose some two blocks up hill from where Sheldon’s race was taking place. It began its journey simply enough by tipping over. The startled deliveryman jumped on it, trying his best to steer it to the curb by strategically applying body weight to the inner end. He slipped, fell to the pavement, and the keg joyfully broke free of his grip. It then rolled down the two blocks of hill as if it actually had a mind, a steering mechanism, and a wanton desire to cause destruction.

Of course this was not logical, so the authorities had not given the beer keg a traffic ticket after it was dislodged from the store front where it finally came to rest. Nor had they demanded that it appear in court for driving under the influence... but they did tell Sheldon how sorry they were that it had ended the race for him. At least, miracle of all miracles, he’d not broken a single bone when it slammed into him like a bowling ball. Sheldon, for his part, flipped through the air like one of the pins in a seven ten split come home to glory. He then crashed down on the roof of a parked car. His accident, kindly recorded and turned over to the TV chasers by a local with a video camera, made front and center on the nation wide

nightly news.... and there was talk that he was going to be featured on all the national sports shows over the weekend.

That was how he met Sasha... well... in a round and about way. Being a true athlete, as soon as he had his legs back under him, he picked up what remained of his bicycle and began jogging down the road intending to finish the race. There was no crowd here. Those people coming out to watch would be down around the finish line and the TV crew who accepted the video of his fantastic collision was already off and gone; chasing after the other competitors not even recognizing the golden ore they'd been handed.

After approximately a mile of struggling, the racer heard what sounded like a woman yelling for help. The few cars passing him by all had the windows rolled up and undoubtedly their radios blasting. It was obvious to him they would have heard nothing.

There was no recourse but to investigate.

Laying the bike down on the sidewalk and taking a second to catch his breath, he listened intently until he heard the yell again. He then, logically, followed it to the source. Strangely enough, the voice was coming from the back of a dogcatcher's truck which was about to drive away. Sheldon, fearing some sort of abduction, jumped in front of the truck and held his hands up, almost being run over for his efforts. In his biking clothes, sunglasses, and helmet, for all intents and purposes he look liked a super hero from a comic book. Walking to the driver's door, he looked at the man, who looked back in confusion.

"What?" the man asked, as if expecting this strange person to rip his truck door off by the hinges.

"I heard someone yelling for help," Sheldon told him. "You didn't hear anything?"

"Just the dog barking; that's all I ever hear. Hey... are you in that race that's going on?"

"I was."

"Was?" The man looked confused again and Sheldon made a quick conclusion that he'd not been hired as dogcatcher because of his intelligence.

"I got smashed into by a beer keg," he replied without thinking. It had just been bad luck; something that happened through no fault of his. It never occurred to him that he might want to hide the truth for reasons of embarrassment.

"That was you?" the man asked in astonishment.

Sheldon heard a voice whisper to him. "Help me.... Please help me.... He's going to kill me."

The racer looked at the back of the truck and saw a lone Collie in the big cage. The dog looked back and mumbled something of a bark as if it was trying to talk to him. Sheldon turned back to the driver.

“What do you mean, ‘that was me’?”

“Oh mannnnn...” the dogcatcher said, getting out of the truck’s cab. Grabbing Sheldon’s hand, he began pumping it up and down. “I heard about it over the call out radio. The police dispatcher says you’re lucky to be alive after the spill you took. You’re gonna be in all the newspapers and on the TV and allllll of that. I never met a famous person before.”

“Pssssttttt... play on that... get me out of here... pleaseeeee...”

Sheldon looked at the dog, back to the man pumping his hand up and down, and then back at the dog; which was looking at him with really sad eyes. Maybe he suffered more of a whack to the head than he’d thought.

“I’m not famous... ah... what’s your name?” He said, gently pulling his hand back from the dogcatcher.

“Fred... yeah... that’s me... Fred the dogcatcher; but you can just call me Fred.”

He placed his hand on Fred’s shoulder. “Fred, I’m not famous. I just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. What’s the pooch in for?”

“Pooch?” Fred looked at him in a questioning way. “Pooch... oh... you mean the dog?”

“Yes, the dog.”

“I’m the dogcatcher,” the big man explained slowly, seeming to realize that this was the fella who had been knocked around by a beer keg. “That’s my job... I catch dogs.” He motioned to the truck. “You need a ride or somethingggg?” He actually dragged the last word out, making sure to relay what he meant as if the biker was reading his lips.

“No, actually, I have to finish my race. Unfortunately I have to carry the bike. It’s what I do... I race. The object here is to finish.”

Fred looked at him blankly.

“Look... Fred... I could use some company on that run.”

Fred smiled really big, and then got a concerned look. “Ya want me ta run with you? I’m sorry, but I can’t. I’m the dogcatcher and I have this dog here. I have to take it to the pound, or I’ll lose my job and all.”

“Well Fred, I really appreciate that, but I could really use some company on my run. Tell you what... how about you let me take the dog and it can keep me company. That way you can go back to work, I can be on my way to finish the race, and you won’t get fired.”

“Rightttttt...” whispered the voice. “Good idea... take the dog....”

Sheldon looked back at the Collie. It sat looking at him in a rather funny way.

“Can’t... nope... sorry... My boss says once they go into the truck they gotta stay there till I get back to the pound.”

The dog whined and then stood up in the cage, placing its paws in the wire loops as if pleading.

“Fred,” Sheldon reached to where his wallet should have been, but his bike shorts were flat. He never carried a wallet during a race. “Ah... Fred... yeah... I was going to offer you something but it seems I don’t have anything to offer. Tell you what... you ever see a racing bike?”

Fred shook his head no.

Mine is right across the street. Why don’t I show it to you before you leave for the pound, and then I’ll be on my way. It’s all smashed up, so they won’t show that on the TV. That makes it kind of special. Then I’ll be on my way again. I mean... I do have to finish the race.”

Fred shook his head yes and turned looking across the street at the crushed bicycle. “I s’pose that would be all right.”

“OK. Go ahead, I’ll be right behind you. I have to.... ah... I have to pee and this alley... well... I figured no one would see me whizzing back here.”

Fred grinned at him. This was obviously something he could understand. “Ok, I’ll be right over there. It really got crushed by a beer keg?”

“That’s right. It’s bent up pretty bad. Remember, you heard the police talking about it on your radio. The beer delivery company is going to give me the keg once it’s empty; sort of a trophy.”

Fred smiled at Sheldon as if he was a favorite idiot nephew, nodded again, and then crossed the street to look at the wreckage.

The racer lost no time moving to the back of the truck and opening the cage door. “Don’t ask me why I’m doing this because I sure as hell don’t know. I’m a lawyer for crying out loud. I could get arrested and thrown in jail for springing you. Wouldn’t I really be the laughing stock then?”

The dog bounded out of the cage and ran up the alley as fast as its legs would carry it. He watched it go, smiling to himself. "So much for a thank you," he muttered. "I suppose I would have done the same thing though. Talking dogs... dam... I must have really got bonked. I'll have to remember to set up the video recorder tonight. If it was as good as they seem to think, I should at least keep a copy of it."

Closing the door, he went back out to the sidewalk and saw Fred bending over examining his racer. "Gonna need a welding torch to straighten out this mess!" the man yelled to him.

Sheldon waved to him and smiled. He wished Fred had not reminded him of the damage. The bike was made out of lightweight Titanium and probably cost as much as the dogcatcher's truck. Nope; a welding torch was not going to turn the trick on that repair.

After Sheldon signed an autograph for Fred in the fellow's citation book, the dog catcher happily got back into his truck without looking in the back. The lawyer smiled and waved to him, wanting to keep his attention to the front as he drove away. As soon as he saw the truck's taillights, he picked his bike back up and started down the road again in a loping jog. He let his mind slip into his running mode, zoning out on just about everything around him. He had another five miles to go before he would make it across the finish line; and that was what the race was really about; crossing the finish line.

Within a mile a noise entered his thoughts and hung there. It was sort of a clicking sound, like claws on concrete. His neck was now very stiff from carrying the bike and his legs hurt. One of the police officers who'd helped him up cheerfully told him he'd done a triple somersault with a double gainer when the keg plowed into his bike. The roof of the car upon which he landed was partially crushed, and luckily, that had broken Sheldon's fall.

Oh yes... that was probably another thing he would get a call about but that would be a problem for the beer distribution company not him... clickity click, clickity click, clickity....

He stopped for a breather. Doubling over he eased the bike off of his shoulders. A wet tongue began washing his face and he stood bolt upright, backing a few steps. "Whoa, whoa, whoa.... where the hell did you come from?"

His lungs suddenly seemed to be on fire and blackness began creeping in at the edge of his vision. He sat down quickly, understanding that if he didn't he would fall down when the faint came on in full force. That was when the dog came up to him again and began licking his face. He hardly had the strength to fight her off.

"I thought you were long gone there doggie."

The licking paused, "Sasha... not doggie..." and then continued.

He tried to look at her as the blackness receded slightly. "Sasha," he repeated, and she yipped.

“Ok, tell you what... Sasha... you stay with me to the end of the race and you can live with me. Deal?”

The dog barked, danced around a little, and then sat down as if waiting for him. Sheldon shook his head a couple of times, took some deep breaths, and then got back on his feet. Shouldering the bike again, he continued on his way. His clouded brain just slightly registered the event. After running the final quarter mile, the biker found himself where the finish line was supposed to be. The area was empty with the exception of a news crew, which was just packing up.

