

Georgio & Zoe



Susan Peerless

A "New Woman" Novel



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Georgio & Zoe

By Susan Peerless

I. THE TATRA

My parents always said that I was an ‘arty’ type. Sure, I was always drawing and painting, but there was more. I had an intense feeling for color and form. Like the time I spent over a month learning to draw cloth. I had a beautiful piece of deep purple velvet that I would drape in various ways, then try to draw It. I got fairly good at It. So, while other boys were playing baseball, I was draping velvet. See what I mean?

Anyway, I soon discovered that a small rural town In Nebraska was not the place to develop artistic talent. So I ran away to New York. I had big expectations. There I was at last, Richard Dent in New York! But my first days in the Big Apple were hell. It was dirty, cold and expensive. My lean savings were disappearing at a rate double what I had expected back in Nebraska.

Then I met Sandra. Sandra was not only the picture of nonconformity, it appeared that she almost made a profession out of being weird. She strictly conformed to not conforming. She had a flat-topped afro in tightly curled pink hair. Her left nostril was pierced like a Hindu woman, but instead of a diamond, she often wore a pink plastic ‘teddy bear’ earring in It or something equally outlandish. And just to show how weird she was, she befriended me.

Sandra was part of an informal artistic group which inhabited a huge old brownstone to the East of the Greenwich Village area, owned,

I understood, by a successful artist, presently in Europe, named Georgio. Artistically Sandra was accepted only on the outer fringes of this group since her only real artistic talent was to look strange.

As her protege, I was accepted on even further out fringes of the group.

I amused them, I guess.

I soon discovered that my 'great talent' needed years of work to even approach some of these people. So, I started to work hard. All I could really count on from the others was to be fed at irregular intervals. I can still see myself, long hair and beard, slaving over a hot palette. I grew the beard because someone had commented that I was a perfect 'angelic' type and if Rubens were still alive, he'd want me to pose all the time for when he was painting cherubs. Anyhow, my beard was a bit sparse and had taken a lot of patience since my facial hair growth was only a little greater than that of a real cherub!

Whenever the mood moved someone in this group, they had a party. Quite a few of our 'members' came from well-to-do families, so money was always available for drugs, just about every imaginable type. The most common was hash, which they referred to as T'ang. The name came from some old S.F. story.

I never could get to like drugs since I hated to lose control of my mind. But I tried to squat among the cushions with the rest and mumble inane little bits of philosophical nonsense.

Sex was also common during these 'gatherings' and tended to degenerate to ..., no, excuse me, to ascend to the orgy level.

My sexual contacts were occasionally homosexual. You must understand that I had no particular interest in doing this, but I worshipped these people, not for their lifestyle, which was sloppy at best, but for their art. I had to stay with it to learn how to paint; everything else was a necessary part of the package.

Life slithered along in this way for over six months.

Then Georgio and his wife, Zoe arrived from Paris. If the others were demi-gods of art, then Georgio was Zeus! Artistically he was a couple of levels higher than the group, whose auras began to look a bit tarnished in my young eyes.

But first a description of these two as it's important.

Georgio was tall, heavy set, black curly hair and beard, but with clear light skin. He dominated everyone around him easily. His painting was fantastic. He had a sure hand with color that made me feel like a kid with his first box of crayons. His paintings sold and for very good

prices. This also helped him to maintain his car in show room condition. This car had been brought back from Europe. It was a 35-year-old Tatra, of all things. Having a weird car was as important to Georgio as was having weird ways was important to Sandra.

Zoe was quite different from him in more than just sex. She had light brown hair, was slightly tall for a woman but was dwarfed by Georgio. She was sort of quiet and fooled around with painting mostly to please Georgio. She was about 22 and almost looked like she could be my twin.

I mean put a beard on her and bind her breasts and she could pass for me?

Also like me, Zoe wasn't much into drugs either.

So, in the usual 'parties' we'd often get off together and talk, and how we talked!

Georgio kept his eye on the situation but when it became obvious that sex wasn't involved, he paid little attention. As opposed to the norm in artistic circles, Georgio and Zoe were completely and permanently devoted to one another.

