

c l o n e s



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 United States License.

You are free:



to share – to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work



to Remix – to make derivative works

Under the following conditions:



Attribution. You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).



Share Alike. If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same, similar or a compatible license.

To view a copy of this license, visit
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/us/>



Download the free ebook (EPUB, Kindle, PDF):
<http://www.feedbooks.com/userbook/15207/clones>

Print-on-demand:
<http://www.lulu.com/product/paperback/clones/12440921>

Cover and Chapter Intro Art By
Rachelle Nidra Somma
rachellesomma.com

2007 ideonex
www.ideonex.com

*“You are the bows from which your children as living
arrows are sent forth.”*

- Kahlil Gibran, *“The Prophet”*

foreward

Overcome by events.

All science fiction authors fear this eventuality. Kurt Vonnegut once wrote a short story about the first space explorer finding the voices of the dead in orbit around our planet, which is overcome by events. Jules Verne's "*From the Earth to the Moon*," where explorers reach our orbiting friend via a capsule shot from a cannon is overcome by events. The film "*Le Voyage dans la lune*," about a trip to a moon filled with wild aliens and monsters, is now overcome by events.

Yuri Gagarin's first trip into space and Neil Armstrong's first steps on the moon rendered all of these fictional works *obsolete*. Actual space flight transformed these works into mere novelty items. Their power to inspire speculation and innovation were lost because we had actually "been there" and "done that."

Within twenty years this book will be overcome by events. The stories I have written will become people's lives, more or less, as first the wealthy and then the middle class are able to clone themselves. Controversies will result, and society will change a little, just as it always does.

That cloning will become a safe medical procedure is inevitable. People can protest all they like and politicians can legislate all they want, but this will manifest itself in our lifetimes, and it simultaneously opens doors to opportunity, understanding, and misuse.

So we better look forward to the good news and prepare for the bad. How will cloning affect the familial architecture? How will clones be viewed in society? Will Cloning Clinics refuse services to certain people the way Fertilization Clinics withhold services to homosexual, physically challenged, and other demographics today? Should people have so much control over their children's designs? We'll see these disputations played out soon enough.

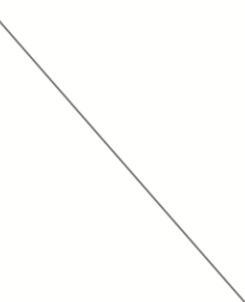
At the same time, what are we going to learn about ourselves from raising cloned children? Today researchers love to work with identical twins because they teach us so much about how our genes versus our environment shape who we are. With clones, we will have the opportunity as individuals to watch ourselves grow up, try to change ourselves, and see what could

have been possible with different opportunities and resources presented us.

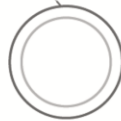
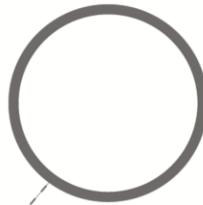
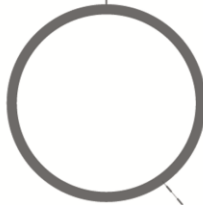
This book is an experiment in speculative fiction. It's an attempt to get people thinking about the possibilities, the positives and the negatives human cloning will bring about in our daily lives. As an experiment, I found in some instances, the children being cloned made a big difference in my characters' social interactions. In other family dynamics, it had almost no impact at all. People are people after all.

Cloning adds another dimension to our social dynamics and family architectures, just as homosexual lifepartnerships, abortion, and genetic engineering change those dynamics. When this book is overcome by events, some of my predictions will come to light, others will be as foolish as riding a bullet to the moon or hearing voices of the dead in space. Only time will tell.

I look forward to finding out.



the pearson's clones
the pearson's clones



the pearson's clones

Our clones knew something was up.

“Mom. Dad,” our son, Emo, was saying, “We know something’s up.”

Joan and I were sitting at one end of the dinner table, holding hands on the table top between us. Emo and our daughter, Alex, sat across from us, holding hands on the table top between them.

“What ever do you mean?” I asked in my best approximation of innocence.

Everyone, even Joan, rolled their eyes at me.

Alex looked at Emo, and Emo looked at me, tilting his head slightly so that he was ‘looking down’ at me even though he was only 15 and shorter than I, “Okay Dad. See, it’s like this. The older we get, the more my sister and I look like you and mom—I mean Joan. Ben Bobb Junior’s been joking us every chance he gets since the PTA meeting last month.”

“That kid Ben’s a juvenile delinquent,” I snapped. “Who cares what he thinks? He’ll be behind bars the moment he’s 18!”

“Bruce,” Alex put up her free hand to pause me. She didn’t call me ‘Dad.’ “Please try and stay on the subject.”

I looked at Joan and thought her confused expression probably matched my own.

“The kids at the bus stop joke us about it all the time. People give us funny looks when we go out in public as a family,” Emo explained. “Alex and I can see them whispering to one another, gossiping.”

The more Emo spoke, the more I thought this was sounding rehearsed, *very* rehearsed. “They act as if they know something scandalous about our family, some kind of inside joke. It’s like when dad jokes someone for wearing a bad toupee.”

“Or Mom knocks someone’s breast implants,” Alex added.

Emo nodded, “It’s like everyone in the world thinks you’re trying to pull a fast one. It’s like you think you’re really clever, but everyone sees the obvious.”

Emo paused dramatically.

c l o n e s

“We’re clones of you two, aren’t we?” his tone did not make it a question.

Joan smiled and tried to laugh lightly, but it came out strained, “That’s silly dears. Lot’s of people have a family resemblance. There’s nothing odd about that. You’re just imagining things.”

Good cover, I thought and squeezed my wife’s hand reassuringly.

She shot me a warning glare that read, *Don’t do anything stupid*.

“We present to you Exhibit A,” Emo announced, and Alex brought a thick book out from under the table to drop it before us with a dramatic *whomp*. Joan and I exchanged looks of concerned confusion.

It was a photo album.

“Do you recognize this?” Alex asked.

Joan nodded numbly, “It’s your father’s and my photo album, the combined pictures from our childhoods.”

“Correct,” Emo said with a single nod. With one hand he flipped the book open to the first page he had marked with a yellow post-it note. I counted a dozen other yellow tabs throughout the book. Emo stood up and leaned over the table to address us.

“Look familiar?” his fingertip pressed white on the photograph of myself at his age, but he was staring at Joan.

“I...” Joan hesitated and looked to me for guidance.

I just looked at Emo, nodding my head sagely, “I get it.”

“So you see it,” Emo pressed.

I continued nodding slowly, narrowing my eyes at him, “You’ve made your point. You look a lot like me at that age. Lots of kids bare a resemblance to their parents. It’s called heredity, you—“

“No Dad,” Emo’s finger came up and down on the picture and Alex rolled her eyes. “We covered that. Look at the photograph and look at me, you too Joan.”

My wife and I leaned over the table to stare at the picture. I had no idea what the boy was talking about. It was probably something in his imagination anyway. The kid was always a little conspiracy prone for his age--.

“I see it,” Joan said at last. “Bruce was wearing the same outfit you are now Emo.”

t h e p e a r s o n ' s c l o n e s

Emo put his finger right on his nose and nodded, “The outfit you bought me Joan.”

Joan nodded silently.

Now it was Alex’s turn to flip the page, directing my attention to a picture of Joan as a teenager, “Care to comment Bruce?”

“Okay,” I shrugged. “It bares a strikingly and purely coincidental resemblance to the polka-dot dress I bought you last year for your birthday.”

Alex frowned. “The dress I’m wearing now.” She pinched the fabric and pulled it away from her sleeve towards me to emphasize this point.

My brow scrunched at it, “Yeah. That one.”

“Do you two see us as dolls?” this was Emo, who raised one eyebrow accusingly.

Joan made to speak, but I interrupted her, “Of course not. There’s nothing wrong with wanting the things that made you happy for your children.”

“Really?” Emo challenged, “What about this--?”

I reached out and flipped the album shut before he could turn to the next incriminating photograph. Emo’s mouth dropped open in shock. Alex, on the other hand, was outraged.

“Ow!” I yelped as she slapped my hand.

Joan’s eyes about popped out of their sockets, “What has gotten into you young lady?”

“You will let us finish Joan,” Emo stated.

I started at this, “Why do you keep calling your mother tha—?”

“All will be revealed in time Bruce,” Alex cut me off.

“But—But—But—“ I protested feebly, but Emo was reaching below the tabletop again.

“Witness Exhibit B,” he announced, placing an old, yellowed greeting card on the table and sliding it over.

I could see Joan’s hand trembling as she picked it up and opened, letting out a little gasp of shock, “Bruce, you said you burned all of these.”

Crap, I thought and went on the offensive. “You know you’re in big trouble young man. You went through my personal-!”

“Some interesting reading, Dad,” Emo kept his eyes locked with mine, “or should I say ‘Honey Bear Pooky Pie?’”

c l o n e s

Joan let out a little pathetic whimper.

“What’s wrong ‘Snugglebunny?’” Alex taunted her, leaning over the table.

Joan did not meet her eyes.

“Me thinks someone’s got a guilty conscience,” Emo noted, shifting his eyes to his mother.

“It’s just a love letter,” Joan sniffled and I thought she might burst into tears any moment. “It’s a beautiful thing. There’s nothing wrong--.”

“These pet names you guys used for one another while you were courting are the same nicknames you forced on us growing up,” Alex challenged.

“Until we got too old for them,” Emo added.

“And practically had to force you to give them up,” Alex finished.

“Exactly,” Emo sat back, squeezing his sister’s hand.

“So what?” I demanded, and Joan whimpered.

“So...” Emo began, pausing for effect, “Alex and I are clones of you and Joan. You are both living out some twisted fantasy vicariously through us.”

“You are not clones!” Joan exploded.

“There’s nothing twisted about it!” I exploded at the same time.

The looks Alex and Emo exchanged were unmistakable, *Slam Dunk*.

Brats, I thought, but said instead, “I mean, if you were clones, there would be nothing twisted about it; but you aren’t clones, so it doesn’t matter anyway. Don’t you see?” I gave a single pathetic laugh to reassure everyone. “No big deal. Never was. Not in a million years.”

“Bruce,” Joan interjected anxiously, “you’re not helping.”

“Yeah Bruce,” Alex added.

“Honey,” I said to Joan, but stopped to give Alex a weird look, not ‘Dad’ again. “Honey, our darling offspring...” Alex and Emo rolled their eyes. “...our wonderful children have gotten some crazy mixed up ideas in their heads and I’m just trying to set them straight. You know, it’s like that time Emo thought aliens were hiding his toys...”

“Ten years ago,” Emo defended.

“...and he needed his daddy to find his toys and show him it was all in his imagination?” I nodded, smiling. “Remember

t h e p e a r s o n ' s c l o n e s

Honey? This is like that time. Alex and Emo are having delusions that they are clones of us, like some sort of ‘*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*’ crazy science fiction idea that no respectable individual would entertain or read or—“

“Bruce,” tears of urgency were welling up in Joan’s eyes. “Please dear. You know how sometimes there are situations where you can keep talking and eventually explain things in a way that will make everything all right?”

I nodded, “Uh-huh.”

Her voice almost squeaked, “This isn’t one of those times.”

“I’m just trying to set my son and daughter straight—“

“Technically, I’m not your daughter, Bruce,” Alex said simply.

“And I’m not your son, Joan.” Emo lifted his chin.

“Bruce—This man—Your father is most certainly your father!” Joan snapped, sticking her fingernail painfully into my cheek, making me wince. “You will respect him and address him properly! Do you understand me little missy?”

Alex frowned disapprovingly at her mother, “How did you feel when your mother referred to you as ‘little missy?’”

“I felt put in my proper place, subservient to my parents,” Joan snapped, but her voice was trembling, about to burst, “just as I hope you feel right now!”

“Fine!” Alex slapped her free palm on the tabletop and looked at me. “Do us all a favor and stop putting your great big stinky foot in your mouth, *STEPFATHER!*”

“Dang,” I grumbled, slumping back against my chair with my arms folded over my chest.

Joan’s temper was starting to overtake her hysteria, “You two have obviously been planning this confrontation for some time. It’s well-rehearsed, and I’m glad those pee-wee acting lessons didn’t going to waste...”

I nodded my head, *Good job Honey. Put them in their place.*

“...and all those video games and movies tend to get your imaginations running a little wild at times.”

I smiled smugly, *Damn straight.*

“You kids have always been so very close...”

That’s right, soften it up now baby. Give them an out.

c l o n e s

“...and I can tell by the way you kids look at one another...”

I frowned and scratched my mustache, *‘Look at one another?’*

“...that you both love each other very much, and you do a great job of providing emotional support at school at home. I’m so proud of how your aren’t ashamed to publicly show your—“

“Oh my God!” I blurted out suddenly. “Don’t tell me they’ve developed feelings for one another!?!?”

“Huh?” Alex and Emo’s mouths dropped open simultaneously.