“Hey!” a good looking woman yelled at him. “Aren’t you the guy who was hit by the beer keg?”

Sheldon stopped, un-shouldered his bike, and bent double, trying to breathe. He waved in her direction and nodded his head as best he could.

She leaned into the truck, said something to someone, and the next thing Sheldon knew there was a bright light on him. The cameraman was standing close enough that he could see the man’s knees through the holes in his dungarees. That was when the woman leaned over him. She said something really stupid about the race and then stuck the mike in his face. He tried to wave her away, feeling like he was about to vomit, but she persisted with her television reporter clichés. That was when there was a woof, and a brownish white body jumped on the woman’s back. She was knocked right to the ground in front of Sheldon. He sort of remembered her looking up just as he heaved whatever was in his stomach all over her.

She screamed... and then began throwing up too. The cameraman, laughing hysterically, kept right on filming. This was really good footage they could use at the next office party. At the very least they could sell it to one of those news blooper shows. There were thumping sounds as the reporter then began to pummel the cameraman with her microphone. He in turn, ran into the back of the truck and locked the door. He was still laughing loudly enough to be heard.

Sheldon sat down, not paying any attention. Soon both the screaming and the laughing subsided and he heard more door thumps. Then the news truck’s engine started and the top heavy vehicle backed out of its spot. The reporter, rolling her window down to keep from throwing up again because of the stink, screamed some expletives at him as they drove away, and that was that.

Looking up, Sheldon found the dog sitting next to him happily panting as if she hadn’t a care in the world.

“Come on,” he said motioning with his head. “My car is over this way. You think you can drive?”

Sasha made a hopping little bark at him and he laughed.

“Did I actually throw up all over that television bimbo?”

“Woof!”

“Thought so,” and he laughed again, feeling just a little bit better.

That night was the first time he dreamed of the girl. She was beautiful and sitting on the edge of his bed just looking at him. Her body was naked and perfectly formed; though she had ratty looking blonde hair and smudges of dirt on her skin. She had had six breasts in three pairs. The first were smallish, but normal in size and shape, the second pair was a bit smaller, but still wonderfully formed while the third pair was smaller to the point of being almost non-existent. When Sheldon tried to speak to her she made no response other than to smile. He saw her slowly reach an arm out to him meaning to touch his cheek... and that was when a paw plopped on his face waking him up. He yelled and sat bolt upright in the bed. He then sucked his breath in at the pain caused by the sudden movement. Cursing, he ordered the Collie off of the bed. As he did this he unconsciously reached down and grabbed a hardness that was not a simple ‘morning erection’. He was surprised by the feeling but was also still half asleep. Laying back down, everything quickly passed back into the night and the darkness; but the dream of the strange girl did not come back.

In the morning Sheldon pushed through the residual soreness of his accident and soaked himself in the shower. The race had been on a Sunday; this was Monday and that meant work. When he finally came out of the bathroom he spied Sasha lying quietly in the corner.

“Damummm...” he said to her. “I completely forgot about you... ah.... girl... I guess. I mean, I don’t see any plumbing hanging down there so I guess you’re a girl... right?”

The dog gave him a disgusted look and put her head back down between her paws.

“How about breakfast?”

She raised her head again, ears perking up as if she fully understood the words.

Sheldon smiled at her. “I thought you might like that idea. We didn’t eat when we came home last night did we? As I recall, I just sorta crashed.” He groaned as he thought about what he’d just said. “Bad choice of words, huh?”

Sasha rose, crossed in front of him, and moved to the bedroom door where she barked.

“Oh yes... I bet you’ve got to go out. No accidents in the house. That’s good. So you’re already house broken. Well, that’s a step in the right direction; makes things a whole lot easier for us.”

He moved past her and walked through the small living room to the sliding door. This opened into his postage stamp back yard. "This way girl. We'll have to figure out what to do with you while I'm at work. The neighbors won't like it if I leave you outside all day to bark at them. They're all sort of quirky like that; mostly old retired people."

He continued watching her after she passed him like a doorman. The backyard was fenced in so her running off didn't concern him but he found himself fascinated with her. The big Collie moved with a flare of dignity, and he found himself thinking about this. He wondered if she'd been a show dog. She flowed more than walked; as if she were royalty? He wondered who would dump a dog like this; or had she been dumped? He would definitely have to check the lost and found section of the paper. If she was his, he would certainly have wanted her back.

When she was done, and Sheldon had discretely averted his eyes while she was taking care of nature, she came back in and they both went to the kitchen. In the absence of any dog food he made them both scrambled eggs and bacon. At first she approached her plate with what he might have called 'good manners'. He was worried for a moment that she might be sick or even have some internal injuries from wherever she'd come from. Then she appeared to give up on the act and wolfed down the food like she hadn't eaten in a week. The biker, still not feeling very well, finished only half of his own and gave her what remained as well. She finished this too along with a second serving of toast.

Placing the plates in the sink, the racer, now lawyer, dressed in his usual suit and tie and then went for his briefcase. That was when he noticed his bicycle in the hallway. That was also when he thought he heard the voice again.

"You didn't just talk, did you?"

It was more of a statement than a question, because Sheldon knew... logically... that dogs could not talk. Sasha, which is what he decided to name her, yipped at him and then sat panting like every other dog he'd known in his life.

"I didn't think so," he replied, turning back to the bicycle which was leaning against the wall in the hallway. Shaking his head after once again viewing the damage, he looked at the Collie... she looked at him... and then he said, "I'm really losing it aren't I? Well, come on girl. I'll leave you in the bathroom for the day. There's water in the toilet and if you have to, you can use the shower for your commode. It's a walk in so there won't be any trouble for you there. Any questions?"

"Yip!"

"Yes, I have to lock you up," he told her, not even thinking about his response to her simple remark. "I'm sorry, but that's just the way it is. Perhaps by tonight we'll have found your owner and then you can get back to saving Timmy from the well... or what ever it was you were doing before we met."

She didn't make a fuss, but walked right into the bathroom seeming to understand what was required.

The small part of the day Sheldon spent at the office was hell. Besides the full keg of beer that was sitting next to his desk, compliments of the beer distributor who's keg had taken him out of the race, there were pictures of him in every conceivable position during his accident pasted all over the walls. On top of this, he had messages from every television and radio station in the area wanting interviews. He also had several other messages, including one from The Tonight Show. For a while he entertained the idea of being drawn in to the celebrity thing, but after three hours of annoyance he finally packed it all in with the self understanding that this was not what his sport was all about.

He was an athlete because he wanted to be an athlete and that was the full extent of it. The thought of showing his face on television for the pure entertainment value of all the fat housewives and dumb football jocks, finally tilted things to the negative and he went out for a long lunch.

After lunch, he was called into his boss's office and grilled about the accident, his race, and the accident again. Then he was given the rest of the day off with the precautionary advice that he should take the rest of the week off to rest his body. It was also strongly suggested that he get a full body scan done just in case there was something more than a broken bone he might have to worry about. He was a lawyer, after all, and a suit against a major beer distributor could be very lucrative. No one, including his boss, would believe him when he said he felt fine. He was told that they all admired his spirit; but money was money, and he should consider that.

As he passed through the office, there was a hushed quiet from the cubicles where normally there would have been a loud banter going on. All the men in the office made a low lying fist and shoved it in his direction with a smile, a wink, and the greeting; 'Iron Man!' The ladies too all seemed to treat him with deference, smiling demurely and lowering their eyes just slightly.

He ignored it, finally deciding it might actually be a good idea to take the week off just to get away from the craziness.

That was when he called Mary Lou and asked her over for dinner. She said she could be out of her office in a matter of an hour and would meet him half way home. Mary Lou was a veterinarian and a little more than 'just' a good friend. She quickly agreed to check out his new roommate. This wasn't the reason Sheldon called her but it was convenient. Mary Lou also told him she would bring along the required shots for the dog so he could get her registered, and licensed; just in case Fred the dogcatcher might come looking. Then she began to laugh. When he asked her what was so funny, she told him that she was actually related to the man. Sheldon mumbled a derogatory remark about it being a small world,

before explaining away the words as something else before hanging up. Something about the relationship bothered him; but it bothered him even more that he didn't know why.

When they arrived home it was still fairly early. All the same, he was worried about the shape his bathroom might be in. He warned Mary Lou that he'd locked the dog up there. She, in turn, laughed, telling him that she was used to anything a dog might dish out to a small area. That, at least, was the mood they were both in upon arriving at the townhouse. Mary Lou had personally taken the time to purchase three bottles of good wine and then promised to cook a dinner for him that even he, with his iron clad training will, could not say no to.

When he pushed the door open, a sweet smell hit him head on... perfume. Sitting at the end of the hallway, just as if this was what she was suppose to do, was Sasha. Gone was the dirty stray he'd brought home the day before, and arrived, was a dog that was immaculately washed, blown dry, and combed.

"Woof!" she barked, wagging her tail just enough that he would see it. If a person could say that a dog was smiling Sheldon would have said she was smiling in a big way... that is, until Mary Lou stuck her head around his shoulder trying to see what he had stopped to look at.

"Sheldon, Sasha's beautiful!"

She pushed around him, as confusion wrapped itself around his brain and began to squeeze hard. How? He'd left her in the bathroom... she'd been filthy dirty... what???

