



## BETTY

By: Barton Paul Levenson

My first glimpse of Betty was over the railing of the catwalk in Birth Lab 31A. She had a little snub nose and skin the color of coffee with creamer. Strong, clean limbs, hemispherical breasts, a flat belly, a nice, triangular tuft of pubic hair. As she lay motionless on the platform, still dripping off the fluid that had surrounded her in the artificial womb, she looked helpless and beautiful and incredibly sexy. Which, of course, was the point.

I was new on the job and my supervisor was a HissThok. If you're not familiar with them, they're the ones from 44 Andromedae IV -- about eight feet tall, pale-green skin in the majority race, with a heart-shaped head and a blank expression. "This one is named Betty," he told me. "She is going to the estate of Lord Aristotle Phillips at Star Gate Plaza. Her programming is as an adult companion, which means as a flexible sex toy, essentially."

"Does this business ever bother you?" I asked him.

He looked at me. "Jeremy, I understand you come from off-planet. If so, be enlightened. Cultures differ from planet to planet, and the speed-of-light limit ensures that the Ecumenical Council can do little more than make faces at home worlds and colony worlds it happens to disapprove of. There has been much criticism of Boneworld for the alleged 'slavery' its human colonists have created with androids. I do not take a position on theoretical ethical questions and neither does the company. Kindly take Betty to her new owner. Lord Phillips will undoubtedly want to try her out, and you will be expected to wait and observe as he does so. The deadline for delivery is nine AM. Please leave now."

I went to the levitator and went down to the distribution level. I walked into Betty's chamber. "Time to wake up, hon."

Her eyes opened. "Good morning," she said.

God, she was a babe. And naked to boot. But not for me. I took the robe from its slot in the wall and handed it to her, then took the slippers from their slot and put them on the platform next to her. "Please get dressed in these. I'm here to take you to your new... owner."

She smiled, slipped into the robe and put on the slippers. "I'm ready," she said.

I walked her out to the delivery flitter and made sure she got into the passenger seat. The flitter's AI automatically adjusted her seatbelt and airbags for her size and shape. I got in and it did the same for me.

I lifted off. Babes Unlimited, Inc. is all one huge building, like a high-tech castle, most of the towers being black or gray in color. I soared away from it at about a hundred meters, headed northwest, and let the autopilot take over.

Boneworld, despite the name, is a beautiful planet, expensively terraformed and lightly settled. There were buildings here and there among the green meadows and hills, but no roads. At Mach 16 we reached Lord Phillips's estate in less than half an hour. It was another castle-like structure, but smaller, less complicated, and in much nicer colors -- pastel greens, dark forest greens, and thin lines of gold.

"Flitter, license number 2A-5W, please switch to estate traffic control," said his house AI.

"Switching," I said. I let his AI take over the flitter's flight and watched as we gently touched down on his landing pad. I lifted the canopies and got out, then helped Betty down from her side.

A male android in dark green livery -- one of ours, I recognized the model -- met us at the entrance. "Please state your business."

"Delivery and verification of a Babes Unlimited adult companion," I said.

"You are welcome," said the servant. "Please follow me."

We walked through opulent corridors ten and twenty meters high, with walls plated with what looked like obsidian. Lighting was from holodiodes, so you couldn't

see any actual light fixtures. Finally we came to Lord Phillips's bedroom. He stood there in a scarlet robe and a silver laurel crown, looking down at us from his two meters of height. He looked about thirty, deeply tanned, muscular, with shocking shoulder-length, platinum-blond hair. I happened to know he was over 200, but of course that doesn't mean much for someone's appearance these days.

"Do what I do," I told Betty. I knelt on the floor, and then stretched myself out, arms forward. "Lord, a delivery man humbly begs entrance."

Betty did it. "Lord, an adult companion humbly begs entrance." Thank God she hadn't repeated "a delivery man," but that only happens in sitcoms.

He walked toward us, knelt, and put one finger under Betty's chin to lift up her face. "You are welcome," he said. "Delivery man, you may rise as well."

"Thank you, Lord," I said. The aristocracy on Boneworld is entirely in the minds of the first colonists who created it, but that was the system, and you played by the rules if you wanted to get along. I got up.

There was a circular, scarlet-blanketed bed at the back of the room, easily five meters across, with pillows where it met the rear wall. "Take off your clothes," said Lord Phillips. "I don't want a stitch on you."

Betty obligingly stripped, not that she had far to go. Lord Phillips did the same and they got onto the bed together.

