

Wish Fulfilment Pty Ltd

By Gillian Hagenus

There was a time I thought you could dance to anything if it was played loud enough. But this music lacks soul. The baseline vibrates my sternum, but doesn't penetrate it, stays humming on the surface. That's fine. It will be easier to focus this way.

I head straight to the bar. This kind of work is always better with a drink in hand. I try to ignore the way the hair on my forearms snags on the sticky surface as I lean to get the barkeeper's attention, flashing my credit card in two fingers like a cigarette. This trick works faster than any pair of carefully-laid breasts and results in much less dry cleaning. It's been a while since I've really been out – in fact, it's been a while since I've done this kind of creation – but there are some things you don't forget. I play roulette with the specials menu and end up with something pink and swirly that tastes like maraschino. Too sweet for my liking, but it'll give my lips a flavour, so I can get a feel for his teeth.

I survey the dance floor. I'm not really looking for faces. A face I have. Now, I need his body. The lights strobe everything blue and a smoke machine hisses acrid vapour, shrouding everyone's bottom halves. I'll have to go in. I can't remember the last time I hit the dance floor with no other purpose than to dance. After a while, every dance floor becomes the same scene; a mass of bodies without faces, shop window mannequins who've learnt how to two-step in the dark. I tug the neckline of my dress down further, hold the bubble-gum drink above my head, and sashay into the heaving fray.

There.

A silver belt buckle, leather wrapped around a slim pair of hips. I make eye contact with him and shimmy closer, slide a hand up his stomach, over his chest. Nothing but hard muscle resistance. No good, then. I spin playfully away.

The second looks more promising. He's confident, but not overly. Nicely weighted, thin, but not too hard, a hint of softness around his middle that I can make out through his tight-fit white t-shirt. We go through the motions and I run a hand over him, exploring, checking off the list as I go: a little cushion on the belly. Check. Some strength to his arms. Check. A tush you can get your fingernails into. Check. I turn around and press myself against his crotch. His hips move out of sync with mine like a badly-dubbed foreign film, but it's enough to get a vague sense of size. Miriam wasn't too specific in that department, but I provide a high-quality service. I set my drink down on a nearby shelf, sticky and piled high with half-finished cocktails, then turn and throw my arms around his neck, dig into his hair and crush my lips to his to speed up the process.

His lips are thick and pillowy. That might cause problems.

Miriam specified she wanted thin lips, so that's what I've given my creation. It was something she read somewhere, that thin-lipped men held more secrets; the more mysterious, the better. I'll have to deal with the problem of the lips later. Right now, I'm conscious of how little time I have left to get this done. I've left this job later than I normally would, but I hadn't anticipated just how long it would take to make Mr. Holmes's tulip field sing. I'm behind schedule.

Sure enough, his teeth scrape at the cherry on my lips and I file that feeling safe at the back of my mind. I pull his ear to my mouth and say, 'You wanna get out of here?'

'Your place or mine?' He asks.

I try not to pay too much attention to the timbre of his voice, don't want it sneaking in later to mess with what I've already given my John Lucid.

'I have roommates,' I lie.

'I'll get us an Uber.'

He tells me his name, but I do my best not to register it. When we stumble through the door of his place, I tell him to keep the lights off. I need to concentrate. His hands are a constant fumble, trying to reach for the softer parts of me around my dress. But I focus on my own hands, make sure to explore every ridge and river of him. He starts to undo his fly, get straight down to business, but I need to know what his body feels like fully unclothed, pressed all the way up the length of me, nothing but skin. So I pull away and slowly take off my dress, encouraging him with my eyes to do the same. One last sensation to file away now. When he enters me, I take note of that initial feeling of being filled by him and only then do I let myself zone out. I don't really need to be here for this part. I'm confident Miriam can take care of the rest herself.

When he's done, I fill up the time it takes the Uber to arrive by making excuses and empty promises, then get dressed and leave.

Back at my own apartment, I have just enough time to lie down and dream so I can add my new knowledge to my Lucid. My apartment is a sparse and undecorated studio in monochrome. This is my secret. A lot of new players to the game struggle with their creativity. Many people can lucid dream, but few have the depth of imagination required to dream of something no-one's ever seen before. I surround myself with dull, uninviting things to keep my brain clear. Otherwise, my dreams just take on the shape of things that already exist. It's tough to get past the image of a wacky-coloured teapot to conceive of the tea-pot-shaped fire hydrant that blasts water from its spout. Sure, it would be nice to have a few plants, a splash of colour in here, but I am extremely good at what I do, I make a lot of money doing it, and I intend for it to stay that way.

I don't bother taking off my dress, just kick off my shoes and lie down on the bed. I fall asleep fast and make my way up the dirt trail on the side of the mountain to my dreaming

space, a towering white marble acropolis, with columns that reach up to the sky. Here, the sun is just setting, stretching through the columns with a desperate intensity, like it's trying to hold on to the side of the mountain. When I walk, my shoes tap in the silence like an old woman's cane and the sound echoes across the marble, despite the lack of a ceiling. My Lucid is standing in the centre like a Greek demi-god, staring up at the sky. His curling brown hair is pulled into a bun at the nape of his neck and his thin lips kick up in one corner in something like mild wonder.