"Wait Mary Lou."

She turned and looked at him from her position of bending over Sasha. "What?" Her voice had an inflection of annoyance.

He saw the dog make a face at Mary Lou and then she was back to normal, just sitting there panting like any other dog might have done.

"She was in the bathroom and dirtier than a tarred gravel road. Look at her; she's perfectly clean. Someone's been in here. Let me check."

Mary Lou waved her hand dismissively. "It's probably that beer company again. They must have sent someone over and they thought this would surprise you or something."

"That would be breaking and entering so I think I'll disagree."

She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't think it was Fred," she said teasingly.

Sheldon frowned. Pushing past her and the dog, he moved around the corner and on back to the bedroom flipping lights on as he went. He heard the sliding glass door open and close again.

“Mary Lou?”

“Just letting the dog out. You said she’s been in all day. She’s got a marvelous constitution. I didn’t smell any accidents.”

Sheldon went to the bathroom and flipped on the light. Everything was in its place, including the blow dryer. He picked up his hair brush and looked at the hair on it. It was long, and blondish. He sniffed at it and smelled the perfume that had assaulted his nose when he walked through the door. If he wasn’t mistaken the smell was the same as the bottle he’d hidden away as his mother’s Christmas gift. He checked the shower stall and found it still wet. He felt the towels on the towel bars and these were damp. He saw, however, no evidence of any doggie accidents.

When he came back to the living room, Mary Lou was sitting on the couch with Sasha. She was looking her over with a professional eye. He flopped into the chair opposite her.

“She’s marvelous Sheldon. Definitely a pure bred and show quality enough that you would win a lot of ribbons. Too bad you don’t have her papers because you could make a lot of money breeding her.”

“Woof.”

“I don’t think she’s so keen on being a breeder for somebody’s wallet,” he replied.

Mary Lou moved her hands down, feeling the dogs mid section. “Why, because she woofed at you? She’s never had pups, I can tell you that much.”

Sasha jumped down off of the couch and went over to sit next to Sheldon. She looked back at Mary Lou in a defiant fashion but only Sheldon seemed to notice. Mary Lou just prattled on and her words were lost to him. One of his hands absently went down and scratched the dog’s head. Her fur felt very soft; softer than human hair in its texture. His brain zoned out and didn’t come back from his day dreams until the smell of food woke him from his stupor. If he was nothing else, he was hungry.

“Mary Lou... was I asleep?”

She came out of the kitchen holding two glasses of wine. She handed him one, and clinked the stem of her own on his glass. “No, but I think you could be suffering from the aftershock of your accident. You should go and get checked out tomorrow if your brain is still foggy. This sort of thing has been known to happen; but I’ve never heard of it being delayed for so long.”

“What?”

“Being in shock... sort of like battle fatigue. You’re in good shape so your body keeps chugging along with a minimal input from the brain. After a while the person either snaps out

of it or they collapse. I've seen clips of boxers getting punched and they don't go down for up to three seconds after the punch." She winked at him, took a sip of her wine and then turned to go back into the kitchen.

"She's full of cow manure," muttered a voice.

He looked at the back of the dog's head as she sat at his feet, his right hand still absently scratching her behind the ears.

"Did you just say something?" asked Mary Lou, turning back to him.

"Didn't say a word," he told her, taking a sip of his wine to cover his expression.

"Dinner's ready," she said then, giving him an odd look.

"What?"

"You didn't just tell the dog that I was full of cow manure?"

He looked at the dog, which had turned her head sideways to look at him. Her tongue was hanging out of her mouth and it looked as if she was actually smiling at him.

"Noooooooo..... I never said a word; but I did hear those words."

He looked at Mary Lou and gave her a very worried look. "If I'm going nuts then so are you because you heard it too... right?"

"Come on," she told him in a way that said she thought he was the one full of cow manure, "I'm going to get some food into you and then I'm going to put you to bed."

That night, the girl in his dream was back. Still she said nothing. Her hair was long, and unfettered. Her body was naked and perfect. He found himself yearning for her, but was too stiff to move. This time she was perfectly clean and smelled wonderful. He didn't remember ever smelling anything in his sleep before. She was such a mystery.

He never had such a vivid dream. She moved up on the bed and sat close to him. Her six breasts stood out from under her hair, which flowed over her shoulders in an abundance that seemed un-natural yet so beautiful. She leaned over his face and her hair fell over him feeling silky on his skin. It was long and blond, and covered them both like a tent. It was so wonderful to experience. Inch by inch, she came closer to him, looking into his eyes, leaning slightly ever so closer until their lips touched. They kissed a long and deep kiss, her body continuing forward until she was lying fully on top of him in the bed.

That was when he woke with Sasha laying on top of him lightly licking his face. He sat up so fast that it startled her and she jumped down off of the bed with a yelp.

“Don’t do that!” he half yelled at her.

Looking at the clock he found it was three in the morning. Wiping his face with a hand, he snorted, closed his eyes, and flopped back onto his pillow.

The girl of his dreams did not return that night.

Breakfast was not the way things had been in the past. Sheldon, eyes half closed and still in his underpants, made his way to the kitchen to start the coffee. True, he did not have to go into work, but routine and training did not wait for any man, woman, or child. His groggy thoughts on the subject ran through every possible angle trying to find a way to stay in bed, but at the very least he figured a good run would help clear his mind.

Opening the can of coffee, he smelled it, and then wrinkled his nose. It was his normal decaf, but it smelled stale. Well, it couldn’t be helped; he never could drink stale coffee. He poured the contents of the can into the garbage. Next he found a can of dog food and opened it. Dumping the meat, which was swimming in a jelled looking gravy, onto a plate, he placed it on the floor next to the water bowl he’d brought home the night before.

“You know I’m not used to cooking breakfast for anyone,” he said loudly. Opening his eyes a little bit more, he looked around for Sasha but didn’t see her.

“Sasha? Come on girl. I’ll let you out for a whizzer. It’s been a long night and I’m betting you need to go out.”

He walked over to the sliding glass door and opened it. Turning, he looked back towards the bedroom. “Oh come onnnnn, I’m sorry about last night, all right? You scared the hell out of me. I’m not used to having a dog in my bed... especially one that licks my face in the middle of the night. It was a gut reaction.”

Sasha poked her head around the doorframe of the bedroom and looked at him. He, in turn, opened the door a little wider and stood to the side bowing like a proper doorman. He motioned with his hand that she should obey like a good doggie. Sasha, acting insulted that he would treat her like this, walked slowly out to the living room and went through the door. He watched her as she walked outside, did her business, and then came back in again. She still looked freshly combed; though the smell of the perfume had eased off a bit. Who ever put it on her must have used a lot of it.

That was another mystery he had to puzzle out. Maybe Mary Lou had come over ahead of him and cleaned the dog up as a surprise. Maybe she had a key to his house and forgotten that he wasn’t supposed to know about it. He let that thought go as soon as it came into his

head. Mary Lou made even better money than he did, so why would she finagle a spare key to his place. She had no intension of getting hooked up with anyone and that was what actually kept their relationship alive; Sheldon wanted none of that either. Between training, racing in Triathlons, and being a lawyer, he had absolutely no time for a relationship with anyone.

When Sasha was done, she came back in, paused to give him a look, and then walked slowly over to the small kitchen.

Closing the sliding door, he called out to her loudly, "Come on... I said I was sorry. You scared me; it was a normal reaction."

Sasha stopped and turned, looking at him over her shoulder. The look was full of hurt feelings.

'Just like a female to throw the guilt around like that,' he thought to himself as he crossed to the kitchen. 'It must be a built in system for all females regardless of the species.'

Pushing past her, he looked at the empty coffee pot, sighed, and then headed back to the bedroom to change into some running clothes. He would have loved a real cup of coffee, but training was training, and he could drink no caffeine. Stopping at the door, he found his bedroom had been tidied up, and the bed made.

Sheldon absently rubbed his head. He didn't remember making his bed. In fact, he generally didn't make the bed at all.

"The beer keg... has to be the beer keg. My brains must have been rattled really really bad. Maybe I shouldn't go running after all. Maybe I should get checked out... see what the doctor has to say."

Sasha pushed past his legs, walked over, and hopped up onto the bed, looking at him.

"Oh sure... and I suppose you're going to tell me that you made the bed?"

She put her head between her paws and looked up at him from that position. Sheldon almost laughed, but her eyes seemed as if they were actually speaking words to him, and the words were not words he wanted to hear at this point in time. It was like having his mother staying with him in doggie form.

"I am not a slob," he told her, moving to the bathroom.

Just as he was about to walk through that door, he heard a female voice say, "Yes you are."

He turned and looked at the big Collie. She yipped at him in a very small voice and then put her head back down between her paws again.

Sheldon looked at her, trying to figure out if he was going nuts or if there was another explanation. His right hand absently went to his head.

“Did you just talk?”

He quickly held up the same right hand, palm outwards. “Forget I asked that. I know it’s not possible for you to talk the same as it’s not possible for me to really understand you when you yip, bark, and/or look at me.”