Georgio was working on a huge canvas; it was a work titled 'Far Wonders' and everyone was emotionally involved in how it was going, commenting on each change and development.

Zoe said that she didn't want to watch any more but would wait until it was finished. She decided to visit some friends who were trying to make it out on a farm in Chester, New Jersey.

Georgio gave her the keys to the Tatra but came over and asked me to go along just in case. I was more fiddling with paint rather than doing anything serious at the moment so why not? It was a cold windy day. It had snowed two nights before. There were patches of hard packed snow in places on the streets, so Zoe drove with great care.

I asked her, "Are you sure you want to make this trip?"

It'll be tiring fighting slippery roads."

"Uh-huh."

"I could drive for you."

She glanced at me. "No way Dick. This monster has a big 8-cylinder rear engine. It's not easy to drive but even Georgio says that I handle it well. I toiled it all over Austria one winter. He preferred me driving because I'm more careful. But thanks for the offer anyway.

“What’s the problem with this particular car?”

“Honey, as I said, it’s got a big, 8-cylinder rear engine. This may be fairly light since it’s air-cooled but it’s back there and this car tends to become unglued rather easily, especially on snow.

“Hum.”

“Don’t worry, Dick. You’re no bigger nor stronger than I.

My only defect is that I don’t have a dong between my legs.

But I can handle this machine.”

I grinned. “That’s what I like about you. You go right to the point.”

“How Freudian!”

“Yeah. I guess it was.”

I just watched the dismal, wintry, Jersey countryside go by. I’m a summer man myself. In winter the whole world is black and white. We were on a two lane road, probably nearing Chester. They had gotten as much if not more snow here.

Zoe maintained a fair speed with only the slightest occasional weaving. I had to admit that she was right. She could handle that car.

Then it happened. We were coming down a slight grade on a curve. A total idiot in a semi was trying to pass a Ford and a VW on the curve. When he saw the Tatra he tried to brake and started jack-knifing on the snowy curve. The VW saw what was coming and headed for a snow bank. I didn’t see what happened to the Ford. My whole field of vision was rapidly filling with the side of the semi. Of course, Zoe was trying to get out of the way but by now we were going down the grade side-wards. The Tatra was in a slow spin.

Zoe said, “Oh my God! I love you Georgio. I won’t leave you.”

She spun and looked at me intensely. Her face was framed by the expanding view of the side of the semi. A paper stuck to the side of the truck flapped in the breeze. The only thing I remember from there on was the inane thought that Georgio was going to play Hell finding parts to fix this car here in the U.S.!

I awoke in the usual ‘Where am I?’ situation. A nurse was looking at a clipboard at the foot of my bed. “Am I in one piece?”

She came over. “Pretty well. You’ve got ten stitches in your shoulder and a concussion.”

“And how did Zoe come out?”

“I’m sorry.

A chill went down my back muscles. ‘You’re sorry? Was it that bad?’”

She nodded. “She was dead on arrival, Mr. Dent.”

“What happened to her?”

“A broken neck. She felt nothing, I’m sure. Can you tell us who to notil~?”

I nodded, not trusting my voice. I was crying Inside and soon would be outside. “Oh shit! Why the flick her? This God damned, slimy, mother fucking universe is ... I’m sorry, nurse.

Tears were streaming down my face so I mopped with the end of the sheet.

“That’s OK. Men often let out their emotions swearing, woman more often by crying.”

“And I do both.”

“And you do both. So what? Was she your wife or..

“No, but she was very important to me. Call over to New York, 254-7805, and ask for Georgio. He was her husband. Tell him I died too. I couldn’t face him now.”

“Don’t be silly. Georgio who?”

“McAllen.”

“Georgio McAllen?”

“Yeah. I don’t think that Georgio’s his real name.”

“I’ll call now. By the way, the police want to talk to you.”

“I imagine so. Send them in.”

Them’ turned out to be a young state trooper who was as self-important as are all too many of his kind. It’s so very difficult for them to learn a little humility.

I told him all I could remember.

He studied some papers and replied, “OK, Dent. For your information the truck driver is in excellent condition for trial. The VW driver made it by the skin of his teeth but the old lady in the Ford, who was driving slowly as conditions warrant, is dead.”