I'm not that turned on by seeing other people have sex. It amuses me that there's very little porn on Boneworld; when you have the opportunity to indulge all the perversions you like, who needs to read about it or watch it? But I kept still and watched, ready to grab Betty if she turned out to be misprogrammed in some way. It's

been years since the last incident, but you watch anyway, because the one time you let down your guard is the one time you're sure to have a massive personality failure.

Lord Phillips was one of those guys who like to switch positions a lot. I counted mentally as he kept adjusting. Finally he was done with her and rolled off, sighing deeply.

"Is she satisfactory, Lord?" I asked.

He looked over toward her. "Mmm. No. Something about her brow structure. It's just a little bit off-putting."

"We can correct that, Lord."

He shook his head. "No. Have her destroyed."

"Lord, if you don't want her, there exists a secondary market for used adult companions. To merely destroy her-"

"I do not like to think of someone taking a companion I have already had," said Lord Phillips. "Please have her destroyed. I will pay the termination fee."

Senseless, wasteful... evil. I didn't say any of those words. I tried not to show any emotion. "As you wish, Lord. Please contact our billing office on the Colonial Web."

"Thank you, I shall."

"Betty, would you come with me, please?" I asked.

Betty nodded and got up. She put on her robe and her slippers again and walked out with me to the flitter. I took off and turned on the autopilot again.

"Why am I to be destroyed?" asked Betty.

I sighed. "Because this is a wasteful, immoral culture and your almost-buyer is a sociopath creep."

"You do not like him?"

"I do not. Not even one little bit."

"He did not hurt me. Except the initial thrust, the loss of my hymen; that hurt a bit."

I sighed again. "He's a pig. He's so high on himself he'd rather kill you than let someone else have you, even though he doesn't want you himself."

"You seem kind," said Betty.

I looked at her. "And you seem lovely and desirable, and I think Phillips is out of his tiny, aristocratic mind to want to lose you. You're beautiful and nice and he's a stupid shit."

We were silent the rest of the way back. When we entered Babes Unlimited traffic space I let their AI take charge of the flitter. It put me down at an entrance I hadn't seen before. The sign over the top said TERMINATION. Next to the door, some wise guy had written Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate. Abandon all hope, all ye who enter here.

I helped Betty out of the flitter, took her hand, and walked her inside. "What happens to me now?" she asked.

I indicated the killing beds. "Lie down in one of those."

She did. No protest. I closed the restraints over her limbs and lowered the stun gun from the ceiling.

"Thank you for being kind to me," she said.

"I'm not kind," I said. "I'm a self-centered bastard. I took this job even though I knew it was wrong."

"You care about people."

"Yeah. Watch me prove how much." I centered the stun gun over her forehead.

"I love you," she said.

I nearly thumbed the red button. I came close to doing it, but I pulled my hand away at the last moment. "What?"

"I love you," she repeated.

For a minute I didn't know what to say. Then: "Babe, you don't even know me."

"I have seen two men. Lord Phillips and you. Lord Phillips has no love in his heart. You do."

"There are millions of guys on this planet."

"I will never know them. I will be dead shortly."

"Look, are you just trying to get me not to kill you? Because it won't work. You can't just say 'I love you' and the executioner changes his mind. Real life doesn't work that way."

"I know," she said. "I am thoroughly programmed as an adult companion. I know a great deal, though I have only experienced a few hours of life. I merely wish you to know, before you kill me, that I love you. You need not act on that knowledge."

"Right, I won't." I lowered the stun gun again. Thumb over the red button. One blow and she would be out of it, and then I would dump her into the vats.

I was going to do it. Any minute now.

"I love you," she mouthed silently.

I threw the stun gun back at the ceiling, making it shiver on its mobile arm. I flung open her restraints. "Fuck this," I said. "I never should have taken this job. Come on, I'm getting you out of here."

"Don't get yourself into trouble over me," said Betty. "I am legally the property of Babes Unlimited, and am worth over 84,000 liquons on the open market."

"Fuck the open market."

"If you take me, you will be committing grand theft."

"I'd rather be a thief than a murderer. Come on. Come on." I lifted her out of the kill chair. I kissed her lips, then thrust my tongue into her mouth and held her close, feeling that delightful body close to me. Then I tore myself away. "Come on."

I ran out to the flitter with her in tow. We got in. The comm. system said, "Jeremy, what are you doing?" My HissThok boss.

"Change in plans," I told him. Then I shut down comm. and put the flitter on full manual. I took off like a bat out of hell.

"Where are we going?" asked Betty.

"Some world where they don't kill girls because of something unpleasant in their brow structure," I said. I headed for the spaceport, thinking about how to get past the cops. I already had some strategies in mind.           The End