Stalking into the bathroom he shut the door hard and locked it. He looked at the empty shower stall. The thought that the dog had been completely washed came back to him and he wondered if the person who washed her had used his shower to do so. Looking closely at the drain, he found blond dog hairs. This was crazy... why would someone come into his house, wash the dog he’d just brought home, and then go away again. Forgetting the run, he turned the water on and set it to the hottest temperature he could stand. Sitting down on the shower floor he pondered all the questions. He was so confused. Perhaps it was a message of some kind like the horse head in the “God Father” movie... that sort of thing. But who the hell would be trying to send him a message; the beer distribution company?

There was a tap on the door.

“What?” he yelled out without even thinking.

“Do you want coffee?”

“Sure.... why not.... and regular... I’m tired of the decaf crap. I keep the good coffee hidden in the freezer.”

What just happened took a minute to sink in, but when it did; it hit him between the eyes like a hammer. Before he could stop himself, he was up and yanking the door to the bathroom open. He stood, dripping wet and framed by the door. No one was there.

“Sasha?”

The Collie came around the corner from the direction of the kitchen and sat down in the hallway. She looked at him as if asking; ‘What now?’

“You... I mean...” He sighed, feeling very unsure of himself and his sanity. Turning his back, he closed the door and went back to the shower. Maybe a good hot soak would clear his head.

When he came out of the bathroom he was at least feeling better than he had. His nose then picked up the smell of the coffee brewing.

His first thought was that Mary Lou had stopped in to surprise him with breakfast. His second thought was of the voice that had asked him through the bathroom door if he wanted coffee. What had he said? He said 'yes'...

Dropping his towel he ran to the kitchen, the smell of coffee growing stronger with each step... and there it was... the dog sitting next to the counter where a fresh pot of coffee was just finishing up. Sasha held up one paw and looked at him as if she were in some silly dog movie. She barked like Lassie, and then put her paw back down.

"It's not funny Sasha! Who was just here? There had to be someone..."

He moved into the kitchen, looking around, moving things, knowing that the entrance to the kitchen from the living room was the only doorway. There was no one there... no evidence that anyone had been there... nothing.

Reaching for the coffee pot, he pulled it from the warmer and smelled the contents.

"I hope I didn't make it too strong. I don't drink the stuff myself."

Sheldon turned a little too quickly and sloshed the hot liquid on his bare skin. He cursed, set the pot on the table, and then began dancing around rubbing at his skin where he'd been burned. "Who's there?!" he yelled. "Show yourself! This is not funny!"

He heard a yip, and a whimper. Looking down at Sasha, she gave him another hurt feelings expression.

"Not now," he hissed at her. "You can't talk.... You're a dog.... so that means someone is in here."

The Collie glanced at the coffee pot, at Sheldon, and then to the coffee maker.

Sheldon watched her expressions and actually got a feeling for what she meant. It was sort of spooky, but he knew she was saying he should put the pot back on the warmer. Turning, he placed the pot back where it had been. That's when he heard the voice again; and it was right behind him.

"Don't turn around."

He slowly raised his hands in the air. "I'm not armed," he said.

"Don't be silly," replied the voice which was very feminine, "You have two perfectly fine arms."

"Who are you?" he managed to ask.

"You know who I am," was the reply.

He turned, quickly throwing his hands in front of himself and making fists like a boxer; but no one was there. Hearing a low disappointed sounding growl, he slowly looked down at the big Collie. Now he was getting totally creeped out. Even as a child he was always focused and in control. As long as he could remember it had just been this way. This was the first time in his whole life where he actually doubted his own sanity; and that was the one thing that he'd never doubted in his entire life.

He slowly turned back around and faced the coffee pot.

"That's much better," said the voice. "Now then... can we please talk? This is making me crazy."

Sheldon slammed his hands down on the counter top and turned quickly again. "It's making you crazy???" he yelled looking all around. "What the hell do you think it's doing to me!?"

Still there was no one there.

He sighed and turned back to the coffee pot placing his hands flat on the surface of the counter. "I'm going to go with this, though my entire brain is screaming that I'm not exactly right in the mind. I am hoping, whoever you are, that you will understand the dilemma I'm in here. That being said; what is it you want from me?"

He heard a sigh behind him, and one of the kitchen chairs pulled out. There was the sound of someone sitting down. "And you don't think this is just a bit difficult for me?"

Sheldon almost turned around again but he resisted the urge to face this person, or ghost, or demon, or whatever it was that was haunting him. He suddenly had a crazy mental picture of Fred the Dogcatcher wearing a beer keg hat and wearing nothing but an insane grin. He was holding a big knife, and was creeping up behind....

"Thank you for saving my life."

"What?"

"You saved my life yesterday and then you told me that I could live with you. That was so very wonderful of you."

"Wait... I didn't..."

He turned around; but again there was no one there. Sasha looked at him from the kitchen chair wagging her tail.

"No... this can't be happening," he said to her.

Turning, he placed his hands on the countertop next to the coffee maker again. "Please tell me you are not the dog."

"If that's what you want, I won't say a word."

He sighed. "But it is you?"

"Yes."

Sheldon laid his head against the cupboard and closed his eyes. He felt like crying... like running out of the house stark naked; running until he could run no longer... but the logic half of his brain kicked in; riding to his rescue as it usually did. The lawyer part of him began asking questions and the other half of his brain began to listen. It stood back and let the stronger half protect him as it always had.

"This is not logical."

He heard the clicking of claws on the floor... and this was not logical, because she was not big enough to sit on the chair like a person with her feet touching the floor.

"I suppose you would be right, except that in cases such as this, logic doesn't come in to play. It stays outside where it belongs." There was a smiling chuckle. "Like a good doggie."

"And now you want to debate my lunacy?"

He heard the chair squeak slightly as weight was shifted. "Not at all. You don't think this is any less difficult for me? I'm a dog, and here I am changed, able to do things I could never before do; but only when no one is looking at me."

"Makes perfect sense to me," Sheldon replied. "In that case I can't share in my craziness or other people might understand that I am not crazy. Thus... you cannot do anything when anyone is looking at you. It's a classic case, and I've actually seen it argued in court."

"I think that sums it up rather nicely. Answer me a question though," and she paused a moment for emphasis. "If a tree falls in the woods, and there is no one there to hear it, does it make any noise?"

"That's the oldest question in existence," he told her.

"And that is exactly what we are talking about... existence. I exist, but you are not willing to believe that I do, simply because you cannot see me as I am right now."

"I remember the expression to be: 'Seeing is believing', and not the opposite."

"But, answer the question."

“Yes, it makes noise... reality says that it has to make noise.”

“And whose reality dictates that this should be so? You cannot prove the tree makes a sound if it is not witnessed.”

“So you’re telling me that you are real even though I cannot see you as you are right now?”

“Yes.”

“Describe what you look like in your present state.”

“Certainly. I am as big as you but I still look like a dog. I walk on my back legs and I have hands and arms, as you do, but they are still covered in fur. Might I add that you are very handsome from the back, though I would prefer that you looked more like myself... with lots of fur... perhaps black, or speckled gray.”

“OKKKKKkkkkkkkk..... I can envision that, but I’m waiting for the other shoe to fall here.”

He banged his head on the cupboard door accidentally and he cursed under his breath.

“Fowl words are the mark of a weak mind trying to make itself be heard forcefully. You are a lawyer and you know this to be true, yet you curse.”

Sheldon sighed. “I’m sorry. It was a gut reaction to hurting my head. Yes; the least I should be to my madness is polite.”

“Thank you,” she told him, and then continued. “There is no argument against the reality of my existence. Remember last night? Mary Lou heard me too.”

Sheldon opened his mouth to say something, but the less logical side of his brain over ruled the logical lawyer half, pointing out that this was a very strong case. Mary Lou had done her best to serve him dinner and get him to bed, but she’d taken the cow manure remark quite personally. Apparently she’d grown up on a dairy farm and took cow poo very seriously.

“Ooooo Kkkkkk... so you have a valid point; unless I actually did make the remark, not really meaning to say it and not thinking that I had because I received this tremendous knock in the head.”

“Who made the bed this morning?”

“That was something else I’ve been meaning to ask you about... if you are a dog, and we have agreed that you are, how did you make the bed?”

“I told you; I have hands. I am not physically the same when you are not looking at me.”

He snorted. "Of course you're not. You transform like some sort of dog gone Werewolf... ahhh... no pun intended with the 'dog gone' remark. That just sort of..."

"Slipped out... yes, I'm sure that it did. I'll let it slide this time."

He heard the chair squeak again and claws clicked across the floor. The voice came right behind his ear, sounding very soft and feminine. "I find you so very attractive for a human. I wish you could see me and that I could see the front of you. You saved me from the one called Fred; and then you said I could live with you." She paused, and he could feel her warm breath on his neck. "Make love to me," she whispered.

"Fred the Dogcatcher!" Sheldon near shouted; his body stiffening in unexpected excitement. With her whispered words he'd actually felt an electric sensation moving him into the erection zone. This was not right. In his mind he turned the corner of his remaining sanity and the picture that gripped his mind scared the living hell out of him. Headlines in the Daily News; IRON MAN TRI-ATHLETE CAUGHT MAKING LOVE TO DOG... no... worse... NEWS AT ELEVEN! "I didn't save you... the man is a simpleton!" he exclaimed, trying to change the subject. "He's only a dogcatcher. I almost felt bad matching wits with him. Saying I saved you isn't..."

"Just so you know..." she interrupted him, "That's not what he's called where I come from; and he is far from a simpleton. You have greatly risked your life to help me and in that, we are now mated."