“Shit! How come I came out so well?”

“The body of the lady who was driving cushioned you.”

‘What?!’

“The side of the trailer came into the car at the level of her head. The impact threw you into her and broke her neck.”

“But I had on a seat belt.”

“They don’t do too much good in side impacts. Besides the frame of your seat gave way. What kind of car was that anyway? Couldn’t find any papers and I need it for my report.”

“A Tatra.”

“A What?”

“A Tatra, an old Czechoslovakian make.”

“Oh. Now what

“No more questions. No more questions.”

“Sorry buddy but

“NO MORE FUCKING QUESTIONS! YA HEAR ME?”

“Don’t get violent Mac. I’m the police and

“NURSE!”

I don’t know why I came apart like that. Oh shit, sure I ~now why, but ... Anyhow, the young cop found out that nurses can be far more intimidating than state troopers! I was left with my morose thoughts. Now I had to face Georgio. Maybe he would find enough kindness in his heart to make my execution fast and painless!

When I finally did face Georgio he didn’t put any blame on me at all. All my auto-proclamations of blame didn’t affect him at all. What did affect him was Zoe’s death. And that effect was devastating. He lost all interest in painting. He ate once in a while; that’s all. All the parties were canceled. In a word, the world came to a stop.

Then Macu was sent for. Now Macu is a huge black whose real name, I understand, is Malcolm Brown. He comes from the Gesham Street area of the upper Bronx, but his stage ‘personality’ is much different. He claims to come from the high Himalayas, as unlikely as it might seem that one of his race should come from there! But he’s a self-proclaimed guru md, since he is accepted by many as such, he manages a sort of living by being a guru.

Macu was sent for to solve the problem of Georgio’s activity. He listened to just about everyone, managing to appear very wise and

guruish. He was especially interested in me, often repeated, tale of Zoe's last seconds. He then went n the kitchen and squatted there to 'meditate'. All in all, it wasn't a bad performance.

I eye-balled him as I got a plate of food and a cup of coffee for Georgio. He just sat there and mumbled. What a way make a living! I carried the food to the studio where Georgio lay on a sofa, his feet up on the wall, staring into space.

"Come on, man. You've got to eat."

He grunted.

"What's Macu supposed to do?"

He glanced up at me. "I don't know. I didn't send for him."

"I think that everyone wants you to go on painting."

"Obviously. But they just can't get it through their heads that Zoe was an essential part of me. We were a team. I can't paint now."

"Well, they still hope. Before you couldn't even talk to anyone."

He shrugged.

"But I find it easy to talk to you." He stared at me, puzzled. "And that doesn't really make sense."

At that moment, Macu strode in. He squatted in front of Georgio, arranging his white robes as he sat. "Georgio McAllen, I have seen the truth. Your Zoe is a very special person."

Georgio snorted. "Was, Macu, was."

"Let me finish. Richard Dent is the key."

I exclaimed. "What?"

Georgio just leaned back and studied Macu without looking at me.

Macu continued, 'You have not seen what the fates prepared? Consider. One, Richard arrives shortly before you and Zoe return to New York. Two, he's the spiting image of Zoe if you take off his beard and give him breasts. Three, consider Zoe's strange actions at the time of her death. She makes a statement of shock at what is happening, then states that she loves you, Georgio; then says that she will never leave you. She then turns from the oncoming truck and stares intently into Richard's eyes. She is possibly doing so at the time of her death.'

Georgio eyed him, thinking.

"I don't know if you're trying to say what I think you're saying but I find it ..

Macu raised his hand.

“Bear with me. The fourth point to consider is what convinced me. While I was mediating in the kitchen, Richard came in and prepared a plate of food and some coffee. I see those items at your elbow Georgio.”

Georgio spun on me. “Why do you serve me? You have since you returned. Zoe always did it before,”

I tried to think. “I don’t know. I felt guilty. It seemed the natural thing to do. Well not really the natural thing but

Macu smiled. “You have stopped because ‘natural’ is the right word. And you, Georgio, are very quick. You have grasped the concept before I could express it.”