Each one looked at the other, searching for some insight into my statement. I could see Alex get it first, as she let go of Emo’s hand like it was a tarantula. Emo figured it out from Alex’s expression, and his own face instantly matched her look of disgust. Joan dropped my hand on the table and pushed her chair away from it to give me the indignation look, fists on her hips.

“Way to go champ,” she said after letting me wriggle under the heat of her gaze for nearly a minute. “You just destroyed fifteen years worth of innocent sibling love expressions. Congratulations Bruce.”

At least she wasn’t on the verge of tears anymore. In fact, everyone was staring at me with mixtures of disapproval and shock. Good. I had given them all a common enemy. Now I could make some progress.

I took a deep breath and said, “Why is cloning a bad thing? There are advantages to being a clone. It reduces the number of variables you have to deal with in life. You know what you’re body’s going to do to you as you get older. Most people have to worry about their genetic predispositions to diabetes, cancer, and whatnot. Clones know exactly what they’re genes have in store for them.”

“It’s like my philosophy professor used to say, ‘If you want to know what a girl will look like when she gets older, look at her mother,’” I smiled reassuringly at Alex. “See sweetie, this way you know you’ll grow up to be a hottie, just like your mommy. You can tell your prom date that this is what you’ll look like when you grow older and they’ll be more likely to stay in a long-term relationship with you.” I nodded my head encouragingly, “Isn’t that cool?”

t h e p e a r s o n ' s c l o n e s

Alex's stare was pure horror.

"Bruce honey," Joan said, squeezing my hand urgently, the hysteria creeping back into her voice. "Please be quiet."

"But it's not our choice," Emo argued and Alex nodded. "You decided to make us just like you. Nature could have made us out of any possible combination of your genes, but you made the choice of what our genes were going to be and what we would have to live with because of them."

Joan's mouth was open, working, but it took several moments for any sound to come out, "None of us is given the choice to be born sweeties. Everyone, at some point in their lives, gets so upset over what life has dealt them that they try to take it out on their parents, to blame them. It's perfectly understandable to feel that way from time to time, especially at your age, being young adults. It's a very awkward time of life. You're trying to assert your independence, but at the same time so much of your life is out of your control."

"You don't understand, Mom. By choosing to make us clones," Alex countered, "you have placed that much more of a burden on us. We have that much more of our lives out of our control. You did this to us!"

"Why are you putting us on trial?" Joan exclaimed. "Even if you are clones, there's nothing wrong with that! Why this persecution? Why this—this—this witch hunt? It seems like everyone's scrutinizing everyone else's kids for signs that they might be clones! Your father and I had you out of love for one another! That's all! Why does everyone try to second guess that?"

"Yeah!" I broke in. "Exactly. It's just your mother's and my love for one another that prompted us to clone ourselves. Think about it. Your mother and I met in our 30s. We had both spent entire lifetimes without one another. It's hard for you to understand this at your age, but there was so much we had missed out on. I wanted to watch your mother grow up and develop, to see her become a woman, to watch her chest expand into--."

"Not one more word!" Joan warned. "I will divorce you so fast and so thoroughly your head will still be spinning when you find yourself living in a cardboard box behind the supermarket!"

Alex's eyes danced between us for a moment, then at her own chest and her mouth crinkled up in that way my wife's

c l o n e s

would when I made an especially kinky bedroom request, “Gross!”

My face flushed red, but I managed put on my best righteous indignation look, shaking my finger at her, “I don’t know what you’re thinking young lady, but grow up!” Good recovery.

Now it was time to get back in control.

“Okay kids,” I held up my hands. “What’s brought this up?”

Alex and Emo both frowned at me.

Emo cocked one eye at me quizzically, “Are you deliberately being obtuse?”

“Huh?” I yoked. “I’m a little overweight but—”

“Obtuse,” Alex repeated the funny word. “Deliberately ignorant, bullheaded.”

“Wha?”

“After everything we’ve just told you, you’re asking us why we’re bringing this up,” Emo explained.

“Yeah! I am!” I shot back. “So you kids have been suspicious for a long time. Big deal, but you’ve decided to call a family conference over it. You’ve rehearsed this whole schpiel I dunno how many times, but you’re even using big words that nobody understands to control the conversation. Something triggered what I’m witnessing here. Something made the pot boil over so that you kids had to jimmy-up up this whole dramatic confrontation. What was the straw that broke the weak link in the chain?”

Emo was obviously off-balance. “Uh...” he began and looked to Alex for support.

Ah-ha! The advantage is mine! I thought, and then said in my most parental sympathetic tone, “Did someone say something to you? I mean, other than just the kids making fun at the bus stop?”

Emo was playing with his hands now and Alex was avoiding my eyes. Finally she said, “Tony Ford’s mom s-said... sh-she said...”

Tears were welling up in Alex’s eyes, she was choking on her words the way she did as a little girl. My blood started to boil. What had that tight-ass busy-body said to hurt my baby girl?

“Mrs. Ford said we were an abomination in the eyes of God,” Emo blurted out suddenly.

t h e p e a r s o n ' s c l o n e s

“I’m gonna strangle that ignorant cunt!” I roared, coming to my feet, fists clenched.

“Bruce calm yourself!” Joan commanded, but I wasn’t listening. “You aren’t being a good role model!”

“Or even less of a role model than you usually are,” Emo quipped under his breath.

Alex snorted once despite herself.

I shook my head and started pacing with a growl, “I’ll kick her dumpy ass up and down the street for all the neighbors to see!”

“Yes Bruce,” Joan said calmly, “that will show them what a respectable and mature human being you are.”

“How can you be so--?” I stopped. Of course, I knew why she was so calm. I was freaking out. That meant she had to assume the responsibility of being the sane one. Only one member of a marriage is allowed to lose control at a time. She had broken down earlier, and now it was my turn.

“You’re trying to change the subject Dad,” Emo was trembling with anger now. “This isn’t about Mrs. Ford—“

“Yes it is!” I shouted.

“No it isn’t!” Alex and Emo shouted simultaneously.

I couldn’t hope to compete with their unified voice. They were louder, and that meant they had the floor. All family discussions adhere to this protocol. Otherwise there would be no order.

“It’s your fault we’re clones!” Emo shouted pointing at me.

“It’s your fault everyone makes fun of us behind our backs!” Alex shrieked.

“You’re a terrible father!” Joan caterwauled.

“Calls us demon spawn!”

“Says you’re a pervert!”

“Always setting a bad example!”

Forget what I said about ‘order.’

“No! Look—wait! Hush! Everybody be quiet for a minute!” I threw up my hands, pacing around the kitchen table as I spoke, “Now I’m the man of this household—“

“One of the two men in the household!” Emo interjected forcefully.

c l o n e s

“—and I have a few things I need to get clear,” my son’s statement caught up with me. I waved a finger at him, “Be silent!”

I hitched up my belt and took a deep breath, “Now then.”

“You’re not some sort of demonic hellspawn,” I assured them, focusing my attention on Emo first. “You’re just a genetic copy of me. I’m not demonic hellspawn, am I? No. I’m just a regular guy, and when you grow up, you’ll get to be a regular person too. Just like me. Isn’t that comforting?”

Emo turned halfway away from me in his chair, shaking his head. His shoulders slumped and his head dropped in shame.

“Lots of people have daughters,” I stated, turning to Alex, ”and being the spawn of my loins probably triggers some fatherly genetically-coded repulsion for you.

“Just because you’re a younger, nubile version of my wife, does not mean I have any sort of a sexual attraction to you Alex,” I said. “You are my daughter, and that is all you are. Nothing more, nothing less.”

Alex’s eyes were like saucers as her face flushed bright red and she put her hands over her face.

“Who cares what they say? Let them think we’re a family of perverts!” I exclaimed, shaking my fists at the ceiling. “That doesn’t incriminate us! That incriminates them! It’s their imaginations coming up with that stuff! They’re the perverts!”

With a wail Joan burst into tears, folding her arms over her head on the table in a heap of hopeless sobbing.

I frowned at each one of my family in turn, not that they noticed. Each one was lost in their own world. How did I end up with this gaggle of neurotic losers?

“Look,” I said, my energy expended, and the weariness creeping in, “the point is that it doesn’t matter what people think. They can only persecute you if you let them. If they have a problem with cloned children, then that’s *their* problem, not *yours*. Lots of people have problems with other people. It gives them something to distract them from focusing on what pathetic losers they are themselves and working to better themselves.

“Every time one of the kids at school taunts you about being clones of your parents—your highly successful parents, who are pinnacles of the community, you’re going to feel hurt and nothing’s going to prevent that.

t h e p e a r s o n ' s c l o n e s

“But what you can do is channel that hurt into productivity! Every time you feel slighted, don’t snap back at the jerk insulting you, take those emotions and donate money to a clone-rights organization, write a letter to the editor defending cloning, start a blog about clone discrimination, or join the political party most sensitive to clones.

“Do something productive! Those self-righteous religious nuts can *say* anything they want, while you are *doing* something. In the long run they will have nothing but their insubstantial anger to give them warm fuzzies, while you will have a lifetime of accomplishments behind you. You will have *changed the world!*”

“Don’t...” I concluded with a heavy sigh, resuming my seat, “Don’t let others judge you by their ignorance,”

There was only silence then, and I simply stared at my hands. I didn’t know what else to do. I didn’t want to make things worse than I’d already done. Who’d’ve thought something so simple and innocent as having oneself cloned could carry so many oddball repercussions? When I finally did look up, everyone was staring at me, perfectly composed.

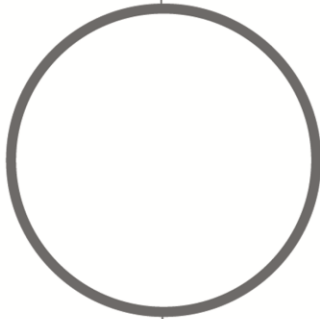
It was Alex who spoke, “That was good Dad.” The others nodded their agreement.

I started to say, “Thanks Al—“

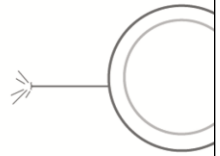
“Don’t ruin it by saying anything more,” Alex warned.

Joan and Emo nodded their agreement.

So I just smiled.



ben's clone
ben's clone



ben's clone

My clone was a huge disappointment.

School let out hours ago, while still daylight out. I slouched in my living room recliner, sipping scotch, pacing myself as not to drink away my anger. My fury and disappointment were dangerously close to becoming self-loathing and despair, and I steeled my resolve when I finally heard his key tinkering with the front door lock.

He noticed me in the candle light once the door closed behind him, a moment too late. I savored the nervous expression my angry glare evoked from him. He stood on the foyer doormat as if it were a life raft, and one step onto the hardwood floors would lose him to the sharks.

I knew the feeling. "Got a call from your guidance counselor today," I said. He came to attention satisfactorily, "Said you've missed so many days of school you automatically failed the year."

He didn't answer, not wanting to make things worse.

"There's gonna be some changes next year," I continued. He folded his arms protectively, avoiding my eyes in that familiar way, "No more partying with your friends on weeknights, not until your homework is done, and you're quitting your job at the gas station—"

"There won't be a next year," he blurted out suddenly and pursed his lips into a white line.

I was too angry for the incriminating gesture to register. I leveled my forefinger at him, "Don't even think you're dropping out--"

"I don't have to," he interrupted me again. He knew better, "Mr. Gregory called me into his office this afternoon."

"What'd he say?"

"He said I'm eighteen," there was a long pause and he finally met my eyes, squinting as if my anger's intensity was too much, "I'm not the school's responsibility anymore."

"What?" I shouted, leaping out of my chair. The snifter of scotch shattered on the wood floor, pine, a soft wood, leaving a dent like a scar in the surface. Junior took a step back, coming up against the door, "What do you mean you're not the school's

c l o n e s

responsibility? Of course you're their responsibility! They have to let you finish your education! What the hell are my taxes paying for?"

"Well, they're not paying to detain me another year," he put on a fake casual smile, knowing exactly what buttons to push.

"I'll send you to private school," I said. "You have to graduate."

"You can't afford it," he countered "You can't even keep the electricity on. You hide the pickup two streets over to fool the repo guy. It's even got me looking over my shoulder... seeing as how you bought me on credit."

"You can afford it," I nodded at him, one eyebrow cocked knowingly. "You'll get your degree at the community college, and you'll pay for it with the money from the gas station."

"Like hell I will," he snapped and I wanted to slug him.

Instead I got red-faced and shouted, "As long as you live under my roof you will do as I say!"

He just stared at me, shaking his head calmly, resolved. With his hand hidden behind his back, I didn't notice him twist the doorknob. In one swift motion he disappeared. I lunged forward too late, and came up against the closed oak door. By the time I got onto the porch, he'd vanished into the night.

"Will you need a surrogate to carry the embryo to maturity?" I remember how that question leapt off the form at me. I hadn't thought about it. Somehow I always associated cloning with bubbling vats of embryonic fluid, fetuses floating peacefully inside. Of course I would need a damn surrogate.