He's a fine piece of work.

Usually, making John and Jane Lucids to grace the stage of the bored middle class's erotic dreams is amateur work. I left it behind years ago, but Miriam offered me top dollar for the premium experience only someone of my skill could deliver. She's the trophy wife of a rich media mogul who apparently hasn't the time for her anymore and this John Lucid is how she will take her secret, ecstatic revenge.

'Take off your clothes, please,' I say when I reach him. His movements are languid and fluid and when he is stripped bare, he lowers his head and meets my eyes through his lashes, not so much shy, as seeking my approval.

His naked body is beautiful. He has everything that Miriam specified, as well as a few details of my own; the dimple at the corner of his mouth, a shining spot of light in each liquid green iris, and a small snowflake of a birthmark low on his right hip, my personal signature. But I don't have time to sit and soak him in, so I move in close and run my hands over his chest, start to etch the feel of the man from the club onto his previously-intangible skin. After my fingers have painted every moment of touch onto the canvas of his body, and my lips have whispered across his face, reconciling the feel of the other man's deep flesh, with his more subtle mouth, I give him another quick appraisal. Goose bumps freckle his skin and the sun accents a light dusting of golden hairs across his chest.

‘Do I please you?’ he asks, a musical quality to his low, roughened voice, like an acoustic guitar. And the answer is yes. I admit, I’m a little breathless and I can feel a heat still high in my cheeks. It’s fine work. And now it’s complete.

When I wake, I’m still for a moment, listening to my heart knocking quick against my chest. I force myself up and out of my stale dress, replacing it with a sharp grey pantsuit that’s impossible to rumple, even after an hour and a half on a plane. A quick check of my watch tells me it’s 4 am. I swiftly re-apply my makeup, take up my pre-packed carry-on, and catch the train to the airport.

The flight to Melbourne is uneventful. From my window seat, I watch the sun rise, rendering the high hills and valleys of the clouds a study in peach and baby pink. I think of John Lucid and my acropolis and the old, regal house that waits behind it. For a moment, I picture John Lucid’s elegance stretched across the meridian lounge in the library there. I smile. I think he might be my greatest work.

At 8am I arrive at Miriam’s and she ushers me into a living room that looks straight out of a Frank Lloyd Wright style guide.

‘Actually,’ I say to her as she shifts a few heavy books on a coffee table that’s already tidy and apologises for the mess. ‘The bedroom will be much easier. We’ll want to be lying down for the transfer.’

‘Oh yes, of course. Sleeping. *Dreaming.*’ She winks and gives me a sly smile. ‘We’ll do it in the master.’

Miriam takes forever to fall asleep. Vaguely, through the dream haze, I feel her foot graze mine, flapping up and down impatiently against the duvet. I wait in the acropolis with John Lucid. He doesn’t speak much, except to ask what we’re waiting for, but I like to look at

him, the way the sun lights his sandy eyelashes like filaments of gold. I sit on the marble floor and paint patterns with my fingers, colours sparking bright, and fading to pastels. John Lucid sits too and watches. Being next to him is like wrapping my hands around a mug of coffee; he has an unexplainable warmth.

Finally, a searchlight sweeps the cave in the side of the mountain, just outside the towering pillars of the acropolis. Miriam's dream. I stand and shake the legs of my pants back down over my ankles.

'Alright, John Lucid,' I say. 'This is good-bye.'

A confused crinkle appears between his brows.

'Why?'

I place a hand gently between his shoulder blades and point him towards the cave.

'Go into the light, John.'

And so he goes, silhouetted black and glowing at the edges. He turns back to look at me right before he reaches Miriam's light and I think for a moment he looks sad. And then he's gone.

I doze off on the plane on the way back, but don't dream. It's only early afternoon when we touch back down in Sydney and I'm hungry, but too tired to think about lunch. It's an overcast day and my apartment squats grey and hard in the low light when I push open the door. The silence seeps into my pores as I get undressed and I flop onto the bed, sigh at the ceiling. Before long, I'm on the mountain again, scuffing along the path. When I climb the steps of the acropolis, a figure with its back to me waits in the middle, his silhouette familiar. I know it like the back of my hand.

Crap.

This has never happened before. The transfer shouldn't be a difficult process. Any minute now, Miriam is going to call, demanding her money back.

'John Lucid,' I say. 'What are you still doing here?'

He lifts his shoulders in a gentle shrug and scrubs his fingers along the 5 o'clock shadow at his jaw.

'This is not good, John.'

'Isn't it?' he says. 'It's peaceful here.'

'Yes, but you're not supposed to be here. You were supposed to go into the light.'

'I'm yours, Caroline,' he says, and I don't know why, but my heart catches at my name in his mouth. 'If I'm still here, it's because you want me to be.'

He casts his head back to look at the sky. I've filled it with clouds painted in the same peaches and pinks of this morning's sunrise. I think again about the manor house waiting behind the acropolis, think how all the bookshelves are empty and how I wish I could fill them, but have never been able to, even with all this lucidity.

John Lucid takes my chin in his long, delicate fingers and that origami-swan crinkle appears again between his brows.

'Do you want me to go?' he asks softly.

I close my eyes. I really am tired.

Still, I'm surprised by how quickly I answer.