Sheldon felt a tongue lick him lightly behind the ear; and then the doorbell rang. He turned without thinking and found Sasha sitting on the floor directly behind him. She 'woofed', and wagged her tail...smiling at him; and then the doorbell rang again.

He screamed and ran from the kitchen. The door.... someone was at the door... this just could not be happening!

Yanking the door open, he came face to face with Fred the Dogcatcher. Both men screamed at the same time; Fred at Sheldon's nakedness and Sheldon because it was Fred.

He slammed the door and yelled at it, "I'll be right there! Give me a minute!"

"Take yor time!" was yelled back at him through the door. "Just come back with some dam clothes on!"

Sheldon poked his head around the kitchen door and hissed at Sasha, "It's him! Go hide under the bed for God's sake!"

To the door, he yelled, "I'll be right there... I wasn't expecting anyone... Give me a minute!"

A blond four-legged blur ran past him and disappeared into the bedroom without a sound. Sheldon danced around the living room a bit, and then realizing that all of his clothes were back in the bedroom closet where they should have been, fled in that direction.

“What did you mean when you said this guy wasn’t what he appeared?” he hissed at the bed as he passed it. Reaching into the closet, he pulled out a pair of dungarees, slipping them on over his naked legs.

“He’s a demon!” hissed back a voice from under the bed. “If he catches me, I’m history. He’ll kill me if he gets the chance, and he’ll eat your guts for helping me escape.”

Sheldon looked at the bed, a sudden measure of fear stabbing at his chest. “Eat my guts?”

“Yes... yes... yes... eat your raw guts and kill me! Get rid of him!”

Sheldon was back in action again, buttoning the pants and being careful when he zipped them up since he wasn’t wearing underwear. Next he slipped on a T shirt and then ran back to answer the door. Before he opened it, he took several deep breaths and slipped into his best lawyer’s game face.

“Hello Fred,” he said in a friendly fashion. “What can I do for you?”

Fred took his hat off and held it in front of himself as if he were an old time ‘Bo Come a Courting’.

“Are ya feeling all right?”

Sheldon played into the man’s concern. “I feel like I’ve been run over by a beer truck, and not just a keg. My head hasn’t stopped pounding and I was just thinking about going to the emergency room to get checked out.”

“Ya shoulda done that the day before yesterday when the accident happened. You’re a lawyer, right? You woulda told me to do that if the tables were turned.”

“Yes... sure... I suppose I would have.” He thought about it for a moment. “Who told you I was a lawyer?” He instantly suspected Mary Lou.

“The newspapers did. I read all about ya there.”

It was then that Sheldon saw the rolled up newspapers in the man’s hand and he immediately felt guilty for suspecting Mary Lou, and Fred, both at the same time.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?” he asked the man, swinging the door open further for him.

Fred smiled, and then his face made a sort of contorted look as if there were a conflict taking place within the individual. “Why surrrreeeee... that would be real nice. I brought ya some

extra copies of the stories, and a few that I thought you might autograph for me like you said you would.”

“Of course,” the lawyer replied, completely caught off guard. There was no anger in the man’s body language, nor insinuation that he was anything but a gentle, albeit, not so bright a soul doing the best he could in modern society. “I’d be glad to sign whatever copies you have for me.”

Smiling, Fred stepped through the door and past the lawyer.

Sheldon suddenly had the feeling he’d done a very bad thing allowing the dogcatcher into his home. The mental image of a camel with its nose under a tent entered his left brain and exited screaming from the right. As he closed the door, his back was to the dogcatcher.

“Where is she?” hissed a voice.

“Excuse me?” he asked. There was a sudden feeling of ice water pouring through his chest.

Both men turned and looked at each other. Now the dogcatcher was on the inside and Sheldon was the closest to the door; the one on the outside. Fred held out the papers. “I said ‘thank you’.” He gave the lawyer a concerned look. “Are you sure you’re feeling ok enough to do this?”

“Yes... yes... of course, but I could have sworn you said something else.”

Fred looked puzzled. “Nope; didn’t say anything.” He sniffed. “You did mention coffee?” And his body twitched just a little.

He turned again facing away from Sheldon, and the sinister voice hissed, “Coffee isn’t going to block me... I smell her, or what’s left of her scent... she has been here and you let her escape!”

“Who are you?” Sheldon asked to the dogcatcher’s back, feeling very frightened.

The man turned around. “I’m Fred the Dogcatcher... who’d ya think I was?”

Sheldon, try as he might, could not keep his game face in place. In fact... he found that he couldn’t keep his stomach in place either. He did manage to excuse himself before he ran into the bathroom and vomited. When he was done, he wiped his mouth, swished out with the mouthwash sitting on the vanity and stepped back into the bedroom. He found Fred about to pick up the comforter from the bed in order to look under it.

“Excuse me?! What the fuck do you think you’re doing?” This was his house, and demon or otherwise, Sheldon’s temper flared.

Fred looked up at him with a dazed look on his face. "There you are," he said. "The way you rocketed out of the living room, I was worried about you, so I came a looking."

"And the reason you were about to stick your head under my bed?"

Fred's expression became confused. "What makes you think..." and his voice tapered off as he looked down at his hand which was still holding on to the comforter. He released it as if it had shocked him.

"I'm doing it againnnnnnnn..." he cried out.

Sheldon took a step closer to the man, but not because he was concerned... doing so put him one step closer to the door of the bedroom.

"Doing what Fred?" he asked softly.

Fred looked at him, and his face was truly frightened. "It's take'n me over and I can't stop it less'n someone is with me. He don't come out when there's anyone who can see him."

"Who Fred?"

The big man looked as if he was about to cry. "I don't know," he squeaked.

"Fred... maybe we should go in and have that cup of coffee, huh? You can tell me all about it all right?"

Fred's body jerked and he stood upright, spinning around so he was facing the wall.

"Don't fuck with me boy!!!!" he fairly screamed, and his voice was nothing like the one the dogcatcher had just been using. "She's in that bitch dog, and I will find her!"

Sheldon felt frozen to the spot. He swallowed, and then managed to speak. "Wh...wh...who Fred? Who are you looking for?"

"Sasha! Queen of the Damned... Purveyor of Lies... Destroyer of Life... Thief of All Things Sacred!"

Fred made a jerking motion, and spun around to face Sheldon. The lawyer jumped backwards slightly with the suddenness of the movement, but it was Fred the Dogcatcher who looked at him. He was drooling slightly. "Could we pretty please have that coffee now Mr. Keg?" His voice sounded so small. Sheldon could sense the struggle he was having to control whatever it was that had taken over his body.

"My last name is Crane, Fred... not Keg. A keg is what ran me over."

"Coffee," he whispered. "It keeps him away. I need strong black coffee."

Sheldon immediately took the lead and the two men made it to the kitchen in a very odd manner. Sheldon walked backwards, never taking his eyes from Fred, while Fred walked front ways, doing the same thing. When they got to the kitchen, Sheldon managed to get Fred seated at the table while he poured him a large cup of black coffee using only his peripheral vision to find the pot and cup. His hand was trembling when he passed Fred the cup of steaming coffee. The dogcatcher drank it straight down, held out the cup and simply said, "More."

Three cups later his face seemed to lose the tenseness that was in it. "Better... I think he'll stay gone for a while now."

"Who will stay gone Fred?" Sheldon asked him softly. Holding out his last cup of coffee. Fred took it and looked into it as if it were a reflection pool.

"I don't know his name. It's something like Andy, or Anubabisis... something I never ever heard before... and I think he's a dog."

"Who sent you here this morning Fred?"

"He did. He told me I would find the Collie dog here."

"And you believed him?"

"I don't listen to the bastard. The problem is, though, when no one is there to see me, he controls my body. I think I transform... is that the right word? When I look into a mirror I can see him... but I don't know if anyone else can." His last sentence was said in a whisper.

Sheldon ignored the remark, pressing for some details. "Why does he want the Collie dog?" The lawyer was careful to ask this question very softly.

"It's not the dog he wants, but the dog has someone like him in her."

"This is getting weird Fred."

The other man looked up at him, and snorted. "Tell me about it. I can't so much as go to the bathroom without him trying to control me. Yesterday I almost pissed on a tree in the public park during the middle of the day. When I see him in the mirror he growls at me. He's this big black dog looking thing with really long straight ears, and he's not a really nice sort of creature. I get the impression that people don't mean a whole lot to him."

"What's he after?"

Fred shrugged his shoulders. "No idea in the world, but somehow it's connected to that Collie dog I picked up the other day. I think the one inside that one did something to really piss him off."

Sheldon caught a movement out of the corner of his eye, and saw Sasha poking her head carefully around the corner. He grimaced and shook his head in the negative, trying not to alert Fred. With a free hand, he made to point towards the door, but Fred made a noise in his throat like he was going to vomit, and half rose from the kitchen chair. The lawyer put a hand on his shoulder and gently pushed him back into the sitting position.

“And you say coffee keeps him under control?”

“Yeah... but I’m mighty sick of drinking the stuff. I almost don’t have a throat left from pouring it down the way I have been. He don’t even like the smell of it... no idea how come... he just don’t.”

Fred reached out and grabbed onto Sheldon’s arm. “Please help me,” he whispered hoarsely. “I’m getting desperate.”