It took months to decide on one. My ideal choice was far beyond my budget. For the "limousine" of womb-rentals I would get a woman who's fulltime job was growing my baby, eating a prescribed diet, no seafood or smoking, and avoiding even weak electromagnetic fields, like televisions. She would also play a selection of music and audio readings for the baby, for when the brain was grown enough to hear it. Just imagine the genius developing in that womb, coming into the world already familiar with classical music, foreign languages, and books on tape.

The best I could afford was Latanya, who worked fulltime at a dry-cleaning joint renting out her womb for the extra cash. I signed a contract with her assuring me she would not smoke, drink alcohol, or take illegal drugs for the duration of the

b e n ' s c l o n e

pregnancy. I wonder if the chemicals at the dry-cleaners affected Junior's brain chemistry in some way. He *looked* healthy at birth.

Naturally Junior wanted to know about the life-support system that carried him to term.

"Technically she is my mother."

"Don't think of her that way. You don't share any of her genes--"

"I share her mitochondria."

"Uh--" Did he? Could that be the problem? Could that explain our differences? "Well..."

"You don't know what mitochondria are, do you?" he grinned like an oaf at his father's ignorance, the bastard.

"I—uh—paid extra to have my own mitochondria put in the egg."

He gave me that look of disbelief that would make my own father slap me cross-eyed. I resisted my instincts. It was not a "constructive urge," as the social worker put it. I tried to dissuade him. Wasn't I enough identity? I even tried satisfying him with a picture of Latanya, but that only made things worse.

"Mom's African American?"

I nodded my head awkwardly, staring at the floor, "Yes, I'm afraid your mother is--"

"Cool!"

I looked up, "What?"

"I'm black."

"You're not black," I countered, "You don't have any of your mother's genes."

"Yeah, but I spent nine-plus months eating what she ate, listening to her music, her social interactions while my brain was wiring up for life. It's not just genes, blackness is a way of life."

"I met with her once a week to talk to you in there too."

"It certainly explains a lot, like my taste for jerk chick--"

"You're my child and you're white!" I exclaimed.

His eyes went wide and he pointed at me accusingly, "You're racist!"

"What?" I exclaimed.

"You're a racist!" he laughed and slapped a palm to his forehead. "I don't believe it! All this time I never realized it, but you are a bona-fide racist!"

"I am not a racist," I defended instinctively. "I think everybody should have the right—"

c l o n e s

“--to own black people!” he finished, eyes wide, mouth agape with the revelation. “You’re a racist. It’s been right there in front of my nose all my life and I just accepted it as normal behavior. What a hypocrite—“

Before I knew it, he was on the ground and my hand was prickling in that familiar, regrettable way. I stood over him, daring him. He stayed on the floor, afraid to provoke me further, and that angered me more.

“Stand up,” I ordered.

He rose to his feet without looking me in the eye. The handprint was already swelling out on his cheek, with some speckles of blood blooming. He would miss a week of school because of my split-second loss of control. I sent him to his room.

That weekend, after Junior’s bruise faded enough to be unrecognizable as a handprint, I tried making amends. When he was younger, he was easy to bribe with comic books or baseball cards, this time I knew there was only one way to console him. It was ironic—yes, I know what that word means-- that exercising my authority was the very thing that forced me to concede.

Junior accepted my offer to drive him to meet his “biological” mother quietly, barely breaking the week-long silent treatment. He called her himself and arranged to visit. I drove him into the run-down, government-subsidized housing where she lived and walked him to the door. It opened before Junior could knock, revealing the short, fat smiling woman who carried him for nine over-priced months. They hugged. As soon as Junior was inside the humid apartment reeking of house pets, her smile dropped into a scowl. She closed the door in my face without a word.

If Junior was slipping away during his teenage years, he was lost on that day. His youthful, heroic illusions of me were vanished. The child who tossed the ball with his dad in the back yard was no more, replaced with a young adult who understood that I was just another human being, full of faults, like my own father.

I learned of my old man’s stroke months after it killed him, when a debt-collector noticed the smell. Dad’s Doberman barely survived that time digging scraps from the garbage and chewing on the old man’s corpse. I had it put to sleep.

b e n ' s c l o n e

In the weeklong process of settling his accounts, selling off his worldly possessions, and purging any remaining evidence of his miserable life from the earth—short of taking a sledgehammer to his headstone, I realized I was the last one, last of a family line who served in every single American war. I was it.

Three ex-wives in fifteen years did nothing to inspire the confidence that I might one day have children to pass this legacy onto. When I sold off the old man's gun collection and the land his worthless shack of a house was sinking into, I was surprised to find myself \$110,000 wealthier before taxes. I owed it to the old man to ensure the family name carried on at least one more generation.

Even with the \$110k, I was still short. My wages at the shipyard wouldn't secure a loan worth a damn, so I took out a second mortgage on my house on false pretenses with the intention of declaring bankruptcy at a later point. I could never afford the lawyer to do that, and my credit was forever wrecked, but I guess that just proves I'm not the government.

Raising him wasn't easy as a single father. I got him away from Latanya, around three months old, and found a more appropriate sitter. Between her and my mortgage payments, forsaking all else, I was working twenty hours overtime a week staying afloat. Every couple of months I switched sitters, to prevent arousing suspicion and to keep Junior from growing too attached. Life became exhausting, but I guess the wonder of seeing myself grow up in the snippets of free time made it all worth it.

Once Junior was old enough to send to public school, I let my tax dollars keep an eye on him. He was home alone most of the afternoon, but I sprung for cable television and that kept him out of trouble. With the economic burden alleviated... alleviated... alleviated--decreased, I cut my hours to devote more time to Junior's aware years. He wouldn't remember that I wasn't there for his first words and potty training. I could still shape him as a person.

Junior grew up, got expelled, and eventually the letter from Virginia Military Institute arrived. It was in a small envelope, same small envelope I got my senior year of high school. The one I hid from my father for two weeks until he

c l o n e s

found it in one of his room searches.

"One day, you'll have children too," I heard him say through the haze of pain, as I cowered against the wall, "and I hope they are as much a disappointment to you."

And it got worse.

"You're joining the Navy?" I asked.

"Already signed up," I noticed he was only packing the clothes he'd bought with his own money from the gas station. "I'm gonna be a nuke, work in a submarine."

"Why did you do that?"

"Why do you think? To get away from you. It's the fastest way to get out on my own."

"You're not doing this," I said sternly. "This was not what I wanted for you."

"Really," he said contemptuously. "What exactly was that?"

"I want you to be better than me," I said.

"I am better than you," he said, still packing, "I'm smarter than you, stronger than you, and I am already more successful than you. I have a job, a car, a girlfriend—"

"You have a girlfriend?"

"I have a career planned out. I am so far above you it's not even funny," he shook his head in disgust.

"I had a plan for you too," I sacrificed—

"You planned out my life all right. It was going to be exactly like yours."

"I think I have that right," I argued. "After all the sacrifices I made. I have a say in this."

"You don't own me," he retorted.

"It cost me over half a million dollars to bring you into adulthood."

"You don't own me."

I raised my hand to strike him, but he stepped forward, fists tight, swelling his chest, locking eyes with me, "I dare you old man. You know damn well I could lay you out easy."

I lowered my hand.

He shook his head, the way my father used to do, and I felt that same rush of shame, "Why the hell did you create a copy of yourself if you hate yourself so much?"

I blinked, *Hate myself?*

b e n ' s c l o n e

I watched him stuff things down into the duffle bag, relentlessly packing. There was the washboard stomach now five years from protruding over his belt buckle and ten years from preventing him seeing his penis. There was the mop of thick brown hair he was going to miss so much, curse my mother's father's genes. What about his inevitable Type-I diabetes? Or the inexplicable kidney stones that will start plaguing him in his mid-30's?

"I get it," I said at last. "I made you. Giving you life was my choice, making you just like me. So I deserve the blame—completely—for the hand I've dealt you. I chose to give you all my faults and defects, and I'm sorry for—"

"This has nothing to do with me being a clone," he interrupted. "This has to do with you being a bad father. People come up with the stupidest reasons for having children. Some figure they're a failure at everything else in life, so they do it to have one accomplishment. Other's do it for love, something that depends on them completely. Others for the power trip...." He trailed off, shaking his head.

He drew the duffle bag tight, and stared at it, slumped over on the floor at his feet, "I wish there was a competency test for having children. I mean, this is the future of our species we're talking about here, and the only criteria for getting into the next generation is finding some way to reproduce."

He slung the duffle bag over one shoulder and pushed past me. I could only stare at his room, trying to understand, looking for the insight that would prevent this. It was the first time I had seen his room without suspicion or criticism. There was a lot of me here.

I heard the front door open. "If you go down this route, you'll end up just like me," I shouted, and I couldn't blame him for not believing me. How could he know that just this once I was speaking in his best interests, because they were mine too?

The door shut. I knew the rest of this story, and was glad I didn't own a dog.

I spent the rest of the afternoon pouting in the living room, sipping scotch from a coffee mug until the sun set and I was alone in the dark. A week ago I saw an article in the paper about a surgeon successfully transplanting the head from one monkey to another. He thought the process could be repeated on

c l o n e s

a human, transplanting a head to a clone engineered without a brain. The promise of immortality always seemed right around the corner, like the cure for cancer.

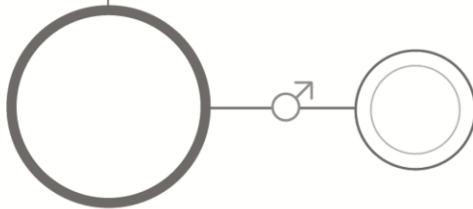
I stared at the door. *What a waste*, I thought.

My old man didn't want me. I was an "Oops." He didn't feel he owed me anything. Junior was intentional. He had cable TV and Internet. He had an eclectic—yes, I know what that word means--upbringing from his many babysitters, and an independent adolescence that taught him self-reliance. He even had my wisdom, the most important advantage of all, my advice on everything in the world, to prevent him making my mistakes.

My bottle of scotch was almost empty and I was sinking deeper into my lazy-boy with these thoughts as a blanket. The day's event's had made me aware enough to know I was "rationalizing," as the social worker put it, but what else could I do? My 18-year sentence was up, but the crime was just now being let loose on the world. Even with someone to warn me, I would still make my mistakes. Even with every advantage provided me, I would still fail. It was in the genes life dealt me, completely out of my control...and there was something very comforting about that.



lizzie's clone
אטלס, אובדן



lizzie's clone

My clone was a precious treasure.

She looked so adorable standing on the sidewalk outside the school. Her mouth was all pouty and a stack of textbooks were pressed to her still-flat-at-16-years chest. I still hadn't given up on convincing her to use a book bag. The right book bag could really accessorize a young lady. I was so proud of my book bag in high school. I even had a very stylish lunch box for the meals I made myself.

Edea climbed into the car, sweeping her plaid skirt under her as she sat down in a very lady-like manner. Then she propped her steel-toed boots up on the dashboard and belched in a very tomboy manner. I just sighed at my adult-in-training.

"Where's that knitted cap I made you?" I asked, pulling a dreadlock out of her eyes and tucking it behind one ear.

Her eyes popped at me, "You're kidding, right?"

I popped my eyes right back at her, "It's cold out. Or does your knitted hairstyle keep your brain warm?"

"That hat was a crocheted sprawling suburban nightmare," Edea said, checking her makeup in the jetta's vanity mirror.

"I'm sorry," I said, pulling away from the curb. "Please clue me in to your hip teenage dialect."

"It's conformist," Edea was adding even more black mascara to her eyes.

"Oh," I mocked comprehension. "Conformist. Yeah. I see." I gestured to the other kids hanging around outside the school. "Just look at all those crocheted winter caps..."

"Mom..." Edea began, rolling her eyes.

"...a veritable plague of high schoolers wearing winter caps their mothers knitted for them..."

Edea looked at me, "Mom..."

I looked right back at her, "I think you mean that you don't want to be non-conformist, snuggles."

"Fine," she shrugged and went back to her mascara.

"You'll catch cold if you don't keep your head covered," I said after a moment.

c l o n e s

Edea rolled her eyes at me again. Why was that the universal method for teenagers to communicate contempt for their elders? Was there some convention of teenagers long ago where they decided on the eye-roll as “Insolence Gesture of Choice?” Although, I had to admit, Edea wore it well.

“There is absolutely no scientific basis for that claim, Mother,” Edea explained in her best approximation of adult authoritarianism. “Cold weather does not cause colds.”

“Why do they call them ‘colds’ then?” I challenged.

“Because our ancestors thought cold weather caused them,” Edea quipped.

“Because people got colds when it was cold outside,” I said cheerfully.

Edea responded with increased contempt, “Right, but only because people were shut up inside together, breathing the same air, and spreading germs to one another.”

I reached over and pinched Edea’s cheek, wriggling it, “My little smarty-pants!”

“Ow!” She pulled out of my reach and shook a finger at me. “Bad Mother!”

We drove on in silence, Edea in consternation, me in glowing amusement.