I was confused. “Well express it to me. I’m lost.”

Macu stared me in the eye. “Seconds before her death, Zoe’s mental eyes were cleared. A great power derived from her love for Georgio was developed, used and died with her body. In that moment of universal clarity she did the only thing she could. She saw that she would die and that you would live so she passed her spirit or soul into you. You are Zoe.”

I stepped back from him. “You’ve lost your marbles.”

Georgio had been vividly interested. “Would he have some of her memories?”

“Possibly some. Zoe may be aware of this conversation and may help.”

Georgio looked at me so intensely that I became afraid. He spoke quickly and decisively. “That day just outside of Wien. The Tatra broke down. We worked hard to fix it. You skinned your knuckles trying to help me fasten the ... the

I spoke without thinking, “The timing chain. It goes through a hole in the block and.

Georgio still stared at me. “Yes. The timing chain broke.”

“But I couldn’t know that. I wasn’t there with you in Vienna.”

“I didn’t say Vienna, I said Wien. How did you know the German name for Vienna?”

We all just stared at each other. Then I shook my head. “This is silly. I’m not Zoe.”

Macu sighed. “Then how did you know about all this?”

“I don’t know. I just said the first thing that came into my head.”

“Have you ever worked on the Tatra mechanically?”

“No. I had never heard of the brand until Georgio brought this one.”

Georgio leaned back with a light smile. “No. Macu, you tried to give me a beautiful dream. You tried. And for this~ I thank you. But of course it is impossible. As for the timing chain, in one of their indeterminate conversations Zoe mentioned it to him. He just doesn’t remember when she did.”

Macu turned to him. “You throw away what is so precious when it is in your grasp!”

“NO!”

And with that Georgio stood and strode out.

Macu bowed his head. “His pain is too deep.”

A hand touched my shoulder. It was Sandra. “I heard and it is true. You will do it.”

I was distracted by the fine gold chain that ran from her pierced right nostril to her right earlobe then under her chin to her left ear lobe. “Do what?”

“Become Zoe to him.”

“The whole idea is

Macu grabbed my arm. “It is not. You do have Zoe within you.

“Poor woman.

“Do not joke. Do you want Georgio to continue his work?”

“With all my soul.”

“Then?”

Sandra took my shoulders in her hands. “I will make you look just like Zoe.”

Then Macu said, “And if you just hang loose and do what seems right, Zoe will guide you.”

“But I can’t

Macu’s eyes burned into mine. I wilted before him.

“You were brought here by the fates. It is your karma. (you have no choice.”

“I could just leave.”

Macu smiled. “No you couldn’t. You couldn’t leave Georgio to a life of no art, of grief. You feel nothing for him?”

I hung my head, tears began to come. “I am at fault. It was my hurtling body that took her *life*.”

Sandra put her hand under my chin and lifted my face. The had tears in her eyes. “Zoe?”

I continued, ‘You ask if I feel anything for Georgio. Yes I lo. I love him.”

Without another word Sandra stood and took my hand. The led me into her room. She indicated that I should undress and left.

I just sat there and did nothing. I suppose it was shock.

Sandra returned with a load of clothing in her arms and a cup in her hand. She dropped the clothing on the bed and handed me the cup. “Drink this. It will help you through the First part.”

I automatically drank. It was a warm bitter tea.

Sandra took the cup then began to undress me.

I felt comfortably complacent.

She began to talk to me in a low soft voice.

“You liked the tea, don’t you? But you must remember :hat Dick hates tea. Zoe. however, likes tea, don’t you Zoe? Now we’re rid of those clothes. Here I’ll lend you my robe. Fine now sit down here. I’m going to shave you.

First, with scissors, she cut off my beard. Then she ran an electric razor along my face. Before I knew it she was running it along my arms and legs. I didn’t seem to care. Then she took the little ribbon off my long hair and began to brush it.

‘Your hair will be real pretty if you brush it every day. Now I’m going to brush part of it over your face. Now I’ll cut it off just above your eyebrows so you can see. There. You’ve got the cutest bangs.”

“As Zoe always wore hers.”

‘Yes dear, like Zoe wore hers.”

“Because that’s how Georgio likes it.”

