

PreView

(2020)

Avatar Resurrection!

The Novel

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- 15 Get out of here! Moriah screeched.
- 16 It was real. And alive, too, wasn't it?
- 17 Must Be a Pair of Golden Eagles ... I Didn't Realize They Were So Large!
- 18 In this reviewer's opinion, Moriah must now be viewed as a fraud.
- 19 His mouth was pulled open, jaw unhinged, tongue and eyes missing.
- 20 Do you always talk in riddles? Only when everything around me is a riddle.
- 21 I will show you the files. But first get a bottle of wine, you may need it.
- 22 I don't want to be alone anymore ... I want you in my life.
- 23 And Doctor MacDonald? What is he doing today?
- 24 Look at it as if you're writing a story, create from the neck down.

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- 25 Shaking, tears streaming down her cheeks, Andrea could only nod in agreement.
- 26 That review in The Village Voice was no mistake. Someone deliberately planted it.
- 27 Entranced by what he saw ... Sean fell prisoner to his own lust.
- 28 Maybe Pamela really does love me. She Does. And more than you know.
- 29 He's Alive! Alive! Thank you, Mary Shelley
- 30 They found Donald Beaumont. Or what was left of him.
- 31 That bronze is modeled after the goddess Cybele, whose victims were all men.
- 32 Sean whispered, You can't come with me. It's not safe.
- 33 Please, God ... Let him live.
- 34 I said get out! I don't ever want to see you again.
- 35 Do you know Ms. Eagleston? Sean laughed, then replied, Only too well.
- 36 First things first ... Find that bitch and find out for yourself.
- 37 You son-of-a-bitch! You lying son-of-a-bitch!
- 38 The brain of woman in the body of man!
- 39 It's them! Sean thought. Get the hell out of me!
- 40 Get this damn thing over with. One way or another..
- 41 Moriah laughed, If you want to pose for me, you must take off your cloths.
- 42 What you see is what I see, when I look into your eyes ... and into your soul.
- 43 You are forever be in my heart ... I pray you will allow me back into your heart.
- 44 Do you think Pamela will actually use that gun?
- 45 Have you titled it yet?

#

Disclaimer

While drawn from my youthful experiences growing up, recollections from my work experience in business, and my years as an art dealer and faculty in academe, *Avatar Resurrection!* is an autobiographical novel, a work of literary fiction. Names, characters, places and events described, referenced or portrayed in *Avatar Resurrection!* are the product of my imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, places and events is coincidental.

#

CHAPTER 1

Academy of Fine Art Greenwich Village

Driven by a nor'easter the solid wall of rain succeeded in scrubbing the streets and sidewalks of lower Manhattan kitchen clean and accomplished in two hours what a battalion of broom pushers and motorized street sweepers would have needed a week to do. Those same schizophrenic April showers also succeeded in chasing Dr. Sean MacDonald in and out of doorways and ducking underneath flapping awnings, as he zig-zagged his way through Greenwich Village on his way to the Academy of Fine Art.

When the traffic light changed, Sean stood at the curb, staring down at a puddle, mesmerized by a candy wrapper trapped in a seemingly endless whirlpool of cigarette butts, plastic straws and styrofoam cups. When Sean asked himself for the umpteenth time, *Do you really want to do this?* his left brain immediately said, *You made a deal, MacDonald, you have no choice.* But his right brain told him to, *Go home and finish the final rewrite for your editor.* And to make things worse, something just didn't feel right and he had learned the hard way not to ignore his intuition. *It's your female side,* his therapist told him. *Listen to it. It's more you than you are willing to admit.*

Sean needed a moment or two to sort things out before it was too late. *Before you can't turn back.* Stepping away from the curb, he started arguing with himself, but his train of thought was quickly broken, when a dozen or so women bustled past on both sides of him, chattering in Mandarin, as they skirted the puddle and shuffled across the cobblestone street. Their unseen sandals, hidden by long silken pants, clicked and clacked over the blocks of shiny wet granite, calling up forgotten images of the rapid-fire slap of ivory tiles on mahogany tables from heated games of mahjonn, waged by half-naked aging women in the rooftop solarium of the private Jewish country club he spent four summers in high school, working and losing his boyhood virginity.

Pulling himself back to reality, Sean slipped the letter from Bradley Johnson out of his sport coat pocket to double-check and make sure he hadn't forgotten anything.

