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## Dream Wife

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**Dream Wife**  
Myralin Trayer  
Short Story

Robert supposed that his dream could be the natural result of Lucy's startling decision. Freud or Jung would probably say that his male image was threatened by her desire to take a job outside the home, therefore he had masculinized her in the dream. He shuddered as he recalled the dream. In it he had returned home after a grueling day in which he had been mugged and robbed of several hundred dollars. In the dream the mugger had even pried the wedding ring from his finger and made off with it. When he had come home, there had been Lucy—dear, sweet, gentle Lucy—standing before the hall mirror. When she had turned to greet him, he had been horrified to see that her once-smooth face was covered by a full beard.

"Your face!" he had gasped. "You have a beard!"

"Rather nice, don't you think?" Her hand had stroked it lovingly. The thing had no redeeming qualities that he could see. It wasn't soft and silky like her hair, but was wiry and rough. In color it resembled wet cement, and it badly needed trimming.

"When did . . .? Why . . .?" He was unable to look at anything but the beard.

"I just decided this morning I wanted a beard. It seems to go with my new job. So I grew one today. Isn't it lovely?"

"New job? What job? You were able to get a job already? Doing what?"

"Yes," (her hand continually caressed the rough gray matted beard that obstructed her face.) "I will be teaching English at the University. With my beard I should fit right in at good old Academe. Don't you think so?"

"But Lucy, you're not qualified to teach. English, did you say? You, who can't even conjugate a verb? You can't teach English."

She smiled a complacent smile. "I know, but I won't be teaching grammar. I will be teaching poetry, concentrating on the religious poetry of Chef Boy-Ardee."

Robert knew nothing about the religious poetry of Chef Boy-Ardee, but he could hear echoes of the poems ringing through his mind.

Lucy had started walking toward him, smiling and rubbing her beard. Then he had been running away from her, down long flights of stone steps whose shape and form were blurred by a thick covering of matted gray moss. He stumbled, tripped, and went sprawling through slow time and vast space. Landing, he found himself bound and unable to move, ensnared by the clinging tentacles of gray moss. Lucy had stood above him and laughed at him through her thick gray beard. He awakened panting and covered with sweat. He felt haunted by the images, and he was unable to get back to sleep.

When the coming of dawn began to paint the edges of the windows with gray fur, he had slipped from the bed while Lucy still slept, and had crept silently from the house without breakfast. He kept seeing her, behind

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*Freud or Jung would probably say that his male image was threatened by her desire to take a job outside the home . . .*

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## Dream Wife (continued)

his eyes, laughing at him through that awful mass of beard.

His day was a busy one, and he was finally able to put the memory away. By the time he returned home in the evening it was forgotten. He thought. When he went in, there was Lucy, back to him, facing the hall mirror. She turned slowly. He stood transfixed. The dream was before him again in all its terribleness.

Sweet gentle Lucy lifted her lips to his, her face smooth and glowing. Robert quickly kissed her on the forehead as the memory of the dream grew in his mind. He couldn't look at her. He couldn't bear to kiss her. He wiped sweat from his forehead and ducked his head as if he were looking for his handkerchief. The dream was erecting a wall between them.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Nothing at all," he assured her. "How long till dinner?"

"Well . . .," she turned away from him. He stared at her back covertly, trying to visualize her face without the beard. "Actually, it's up to you. Right away if you'd like to take me out. Longer if we stay here. I've been out all afternoon looking for a job."

"You didn't go to the university, did you?" As he looked at her the beard was there. He dropped his eyes to the newspaper that he held in his hands. That beard! It had looked like masses of Spanish moss, he thought, completely enveloping the lower part of her face.

"No, I didn't think of going to the university. Do you think they would have anything I could do?" She looked at him with her head cocked to one side. "Are you sure there is nothing wrong? You look like you just saw a ghost."

"It's nothing," he insisted, "at least it's nothing important." Then he told her about the dream.

"A beard! Honestly, Robert, couldn't you be more creative than that?"

"I hadn't realized that dreams were creative efforts," he replied stiffly. He felt unimaginative. "I have heard some fairly creative interpretations though. Care to try your hand?"

"At interpreting the dream? Okay. Ummm, let's see. A bearded woman. That which is unnatural. A covering for my face, a mask, a disguise. Robert, don't you like my face?"

"Is that what you think it means? I guess that would be a feminine interpretation."

"Feminine interpretation? Do you mean to say that the interpretations of dreams, like beards, are determined by sex?" The lower half of her face was in shadow. She looked like she needed a shave. He reached out tentatively and touched her cheek. It was soft and smooth. Of course it was soft and smooth!