“And the cold weakened their immune systems too,” I said after a moment.

“No,” Edea asserted. “Cold weather has no affect on people’s immune systems.”

“Hmmm...” I intoned pleasantly.

“Don’t,” Edea warned. “Don’t go there.”

“There was a message from boy on the answering machine,” I ignored her warning.

Edea rolled her eyes, “You can delete it.”

“I think he wants to ask you out to prom,” I grinned warmly. “He’s got a nice voice.”

“I’ll delete it when I get home,” Edea said, picking her nose absentmindedly.

“You know,” I said as we pulled into our neighborhood, “when I was your age, I was wearing heels.”

“These have heels,” she gestured at the boots.

“I see that,” I nodded. “They also have steel toes too, right? Those Doctor Martins?”

l i z z i e ' s c l o n e

“Doc Martins,” Edea corrected, “and yes, they are real shit-kickers.”

“My little rebellious angel!” I cooed and reached over to pinch her cheek again.

She slapped my hand away, but gently, and asked, “Is Joe still coming over for dinner tonight?”

“Yes,” I muttered without enthusiasm. “Your father’s still coming over.”

Edea seemed to cheer up though, “Cool. He’s not my father, but that’s cool that he’s coming over.”

“Where do you think you get the whole tomboy thing?” I joshed, poking Edea in the side playfully.

“You.” Edea said this last with enough seriousness to make me change the subject.

“So how was detention?” I asked.

“Don’t spoil your dinner,” I told Edea when we got inside, where she immediately started browsing the refrigerator.

“Not,” she muttered.

I came up behind her, waiting patiently for my turn at the fridge. She was sipping skim milk straight from the carton as she browsed the refrigerator’s contents. She opened a zip lock bag of shredded sharp cheddar and stuffed a hefty pinch of the stuff into her mouth like it was chewing tobacco. Then she put the cheese back and opened a jar of mustard. She scooped out a dollop of the stuff with her forefinger and popped that in her mouth.

“I’ve seen enough princess,” I announced, taking both her arms to gently set her aside. “I’ve got to make dinner.”

“One sec,” she reached back in to grab a half-carton of strawberries.

“No. No. No,” I waved my finger at her. “Those are way too old.”

I made a grab for them, but Edea pulled them out of my reach, and turned to shield them from further attempts, “They’re fine, just a little fermented.”

“You’ll get salmonella poisoning,” I warned.

“From strawberries?” she muffled through a full mouth. “You can only get that from chicken.”

“It’s not healthy,” I said, returning to the fridge to pull out the ingredients for tonight’s meal.

c l o n e s

“Of course it is,” Edea chomped into another strawberry and made an obnoxious sucking sound. “Old food is covered with germs. Germs keep immune systems healthy. That’s why I never get sick.”

I started washing the vegetables in cold water, “Don’t come crying to me when you get intestinal distress, princess.”

“We’ll see who gets what,” Edea said, wandering out of the kitchen. “That anti-bacterial soap you’re using is creating an environment for the nastiest bugs to thrive.”

I turned on the pleasantness again, “That’s my little rebel.”

“So what are *you* rebelling against?” Edea demanded unexpectedly, rounding about to march back into the kitchen.

“Rebelling?” I paused in my chopping. “Who? Me?”

“Yes mommy-dearest,” Edea used her favorite sarcastic tone of voice with me. “What are you rebelling against?”

I frowned, confused, “I honestly don’t know what you mean, schnookums.”

“I mean this whole model housewife bit you play,” she waved her hands around, gesturing at my precious kitchen. “I’m rebelling against you by rejecting all this traditional nonsense. What non-traditional nonsense are you rejecting?”

I shrugged and started dicing the now deskined cucumbers, “I really don’t know dear.” I brightened up then, “What do you think I’m rebelling against?”

Edea closed her eyes and her face showed signs of frustration, but I really had no idea what this was all about.

“Grandma was a chemist, right?” Edea asked.

“Yeppers,” I set to peeling carrots.

“And you majored in...?”

“Home Ec.”

Edea frowned, “Come again?”

“Home Economics,” I said, slicing the carrots long-ways into thin strands.

She came over to stand beside me, but I stayed focused on my careful slicing. “What is that? Like a Bachelors of the Arts?”

“It should be,” I swept the soft mound of carrot mulch into the salad mix and set to grating the Parmesan. Parmesan cheese should always be grated off of a large block to preserve the flavor. “Being a mother and maintaining a house is a full time

l i z z i e ' s c l o n e

job. Learning how to do that should be worth a degree of some sort.”

“So grandma got her Ph.D. in chemistry and you got a high school diploma with a concentration in homemaking,” Edea leaned on the counter and popped another strawberry into her mouth. “So what are you rebelling against?”

I took out a fresh zip-lock baggy, put the block of cheese inside it, and tossed the old zip-lock into the trash under the sink.

“Well?” Edea prompted.

“I’m thinking,” I said, writing today’s date on the fresh baggy in permanent marker before putting it in the refrigerator.

“What was grandpa?” Edea asked then.

“Man of the house,” I replied, and began tossing salad.

Edea frowned, “But I thought—“

“You *think*?” I mocked shock. “I thought you knew everything?”

Edea didn’t bite, “You told me grandpa—“

“So you do listen to me occasionally,” I set the now properly mixed salad aside, and went to pull the roast beef I had set to marinating the night before from the refrigerator.

“Don’t change the subject,” she still wasn’t biting.

Normally I would have made the salad *after* getting the roast started, but Edea was disrupting my standard cooking operations. “Now sweetie,” I said. “I’m all about you playing mental doctor, but I’m very busy right now.”

“Don’t patronize me.”

“I’m not patronizing you, bunny rabbit,” I said simply, poking the roast with a fork to make sure it was tender enough.

“Yes you are!” Edea’s voice got that urgent squeak of frustration that meant her emotions were getting the best of her.

I put my hand over my heart, “I’m really not sweetie-poo.”

“The only reason you would call someone ‘sweetie-poo’ is to be patronizing.”

“It’s a term of affection,”

“It’s a term of placation.”

I slammed my hand down on the kitchen counter, “Would it kill you not to act like such a bitch all the time?”

Edea’s eyes were as wide as mine probably were. *Was it really me who had just said that?* It felt so unreal, like for a moment I wasn’t myself and the swear word was something said in a dream.

c l o n e s

“When I was your age,” Edea said with a smirk, “we showed respect to our betters.”

I swallowed, but managed to smile, “I’ll tell you when I meet some.”

“Watch it lady. Don’t get snippy with me,” Edea said sarcastically and folded her arms over her chest. “I could easily whup your ass.”

“That’s sweet deary,” I patted her cheek, “but no you couldn’t.”

“Being clones makes it mostly equal,” she said, “but I’ve got youth on my side.”

I smiled at her and said innocently, “That’s to your disadvantage kitten.”

Edea was confused, “I’ve got more energy and muscle tone.” She pulled up her sleeve and made a little muscle.

My smile got warm and fuzzy, “I’ve got age and treachery silly.”

Edea was even more confused.

I resumed my roast-poking and caught myself. The thing was ready, so I put it in the oven. “I’ll stab you in the back or throw sand in your eyes, or worse things I can’t tell you about,” I said in my sweetest tone of voice.

“Things too horrible for words?” Edea smiled.

I smiled even wider, “Things I don’t want you to know are coming.”

“Evil Mommy,” Edea shook her head, smiling in return. “Pure evil.”

I set two pots out on the stove and poured filtered water into each one, getting back into the groove. I could have the baby carrots ready for steaming and the potatoes peeled before the water started boiling. Then I could enjoy a glass of wine--once I got a certain someone out of the way.

“You know punkin,” I squinted at Edea, “your face looks a little shiny... and did you remember to wear deodorant today? You’re a little ripe.”

Edea frowned, but did push off from the kitchen counter. She would now go spend the next hour bathing and polishing her combat boots for Joe. She wasn’t so much the rebel she thought she was.

l i z z i e ' s c l o n e

“Although I’m sure your father won’t notice,” I called after her, and reached into the fridge for my half-consumed bottle of white wine.

Mission accomplished. Moment of peace and quiet engaged.

Did he come here straight from work? I thought, looking at Joe standing at the doorstep.

Joe was wearing dirty overalls, work boots, and a big cheesy grin. I could see his truck parked out on the street. It was the same beaten up pickup he’d been driving for years. I shook my head. The passenger-side seat was probably covered in discarded fast food wrappers.

“Heya Lizzie,” he chuckled.

“Sweetie,” I called back at Edea, “you’re father’s here,” stressing the word ‘father.’

“Eat me mom,” Edea called from her room.

“I guess the apple can fall pretty damn far from the tree. Eh Lizzie?” Joe asked with that infuriating smirk of his.

“Take your shoes off before you track your feet across the carpet. I just had it steam cleaned,” I said

Joe grunted and shook his head in disapproval, but he did stoop down to untie his work boots, “A house should just be a place where ya keep stuff while you’re out living life.”

“Is that what you were doing when you were sleeping around on me?” I asked. “Living life?”

Joe winced satisfactorily, but did come back with, “I wasn’t the one keeping you in the house.”

Edea came into the foyer, smelling of soap and perfume. Her dreadlocks were pulled back and her makeup was toned down. She beamed at Joe in a way she never beamed at me, and came up on her tip-toes to give him a hug.

“Hard to believe your mother was ever this tiny,” Joe remarked as he looked Edea up and down.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” I demanded, folding my arms over my chest.

“Ah hell Lizzie,” Joe waved off my offended demeanor. “I wasn’t remarking on your weight. You’ve still got the figure of a sixteen year old.” He gestured at my clone, “It’s just looking at Edea’s like looking at an old photograph of yah. Yah know? She’s really a sixteen year old version of yah.”

c l o n e s

My brow darkened and my lips pursed. He wasn't making things better.

And he knew it. Joe clapped his hands together and inhaled deeply, "Wow that smells great! What'er we having?"

"Roast," Edea chimed in, taking Joe's hand and pulling him towards the dining room. "Mom's been marinating it since yesterday."

I followed them to the dinning room table, where Edea pulled a chair out for Joe, and scooted it under his ample butt when he sat down. I had already set the table; so all that was needed now was a beer for Joe and a third glass of wine for myself.

"You need to wash your hands," I said to Joe, sitting down at the table to his side. "Sorry I don't have any industrial strength cleaner."

"No bulk-sized containers of bleach?" Joe mocked surprise. "I thought you had the stuff delivered here by the truck load?"

He reached across the table for the roast, but I slapped his hand, and placed a bowl of fresh greens in front of him, "Salad is the first course."

Joe just stared at it.

"Is something wrong?" Edea asked, slightly concerned.

Joe leaned over to her with a mischievous grin and whispered loud enough for me to hear, "Which fork was it for rabbit food again?"

They both broke into laughter.

After dutifully eating the salad, they moved on to the main course. Conversation lagged at this point in the meal as everyone set to stuffing themselves. This was my favorite part, the symphony of lip-smacking appreciation for all my hard work.

"Mmph," Joe murmured with pleasure and licked his lips. "I do miss your cooking Lizzie."

"Maybe you could come over for dinner every Sunday?" Edea offered. "We could make it like a family ritual."

"He doesn't get the milk if he won't buy the cow," I said before Joe could schmooze up to the idea.

"You're mother's right," Joe acknowledged after pretending to immerse himself in his plate a moment to figure out a political response. "Although, I certainly do appreciate the free sample." He winked at me.

L i z z i e ' s c l o n e

I knew what that wink meant. “Food’s the only free sample you’re getting,” I whispered. “You don’t get the milk—“

“If I don’t marry the cow,” he nodded furiously. “I got ya Liz.”

“If you don’t *re*-marry the cow,” Edea chimed in with a grin.

“Speaking of livestock,” Joe said with a full mouth. “Edea here is quite a mule. I was thinking she might want to work with me on some construction sites.”

An uncomfortable knot twisted in my stomach at the thought of my baby working construction with all those sexual predators. I stopped chewing the bit of roast I had in my mouth and swallowed it down hard.

Please. Please. Please, I thought, staring at Edea, my eyes pleading.

“That would rock!” Edea exclaimed.

Dammit.

“I’ll gitcha a tool belt this Friday,” Joe was saying. “Maybe you could come help out on some jobs on the weekends till school finishes up?” He looked over at me, “With your mother’s approval a’course.”

Edea rolled her eyes.

“If it doesn’t interfere with her school work,” I said too quickly despite myself.

“Uh,” Edea’s disrespect turned to astonishment at my acquiescence. “Okay. Great. That’s great mom.”

“It’ll be... character building,” I forced a smile.

Edea blinked at me, confused, but said, “Cool,” without enthusiasm. She wiped her mouth with her napkin and stood up, “S’cuse me.”

Joe and I watched her go off to the bathroom. I knew she was going to make a serious assessment of how shiny her face had gotten since she last powdered it 20 minutes ago.

“I’m shocked Lizzie,” Joe said. “I never thought for a minute you’d concede that. I’m impressed.”