I'm looking for a series of in-depth articles focusing on two parallel themes: Moriah the sculptor; Moriah the woman the hottest classical sculptor today womanly synthesis of Michelangelo and Rodin labeled a fraud and a master copyist, by Allan Stern, who seems to have dropped off the face of the earth interview at Academy of Fine Art in the Village, 6:00 PM, Friday, 25 April, two hours before the annual members sculpture show based on Moriah's track record with critics, this assignment is not a slam-dunk fifty-fifty chance you get past the first interviewsince this type of writing is new to you, have the drafts on my desk after Labor Day, to give us enough time for probable rewrites.

"Probable rewrites? Thanks for the vote of confidence, Johnson!"

Pocketing the letter, Sean glanced at his watch. *Quarter to six.* He squared the Windsor knot of his tie, trued his gig line, buttoned his sports coat, then patted his pants pockets with both hands. Hesitating, wondering why he did that, he quickly smiled when he remembered why: *Looking for a stick of gum,* he thought, *Juicy Fruit!*

#

Writing, and not as a hobby, was something Sean had always wanted to do, but lacked the courage to listen to his heart. To heed a timid voice inside him telling him to pack his bags the summer after high school and chase his dream. *I don't want to go to college, I want to go to Paris and write,* he naively told his father. It never happened: those things rarely do, when we ask instead of take. But that voice was never silenced.

Having been given the opportunity to teach the new graduate-level distance learning writing workshops, Sean was able to dust off the mental scripts he'd been writing, rewriting and filing away for years. His compulsive nature now had him up long before the sun crept over the horizon, sitting at the computer, while downing a dozen cups black coffee every morning. He stayed at it until early afternoon, when he went running in an effort to untie the knots he had twisted his brain into. His new virtual classroom schedule also allowed him time to take on freelance writing assignments.

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Sean checked his watch again. *It's too late to back out of this now,* he told himself. *Just do what you agreed to do and it will be over before you know it.*

Hurdling the puddle at curbside, Sean darted into the street. The deafening blast of an air horn sent him scrambling to the safety of the NO PARKING TODAY signs lining

the parking spots across the street. Sean spun around and started to raise his fist and 'flip the bird' at the driver in the truck barreling down the street. Instead, he just shook his head and slapped at the air. When turned around, he came face-to-face with a five-story brick building in the process of being sandblasted back to life. The Haverstraw bricks, once smooth as glass, were porous and pockmarked, their mortared seams begging to be re-pointed. The cast iron frieze over the converted storefront, recently sandblasted and stripped bare of decades of old paint and rust, was waiting for its new black iron coat. While the setting sun, slicing between the buildings behind him and casting his shadow across the sidewalk and up against the face of the building, added its restorative touch: firing the powdery brick to ancient cinnabar.

Stepping back, Sean scanned the old building from sidewalk to rooftop. After counting the truncated spikes in the spiked black-iron crown, Sean's always inquisitive gaze bounced down the face of the building, from window box to window box: yellow daffodils in some; lipstick-red tulips in others; and bursts of red and white impatiens.

Sean checked his watch again and smiled. *You're nervous, aren't you?*

He took aim at the door on his left, but promptly swerved to the right when he saw the words **DELIVERIES ONLY** stenciled onto the wood-planked door. He drummed his fingers over the words Academy of Fine Art gilded in foot-high letters on the inside of the blackened storefront window between the matching pair of deep-set entrance doorways. He tried the handle of the door to his right. It was locked. He knocked and waited. No one answered. He tried again, this time with his fist. Nothing. He looked for a doorbell. Not finding one, he jiggled the harp-shaped brass door handle just to double check. Didn't budge. About to knock again, Sean was startled by the stuttering screech of tires behind him, a flashing red light bouncing off the building. He spun around.

A tow-headed young police officer burst out of the passenger side of the patrol car and demanded, "Where is she?" His partner sitting behind the wheel, an older man the size of a linebacker gone soft, was barking into a microphone buried in his hand.

Sean shook his head. "I'm not....."

The door behind him flew open. A woman screamed, "Keep your hands off me, you pervert!" then stumbled out onto the sidewalk. Pointing an accusing finger back into the empty doorway, she yelled, "It's him! I know it is! And I can prove it, too!"

The officer grabbed the woman's hands, pulled them behind her and cuffed her.

A man, black, wiry, mid-fifties, wearing a three-piece suit, stepped out onto the sandstone doorway landing and calmly explained, "She was in the showroom this time, Rocky, and making a real fuss. I thought she was going to damage something. Or hurt herself. When I asked her to leave, she told me, '*go fuck yourself*'. When I tried guiding her out of the showroom, she started swinging and swearing like a drunken sailor."