Sheldon nodded his head like a bobble head doll, while at the same time, he felt as though he was going to soil himself. “I’ll help you Fred... I’ll help you... but we need a plan. A plan... we need....”

The phone rang, and both men screamed. Fred jumped up and made to move behind Sheldon, but Sheldon was faster, and backed himself into the corner where he could see Fred.

The phone rang a second time, and both men screamed again; then the lawyer got hold of himself. Gripping Fred by the arm, he yelled out his name, trying to calm him. Three rings later, and the name shouted several times, Fred was calm enough that Sheldon could pick up the phone. The whole time he spoke, he never took his eyes off of the man.

“Yeah?... I mean... hello?”

“Sheldon, are you all right?” The voice belonged to Mary Lou, and she sounded like she was a million miles away.

“No... I mean... yes... I mean... Mary Lou, your cousin is here, and he really really needs you right now.”

“What cousin?”

“You remember we discussed Fred the Dogcatcher?”

There was a pause on the phone as she seemed to be trying to digest what he was saying. “Sheldon, hun, I was just calling to see if you wanted to go out for Chinese. Today’s my half-day, remember? Now you’re telling me that Fred needs me? I haven’t seen him for five years. Where is he?”

Sheldon's eyes latched onto Fred's jugular, which seemed to have developed a life of its own. It was pulsing, growing larger by the second and Fred's arms seemed to be changing... growing more muscular.

"He's... ah.... here in my kitchen Mary Lou; and he really needs a blood relative to come take care of him."

"Sheldon... is there a problem?"

"You could say that...."

"I need more coffee," whispered Fred. "He's coming on strong this time and I'm not so sure he's going to stop just cuz someone is watching."

Sheldon heard the front door open, and then there was a clicking sound of claws coming down the hallway. Sasha poked her head around the corner again and looked at him. Her eyes were telling him they should leave... now...

"Mary Lou... please listen to me carefully... call the police and have them come over to my house. Tell them to bring a large animal tranquilizer gun because they're going to need it."

Fred's body began to vibrate and his eyes rolled up inside his head.

Sheldon dropped the phone and ran for his life, bolting around the corner and down the hallway. Behind him was a deep roaring unearthly sounding voice.

"SASHAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaaaa!!!!!"

Man and dog became a blur as they headed out the door and ran for all they were worth around the corner. Sheldon, keeping to his training, ran on the side of the road; that was, until he heard the roar of an engine and the screeching tires of Fred's animal control truck.

Sasha was just in front of him but when he cut to the right and headed through the back yard of the house he happened to be in front of, she followed suite. The move came just in time to keep her from being run over as Fred mashed the gas pedal to the floorboards. The truck zoomed by her missing by just inches. Fred hit a speed hump and went airborne. When he hit the pavement, the truck bottomed out and his muffler ripped off. Jamming on the brakes he cut the steering wheel hard to the left, putting the large vehicle into a slide. The back end hit the curb with a bang. When this happened, the big cage in the back flew out of the bed and into the street. Fred gassed the engine again and the resulting roar sounded like it came from the dragster of death.

Sasha, now out in front, gracefully jumped a wooden fence. Sheldon had to climb, but as he got one leg over, he glanced back at Fred just in time to see the truck go into another slide. At the end of the slide its nose was pointing into the yard and aiming at him like the barrel of a shotgun. That was when he found his dungarees stuck on the pointy end of the fence slat.

Fred's truck leapt into the air like a wild animal as it broached the curb. The engine raced as the wheels tried to grab thin air. Sheldon pulled so hard on his pants that they tore from the crotch to the knee and he toppled over the fence backwards. As he fell, he saw Sasha jump back over the fence. He heard her barking at Fred's truck. As it approached the fence, she ducked to the right and Fred followed, shooting tightly down between the houses, smashing and crashing the garbage cans stored there. Their contents scattered through the air like rotten confetti.

When Sheldon managed to get up, he jumped back over the fence and looked around frantically for the dog. He heard more noise from the street and car horns began to blare. There was a loud crash and the sound of Fred's truck seemed to recede as it made its way down a side road moving away from where Sheldon stood. The lawyer, feeling the wind on his loins, followed the tire tracks out to the street just knowing he would find the big Collie smashed into a bloody pulp. His heart was in his throat as he surveyed the damaged area, but there was no body... she'd gotten away. In the distance he heard a police siren and turned in that direction. He needed to get out of the area or he would have a lot of explaining to do; but he had to find Sasha first.

"Woof... you big stud!"

He spun around and found the Collie sitting next to a large tree which had obviously hidden her from him. He nearly cried in relief, though he had no idea why. She was a stray... nothing more... and he was fucking nuts...

"Woof you big stud? What kind of greeting was that... and we're not indoors anymore, someone else might have heard you; did you think of that?" He was yelling by the time he was done. "Now; are you going to tell me what the fuck this is all about?!"

There was the sound of Fred's truck down the road a little ways and Sheldon turned toward the noise.

He heard Sasha giggle. "Your weenie is hanging out."

That was when Fred's truck came screaming through the intersection a block down from where they were standing. Laundry was flapping in the breeze behind him, still on the clothesline. He was being chased by a fat lady whose yard he'd just come out of. She pitched a rock after him while yelling at the top of her lungs. Sheldon was watching this when a hand snaked around to the rip in his pants and touched his manhood. He jumped about three feet.

"Don't do that!" he yelled, spinning around. Sitting at his feet, Sasha just looked at him, her tail happily wagging. He grabbed his head with both hands. "This cannot be happening to me. I am not crazy... I am not crazy.... I am not..."

There was the sound of screeching wheels and the loud combination of a John Deer tractor and an airplane roar at take off power, as Fred's truck raced through the intersection next to

them. When it was just past, the wheels screamed as the dogcatcher jammed on the brakes and cut the wheel hard to swing it back round.

“RUN!” yelled Sheldon, and they were off again.

Two hours later, Sasha peeked out from behind some bushes in the local park. They’d made their way this far, having dodged Fred in a nip and tuck crash and bang chase the entire distance. Never once had the police shown up; although there were plenty of sirens. Fred almost ran them down on several occasions, seeming to have a very uncanny ability to sneak up on them, even as loud as the truck was without its muffler. They finally found the vehicle wrapped around a concrete telephone pole. The radiator was still steaming, but Fred was nowhere to be seen. Sheldon wanted to head back to his house but Sasha kept them moving in the opposite direction until she spotted the park. It was quiet here, and she directed Sheldon to the bushes where he collapsed onto the ground. From within the greenery they were completely hidden.

“We need to talk,” he told her as she lay with her back to him, watching the park for signs of trouble.

“I’m listening,” she replied. At least Sheldon heard the words, but with her back to him, he couldn’t see her face. He propped himself up on an elbow.

“I’m going to pretend for just a moment that I am not the resident of a rubber room... who the hell are you and what’s happening to me?”

“Typical... so typical... it’s all about you isn’t it? Let’s not bother about the poor dog. I could be road kill somewhere and no one would give a sniff about me. I thought you were different... you rescued me from that monster and then said I could live with you.”

She scooted backwards until she was touching him. She then sat upright and turned, looking directly at him. Her eyes had that sad dog look to them.

“You really like to lay the guilt on don’t you?” he told her. “I have a mother, you know, and she was an expert with guilt, so you’re wasting your time.” He lay back down, feeling her fur against his exposed leg. It tickled in a good way. “OK... let’s start at the base level and build from there. I know who I am, but who and what exactly are you?”

He was about to turn his head so she could answer, when Sasha smiled softly and spoke to him straight on. “I am a goddess... or at least I used to be. That was many and many years before your time.”

“A goddess...” he repeated, and then his eyes gave her a suspicious look. “Waaaait a minute... you’re talking to me. I saw your lips move and you’re still ‘just’ a dog. I thought

you couldn't talk unless I wasn't looking and you transformed or something. I've fallen further over the edge haven't I?"

"Not at all; things have just changed slightly." She looked at his pants where his penis was peeking through the rip again, and smiled.

"Why?" he asked her suspiciously.

"I don't know. That's just the way it is sometimes. Things happen that seem to have no rhyme or reason, and then later you find out why they did... so... we will have to wait for that answer." She lay down and put her head on her paws. "Did you know that you have a most wonderful little private part? I shall have to call you my 'wiener boy'."

"Stop that," he said, tucking himself back into his pants as best he could.

Sasha laughed. "You are so modest."

"So... if you're a goddess, or were a goddess," he corrected himself, "What the hell is Fred?"

"Oh... well... nothing much. He used to be King Of The Under World is all. His name is Anubis, but I believe your civilization cast the idea of him aside. He has always been just a bit touchy about that. Then again, he's gone by a lot of names and done more than a few different jobs. You now generally refer to him as 'The Grim Reaper'. You know... the skeleton guy who walks around with a big sickle?"

"Anubis?"

She raised her head to look at him. "I am not in the habit of repeating myself."

This time Sheldon gave her the look right back. "Oh... I get it... you were a goddess, and now you can talk when I'm looking at you... so now I'm 'just' a mortal to you."

The big Collie smiled at him. "Oh I like you... you are so... so... intuitive. I like that in a lover."

"We are not lovers."

"We will be," she assured him.

Sheldon chose not to rise to the bait. "So what are you to this Anubis guy, and why does he want to kill you so bad?"

