

THE INVENTION



CATHERINE
SNODGRASS

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The Wishing Tree

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Ice Princess
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THE INVENTION

A Short Story By

Catherine Snodgrass

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THE INVENTION

By Catherine Snodgrass

Andrea stared out the big picture window that was the centerpiece of her living room. A golden moon, full and bright, cast an amber glow over the landscape. A lover's moon.

Turning away from the view, she gave a forlorn sigh as she settled down for another lonely night of television. She knew when she married Andrew how dedicated he was to his work. But this latest project took him away from her more times than she cared to think about.

He and his fellow scientists had embarked on this top-secret project nearly five years ago, and as the deadline for completion neared, the work hours became more like marathon sessions. It had been a month since she'd seen Andrew. Longer still since they cuddled at night. Their only conversations had been brief exchanges of information over the telephone.

She, as well as the other scientist's spouses, had no idea what the project was about. They were allowed no closer than the security gate at the lab. They did know that, whatever was going on, the work was being conducted in one of the lab's underground vaults.

Andrea hated it and freely admitted her jealousy. Just thinking of how it had come between her and Andrew made her boil. With an uncontrolled snarl, she hurled the television remote control across the room. She refused to stay here alone another night. If Andrew wasn't going to be home, then neither was she.

She stormed to the door and was about to leave when the telephone called her back. She allowed the answering machine to take the call, but listened as the message recorded.

"Andrea, honey, I know you're there," Andrew said. "Please talk to me. It's very important."

Reluctantly, she picked up the receiver. "I'm here. What is it?" *Another couple of days away?*

"Honey, please don't be that way. I know this hasn't been easy on you. It hasn't been easy on *any* of the spouses. That's what I called about. We've finally gotten permission to show our project. Tomorrow the world will see it, but tonight is for families only. Can you come down?" The excitement in his voice urged her to comply.

"I'm on my way." She slammed down the telephone so quickly she forgot to say goodbye.

Now we'll see what all this secrecy is about.

During the trip to the lab, she tried to determine what could have been invented this time. Peace had prevailed for at least a century, so there was no need for a new weapon. Space travel was commonplace; the new vehicles made it easy to go from one place to another. Perhaps it was a high-tech fuel or a muffled booster for the rocket

sleds the youngsters drove. She was at a loss to figure it out and soon gave up.

She arrived at the lab gate where the other spouses had gathered—twenty in all. After their identification was verified, the guard unlocked the gate, swung it wide, and ushered them inside.

The Head of Operations, Simon, greeted them. He stepped forward with a wide grin, arms opened and inviting. “Welcome. Thank you all for coming. Please follow me. Your spouses are waiting.”

He led them to a waiting elevator that took them deep into the ground, to that very secret vault. From there they went to a dark room. The door clicked shut behind them. Andrea heard a tumbler lock them in.

“We’re here. Turn on the lights,” Simon said.

Amber light filtered around them, not unlike the glow of the moon. With each second that passed, the light grew until it felt like it hummed around them. Finally, a soft white beamed through the large presentation room.

The scientists waited before them. Smiles of triumph, of pride, brightened each face. Two cloth-draped objects stood in the center of the room. One was as tall as Andrew’s six feet, the other about six inches shorter.

Andrea caught Andrew’s smile and felt his excitement. But it wasn’t just his mouth—his whole body seemed to smile. It was contagious. She had to smile back. He gave her a wink.

Then, ever so carefully, he and one of his colleagues removed the cloth from the larger of the two objects. Stunned silence filled the room.

“This is it? This is your invention?” one wife snapped.

“Believe me, it’s not what it looks like,” Simon said. “Andrew, please explain.”

“Gladly.” A punch of a button on the computer panel set the hologram display in motion. “What you see here is a system like no other. We began with a basic framework—a skeleton, if you will. A smoother substance at the joints allows for movement without friction. These fibers on top of the skeleton are what make it move. Then, of course, we have this newly developed covering to protect everything.”

“What makes it go?” someone asked.

“A magnificent discovery we call ‘gray matter.’” Andrew tapped the top of it. “It’s housed up here under this protective cap. It’s the most sophisticated computer ever invented.”

“How does it power up?” Andrea asked.

“It’s fueled continually by plasma already within it. When it reaches its destination, it will automatically begin to function. Its plasma can rejuvenate itself.”

A gasp went out among the crowd.

Andrew nodded. “Yes, it’s true. It is completely self-sufficient.”

“What is the covering over it? It’s like nothing I’ve ever seen,” Andrea said, in awe of the objects before her.

“It took almost a year to develop it. It’s made of tiny interconnecting cells several layers thick. We’ve named it skin. It’s far superior to what we have.”

“What is the other object?” someone asked.