“Right! Now let’s take off the robe and step into these panties and a panty girdle to smooth things out. Uh-huh. Now this bra and some fals-

ies to fill out your clothes properly. Nice. Now let's pull on these panty hose."

"No."

"No?"

"Where are the ones with the flower design? Are they still on the bottom of the second drawer?"

"I'll look." Sandra left.

I turned and looked in the mirror. My God! I looked just like Zoe. My eyebrows are too bushy. I took a mirror and tweezers and began to shape them.

It was a while before Sandra returned. She carried a plastic bag which obviously had a flat box in it.

"You didn't tell me they were new, still in the box."

"I didn't really remember. Georgio liked them and got them for me."

"Who's talking now? Zoe?"

"What?" I was drawing on the panty hose. They were in a light shade with flowers in pastel shades all over the legs. Nice.

"Are you Zoe?"

"No, I'm Dick. Do you like these?"

"Very pretty. But how did you know about them?"

"Silly. I told you that Georgio got them."

"For you?"

"How many people does he buy pantyhose for? I've got to finish my eyebrows. Could you help?"

"Of course. I'm a little frightened. Are you Dick or Zoe?"

"Hum? I'm not sure. Is it important?"

"I ... guess not."

I finished dressing. My moves seemed automatic and deft. When I put on the simple white dress that Zoe often wore around the house, my hands went directly and easily to the zipper under my left arm. I put on a pair of comfortable low slippers and left the room.

People scurried out of my way and stared as I went toward Georgio's studio. It would appear that I was no longer on the outer fringes of the group!

In the studio, beside Georgio's big easel, was a big comfortable chair reserved for Zoe to watch Georgio at work although she didn't really watch him all that much.

I curled up in it and sat watching the unfinished painting expectantly. I may have a long wait. Out of the corner of my eye I saw others peering in once in a while and I heard a murmur of excitement in other parts of the house.

I waited. It was clear that Zoe was in me in some way but couldn't initiate anything or communicate? I decided to try an imaginary conversation with her to see what would happen.

"Zoe, are you there?"

"Of course I am and it took you long enough to work it out. By the way I'm 'here' not 'there'."

"It certainly sounds like you. You start by chewing me out!"

"Well you deserve it."

"You did this in those last few seconds in the car."

"It would appear so. I don't really know how but I did it. I was desperate. But it worked and there's no one more surprised about that than I!"

"So you're in here with me."

"Not quite. We're the same person. It's just that you have to keep 'asking me in' or something. It's an inefficient way of doing what we're trying to do. But you do now have a lot of my likes and dislikes."

"Like comfortably sitting around in your favorite 'hanging around' dress."

"Uh-huh. How do you like it?"

"I must admit that I like it and feel comfortable in it. There's a sense of being prettily feminine."

"My likes influence yours but the second part is more than the dress. It's my own, now your, innate sense of femininity."

"It's nice."

"Of course it is. Did you think it wasn't?"

"Now I know why we must keep on in this."

“Yes?”

“Zoe is Georgio’s inspiration, as essential to his art as his paints and canvas. My life and art will never be as much, therefore I am of far more importance to art than would Dick ever be.”

“Right. And there’s something even stronger. Dick never really loved anyone in his life, so you have a huge hollow in you’re personality. My love for Georgio fills this to overflowing. You love Georgio as intensely as I do now because it’s my love that ... Oh hell! It can’t be explained, just reach for it and sense it.

“I didn’t understand where to ‘reach’ but I thought of Georgio and a shiver of yearning, of excitement went down my spine. She was right! I loved that man like I had never loved anything before in my life. There were overtones of need, of helping him, of needing his protection, of dedicating myself to him, of bearing his children, of submitting my whole being to his needs and desires and a sense of all this leading to a deep personal fulfillment. My senses reeled.

“Zoe, Help!”

“Hold on. It’s just that you’re getting it all at once.”

“But it’s so strong, so overwhelming. A woman can be entirely dedicated to her love but a man never! It so different.

But I cannot physically! It’s so unfair to him.”

“And to you.”

“Well, yes.”