“Just not enough to come back.”

Joe just looked at his plate.

“I don’t get it,” I dropped my fork and knife onto the table. “I’ve done everything to make this work. I’ve kept this house pristine. I’ve made the most elaborate meals every time you come over. I even made homemaking the focus of my high

c l o n e s

school studies.” I met Joe’s eyes, “I’m a professional at this, but you can’t stand to live with me.”

“Lizzie,” Joe began, “it’s just that—“

“No,” I put my hands up. “You’re reason changes every single time I get like this. I need to know really why you left, not so I can get you back—I’ve given up hope of that—but so I can fix it for when the next soul mate comes along.”

Joe was silent in a way that told me he was thinking about how to properly break the truth to me.

“Am I too much of a busy-body?” I prompted. “Is that it?”

“It’s not that. You’re a fantastic, however infuriatingly anally-retentive homemaker,” Joe said. Then he leaned in close to me, his voice hushed, “Why did you have to go and get yourself cloned for?”

“What do you mean?”

Joe shrugged in that way that meant he didn’t want to talk about this, “I mean, it made things all awkward between us.

“Meaning?”

“Are you sure you want to get into this?” he asked.

“Yes.”

Joe was silent for a long time, frowning.

“I felt like a damn pedophile when we were making love,” he grunted at last. “Playing with Edea, I kept seein’ the similarities a’tween you an’ her. It wasn’t right. I had to either be a father to Edea or a lover to you. Ah made the noble choice.”

“By deserting both of us,” I said.

“Ah can’t help not being around more often, but I provide you all this,” he gestured at the house, “an’ I don’t get nothing in return for it. I know Edea ain’t mah blood.”

“I can’t help that,” I pleaded.

“Having Edea was a *choice*,” Joe countered.

“So was me having an abortion when we were first dating,” I said, leaning across the table at him, “at *your* prompting, remember?”

“That’s not—“

“Edea may have been my choice,” I said, “but it’s not something I can take back.”

“I’m not saying it’s something you can take back,” he held up his hands for peace. “You’re the one who was looking for something to change for your next lover.”

l i z z i e ' s c l o n e

“Then this conversation is over,” I hissed, “because I’m not going to let you make me regret having Edea!”

“Cripes,” Joe muttered, throwing his napkin onto his plate.

We sat in silence until Edea returned. Joe picked at his teeth, and I cleared the table. Joe and Edea talked through dessert, while I sat on the sidelines. Finally, mercifully, a full bottle of wine later, the night came to a close.

Edea walked Joe to the front door. Her eyes were bright and admiring as they looked up at him. She loved him. I loved him. We were two women with the same body, in love with the same man, but with different kinds of love. Hers was for a father. Mine for a husband.

I looked around the dinning room table at all the leftovers. My eyes settled inevitably on the wall across from me, displaying my favorite family photos. As always, my attention was drawn to the photo in the center, of myself, my mother, and my father before he left. The peripheral photos all took place long after that centerpiece.

There were none of just my mother and I.

“Night Lizzie,” Joe called from the front door.

I bolted up out of my chair, swiveling around behind my seat to pull the lunchbox-size Tupperware container from the appropriate cabinet. “Hold on just one second Joe!”

I then scooped man-sized portions of mashed potatoes, green beans, carrots, and roast beef into the compartments. My hand paused at the leftover bowl of mixed greens. I shook the idea from my head. Joe would just feed them to his pet iguana. I marched through the living room and into the foyer.

“Here,” I pressed the container into his barrel chest with both hands.

“More free milk?” Joe joshed, and swallowed at my lack of amusement. “Thank you Lizzie.”

“It’ll spare you one trip to the fast food restaurants,” I shrugged.

“When I was your age,” I said to Edea after Joe had left and we were washing dishes and putting them into the washing machine, “women looked for more high-profile jobs than just manual labor.”

c l o n e s

“Construction is skilled labor,” Edea countered. “I’ll be learning a trade.”

“Okay,” I conceded, “but remember how I said it would be a ‘character-building experience?’ I meant that it would scar you for life and encourage you to get a desk job in an air-conditioned office.”

“Thanks,” Edea said. “Really.”

I noticed the blinking light on the answering machine, and nodded Edea’s attention to it, “You should at least call to politely reject him.”

Edea frowned and shook her head, “He’s a jerk. I overheard him telling another girl in class that it was tradition to give up your virginity after prom.”

“Oh,” I was shocked, but thought of Joe again, frowning. “Then screw him—I mean... uh... not literally. Only share your love with someone who’s worthy, upstanding, has some goals in life. Your first should be special. You never forget your first,” I dutifully repeated what I’d heard so many times before and caught myself, crumpling my eyebrows. “Come to think of it. You never forget any of them.” I scrunched my mouth and looked at Edea, “What kind of a woman forgets that sort of thing?”

“Gee, you look familiar,” Edea went cross-eyed and put her finger to her lips mockingly, “Did you ever have your penis inside me?”

We broke off into peals of laughter that seemed to go on forever. When it dwindled away, leaving us with residual giggles, I noticed that familiar feeling of warmth filling that old emptiness inside me. I pushed down the nostalgic feeling accompanying it. This was not Joe making me feel this way; this was deeper, more meaningful, and more committed.

After a pause, Edea asked gently, “Why did you have yourself cloned?”

I took a moment to process this. If she had asked any other time, my answer would have been completely different, but in the context of the night’s events, I knew why I had Edea and made her a clone of myself.

“When Joe and I got married,” I explained, “I thought I had won, you know, beaten the game of life. That I’d won. I wanted to preserve that perfect state of happiness forever, give it to you so you could give it to your clone, on and on forever.”

l i z z i e ' s c l o n e

There was silence, and I bit my lip.

“Mom,” Edea said, shaking her head into her hands, “you are so naïve.”

“Funny,” I perked up. “That’s what your father always said.”

“Joe’s not my father,” Edea countered.

“I know.”

Edea did a doubletake, blinking at me.

I just looked at her, “I know he’s not your father. He was never around enough. He didn’t raise you, I did. He just turned you against me.”

“I’m not against you,” Edea muttered uncomfortably, turning away to slip a stack of pristine plates into the dishwasher.

“Yes you are,” I asserted. “You’re rebelling against me.”

“Well...” Edea shrugged a little, “yeah, but...”

“You think I drove Joe away,” I continued, “and you think that by acting nothing like me, you’ll keep him around.”

“Just like you and grandma,” Edea noted with more insight than I had ever given her credit for.

“I guess it’s just another one of those quirks in our genetic design,” I said softly with a slight shrug.

“Quirk in our *Evolutionary Strategy*,” Edea corrected.

“No,” I countered, smiling again. “I’m the evolutionary strategy, you were cloned by design.”

“Obviously the evolutionary strategy is for us to clone our perfect genes,” Edea noted.

“And then rebel against them,” I said, “like scales that never balance.”

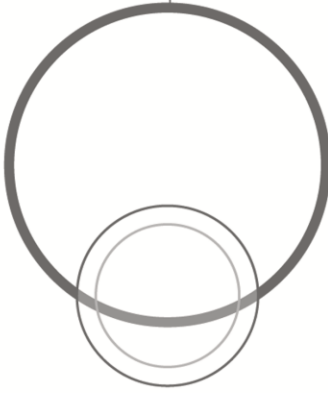
“Don’t worry mom,” Edea said, wrapping her arms around me, “I’ll get it right.”

“The only way you’ll do that,” I said, returning the embrace, “is to not care about men at all.”

“That’s what I meant,” she smiled, “when I said I’d get it right.”



alfred's clone
alfred's clone



alfred's clone

My clone wasn't all right.

He couldn't be. Something was wrong. Something had to be wrong. Things were going bad somehow. Crap. He seemed okay, but what the hell did I know? I was just his father, not an impartial observer. I was way too emotionally and genetically attached to—

“Stop,” Anya warned.

“What?” I glanced sideways at her, frowning.

“Your lips are moving,” she rolled her fingers on her purse. “It just parent-teacher conference. Relax. Keep your eyes on the road.” She used her two forefingers to point at her eyes and then through the windshield ahead.

“Just a parent-teacher conference,” I grunted. “Why do you think they call parent-teacher conferences Anya? They don't call them because everything's hunky-dory. Something's wrong with Alpheus. Something's horribly, terribly, woefully, macabrely—”

“Stop!” Anya barked, stabbing her forefinger at me. “We learn this in psycho-ology classes. You obsessing over Alfie. You worrying so much for him that you making yourself crazy. You making me crazy also.”

I rolled my eyes. I should never have let her get that damn bachelor's degree. A little bit of knowledge is a dangerous thing, as they say.

“Anya—” I began, but she interrupted.

“No!” she barked. “No! No! No! You not take that voice with me! You not—not—not lecturing me! I learn this in class, so I know it right. You respect what I am saying and not talk down to me like I am child!” She folded her arms over her chest and slumped into the passenger-side seat, staring out the window at the moving scenery and pouting.

‘*Lecturing me,*’ I rolled my eyes and huffed. Anya's English was improving, and that worried me. It was expected that she would get better at English after all these years of living in the States. It couldn't be helped, and what choice did I have besides? Alpheus needed to be able to communicate with his

c l o n e s

mother, and I didn't want him speaking Russian, but the better her English, the more independence she might--

"Waitamminute," I said. We had just pulled into the school parking lot and Anya was about to get out of the car. I grabbed the sleeve of her blouse, which I had picked out for her. "I know what this is about. Alpheus' English. It's got to be. He's been spending all his time with you and your broken English. The teacher probably wants to talk to me about my clone's piss-poor grammar skills!"

"Our *son's* grammar," Anya snatched her arm away with a furiously glare. "He's my son and you son, not you 'clone.'"

I blinked as she got out of the Mercedes and slammed the door. I got out of the car and followed her, jogging a little to catch up, and was glad when she did not fight me away from holding her hand. I would hate for Alpheus' teacher to witness any marital strife in my clone's parents.

The English was an easy thing to fix. I would simply send Alpheus to a tutor. If that was putting too much stress on him time-wise, then I could simply cut back a little on his therapy sessions. Alpheus' shrink didn't seem to be much help anyway.

"What's with all the cars?" I wondered aloud as we strode into the school. I could see all the lights were on in the single-story, sprawling public monument to inefficiency.

"Is open to other parents," Anya explained, craning her neck through the throngs of smiling parents crowding the hallway to find Alpheus' classroom.

I wasn't asking you, I thought to myself.

"Numbers counting up... Odd on right," Anya pulled my hand to lead me, unnecessarily, down the hall.

We navigated crowds of parents milled about various classroom doors until Anya identified the right one. The inside looked just like any other school room, cartoon posters with inspirational quotes like "Reading is fun," propaganda to sucker the kids into being contributing members of society. I approved. A few token computers gathered dust at the room's back end. I disapproved.

"Here," Anya put a paper cup of juice in my one hand and a no-bake oatmeal cookie in the other. "You mingling with other parents. I go find Miss Zinn."

"Who?"

"Alfie teacher."

a l f r e d ' s c l o n e

“Oh, yeah.”

Anya wandered away. I took a sip from the paper cup and winced at the acrid flavor, grapefruit juice. I looked around at the crowd and nibbled at the no-bake. So these were the parents who were interacting with their children who were interacting with my clone. These people were one step removed from shaping my clone's environment.

I observed them as such. The mix was good. There were African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and assorted Euro-Mutts. The modern principles of diversity and multiculturalism were well at work here. So far so good.

The individuals weren't so good. More than half were under-dressed for the event. That bothered me, especially since I had moved Anya and Alpheus here because the public schools were a little more upper-class. These people could at least have enough decency to act their status.

I wandered through the crowd, taking in samples of conversation. They seemed decent enough despite their overly casual dress. At least they were polite, but then everyone was polite in these situations. It was how people acted when they thought no one was looking that revealed their true character, and the character they were pushing onto their children.

“How's life in Pelican Point?” The snippet of conversation caught my attention and I froze in my tracks.

“It's fine, except for the bathrooms...”

“What's wrong with the bathrooms?” I blurted out.

The woman rounded on me in surprise. She was squat and obese and I feared for a moment the fight or flight reflex might cause this water buffalo of a human being to charge.

“Well they're awfully small,” she said uncertainly, composing herself.

“They're larger than average,” I said. *Maybe it's the occupant who's too large.*

“Larger in square footage,” she nodded, making peace, but then insulted me by adding. “It's the use of the space that makes them seem small.”

I frowned at her.

“What's your interest in the properties Mister...?”

“Alfred,” I said, “and I designed every home in that neighborhood.”

c l o n e s

“I’m sorry,” the woman offered her hand. “We haven’t been introduced. I’m Emma Greason, and this is my husband, Olen.” I took her hand as she nodded to the short, squinty-eyed fellow remaining a respectful one-step behind her. I reached over to take his hand next. It was clammy.

Putz, I thought, plastering on my fakest smile to nod cordially at him.

“And what do you do for a living Alfred?” Emma asked politely.

“I’m an architect.”