The cloth was removed to reveal a smaller, rounded version of the first model.

“So what will you do with these things?”

“Our counterparts in the upper labs have been working on that,” Simon answered. “They’ll be sent to live on a distant planet a few light years from here. They will be left alone to live and multiply among the objects created for their existence.”

“Multiply?” another asked.

Simon chuckled, a tinny laugh. “Yes, my friends. These units have the capability of reproducing themselves with no tools whatsoever—only what you see. And their reproductions will be able to do the same thing.”

“It sounds like you have found the perfect replacements for us,” a disgruntled husband huffed. “Are we androids

to be extinct now?”

“Not extinct, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain ourselves. These inventions—we call them ‘humans’—will grow and develop. Their computers will gain more data as they evolve. When that happens, we will migrate to their planet and they will care for us. It’s the only way we can survive.” His humor faded as the direness of their situation obviously hit him. “Our probes will monitor their progress.”

The importance of her husband’s work humbled Andrea. And here she was jealous. These were their salvation. “Where are they going? What is the name of this place?”

It was Andrew who answered. “To Eden on a planet called ‘Earth.’ We’ve called the tall human, a male, ‘Adam.’ The smaller one is a female, ‘Eve.’ Adam leaves tomorrow; Eve leaves the following day. They will arrive within days of each other. In a few thousand years, we will follow.”

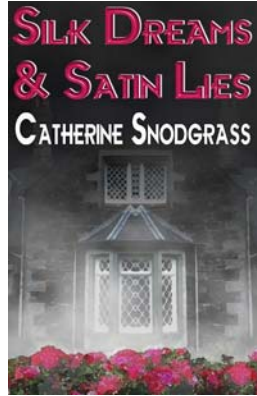
“It’s not a very long time,” Andrea noted.

“No, but it’s all the time we have left.”

Andrea stepped up to the ‘humans’ and hesitantly touched each one. Their covering was soft and resilient; she could see the benefits over her own silicone covering.

“Good luck,” she told them. “Learn well and fast. Our race is depending on yours.”

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...He remembers, Rebecca said to herself.

It was a joy she could not describe. She was mesmerized by the sight of Jonathan seated at the table ahead of her. Black trousers outlined the one muscular leg she could see. The top two buttons of his shirt were open, giving a tantalizing view of bronze in a forest of dark curls. She longed to shove the silky material aside for a more thorough exploration. Her boldness flushed her cheeks with warmth.

The way his sleeves billowed, she could easily picture him on the prow of a ship, wind buffeting him, a patch over one eye, and a parrot on his shoulder. His scowl only added to that illusion.

Stewart bent close to whisper in her ear. "I see you have met our captain."

Her gaze did not leave Jonathan's. "What makes you believe that?"

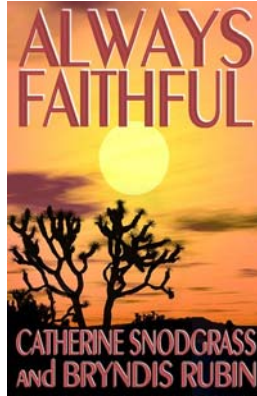
"Oh, the way the two of you are staring. The glower Jonathan keeps giving me."

"It was a very brief meeting."

Stewart chuckled. "It was long enough."

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... The hallway door opened. The roar of the evaporative coolers lessened. A military policeman walked in and glared at her through the bars. “Your request for counsel has been expedited. They’re waiting for the captain to either accept or decline the case.”

“How long will that take?” Rowan fought in vain to keep the quiver from her voice. “And when will I be able to contact my family?”

“You work in legal. You tell me.” He lowered his voice. “Frankly, I hope you get what you deserve. He was a friend of mine, murderer.”

He slammed the door in his exit, putting pressure back on the cooler. The roar this time was nothing compared to the pulse of blood in her ears.

“Yeah...he was mine, too,” Rowan softly replied.

She tucked into the farthest corner of the cot, her despair as smothering as the walls surrounding her...

Always Faithful

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About the Author

Anything Is Possible!

That's Catherine Snodgrass's motto. Blessed (or cursed) with a vivid imagination, Catherine has learned to turn that "talent" inward. She grew up reading Victoria Holt, Phyllis Whitney, and others, and loves to "go places" in her writing. Readers should expect different locales and deep emotions in Catherine's books. She also believes that life is to be lived not watched, and has done some inner exploring of her own—hiking a new path, learning a new skill, and even conquering a life-long fear of singing in public to take a turn or two on the stage of the local community theater. Her work as a paralegal in family and tax law has helped her tune in to the emotions of others and further deepen that aspect of her writing. Having set her children off in the world to explore their own paths, Catherine lives in the beautiful desert of Southern California with her husband (a genealogist) and the animals she loves.

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