"Maybe so, but that's not what I meant." A change of subject seemed to be the safest course for the moment. "Get your coat. I would like to take

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*That beard! It had looked like masses of Spanish moss, he thought, completely enveloping the lower part of her face.*

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my lovely wife to dinner. Then you can tell me all about your job hunting.”

In the car she chattered brightly about her attempts at finding a job. Robert grunted a few ‘Um-hms’ and a few ‘Hmms’ when there was a pause in the conversation that seemed to call on him for a response, but mostly he was silent. He almost felt claustrophobic in the closed car. He wanted to roll down his window, but he knew it would blow her hair and her beard . . .

**Now stop this right now!** he told himself sternly. He parked the car and forced himself to take her arm and help her from the car.

In the restaurant Lucy ordered lobster, saying gleefully, “Maybe I should wait until I have something to celebrate, you know, like when I get a job or something, but I really feel like this is a celebration too. Is that okay with you? What are you having?”

“I guess I’ll just have the superburger,” he said, knowing he sounded like a cardboard martyr.

“Oh. If that’s all you’re having, maybe I should . . . .”

“No, you go ahead. I’m just not very hungry. But you . . . by all means . . . .” Robert was immediately seized by the mental image of Lucy, smilingly chewing a large bite of lobster while melted butter glistened and dripped from the web of her grizzled beard. All his muscles seemed to be in tension. He felt as if he had been trying to make fists of his feet. His calves

## Dream Wife (continued)

ached. His chest felt tight. He forced himself to breathe deeply and try to relax.

Lucy ate her lobster with pleasure and didn't seem to notice that Robert wasn't eating with the same enjoyment. She regaled him with her stories of prospective bosses, men, who wanted "experienced" women. "Why do you suppose men want to marry virgins and hire divorcees? Speaking figuratively, of course."

Robert smiled. He could imagine her standing before a class of avid students, spouting her metaphors and symbols and philosophies. But bearded? "Maybe you could find something you could do at home," he suggested.

"Like stuffing envelopes? No, thank you. I want a **real** job, complete with office and commuting and the whole bit!"

Robert remembered the feeling. He remembered wanting to take his place in the world of men, to battle the world and subdue it. Juvenile dreams, he realized now, but those were proud days. He remembered the momentary feelings of something close to panic when he realized, perhaps for the first time, that he would probably spend the rest of his life doing nearly the same thing. How could he be certain that he would want to be doing that thing in twenty or thirty years? When he married Lucy he felt the job trap had tightened even more securely around him. Now he was also responsible for her support as well as his own. Any thoughts he may have entertained of chucking the whole system and becoming a beachcomber were effectively squelched. Gradually he had gained confidence. He was becoming successful in his profession. He was the head of his family. Why should he be so threatened by Lucy's job plans? Would he be diminished as a man or as a wage-earner?

"Robert? Are you still with me?"

Robert snapped back to the present. "Of course. You were saying . . .," Strangely, he found he was able to recite back to her the list of job-hunting problems she had enumerated.

"Amazing!" She smiled at him warmly.

Robert had seen that smile often before. He loved Lucy's smile, but the only way he could see it in his mind now was surrounded by a scraggly gray beard. He blinked, but the image remained. "Are you finished?" he rose, and she quickly balled her napkin and followed him, a question in her eyes.

Robert acknowledged that the beard existed only in his mind, but it began to be a real problem between them. He could never kiss Lucy without expecting to feel the scratch of a beard on his own face. He didn't kiss her very much anymore, and when he did it was mostly on the forehead. Lucy wore a hurt, worried look most of the time now. Robert knew his reaction was irrational. Maybe he needed to see a psychiatrist. Maybe the problem would just disappear when Lucy gave up on the job idea. After all, it had

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been three weeks, and she had been to almost every store and office in town and had found nothing.

The next day when Robert came home he was surprised to see a chair in the middle of the room, and there was a towel draped across its back. On a table beside the chair was a basin of water, soap and a large mirror.

"What's all this?" he asked suspiciously.

"Well, Robert, I've decided to give up. No more holding out. You win."

"What do you mean?"

"My beard is causing all sorts of problems between us. Right?"

"What?"

"My beard. The one you see every time you look at me. The one that is between us every time we're together. So I have decided to get rid of it. I'm shaving it off. Would you like to do it for me?" Lucy draped the towel across her shoulders and began to lather her face as she had seen him do.