"He's my husband," she told him calmly. "I suppose he wants to kill me because he's jealous... or perhaps it's because I stole something from him... or maybe he just got out of bed on the wrong side of the covers. That happens now and again."

“Tell him to move the bed against the wall and then there’s only the one way to get up.”

She laughed at his attempt at a joke. “If that were the case, I can assure you he would always be in a bad mood. He likes choices.”

Sheldon rose to his knees. “I’m getting out of here,” he told her. “The idea that I’m a full fledged loony has sort of gotten me just a little bit upset myself. If you’ll excuse me; you’re on your own. I don’t think I feel like getting killed by a crazed dogcatcher today.”

Sasha rose, blocking his way. “You can’t leave.”

“Why not? and I can’t even believe I’m asking that.”

The dog’s tail wagged, but only slightly. “I saved your life, remember? I jumped in front of the truck and lead Fred away from you... you were stuck on the fence.”

“OK; so we’re even. I let you out of the truck in the first place.”

“Yes you did,” she bridled, “But I...”

A huge jackal headed body in a shredded dogcatcher’s uniform threw itself into the bushes landing squarely on top of Sasha.

“GOTCHA!” it screamed in triumph.

Before he could stop himself, Sheldon dove on top of the two, wrestling with the creature, trying to pry its strong arms off of the dog. Sasha for her part was barking furiously. The three of them ended up rolling out of the bushes and into the open, biting, scratching, and screaming for all they were worth. Teeth flashed and flesh tore as the fight ensued. Sheldon realized that, even though he was in the best shape of his life, this was a fight that he could not win in this fashion. He had the dog creature by the waste but it now had Sasha by the throat and was shaking her like a rag doll.

Gathering his wits about him he jumped off the strange beast, spun, and executed his best soccer kick to the creature’s groin.

Sasha was immediately dropped from the bloody jaws as the part man part jackal creature screamed in pain. It fell over from its kneeling position and curled into a fetal position holding its testicles in both hands.

The lawyer was tempted to kick the creature once more time for good measure, but the site of Sasha’s limp body almost made his heart stop. She was covered in blood and this frightened him so badly that he rushed over, picked her up, and began running.

“Hang on girl,” he said to her breathlessly. “Hang on... we’ll do something... but you have to hang on...”

Behind him, he heard a scream and knew the creature was struggling to its feet. The pursuit was on again; but this time he knew for certain why Fred was upset with him.

He let his mind slip into its running mode. His breathing became controlled and his pace evened out. He was looking for an escape... somewhere to go, somewhere to go... somewhere... and that was when he spotted the Starbucks coffee shop.

“There it is Sasha... that’s it... he hates coffee, so that’s where we have to go.”

Sasha’s head rolled limply in his arms and he became panic stricken.

“For God’s sake hang on!”

Sammy Wilks heard the bell to the shop jangle. It had been a slow day but that was all right. He figured he deserved a slow day every now and again. Only he and Alice Harcourt were in the coffee shop, along with three senior citizens, doing what Sammy called ‘frittering away the time waiting to die’. They tipped well so he didn’t mind so much, except for their constant comments that. ‘In their days things were different’. The building this Starbucks was in was part of the historic section of the city, so this was not a new brass and glass shop. Things here were solid wood and more old generation.

The heavy door, which had hung in its frame for better than a century sounded as if it had been kicked open rather than slowly pushed, and this startled him. He quickly turned to see what was going on.

“My dog’s been attacked!” yelled Sheldon. “Call the police! Call an ambulance!”

“For a dog?” Sammy asked, his mouth dropping open. His Adam’s apple bobbed up and down with the words.

“Call the damned police!” Sheldon screamed at him, laying Sasha on the floor. “The bastard will be here any minute!”

“Who... Bastard? Who will be here????”

The lawyer ran to the door and leaned upon it, turning the dead bolt. He then began moving tables and chairs in front of it. By now, Sammy was on the phone to the police, not so much about the dog attack but about the nutcase barricading himself into his store. He’d seen

enough things on the nightly news to know when to do this much. One of the old people, an aged lady with blue hair, tottered over to the Collie and knelt down to look at her wounds.

“I was a nurse in World War Two young man,” she said loudly, indicating partial deafness. “Perhaps I can help. She’s still breathing at least. ‘Where there’s life, there’s hope,’ we always used to say.”

“You wasn’t no nurse Martha,” said one of the old men, rolling his eyes up as if to say; ‘Here we go again’.

“That would be very nice of you,” Sheldon said over his shoulder as he continued moving whatever tables and chairs he could.

A shadow passed over the plate glass storefront window like a thundercloud and the jackal headed creature stood in the middle of it, growling. He was a full head taller than the lawyer and his body of black fur rippled with muscles. His teeth showed pure white in his black face and there was blood on his lips.

On the phone a tired sounding police dispatcher was talking to Sammy. She didn’t sound convinced that a cruiser should be sent out because some guy’s dog had been bitten. She tried to explain that most of the force was out trying to track down a crazy assed dogcatcher playing tank with his truck. Alice, who’d just returned from the store’s large refrigerator, didn’t look left or right before turning her back to the front of the store and flipping on the coffee grinder. The noise of the grinder made it so Sammy had to yell into the receiver and this severely annoyed the police dispatcher.

The two old men, still sitting at their table, stopped their movements in mid air. One of them dribbled his coffee down his front as he stared at the scene in front of him.

Everything began happening at once.

Sheldon jumped back and leaped over the counter snatching the open bag of coffee Mary was grinding.

The old lady kneeling next to Sasha looked up, and remarked, “Oh my, that is one big dog!”

Sammy Wilks, holding one hand over his ear to hear the police dispatcher better, turned, saw what he saw, and began screaming his lungs out. For all intents and purposes, he sounded just like a little girl.

One of the old men stood, clutched at his chest, and cried out, “It’s Death... he’s come for me!”

The other old man, not to be out done, rose, clutched his own chest, and yelled out, “Me too!”

Anubis didn't bother with the door. Making a fist, he slammed it into the plate glass shattering it. He then leaped up onto the display screaming his centuries old pent up rage and anger. The smell of brimstone rushed into the store on a swirling wind which mixed with the coffee smell, engulfing all that were there. That was when Sheldon threw the bag of coffee at him. It smacked the jackal-headed god in the chest. Coffee grounds dusted the air as the open bag spewed its contents. Anubis stopped bellowing, looked at the ground coffee spilled everywhere, sniffed loudly; and then jumped down off of the display and into the store laughing.

Sammy stopped screaming as if someone had turned off a switch and his face showed question.

Sheldon looked at Alice, who smiled weakly at him. There was a pregnant moment of quiet and calm the likes of which happens before a terrible hurricane strikes the coast.

"What kind of coffee was that?" whispered Sheldon sideways at Mary.

"Decaf," she whispered back.

A look of understanding flashed across his face. "It's regular he doesn't like... where do you keep it?"

She pointed to the bins in front of him, where there were bags and bags of coffee, both ground, and whole bean. Sheldon picked one up, measured its weight, and yelled, "In your face Dog Boy!"

Putting everything he had behind the throw, it struck the underworld god in the face and blew apart like a bomb. Anubis staggered and then righted himself roaring again. Alice picked up another package and threw it. Within seconds, the two old men had moved behind the counter joining in. The store became heavy with the smell of coffee grounds, the smell overpowering the brimstone odor completely.

Sammy began screaming into the receiver of the phone again, while slowly sinking down into a protective position behind the counter. Martha, believing she was back in World War Two, began cursing the Japanese. Grabbing Sasha by the forelegs, she pulled her around the counter to a safer place by the tables and then threw her own body over that of the dog to protect her.

Anubis, arms covering his head, cowered under the assault of the coffee grenades. Rallying, he managed to raise himself up. Bellowing for all he was worth, he caught a small two-ounce gift pack right down the throat. Clutching at his neck, he gagged trying to hack it back out; but the coffee package was stuck fast and his air was shut off. He staggered and then pitched forward onto the floor. When he hit, he bounced slightly and didn't move further. The deluge of coffee continued for another five seconds, before Martha stood up and bellowed, "CEASE FIRE!... CEASE FIRE! SAVE YOUR AMUNITION! THE BASTARDS MIGHT RALLY FOR ANOTHER BANZAI"

Sheldon, Alice, and the two old timers all froze, their arms cocked back ready to lob in more packages of coffee.

“Is he dead?” asked one of the old men.

Martha, staying slightly crouched and wary, crept up to the coffee covered body and poked at it. The creature didn’t move. She picked up one of his hands by the shredded uniform sleeve and the hand that emerged from the coffee grounds was flesh, not fur. She let it drop back to the floor, where it landed with a dead sounding thump.

“Fred!” shouted Sheldon. “It’s Fred... he’s back!”

He jumped from behind the counter and quickly turned the body over. The dogcatcher wasn’t breathing and his eyes had rolled up into his head. Sheldon tried slapping his face. “Fred... come on Fred.... wake up.... please wake up. You can’t let the bastard win like this Fred!”

“Stand back,” Martha commanded. “Let an expert show you how it’s done!”

Sheldon moved back and the old lady got closer, kneeling next to the body. “He ain’t breathing!” she said to no one in particular.