“But woman-like you think of your man first! You’re over the hump. You’re Zoe now. We’re Zoe now. I’m Zoe. By God I am!” Dick sort of slipped into the background without a struggle, almost thankfully. There was no sense in continuing a conversation with Dick since he didn’t respond anymore. There was just me!

Suddenly a pair of strong hands grasped my shoulders and began to shake me. My eyes flew open but only showed wildly agitated hair whipping back and forth in front of my face.

I yelled, “Stop, oh please stop!”

The shaking stopped and I found myself looking up into the anger clouded face of Georgio.

“Why are you here like this? Using her clothes, everything about you like her. Don’t look at me with that soft look.

Why?”

“Because I must, dear Georgio. Because I must.”

“I know that you are not Zoe.”

“You know that I am. If you thought that you were dealing with Dick you would have smashed him into the corner with one blow, but you shake me like you always do when you are vexed with me.”

“Prove it! Speak to me in French.”

“Gladly, but Dick knew some French.”

“Spanish then.”

“Very well. Tu sientes que soy Zoe, tu Zoe amada, ver— dad?”

He stood there, hands still on my shoulders, eyes wide but shaking his head.

I moved my hand up his arm to his elbow and stroked the inside of his arm with my thumb as only I knew how to do. It was one of our little love signals.

He staggered back, knocking over his easel, like I had touched him there with a red-hot sword.

“Oh my God, oh my God” He held out his hands beseechingly to me. “Is it really my love or is my mind going?”

He turned to the door where a number of faces watched.

“Don’t just stand out there! Come and tell me if it’s really Zoe. Sandra look and tell me!”

Sandra entered and locked looks with me. “It is Zoe.”

“Are you sure?”

“Do not insult me Georgio. I’m as sure as I am that I’m myself.”

One second he was standing there with his arms outstretched, and the next I was in those arms being spun around the room. He then set me down and kissed me like I’ve never been kissed before in my life or like I’ve been kissed many times before by him. Confusing?

My head was twirling. I thought that his tongue would never stop while instinctively and unabashedly I gave it little play nips. Then he stopped and looked down at me. I stared into his incredibly handsome face and my legs gave way. I felt to be melting down into hot butter. He didn’t even notice that he was supporting my entire weight!

I breathed, “My God Georgio, I love you so!”

Later we were alone and his curiosity at what I had done in the car overcame the poor dear.

“Think back. Close your eyes. Remember.”

“I can remember. I can! I see my hands on the big cream-colored plastic steering wheel. I’m wearing those nice kid gloves you gave me for Xmas. I’m turning and looking at Dick. His eyes are wide. There’s a shadow falling over everything. It must be the approaching truck. His hands are braced on the seat and dash, and there’s a wet stain spreading over his crotch. Everything is so intensely clear, like I can see through things. I fall into his eyes. Then there’s no more.”

“But that’s what you saw. What were you thinking?

What did you DO?”

“I don’t know. I remember nothing of that.”

“Shit.”

“I have a favor to ask.”

“Name it darling and it’s yours.”

“There are a number of Dick’s paintings in the studio.”

“Yes, and all done in a style best described as primitive infantilism.”

“I don’t care about that. I want you to pick out the best and want you to hang it in our room.”

“Oh come on..

“Georgio. Dick was swallowed up by a love that couldn’t be stopped. Look upon it as a memorial.”

“You are right, of course. I will proudly hang one of his paintings.”

I snuggled closer. “Now, there’s one other little problem.”

“What’s that?”

“Me. Physically, I mean. Will our relationship always have to be platonic?”

He smiled one of his heart melting smiles.

“No, mon petite, we’re going back to Europe. To get a car, mine Liebe and then off to Tunis, mi querida. Tunis, where there’s a wonderful hospital with French doctors who are experts in these little problems. And then perhaps to Majorca to enjoy the results of your little operation!”

“Oh. Dick wouldn’t be too pleased with what we have planned for his body!”

“Dick doesn’t seem to be around anymore to complain.”

“No, and that bothers me, Georgio.”

“Why?”

“Well, it seems too easy. What if I go and he comes back?”

“We’ll worry about that if it happens.”

We talked and planned well into the night.