“An architect? You know my daughter’s been playing with AutoCAD,”

“AutoCAD makes architects stupid,” I waved off her boastful statement with one hand.

“I’m sorry?” Mrs. Greasy frowned, offended.

I contemplated whether I should play nice or be honest. *Screw her*, I decided. This idiot woman was raising idiot offspring who were making idiot social interactions with my clone and bringing down his intelligence during these crucial, formative years.

“AutoCAD is an architectural video game,” I lectured. “You just draw a sketch of your building’s layout and it figures out all the framing for you. It’s making architects miss important points. The program isn’t perfect; it makes mistakes. A true architect can catch those mistakes before they go to production.”

Mrs. Greasy’s look was odd, skeptical, “But that’s still impressive. Don’t you think? For a child that age to be working with such an advanced engineering program?”

“I’d be more impressed if she were working with a drafting table and a t-square—Oww!” I spilt grapefruit juice down my sleeve as Anya pinched my underarm painfully.

I glared at her, but she was smiling pleasantly at Mrs. Greasy, “Hello. My name is Anya.” She held out her hand to the woman, who took it graciously. “I am very pleased to be meeting you.”

“Hello Anya,” Mrs. Greasy said warmly and nodded to the putz. “I’m Emma and this is my husband, Olen.”

Olen squinted and nodded politely from behind his wife.

“Did I hear you say you daughter using AutoCAD?” Anya asked. “That very impressive.”

Emma beamed proudly, “She’s our little architect.”

a l f r e d ' s c l o n e

I huffed disapprovingly and looked to Anya, “You and Mrs. Greasy—“

“Greason,” Emma corrected.

“—have something in common. She thinks the bathrooms at Pelican Point are too small also, even though they’re larger than average and—“

“It’s a neighborhood house, not the Sistine Chapel!” Mrs. Greasy sniffed, did an about-face, and walked away. Her lovable doofus of a husband beamed at us through those squinty eyes and nodded.

“Pleasure meeting you,” he said with all sincerity and shuffled away to follow his wife’s enormous butt shambling into the crowd.

“You so rude,” Anya quipped with narrowed eyes, shaking her head in disapproval.

I just looked at her, disapproving of her disapproval.

“Come,” Anya ordered, gesturing for me to follow her. “I find Miss Zinn.”

Miss Zinn was talking with another pair of parents, gay apparently, as they were two women. I thought I might have a sore neck tomorrow from all the disapproving head-shaking I was administering to this crowd.

The pause did afford me the opportunity to scrutinize my clone’s teacher. Miss Zinn was another collusion of bad examples for my clone to emulate. She was squat, overweight, and much too young, much much too young. This round little woman looked like she was fresh out of high school. Alpheus needed *adult* supervision, with the wisdom and emotional maturity that accompanied that, not babysitting.

“Hello Anya!” Miss Zinn turned to us exuding bubbly enthusiasm. Too much enthusiasm wasn’t good for a growing boy. It led to unrealistic expectations, hopefulness for the future, and belief in a world where everything happens for a reason. Everything doesn’t happen for a reason. You have to change the world to fit your needs.

“And you must be Mr. Schmuckler,” Miss Zinn enveloped my hand with both of her meaty mitts and jangled my arm up to the shoulder socket. “It’s such a pleasure to meet Alfie’s father!”

“Lady, you need to curb your—“ I began but Anya ran interference.

c l o n e s

“Please you call him Alf,” Anya stepped closer to the woman. “Alfie is loving school very much.”

“He’s a darling child,” Miss Zinn started flipping through a stack of blue brochures in her hands, continuing to speak as she did so. “I’m so glad you could come out tonight... So important for parents to see where their children are spending so much time... and offer input... ask questions... Let’s see... Here we go!”

She handed us each a blue slip. I took one and looked at it. “Progress Report for Alpheus Schmuckler.”

I knew Anya would need much more time to fumble her way through reading the thing, so I seized the opportunity to quickly consume the data on my clone’s school performance and go on the conversational offensive.

“Does not play well with others?” I read aloud from the report.

Judging from Miss Zinn’s little jump, I had spoken too harshly, “Oh, well, yes. You see Alfie has a bit of a problem in his social interactions with the other children. He doesn’t like to share, seems to demand approval from everyone, and when he doesn’t get it, he ostracizes those classmates. It’s quite unusual in a child his age actually—“

“Well--!” I was flabbergasted, and Miss Zinn did another little jump to my satisfaction. “Well, maybe ‘others’ are the problem! You ever think about that? Maybe Junior doesn’t suffer fools very well.”

Miss Zinn’s eyes were frozen wide.

“Alfie not have many playmates,” Anya interjected pleasantly.

Miss Zinn’s look of fear turned pleasant as she turned to Anya, focusing on my wife like a life saver in a storm, “That’s probably it. You might want to try exposing him to more opportunities for social interactions. Setting up play dates are a great way to provide him a variety of environments.”

“Play dates,” Anya repeated the term as if she were taking mental note.

“What about—“ I frowned as Miss Zinn seemed to shrink from my conversational advance. “What about his English, math, and sciences? This ‘Progress Report’ only talks about his behavior. What kind of school are you running here?”

a l f r e d ' s c l o n e

“Well...” Miss Zinn began, “we really don’t try to emphasize those aspects of schooling at this point. This is more of a time for acclimating children to the public school structure.”

My frown deepened and my eyes narrowed to slits, darkening my vision as I stepped toward the fat little woman, “I’m sorry, but wouldn’t acclimating children to academia involve teaching them something? What are these kids doing all day?”

Miss Zinn had taken another involuntary step away from me, unconsciously placing her hand over her heart, “I assure you Alf—“

“Mr. Schmuckler.”

“—that we engage your child in a wide variety of activities. The children have physical education, arts and crafts, we sing our ABC’s—“

“ABC’s,” I nodded. “That’s good. How’s Alpheus doing with those?”

“Fine.” Miss Zinn’s eyebrows perked curiously. “Absolutely fine.”

“His English is okay?” I prompted.

“His...” Miss Zinn glanced sideways at Anya, who had let out a tiny disparaging peep, “His English is fine Mr. Schmuckler.”

“Good,” I nodded, pretending to ignore what I could have sworn was her emphasizing the ‘Schmuck’ part of my last name. “I’ve been worried that Anya’s—“

Miss Zinn turned to Anya, “What nationality are you Anya?”

“I am from St. Petersburg,” Anya’s smile was as pleasant as it was plastic. “Alf worry much about my bad English infecting Alfie.”

“How did you meet Alf?” Miss Zinn prompted. Something had changed in this woman’s demeanor and it was making me very wary of where she was going with this line of questioning.

“Online,” I interjected, trying to resume control of the dialogue, but Miss Zinn paid me no mind.

“I am mail order bride,” Anya stated matter of factly. Her lips pursed to restrain the grin of delight she experienced at revealing this. She knew I didn’t like us advertising the fact that my family was engineered.

c l o n e s

Miss Zinn shot me a look that I interpreted as disapproval, “Alfie’s English is perfectly fine Anya.” She put her hand on my wife’s arm comfortingly. “You have absolutely nothing to worry about.”

“Thank you,” Anya squeezed the woman’s arm in return. “I am sorry for Alf being...” she struggled for the right word and looked to me for help.

“For demanding a little accountability,” I stated.

“You’re husband is just a little overprotective,” Miss Zinn assured her, still ignoring me. “It’s perfectly natural. It’s been a pleasure meeting you.”

“And same for meeting you,” Anya smiled warmly.

Miss Zinn scrunched her face at Anya with that sort of affectionate camaraderie two women united against a common enemy share.

“It was a pleasure meeting you, Alf,” she stressed my name and the first-name basis of our social hierarchy. “Cloned children are becoming much more commonplace in our classrooms, and I assure you, Alfie’s performance has no bearing on you personally.”

Obviously, *I* was the common enemy. As I had no idea what this woman’s first name was, I refused to use any name at all, “There’s always private school.”

“There certainly is,” Miss Zinn said so cheerfully it was now painfully obvious she was trying to kill me with kindness. “You two please help yourselves to more juice and cookies and make yourselves at home.”

Anya made for the refreshments table, but I caught her arm, “Let’s go.”

“Why does everyone always compare things to the Sistine Chapel?” I grumbled on the car ride home. “Wouldn’t something residential be more appropriate? Like the Heurtly House?”

“Because no one knows Hurty House is.”

“Heurtly House,” I corrected, “by Wright.”

“Yes Dear.”

“Besides, the Sistine Chapel isn’t famous for its architecture so much as the great big painting Michelangelo put on its ceiling.” I continued. “Big whoop, right?”

“Uh huh.”

“Are you listening to me?”

“Uh huh.”

a l f r e d ' s c l o n e

“Are you not listening to me?”

Anya smiled at me, “Yes dear. I am not listening to you very much.”

“I should’ve gone with the Jordanian model,” I muttered under my breath.

“Now you just being bastard,” Anya snapped. I should’ve kept it a little more under my breath.

I said nothing more, but it was true. Jordanian women were more respectful. They came from a much more patriarchal culture. I should have gone with a Jordanian woman.

Anya didn’t understand. That bitch, Miss Zinn, didn’t understand. I could see the accusations in their eyes. They both thought less of me for having a clone, but Zinn had the double-whammy of also thinking me slime for the mail-order bride. They thought I was just being selfish, shallow, narcissistic, but my every concern was for my clone. How did that make me self-absorbed? I was giving everything to Alpheus.

When I design a building, I pull from the entire history of architecture preceding me. I look at the works of the past masters... Michaelangelo... Brunelleschi... Leonardo... Chris Jones... Christopher Alexander... Frank Lloyd Wright... Louis Sullivan... Buckminster Fuller... but I hold only appreciation for their accomplishments. I do not consider them sacred. I work to top their innovations, improve on them.

Wasn’t the whole point of raising children to improve upon our present designs? With Alpheus I had my entire history, all my experience, my wisdom to pour into him and make him a better person. This wasn’t a “cult of me” thing. I wasn’t living intrinsically through him. I just wanted the variables controlled. I wanted him to improve upon my--.

“Stop,” Anya barked and I blinked at her. “You lips moving again! You speak to me! Not being in you head all time!”

I said nothing, but narrowed my eyes through the windshield and pressed my lips into a white line. They would not betray me again.

A few moments later, I pulled into our driveway. I could still feel Anya’s gaze. It burned the side of my face; although, I knew that was only my imagination. I made a point of not making eye contact as I got out of the car.

“You giving me silence treatment?” Anya demanded as we walked up to the front door.

c l o n e s

I said nothing, which I realized was the same thing as saying, *Yes I am giving you the silent treatment*. So I pulled out my keys and pretended to fiddle with finding the right one.

“You neurotic,” Anya’s tone was accusatory, “and you pushing neurosis on you child.”

Psychology, I thought and rolled my eyes. *Why did I have to let her major in psychology?*

“He’s five years old,” Anya folder her arms over her chest and scrunched her mouth. “He’s too young to have any neurosis.”

I unlocked the door, taking a deep breath as I did so.

“We must speak of this Alf!” Anya urged from behind me.

I lifted my countenance and opened the door.

“Hello Mr. And Mrs. Schmuckler,” Becky greeted us in the foyer her voice hushed. “Alfie’s sleeping upstairs.”

I beamed at the girl, approving of the high school physics book she carried in one hand, obviously having studied it all night. “Thanks Becky,” I said. “You’re the best sitter we’ve ever had.” She was also our fifth one. The others weren’t so great.

“We hope Alfie wasn’t too much problem,” Anya said at my side, and I realized she had slipped her arm under mine as we came through the door.

“Oh no,” Becky waved the thought away. “He cried for his daddy awhile, but I just kept promising him you’d be back when he woke up. Did you have fun?”

I squeezed Anya’s hand and smiled at Becky, “You know, open house at the school. Got to scope out the quality of Alpheus’ education, nothing all that important.”

“Met many very nice people,” Anya leaned into me affectionately.

“That’s nice,” Becky said sincerely.

I flipped open my wallet and counted out the bills, adding another five to the mix, “Here you go, Becky. Thanks for being so dependable.”

“You’re welcome Mr. Schmuckler,” she replied, and I stepped aside to let her out the door. “Call me again when you need me.”

“I certainly will,” I closed the door behind her.

Anya’s arm dropped out of mine and she walked into the living room, her high-heels clicking on the white tiles. I took my jacket off and slipped my shoes off beside the door. Anya had

a l f r e d ' s c l o n e

taken her shoes off in the living room, where she was massaging her feet on the sofa. I picked her shoes off the floor and placed them beside the front door where they belonged.

“Maybe private school’s the answer.” I said, coming back into the living room to drop onto the sofa beside her. “There’s no accountability with the public school systems. It’s not like I can have disciplinary actions taken against that Miss Zinn for being obese and setting lax standards for Alpheus.” I loosened my tie and made to put my hand on Anya’s knee.

Anya moved her leg to dodge my advancing affections with a hiss. She stood up, arms folder over her chest, and paced back and forth across the room. “Is like when you try and lawsuit hospital...” she muttered.