"Are you crazy? Or more to the point, do you think I'm crazy?"

"Of course not! I never dreamed of shaving in my life, and I would only do it for someone I loved very much, never for someone I thought was crazy."

"Lucy, honey, this is silly. You don't need to . . . hey! There's no blade in this razor!"

"Yeah, I know. But it'll do fine for my beard. Are you sure you don't want to do it for me?"

"No." Robert was unexplainably moved—aroused—by the thought of seeing Lucy all lathered and pulling a razor over her face. "You do it."

Lucy's eyes glowed above her lather-smearred cheeks. She seized the razor, tipped up her chin, and began to draw the razor up over her face, from her jaw toward her hairline.

"Not that way!" He grabbed her wrist. "Shave down, not up. You'll ruin your face that way!"

"Oh. Okay." Obediently she turned the razor over and started the other way. "But I always pull the razor up when I shave my legs," she reminded him. "Why is my face different?"

"The hair on your legs isn't as thick or as long as your beard." He trembled when he visualized the razor pulling through her beard. It reminded him of hanging his fishing line in thick underwater grasses.

He watched closely as she continued to scrape the soapy lather from her face. He felt his excitement build with every stroke of the razor. He wanted her to continue wielding the razor on and on; but, conversely, he wanted her to hurry. He could hear the slick, squishy sound the razor made as it slipped through the soap, and he imagined he could hear the coarse hairs being sliced and chopped away. His throat felt tight, and he had trouble getting his breath.

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**Dream Wife**  
(continued)

Lucy rinsed her face and pulled the towel from her shoulders. She turned to him. "Better now? See? No beard!"

"Much better," said Robert hoarsely. He kissed her without restraint for the first time in several weeks.

The evening was all Robert could have hoped for. All the barriers which Robert had felt between them were swept away. There were no bearded snakes in his Paradise. Robert felt as if he were acting out one of his fantasies in which he made love to a strange woman, a mysterious beauty whom he may never see again.

Yet there was the wondrous being of Lucy, the dear, the familiar, his own wife. It was an unbelievable, a totally new excitement which he felt. The feeling of excitement and euphoria carried him through to the next morning, and he spent the day smiling at the world. His boss complimented him on the quality of his work and spoke of "things getting better for you around here, young man!" Robert interpreted that to mean more money, and decided to phone Lucy and ask her out to dinner to celebrate. There

was no answer, but that couldn't dampen his elation. He would surprise her at home.

When he entered the house, there was dear, sweet, gentle Lucy waiting for him. He kissed her and never thought of the dream. It was marvelous.

"Let's go out to dinner. We need to celebrate," he told her as he squeezed her close.

"To celebrate? How did you know? Who told you?"

"Who told me what?"

"Who told you about my new job?"

"Job?" he squeaked. "What job?"

"Well, really, I have you to thank for it. You were the one who suggested that I go to the university for a job, and you were the one who taught me to shave down instead of up. You taught me all I know about it!"

"What are you talking about?"

"My new job! I am now a barber at the university barber shop!" Her face was shining so brightly he couldn't dampen her happiness with his own lack of enthusiasm.

She chattered all through dinner, and he tried to be happily responsive to her. He didn't tell her about the anticipated raise. Let her think it was her evening. Let her enjoy herself tonight; for, heaven knows, she wouldn't have the time or energy to do this sort of thing after she started to work. He sighed.

That night the dream came again. There was Lucy, just like the last time, covered with a ragged Spanish moss beard. It reached nearly to her waist now. She laughed at him and tickled his ear with the tip of her beard. He felt her warm breath on his neck, filtered as it was through the matted gray mass. She massaged his cheeks with it, and he felt it snag on the stubbles of his own beard. She wrapped it around his head and tied him to her with its hairy strength. He realized that he didn't feel revulsion this time; in fact, he was subtly intrigued and pleased. His bonds of captivity had become a bond of desire, and they had made love with her beard binding them together.

The next morning as they ate breakfast, Robert watched Lucy through half-closed eyes. Her face was smooth and glowing with excitement.

"I'm so glad it isn't raining today," she said. "That makes it sort of symbolic for my first day of work. You know, sunshine and all . . ."

Her hair swung as she moved her head. It was soft and silky.

". . . sort of like a blessing on the first day or something."

She smiled a dreamy smile.

"Lucy," he began tentatively. "You couldn't grow a beard if you wanted to, could you?" □

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*She laughed at him and tickled his ear with the tip of her beard . . . His bonds of captivity had become a bond of desire . . .*

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