Tilting his head back, she opened his mouth and saw the two ounce gift pack of coffee lodged in the back of his esophagus. Without hesitation, she jammed her fingers down the man’s throat, hooked them around the little bag of coffee, and popped it out. She tossed it aside and then balled up her fist, slamming it down onto Fred’s chest with a force that resounded off the walls of the coffee shop. She was rewarded with a loud cough and a moan as the dog catcher gasped for air.

“BREATH YOU FLAT FOOTED SON OF A BITCH... BREATH!” she yelled at him, raising her fist up to strike him in the chest again.

Sheldon grabbed her fist in mid air, surprising even himself. “He’s breathing Martha... let it go now... you’ve done a great job here. What unit were you with?”

“Unit?” she asked him, her eyes suddenly seeming to lose the flame that had been in them.

“You said you were a nurse in World War Two.”

“I did?”

“I told ya she warn’t no nurse,” said one of the old men from behind the counter.

Sheldon shot him a glance that shut him up before he could say another word. Turning back to Martha, he said, “Thank you. I think you must have saved a lot of lives. I’ll take over here, could you tend to my dog please?”

She beamed at him. “Why thank you young man. I would be glad to take care of your dog.” She leaned close and whispered, “I think she’s going to be fine. She told me she couldn’t die and leave a hunk like you unattended.”

Sheldon looked at her, surprise on his face. “She told you that? I mean... you heard her?”

Fred groaned and his knees began to pull up to his chest. Forgetting Martha, Sheldon dropped down next to him and began scooping coffee grounds around and over him. Looking at Alice, he told her, “We’ll need more to cover him with or the other guy will be back.”

Sammy slowly stood up from behind the counter, his face ghostly white. In the background was the sound of sirens.

“The am...am...ambulance is on its way,” he stuttered, “And I think the police are coming too.”

Fred groaned loudly and the coffee server fainted, falling from sight behind the counter.

Explaining things to the police was not an easy task, but Sheldon, with the help of the people in the coffee shop, managed. Before the authorities arrived, they all agreed it might be wiser to leave out the part about the half man-half jackal monster thing. It would be much easier to simply point the finger of blame at a deranged dogcatcher. Sheldon felt guilty about this, but he promised himself he would do everything he could to help the man. If Fred was crazy, then he was himself, and for some odd reason he actually felt bad for the big man. It was like he owed him for some reason. Perhaps if he hadn’t released Sasha from the back of his truck none of this would have happened in the first place.

In actuality, things were made a little easier because of his status as an athlete. The first police officer to arrive on the scene was the same one who had witnessed his accident first hand. He’d been the initial person to reach Sheldon and had helped him off the crushed car roof after he was attacked by the beer keg. The policeman actually laughed after straightening out the mess in the coffee shop, and told Sheldon how he’d been dubbed the ‘Beer Keg Biker’ by the nation’s media. The talking heads had gotten great mileage out of his mishap, and though Sheldon was never aware of it; he had indeed become world famous.

Because of this notoriety, and at the racer’s insistence, Fred and Sasha were put into the same ambulance. He was also allowed to ride in the back with them. As they loaded Fred into the ambulance Alice placed a two-pound bag of Starbuck’s blend on his chest. When the paramedics looked at Sheldon questioningly, he nodded and told them; “Trust me; you’ll want to keep that there.”

It was not normal procedures for a dog to be taken in an ambulance but this was ‘The Beer Keg Biker’, and the paramedics were also weekend cyclists. There was an immediate

unspoken fellowship amongst them. During the ride one of the paramedics discretely pointed out Sheldon's exposure, offering him some medical tape to close up the tear in his pants. As he taped up his leg he watched Sasha closely. His heart went out to her still form. The big Collie had been mauled badly but she was still breathing. The paramedic who gave him the tape, shook his head in the negative when he examined her gum line. He had studied to be a veterinarian before dropping the course and changing over to paramedic, but it didn't take a vet to see that she was in bad shape. The gums should have been pink; not deathly pale. She'd lost a lot of blood.

When they arrived at the hospital, Fred and Sasha were placed on opposite gurneys in the same small curtained off area in the Emergency Room's receiving area. Sheldon, having been asked if his taped up leg hurt, sat upon a small chair between the two. Since they had all arrived in the same ambulance the staff just figured there was a relation and kept them together. Sheldon had also discretely pulled a sheet over Sasha's head as she was wheeled in. Fred and the dog were both now on IV solutions and both were very much unconscious.

The triathlete, seeing his reflection in a mirror, shook his head sadly, and whispered, "What a way to end a race."

When the ER doctor came in Sheldon did a lot of fast talking to keep from having Sasha booted out. He told the man she'd saved his life, and he was very distraught. He was almost to the point of shouting when he was recognized again as 'The Beer Keg Biker'. All the doctors and nurses in the ER suddenly wanted to shake his hand and get an autograph. The nurses, including the ones that were not even single, all smiled, doing their best to charm him.

It was a dream... it was a nightmare... it was all happening real time, and he was suddenly so confused.

"Look at him," sighed the goddess White Anubis. Standing next to her was Lord Anubis, King of the Under World and her husband. Sheldon and the hospital staff could not see them as they stood watching.

"I hate losing to you," grumbled the jackal headed god. "But the race has been run and I was defeated. He did not cast you off to save himself.

She turned to him, licking the side of his neck gently. She was his exact image except where he was black, she was white... where he was male; she was female. Where he was the god who ushered the dead to the other side, she was the goddess who'd kissed them at birth; allowing for the first breath of life.

She was also the goddess of love.

"You did not entirely lose My Lord... he did not become my lover as I'd predicted."

"He has no taste then."

“Not so... not so...” She told him gently. “I did not have ample time or I might have convinced him. His society has taboos; and one of them is sexual relationships between the species. You have to remember that I was a dog.”

“And a very beautiful dog,” he told her, putting his arm around her shoulders and looking into her eyes.

“Thank you my love,” she whispered into his ear; taking a moment to give him a kiss. “That is very kind of you to say. How shall we rectify the damage we have done to the lives of these three creatures?”

Lord Anubis thought about it for a moment. “Let us take things back to his first night after the racing accident. I think that should fix it nicely.”

She nodded in agreement. “I shall take care of the gifts for the man and the dog; you shall have to take care of the dogcatcher.”

“Gifts?” he asked.

“Of course my darling, these creatures have earned the right to something special... something that only you and I might be able to give them.”

Anubis sighed. “Very well.”

She hugged him gently and his stern nature melted just a little.

“To the one known as Fred the dogcatcher... I ... ah.... I’ll give him an extra five years to live and he shall now have a job finding homes for the dogs he catches, rather than sending them on to me. Does that make you happy my wife?”

She looked up at his face, and smiled. “Yes it does, very much. And what of the Collie? Shall we leave the dog with this Sheldon person?” she asked, masking her feelings for the man.

He nodded. “She is a beautiful creature and they do go well together. I think that would be a good idea.”

White Anubis smiled at her husband. He’d just played into what she wanted exactly. She was the ancient Egyptian goddess of love and by keeping Sasha with Sheldon, she would be able to give them both a private gift that pleased her greatly. Putting an arm around her husband’s waist, the two of them watched as time was set back. When it was done, Anubis took his leave, having other things to attend to. White Anubis stayed behind, telling him she would be along shortly.

“You will not have relations with this man,” he admonished her sternly, knowing she would do as she pleased in any case. He was a jealous husband but he knew his wife well enough to close one eye when it was necessary.

“Of course not dearest,” she told him with a smile, “He is but a human and you are a god... you are my opposite; and my one true love.”

He snorted his laughter and then disappeared in a cloud of brimstone smoke.

The goddess turned to watch Sheldon’s dream progress with pleasure. Lord Anubis would not bother her any more this night, and she had her gifts yet to give.

Time was now back at the exact moment when Sheldon’s second dream had begun.

That night, the girl in his dream was back. Still she said nothing. Her hair was long, and unfettered. Her body was naked, and perfect. The man found himself yearning for her but was too stiff to move. As before, she was perfectly clean, and smelled wonderful. He didn’t remember having ever smelled anything in his sleep before. She was such a mystery.

She moved up on the bed and sat close to him. Her six breasts stood out from under her hair, which flowed over her shoulders in an abundance that seemed un-natural and yet so beautiful. Leaning over his face, her hair fell over him feeling silky on his skin. It was long and blond, covering them both like a tent. It was wonderful to experience. Inch by inch she came closer. Looking into his eyes, she leaned ever so closer until their lips touched. They kissed a long and deep kiss, her body continuing forward until she was lying on top of him in the bed.

As White Anubis watched, the sleeping man hugged the girl to himself and they began the process of making love.

Reaching out slowly... gently... she felt the girl’s hair in her fingers while watching love’s purpose being pursued.

“This is my gift to you Sheldon,” she whispered, next touching him on the ear and lightly tracing its lines with her finger. “You shall know many other realities in your lifetime, and you will understand them all. In your dreams, you will always be able to see Sasha in her ‘reality’, and during your times of wakefulness Sasha will see you in yours. She will be your lover both here and there.”

“Sasha,” she next whispered to the girl moving in rhythm to the man lying under her. “You will ever be able to talk to your man in his own language when you are in ‘his’ reality and in yours. You will live your life in his years, not those of your species, and you will both have long and productive lives.”

She smiled and began slowly walking backwards into a blackness that opened behind her. As their soft moans became louder and closer together, she said quietly, “By White Anubis you

are now mated... you are one creature together... forever. For the rest of your lives, I grant you love.”