“We’ve been over that one a million times,” I leveled my finger at her. “Natural birth is too stressful on a child. The doctor should have cut you open way earlier on that delivery. It was negligent.”

Anya paused in her pacing long enough to narrow her eyes at me and sniff derisively, “The judge not think so.”

I folded my arms over my chest and sank into the sofa, “That judge was a putz.”

“You not putting Alfie in military school,” Anya snapped.

“I’m the man of this house,” I said, “he’s my clone, and I’ll make the ultimate decisions as to what’s best for him.”

“Alfie happy at public school. That best for him.”

“Alpheus is too young to know what’s best for him.”

“I divorce you...” Anya’s uncertain tone assured me it was an empty threat.

“You won’t get custody,” I scoffed. “He’s my clone.”

Her tone became dangerously assertive, “You use that in court to get custody of our child?”

“My child,” I countered. “He’s all my genes.”

“I carry him for nine months,” Anya said. “He my environment.”

I never should have let Anya take those psychology courses.

“Childrens should be with their mommas,” Anya continued. “Not with neurotic adult-child like you.”

“Alpheus should be with himself,” I argued. “I know him better than anyone.”

c l o n e s

Anya's mouth dropped open in disgust, "You not know yourself Alf."

I dismissed that nonsense with a loud huff, "Of course I know myself. What don't I know about myself?"

"You enormous asshole."

"Get out."

"Get out?"

"You heard me. I own this house and I'm telling you to leave."

"Is my home too. I no have to leave," Anya stomped her foot for emphasis. "You have problem then you leave. I going to bed and you take couch." She made for the stairs.

I shook my head, but started unbuttoning my shirt just the same. I would just need to make sure I was up before Alpheus.

Anya turned to look at me once more from the staircase, "You know what? I hope you use that. To tell the judge he you clone. That would be a first and get in news."

"I'm sure you think it'll make you a big star," I said.

She nodded and made her way upstairs, "Maybe I write best-selling book."

The Malaysian model wouldn't have been so fiery.

I lay on my side, pulling a sofa cushion under my head and tossing my jacket over my shoulder. I looked up and watched the light go dark as Anya closed the bedroom door. I didn't feel like turning off the living room light just yet.

Of course I was the better choice for Alpheus' custody. Our bodies and brains were architecturally identical. I knew exactly what worked and what didn't for my parent's raising me, and I would apply that to raising Alpheus.

He's my clone dammit! I punched the pillow and grimaced into it.

"Daddy?" Alpheus' voice drifted down the stairs.

The concern in his voice got me right up off the sofa. He was standing at the top of the stairs. His stuffed platypus snuggled under one arm.

"What is it Alfie?" I asked, scooping him up into my arms to bring him eyelevel with myself.

"There's a lion under my bed daddy," he whispered into my ear.

I drew him close, tucking his head under my chin and wrapping my arms around him. A crack of light in the hallway

a l f r e d ' s c l o n e

drew my attention to Anya standing in the bedroom doorway. We held eye contact for several long moments. There was something warm in the way she was regarding me and I was somehow reluctant to let that go, despite our recent spat. Finally she closed the door, smiling, and I carried Alpheus into his room, where I set him down on the bed.

“Lions?” I prompted gently.

He nodded.

I got down on all fours and looked under the bed, “I don’t see anything.”

“There was a lion,” he asserted.

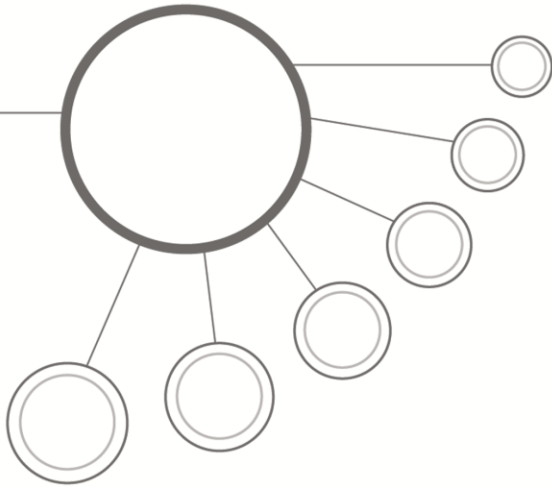
Here he was, this toddler-version of myself, just like in my parent’s photo album. Screw Miss Zinn and screw Anya. How could anyone deny this child anything?

I nodded and sat down on the floor beside his bed, “How about I sleep on the floor here and make sure they don’t come back?”

He nodded and settled down on the bed, where I tucked him in with his platypus before settling down myself on the floor beside him. I lay there for some time, unable to sleep, until I finally reached out and grabbed a nearby stuffed bunny. Cradling it to my chest, I drifted away.



tailee's clones
tailee's clones



tailor's clones

My clones were a challenging, but rewarding experience.

"How was practice?" I asked, trying to sound upbeat; although, Royal, my oldest at 14, didn't look so hot.

"Awful!" she swung her gear into the mini-van's backseat and dropped into the passenger side chair. "Stupid coach Gregory doesn't know anything!"

I waved to the new coach as I pulled away from the field, a bulky woman who looked like she could crush bowling balls between her thighs. Royal flipped the woman the bird, but below the dashboard so she wouldn't see it. She was covered in dirt, had her hair pulled back into a pony tail, and had stripped her uniform down to her sports bra. I had no idea we were capable of looking so butch.

"That's not very mature," I noted, and my daughter looked at me.

"She took me off left attack wing to play defense," she grumbled. "Me! Playing defense! It was awful!" I scrunched my mouth disapprovingly as she put her kleeted shoes on the dashboard, untying them and pulling her shin guards out of her socks.

I opted to pass on that fight to engage Royal's drama with her coach, "So you're getting some new experiences—"

"Mom," she moaned. "I totally sucked out there! It's not fair! I'm offense. I've always played offense. That stupid bitch—"

Language! I warned firmly... in my mind. I chose to let the infraction slip.

"—doesn't know what she's doing!" Royal flung herself back into the seat, crossing her arms over her chest. "Hmph!"

I remembered flinging myself into similar obstinances as a child, but Royal was getting too old for this.

"You know, pouting is very unattractive," I told her calmly. It was important not to get reactionary. While my inner self was reeling with how bratty this mini-me was acting, I had to keep it impersonal. Royal wasn't me. I was raising her to be better than me.

c l o n e s

“Obviously the coach has a lot of confidence in you,” I started out, a rhetorical path taking shape in my mind.

“How’s that?” Royal huffed, but did uncross her arms and resume a little emotional control of herself.

“Think about it,” I said, turning down the radio so it wouldn’t compete with my pep talk. “She’s training you for other positions. If she thought you were only good at offense, she wouldn’t be trying you on defense. She’s giving you a variety perspectives of the field, so you’ll better understand the team as a whole.” I smiled inwardly. It sounded so good even I was convinced.

“What for?” Royal asked.

Here I unloaded the kicker. I shrugged and said, “She’s probably looking for a potential team captain.”

“Oh,” Royal looked thoughtful, and shot a sideways glance at me. “You really think so?”

“Why else would she take her best left-attack-winger off the front lines to play defense?” I asked, and added, “Of course, being Team Captain is a lot more than just knowing the game. It takes a whole lot of character too, responsibility and the ability to stand tall in the face of adversity.” Or something like that. “Think about what it takes to be a leader. Plus think about how good it will look on your transcripts. You might want to go into management one day.”

Royal sat up straighter and nodded, “Yeah.”

We pulled up to the house and Royal got out of the car. “I’ll make dinner tonight mom,” she said, holding the door open. “How’s Spaghetti sound?”

“That would be awesome,” I smiled. She shut the door and I pulled away. I felt like I had just hit one out of the park.

Kids are so easy. They focus on whatever you steer them to through gentle encouragements. So many people waste their energies always telling their children what they’re doing wrong, when they should focus on directing their kids to doing what’s right. Positive reinforcement works so much better than other kinds of discipline. Psychologists have been saying that for decades, but nobody ever listens.

I was a few blocks down the road, when my phone chimed twice, signaling a message waiting. I frowned at it. I hadn’t heard it ring, so someone had deliberately gone straight to my voice mail.

t a i l e e ' s c l o n e s

“Retrieving message one,” the automated system announced when I dialed into it.

“My contractions started at 5 am this morning,” my mother’s voice came over the phone. “I knew from the start you were going to be a special child. The contractions were easy and gradual. At this time of the day, around 11 AM, I took a warm bath to wait for your arrival.”

My heart warmed, and I saved the message for repeat plays later tonight.

My 13-year-old clone, Augusta stood with impeccable posture outside the recreation center. Her yoga-mat was slung over one shoulder as she spoke with her teacher. Her clothes were loose and airy, billowing in the light breeze. Her hair was clipped short, with those lesbian-like bangs I was trying to get her to clip by pointing out more attractive styles on other women. I smiled with admiration watching her, however. My butt had never looked that good.

She pranced over to the van as I pulled up and lightly set onto the passenger seat. She sat upright so that she did not touch the seat back. I watched her teeter there as I pulled away, her earrings dangling.

“You never rest,” I noted proudly. “You’re gonna make a fantastic personal trainer one day.”

She smiled and reached up to fondle the necklace I’d bought her awhile back. It was a tiny symbol that meant, “Ommmmmm...”

“This strengthens my abs,” she said.

“It’s good to have a strong center,” I affirmed. “Royal’s making spaghetti for dinner.”

Augusta’s eyebrows turned out with concern, “She better make the meat optional and use olive oil instead of butter.”

Augusta was a vegan, no animal products, while Royal was all about protein and red meat. One version of me, Augusta, was rail thin and the other, Royal, was stocky as a result. Both versions were the result of my gentle encouragements.

We pulled onto Main Street and slowed at the far end of downtown. Elizabeth, my 12-year-old, stood outside the science center wearing her little lab coat and looking as proud as can be. Her hair was a poofy birds-nest wobbling on top of her head. Her face and sleeves were smudged with ink and food dyes from the

c l o n e s

day's activities. Augusta pursed her lips and shook her head slightly in disapproval.

Elizabeth swung the side door open, flung her backpack with her lab book, magnifying glass, and other sciency things on the back seat and climbed in. She and I exchanged smiles.

"It was so cool mom!" she said, snapping on her seat belt in the back seat. "Today we got to dissect a cat!"

Augusta let out a shocked squeak.

"Well that explains the smell," I said approvingly.

"It's formaldehyde!" Elizabeth exclaimed, oblivious to Augusta's disgust. "The cat was a stray from the pound and it had parasites and mange and—"

"That's disgusting!" Augusta blurted out.

Elizabeth frowned, "No it's not. It's science."

"It's inhumane!" Augusta shot back.

"It's expanding human knowledge," Elizabeth pushed her glasses up on her nose. She was the only one of my clones who needed glasses. Apparently all the reading I had encouraged in her had made her nearsighted.

"At what cost?" Augusta demanded. "Would you carve up Nibbles?" She was referring to one of our seven house cats. We also had two dogs and three birds.

"It's not carving up. It's dissection," Elizabeth countered.

"It's gross!"

"Tell you lady's what," I interjected, pulling up to the house. "Why don't you both do some investigating into animal research and have a debate? That way you can both learn how to argue your position better against other people who disagree with you. Okay? Go online once you get inside and search up on it."

"I will," Augusta declared and got out of the van.

"Will do," Elizabeth said.

"My little LabRat," I cooed, reaching back to tousle her hair in the rear view mirror. "One day you'll make a wonderful scientist."

She grinned, got out, and joined her sister. I watched them march away and into the house, continuing to argue animatedly.

My phone let loose with "Flight of the Bumblebee" as I pulled up to the dojo. One of my older brothers, Cubert, spoke on the other end, "I am fulfilling my familial responsibility to call you on this most important of days."

t a i l e e ' s c l o n e s

“Hey dummy,” I replied cheerfully.

“What are you up to? As if I can’t guess,” he asked.

“The usual, driving the girls around,” I answered, knowing I was opening myself up to criticism.

“You know,” he said, “you’re clones doing all these things isn’t the same as you doing them. You do know that, don’t you?”

“Of course,” I said. “It only means that I could have accomplished all these wonderful things.”

“No it doesn’t—“

“Oh yes it does!” I snapped, not with anger, but happy enthusiasm. “These kids have the exact same genes I do. That means they have the exact same potential. Anything they do, I could have done with the right encouragement and emotional support.”

“Yeah,” he said dismissively, “but you were always too lazy, too unmotivated to actually—“

“Because of environmental factors!” I was passionately defensive. “There was nothing inherently lazy about me as a person! Butthead!”

“Fine,” Cubert sniffed, “but you were still pretty damn lazy.”

“Fine,” I sniffed right back at him, “and now I’m a good little worker bee, unlike my big brother Cubert, the childless wonder, who works in a convenience store and lives in a one-bedroom apartment.”

There was cold silence on the other end, and I reveled in it. Finally Cubert said, “Your success is pure luck. Remember that.”