The woman shouted, "I'm not going to stop until I see her. She knows where my husband is! So you might as well lock me up again and throw away the key this time."

The officer behind the wheel yelled, "C-mon, move it, Kelly!" The young officer gently guided the woman into the back seat of the patrol car, eased the door closed, then hopped into the passenger side of the police car. There was the hint of a wry smile on the woman's face as the car lurched forward, tires skipping and chirping over the rounded cobblestones as it made a sharp U-turn and sped away.

The black man stepped outside and asked politely, "You Doctor MacDonald?"

Sean nodded.

The man held out his hand. "George White," he said with a winning smile, his face relaxed, as if nothing had happened. "I wear two hats here. I teach sculpture and as you've just seen, I also play security guard. Our Director thinks people will listen to a black man, so I got 'volunteered' for the job."

George invited Sean inside with a gracious nod and sweep of his hand.

Stepping past George, Sean noted, "I got the impression she was here before."

George nodded, muttered, "At least a half-dozen times, maybe more." He then pulled the door shut, locked it, then scooted past Sean and took the lead. Sean followed George into a small lobby, the walls plastered with notices for concerts, pleas for rides home and a requisite number of adolescent protests about not wanting to grow up.

Sean smiled, enjoying the fleeting flashback into his own distant college past.

"Ever meet her?" George asked as he led Sean into a darkened hallway.

"Who?"

"Moriah."

"No."

George patted the top of his head. "Keep your head down. The pipes in here are low. Give you quite a goose egg and a nasty headache ... as I know only too well!"

Sean dutifully did what he was told and went a step further by covering his head with both hands just to be safe, since he was easily a head taller than George.

George asked, "Know much about her?"

"Only what my publisher told me. And what little I was able to read about her."

George laughed. "I hope they're paying you a lot for this."

"What are you trying to tell me?"

"Ask me that again after you try to interview her. That's if she even shows up."

George's laugh settled down to an amused chortle.

Sean said with confidence, "But she's already agreed to the interviews?"

"Interviews ... as in more than one ... good luck!"

Before Sean could pin George down to what he meant by his response, they came to an abrupt stop at the end of the corridor and a galvanized steel door painted over with bright psychedelic colors. George pulled the door open and stepped aside.

"No lights inside. Just daylight from the overhead skylights. Watch your step and your head." George smiled. "Good luck, Doctor MacDonald."

Sean nodded, forced a smile, shook George's hand, then cautiously walked into the dimly lit exhibition hall, wondering, *What the hell did you get me into, Bradley?*

#

CHAPTER 2

Moriah

The only light in the enormous showroom, easily half the size of a football field, was from the skylights two stories up. The air was still and musty, reminiscent of a gymnasium after a basketball game. Bronze, marble and metal Erector-Set sculptures cast eerie shadows onto the walls and hardwood floor. In the center of the exhibition was a monumental size bronze statue of a naked woman, easily twice Sean's six-foot height. Her arm was outstretched, holding something, which was blocked from Sean's view by the wings of a hideous part-bird, part-man and part-fiberglass fabrication.

Ducking down, Sean slowly, cautiously, inched his way toward the sculpture.

"Holy shit!" he yelped, when he looked up to see the Herculean woman was holding the head of a man, his eyes bulging, his mouth cast open in a silent scream that echoed through Sean's mind. His long hair slithered through the fingers of the woman's large clenched fist and coiled up and around her forearm.

"Like it?" a woman asked, her voice strong, confident, yet nonetheless feminine.

Sean spun around to find a shadowy figure cloaked in a black floor-length caftan.

"Forgive me, I did not mean to startle you, Doctor MacDonald" she said with a genuine hint of concern in her voice. She stepped out of the shadow of the sculpture.

Sean asked somewhat hesitantly, "Mademoiselle Moriah?"

"Just Moriah. That is my name. My only name. That is who and what I am."

Moriah raised her hand and pointed to the sculpture. To Sean's surprise, Moriah's hand was easily twice the size of his hand. Her fingers thick and twisted, as if having been broken, never set, and left to heal that way. Beneath her loose-fitting caftan was a slight but noticeable hump on her back, twisting her body into a sideways shrug.

Moriah tapped the air with her finger. "What do you think of my work?"

Sean replied without hesitation, without needing to think about what to say.

"I love it! And I also fear it at the same time. And I don't know why."