At bedtime I climbed into one of my sweetest nighties, kissed Georgio good night, turned over and happily went to sleep.

II. TO BE ZOE OR NOT TO BE ZOE

It seemed to be morning. At least the light was dim and I had just woken up in bed, but I was staring at the back of a man’s head. Now what have I gotten into? I don’t remember anything from last night but I do remember a conversation with Zoe in my head. Zoe!

I sat up abruptly in bed causing Georgio to mutter, turn over on his back and start to snore. I looked down at myself. I was dressed in a dainty yellow baby doll nightie!

Now I remembered. I had sort of relinquished all control to Zoe. But where was she now? I don’t know what to do when waking up dressed in a pretty yellow nightgown and In bed with a snoring male! Shit!

Zoe? Zoe where are you? No answer. Our connection has been cut? Or it was all a mental aberration on my part?

In the second case, I had a lot of explaining to do to Georgio. But it couldn’t be! Zoe was so real yesterday and I guess I just sort of faded out.

I slid out of bed quietly so as not to disturb Georgio. Once in the bathroom, I closed the door and stood in front of the toilet with the lacy little pantie of the baby doll around my ankles, trying to piss. Now what?

My only possibility was to continue as Zoe with the hope that she would return before I pulled a real blooper. I started to piss and directed it against the side of the bowl so as not to make noise. I obviously would have to use Zoe’s clothes and hope to play the part although I might not fool anyone. Could I get dressed without waking Georgio?



Probably, since before, Zoe often came out to help with breakfast long before Georgio showed signs of life. I pulled up my panties and went back in the room. With the noise of Georgio's snoring, I could almost make all the noise I wanted.

I found underwear and my falsies. I chose a light blue sort of knit pullover blouse that closed with one button high in the back. My skirt was a blue flower print, full with two big pockets in front. It had sort of a split on the left side where the material was tied in a knot. The fact that it had pockets reassured me as I now knew what I could do with my hands! I put on lipstick as best I could, brushed my hair and, as an afterthought, put on a white bead necklace and bracelet set. I used a pair of white low cut shoes.

As I turned in the doorway to leave, I froze. There on the wall, among a number of other paintings, was centered my "Old Man With Cat".

How in the hell did that happen? Zoe?

My eyes watered a bit. Sweet of her.

There was no one in the kitchen. I stood there, hands in my skirt pockets, feeling inadequate. I came here to carry out my womanly duties but didn't know what to do.

Ah yes. There was something very obvious, the 'last night's' dishes and glasses left dirty from various snacks. I grabbed an apron and started washing them. I had just finished when Sandra entered, stretching, her robe open showing rather nondescript pajamas. I could tell that she hadn't dressed yet because she had nothing stuck in her nose!

"Good morning. You're certainly an early bird."

"Morning. And I didn't get a single worm."

"Hump. Didn't put the coffee on? Jeez."

"Sorry. I was preoccupied."

"Huh! Preoccupied." Sandra busied herself with the big coffee pot.

I watched carefully so I'd know how to do it tomorrow. I then made a big show of 'How busy I am' getting eggs and things out of the refrigerator. Sandra stood at the stove, staring at me. I got out the big frying pan and took it over to the stove. Sandra touched my arm.

"Go sit on that stool."

"Why?"

"Just do it."

I went over to the little round stool, smoothed my skirts primly behind me as I sat down. “Now what?”

‘You’re not there are you?’

‘What? I’m right here.’

“No. I mean you’re not Zoe.”

“Oh, shit. Does it show that much?”

“To me it does. Zoe would not do the dishes. She’d leave them for me. First thing she’d do is put the coffee on with a great clatter in order to get me in here. Then she’d put on water for her tea. She’d pull that stool over by the stove and sit on it with her skirt hanging down the back just because she thinks it annoys me. Then she’d just sit waiting for the water to boil because she couldn’t do a thing before having her tea. Get the idea?”

“Yeah.”

“So what happened?”

“I don’t know. I woke up this morning in a cute yellow nightie, cozied up to the back of a snoring Georgio.”

“And Zoe?”

“She doesn’t answer her phone.”

“Oh Hell! I’ll call Macu.”

“What for? All he’ll do is sit here in the kitchen and meditate. I think he raids the refrigerator when no one’s there.”

“Well, maybe just for moral support. You didn’t do too bad in choosing an outfit this morning. Cute.”

“Thanks loads.”

“Of course, Zoe wouldn’t have put on those nice white shoes to work in the kitchen. ~

“I’ll remember.”

“And she wouldn’t stand around all the time with her hands in her skirt pockets.”

“So what’ll I do with them?”

“Leave them empty. They’re mostly decorative anyway.” She walked out, probably to call Macu.

“Wise guy! I meant my hands!” I continued my Inept breakfast making.

When Sandra came back she had on some sort of garish Mumu. She also had three small pink feathers on, two stuck in her earlobes and one in the side of her nose. She was now dressed.

“He’ll be over shortly.” “I’m saved!” “You’d better make tea.” “Tea! For Macu?” “For you too.” “I hate tea.” “Zoe doesn’t She loves it.” “Yeah.”

So I made tea. And when I heard Macu coming in. I poured two cups.

Macu came in looking at me intensely. “Good morning Zoe?”

“Morning. No. No such luck. I may not look it but I’m 100% Richard Dent. Have some tea.”

Thank you.’

Sandra came in and sat down. She joined the Richard Dent scrutinizing team.

“Drink some tea dear.”

“Why this insistence in getting me to drink tea?” I started sipping my tea.

Without taking his eyes from me, Macu rumbled, ‘Whatdo think, Sandra?’

Sandra looked at me, thinking.

“Zoe’s still there to a certain extent.” “Why do you say so?”

“Well, twice in the last few minutes she’s adjusted her bangs by running her finger down underneath them. It’s a nervous movement typical of Zoe. And she’s finished half her tea, apparently with relish.”

Yes, you’re right,” he said. “Do you like your tea my dear?”

Being called ‘my dear’ by Macu threw me but I did look down at the cup I’d been sipping at. It wasn’t bad!

Macu reached out, took my hand and held it between his. I found that strangely comforting. Then In his bass voice he asked, “And how do you feel about Georgio?”

Georgio? A wave of trembling yearning past over me. My beloved Georgio?

Sandra commented, “She doesn’t have to answer. Look at her face.”

‘Yes, she’s deeply in love with him. Zoe are you there?’

I felt strong emotion welling up. “I don’t know! Oh, I don’t know!”

I put my head down on my arms on the table and started to cry.

Macu reached up and stroked my head. ‘There, there.

Get a hold of yourself girl.”

‘NO!’ I leaped up, knocking over my chair. I stood there, my fists pressed to my cheeks, arms close together, and wailed, “Who am I?”

‘What the hell’s all the noise?’ came Georgio’s voice from the door. He stood there in his pajama bottoms.

“It would appear there’s a little identity crisis,” Macu rumbled. “Not surprising considering the situation. When she woke up she was Dick again. She was trying to cope with the situation when Sandra spotted it and called me.”

“Huh?” was my brilliant reply. “No, not really. I feel right about being called that and... and... But, no, I’m not Zoe.”

“Sandra.”

‘Yes, Georgio.’

‘Tell everyone that’s here that I want to clear the house. I’ll give them some money so they can move elsewhere. I’m not angry with anybody and love ‘em all but I - we have to be alone for awhile to study this. You stay and take charge of Zoe. She needs love and, shall we say, instruction. Understand?’

“I guess so.”

“Fine, I’ll be away for a couple of days. Macu, be ready to help her if it’s needed. I’ll have something for you in a few minutes.”

“Right, Georgio,” Macu said over his cup of tea. “Zoe, you hang in there and do what Sandra says, O.K.?” I looked at him doubtfully.

“Understand, Zoe?” he repeated.

“I don’t understand anything right now, but I’ll try.”

‘Good!’ He gave me a chase little kiss on my forehead and went back into his room.

I sat there looking into my cup of tea. Its flavor was still in my mouth. While tea before had all the flavor appeal of wet, dead leaves in the gutter, it now was pleasant. There was definitely something going on here. My experience last night had left me afraid.