Moriah laughed, a deep throaty womanly laugh, and asked, "Love and hate? Can they be felt at the same time?"

Sean half-shrugged. "What I see makes me feel not think."

Moriah nodded ever-so-subtly. "Are you sure it isn't fear you feel? Fear of the fate that befell this wretched creature, a man like yourself."

Wretched creature like me? Sean wondered and reexamined the large detached head and headless body of the man lying at the woman's feet. He then reconsidered the woman. "I love it because it makes me feel without thinking. And I hate it for the same reason. It, she, and in reality you as the creator of this wonderfully powerful and provocative creative statement are far stronger than I am."

Hesitating, gazing at Sean, Moriah whispered softly, "Thank you."

She then slowly limped out of the shadow of the bronze, stopped an arm's length from Sean, and turned to face him. Moriah was much shorter than he first thought. Her eyes were a curious swirl of brilliant cerulean blue and midnight black. Her nostrils were flared, her lips thick, but surprisingly nonetheless womanly. Her long auburn hair, soft and silky on his eyes, fell onto and shoulders and flared out down her back.

Partially spreading her arms, Moriah asked, "What do you see and feel now?" .

Holding his gaze fixed on Moriah's gaze, Sean stepped forward and held out his hand. "I'm honored to meet you and I'm looking forward to learning about your work." Sean paused, as if searching for the right words to express how he felt. "I simply ask that you be patient with me and my ignorance."

Moriah slipped her large knurled fingers around Sean's outstretched hand. Her touch was surprisingly gentle; but at the same time frighteningly powerful.

Out of habit, something men often do, Sean tightened his grip, only to feel his hand being swallowed up in hers. When he relaxed his hold on her, Moriah held firm, adding to his growing sense of insecurity. She then nodded, as if she felt something in his touch, smiled, gave Sean his hand back, and turned away to face the bronze.

"You're a writer, Doctor MacDonald, what do you know about sculpture?"

Wait, Sean thought, I'm supposed to be interviewing you. He just as quickly told himself, *Don't be a jerk, it's a fair question.*

"Only what I've seen and felt. I'm hoping you will continue my real education."

Moriah said with a smile in her voice, "Well said, Sean."

Quick, change the subject, Sean told himself.

"What in the world was that woman doing here?"

"What woman?"

"The woman the police took away. The one who was all bent out of shape about not being able to talk to someone."

Moriah replied with a casual shrug of her shoulders, "I did not see her. I only heard a woman arguing with George here in the showroom, when I was coming in through the service entrance. She seemed very unhappy about something."

Seeing that woman all over again in his mind's eye ... battered, bleeding, clothes torn, claiming George hit her ... Sean's anger nearly got the better of him. Gesturing to the bronze, he asked, "What did you title this work, it reminds me of....."

The bubble of distant voices startled Sean into lowering his hand and stepping back. He then squinted at his watch in the dark. "Damn! People are already starting to show up." He turned to Moriah, who he found watching him intently. Embarrassed, he asked, "Would you mind if we....."

"George will give you directions to my studio," she said without hesitation, as if she had read his thoughts. Moriah pointed menacingly at Sean. "But you are not to give them out to anyone. Not even your publisher. I will see you next Friday evening at eight. Please be on time ... time is very precious to me."

Moriah turned to leave, her exit slowed by a limp, leaving Sean juggling feelings of compassion, repulsion, awe, curiosity and affection, bordering on *Don't go there!* he told himself. And not because of what he thought; but what he felt, when he looked into Moriah's eyes. *I now know why you wanted me to do this series, Bradley. And it had nothing to do with what you told me, when you called and what you wrote in that half-assed letter. She wouldn't talk with you. She doesn't trust you. Smart woman.*

#

Two hours ago, Sean wasn't sure he wanted to take on this project: read up on the art and science of classical and contemporary sculpture; chase down and interview some eccentric sculptor; stroke her ego; learn about her work; and if he were lucky, write something meaningful about it all. But now, with unanswered questions swirling inside his mind ... and elusive images of Moriah's breathtaking sculpture fanning the

flames of his always overactive imagination ... Sean knew there was no way in hell anyone could now tear him loose from this project.

He glanced up at the towering sculpture and laughed, "Unlike your head!"

When Sean rested his hand on the base of the bronze, he instantly snatched it back. Glancing down, he saw the fated man's tongue cast into the base of the bronze.

Sean quietly laughed to himself, then paraphrased Moriah, "A man just like me!"

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