“Pure luck that I’m taking full advantage of,” I modified. “I’ve gotta go now. I’m picking Mary up from her Brazilian Jui Jitsu lessons.”

“I still say you should have enrolled her in Tai Kwon Do,” he sounded resentful.

“I want my little lady to be able to defend herself,” I stated innocently, knowing it was biting his ass. “Brazilian Jui Jitsu is practical that way.”

“Tai Kwon Do is practical too,” Cubert huffed. I smiled wickedly, having him on the defensive. “If Mary were to get a black belt like me, she’d have no problem defending herself.”

c l o n e s

“Mary wants a little more of a challenge than a Tai Kwon Do black belt,” I stated truthfully. “Two years just seems like a really short timeframe for achieving something like that. She’ll have to take Brazilian Jui Jitsu for 8 to 15 years to get her blackbelt under sensei Hamada.”

“A black belt that isn’t worth anything,” Cubert spat.

I narrowed my eyes, “Tell her that 8 years from now bro, and just watch how she kicks your ass!”

I clicked the phone off before he could reply.

“Uncle Cubert talking trash about Brazilian Kung Fu again?” Mary, age 11, asked as she climbed into the van.

I shrugged and tossed my head indifferently. She had a welt on the side of her head. I’d learned pretty quickly not to worry about it. Mary had bruises healing all over her body, and didn’t mind them. Her hair was buzz-cut, which I approved of a little more than the mowhawk she had previously.

“Don’t worry,” she assured me. “When I get my black belt, I’ll go kick Uncle Cubert’s butt for you.”

I smiled and laughed, “Good girl.”

“I’ll make him apologize to you and kiss your feet,” she added.

“You rock!” I shouted and held up my hand for a high five.

Mary hit it with a smack.

“It’s two in the afternoon now, and at this time your father drove me to the hospital. My contractions were coming every five minutes and lasting 50 seconds each. I wasn’t nervous, but excited. While my first pregnancy was difficult, you were my fifth and I was getting pretty good at child birth...”

I rolled my eyes and blushed, *Love you too mom.*

She was still describing her thoughts, feelings, and color of the drapes in the hospital room, which apparently hadn’t matched the paint very well, when I pulled into Patricia’s driveway to pick up Sophia. I bounced in my seat anxiously waiting for my mother’s message to finish. I could always save it for later, but then I’d have to listen through everything I’d already listened through again. I could always hit “3” and delete it mid-message, but there might be a quiz on the material later.

Sophia, my 10 year old, appeared at the window and waved to me. I waved in return, phone still pressed to my head.

t a i l e e ' s c l o n e s

Sophia's head cocked curiously and I knew what anxious thought was running through her head.

Okay mom, she was thinking, you can come get me now.

Finally I gave up and hit "7" to save the message so it could torment me later tonight. Mrs. Burby was standing outside the house now, giving me a great big beaming smile.

"Hi," I hoped my smile wasn't too nervous.

"Hello there!" Mrs. Burby waved, bouncing on her tiptoes.

"I hope Sophia wasn't any trouble--," I caught my balance as my daughter wrapped her arms around my leg as if I were a life preserver in the ocean during a category five hurricane.

"Sophia looks so much like you, it's amazing," Mrs. Burby noted.

I shrugged and said nonchalantly, "That's because she's a clone of me."

I always made a point of letting people know my daughters were also my clones. I was proud of raising six copies of myself, and I wanted my daughters to be proud of me. Most people gave me momentary looks of horror when I told them, or seemed unsure how to respond. I didn't get it. Cloning was a personal choice, it wasn't as if my kids were deformed or physically challenged. They were just copies of myself.

"That's so interesting!" Mrs. Burby exclaimed, putting her hand over her heart.

This was not the reaction I expected, "It's... something."

"You know, I always thought it would be so much fun to have a clone of myself," Mrs. Burby became increasingly animated as she spoke, her smile growing ever wider, "but Todd wanted to go the natural route with our kids. Plus," she rolled her eyes and tossed her head, "there was the whole costliness of the thing. I imagine it must be so interesting, though, you know? Like standing outside yourself, seeing a miniature version of yourself. Almost like reliving your life from the bleachers, but not exactly, right? It's like," she put her hands on her hips and looked down at Sophia, who hugged my leg a little tighter, "'There I am! That's me, but it's not me!' You know?"

"Uh. Yeah," I glanced nervously at my watch. Mrs. Burby's daughter was huddled close to her mother's knees. She and Sophia watched one another suspiciously. The play date had obviously not gone well.

c l o n e s

“Is it easier raising clones?” Mrs. Burby asked, but didn’t let me answer. “I’ve always suspected it would be a little easier. You know? I mean, you sort of know what to expect. Right? They’re going to grow up just like you. They’ll have your tastes, your interests, your brain chemistry, your health—“

“I’m sorry,” I did a little involuntary curtsy to interrupt this babbling conversation-hog. Sophia had wrapped her long braids around my knees, and I was batting away her hands as she tried to tie them together, “I need to pick up another one of my daughters across town and I’m going to be late.”

I did another stupid curtsy, grabbed Sophia’s hand and made away for the mini-van.

“Mommy,” Sophia said, once we were safely inside and several blocks down the road. “I don’t want to go back there.”

“You shouldn’t let people like that bother you,” I said. “It’s builds character to practice social interactions with difficult people. One day you’ll be really good at dealing with anyone and then you can be a politician, if you want.”

“Does that mean I have to go back?”

“Hell no.”

“Dilated to 10 centimeters...”

My neck was getting a painful crick in it from holding the thin cell phone between my ear and shoulder. I really needed to invest in a headset, but I never seemed to have the time to spare for purchasing one.

“Mommy?” Amelia, my youngest at age nine, tugged on my sleeve.

I held up one finger without taking my hand from the steering wheel while trying to keep the cell phone pressed to my head.

“Contractions coming every 3 minutes...”

“Mom,” Amelia asserted a little more firmly.

“One sec sweetie,” I whispered to her.

“Each contraction lasting more than a minute...”

“Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom. Mom,” Amelia tugged at my sleeve with each repetition.

“Shush dear,” I whispered.

“Doctor Geldfrey was such a nice young man--” *Beep!* Number 7 saved the message to torment me later.

I said to Amelia, “What is it dear?”

t a i l e e ' s c l o n e s

“My oboe lessons are back there,” she thumbed behind us.

“Oh,” I looked around. We were a half-mile down the road from the place. “So they are.”

The music store was too remote for me to go anywhere else while Amelia took her lessons. That was fine, because this hour was a chance to just relax, take a moment, listen to the radio, and veg-out. I savored this.

I sat upright when the “Flight of the Bumblebee” chimed on my phone.

“Don’t tell me you’re spending your 40th birthday driving your daughters around?” my old sister, Aislin’s voice was stern and disapprovingly.

“Familial responsibilities take priority,” I said, ready for a fight. “Just like you’re calling me when I’m sure you’d rather be doing something else.”

“My sister wins the lottery, and this is how she enjoys it,” big sis wondered aloud. “She could have bought a mansion, gone on a cruise, seen the world—but no, she has a half-dozen clones made of herself.”

“The color green doesn’t compliment you very well,” I quipped.

“I’m not jealous,” she answered. “I just don’t see the point. Why not marry, have kids?”

“Clones are easier,” I said. “

“Husbands make things easier too.”

“I’m working on that,” I said. “I’m looking into dating a gemellologist.”

“...”

“A person who studies twins...”

“Huh,” she uttered, completely missing my brilliantly comedic statement. “That’s probably you’re only hope at this point. I mean, what man would want to raise six copies of his wife? That’s like raising someone else’s kids, when he could be having his own.”

“You know I’m too much of a control freak to risk my children’s genetic outcomes to chance... What if one of them...” I left off, frowning and mentally biting my tongue.

There was a long silence before Aislin spoke again. When she finally did, her voice was noticeably resentful. “You don’t

c l o n e s

want to risk having a child born like Daryl,” she said.

“I didn’t say tha—“

“Oh please,” she interrupted. “You broke up with Jason right after I had him.”

“You know,” I offered. “You did get a pretty good deal on Dan,” I said, referring to her husband, “a life-long partner to help raise your kids and all you had to do is let him contribute half his genes to their DNA.” It was a sad attempt to change the subject.

“Don’t change the subject,” big sis warned. “Daryl may have developmental problems, but so do you if your so afraid of having children naturally that you’ll hide behind a gang of clones.”

“I gotta run. Amelia’s getting out of her oboe lesson,” I said, trying to sound unaffected. “I’ll talk to you later.”

I hung up and stared out the window, feeling guilty. I had to get out of that conversation before I let something slip that I couldn’t take back. Daryl was like a malignant growth to me, cancer, and I hated that I felt that way.

After awhile, Amelia, came out of the unassuming brick building. One hand carried the case for her oboe while the other patted at her hair, which was pulled up into a tight little bun. She climbed into the passenger side, telling me about her lesson. I responded with a series of encouraging sounds that were purely instinctual at this point.

“Mommy?”

The phone rang, and when I saw it was another one of my siblings, I decided to let them leave a message. I had too many brothers and sisters to speak with all of them on my birthday *and* take care of my clones.

“Mom.”

My sister was being so unfair. Who was she to tell me what I could and couldn’t do with my life? Did I criticize her for spending all her time tending to her invalid of a child? Wasting all her energies on a human being that wouldn’t live to see his twenties? I had every right to take precautions against the possibility of being stuck with that same fate.

“MOM!”

“Yes dear?”

“You’re not listening.”

t a i l e e ' s c l o n e s

“Sure I—“ I caught myself in the lie. “I’m sorry dear. What were you saying?”

“I don’t like playing the oboe.”

“You don’t want to be a famous musician one day and play with an orchestra?”

“Not if I have to play the oboe.”

“Ooooookay,” I tossed my head, trying to hide my disappointment. “What do you want to be?” For once I simply didn’t feel like praising my clone back onto the track I’d predetermined for her.

She shrugged, “What can I be when I grow up?”

“You can be anything you want to be,” I smiled cheerfully. “You could even be President if you try hard enough.” I imagined that: First Clone President. Although really the first clone president would probably be a clone of a previous president. Like a Bush or a Kennedy.

My phone chimed. I wanted to ignore it, but it might be one of the girls leaving a message while I was on the phone with my sis.

“I reached down and touched your head just as it was breaching...”

Okay. So it wasn’t one of the girls.

Amelia was looking excited out of the corner of my eye. I could see the little gears turning in her head. Her knee bouncing, “I want to be...” She put her finger to her lips, thinking.

“Ten minutes later I was holding you to my breasts...”

Amelia frowned thoughtfully.

Ah, I considered, With freedom comes responsibility.

“Mom?” she asked me.

“And at this time, I had given birth to my beautiful baby, Tailee, seven pounds, eight ounces, and a whole lifetime of—“ Beep! Seven to save.

“Yeah sweetie?”

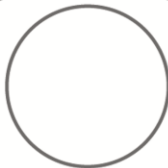
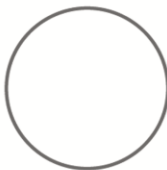
“What’s your job?”

I smiled knowingly and winked at her, “I’m a mommy.”



lance & peter's clone

lance & peter's clone



lance and peter's clone

Our clone was coming along nicely.

We were down to a week until its delivery, but the ultrasounds showed a beautiful baby girl. At least, it looked fairly human. Who could tell anything from that fuzzy black and white image?

It didn't matter. The important thing was that we were going to be a family soon. Peter and I would have a little addition to our household. We would be raising a contributing member of the next generation. Our little girl was heir to the human race.

"How is she?" Peter shook my knee, jostling me out of my daydreaming. "Is she okay?"

"Who knows?" I muttered, taking his hand and squeezing my frustrations away. "All we can do is wait for them to let us see her."

"No news is good news, Lance," Peter said, looking into my eyes and smiling reassuringly. "If we haven't heard anything, then your sister is fine."

"Yeah," I nodded. "I just wish that Dr. Wasserman was a little more sympathetic."

"Save the miracles for the c-section," Peter winked, and nodded past me. "Mom's here."

I looked to the hospital entrance, where Peter's mother was strolling through. She dipped her head and wiggled her fingers at us, beaming. She was wearing a shawl with a summer dress, a fashion tragedy, but I loved her just the same.

"Hello Mother dear," I exclaimed and she brightened noticeably. Peter had told me how much she enjoyed it when I referred to her as my mother. I scooped the tiny elderly woman into my arms and squeezed her so hard her back adjusted with a crack.

"Oh!" she exclaimed delightfully. She was slightly breathless when I set her back down, "Thank you dear." Her eyebrows jumped, "How is she?"

"Dr. Was-A-Man won't let us see her," Peter stated, folding his arms over his chest in that cute pouty way of his.

Mom's voice was almost a growl, "Asshole."

"I think he's still sore," I said.

c l o n e s

“Of course he is,” mom rubbed my upper arms absentmindedly, looking distant. “He’s still pissed about you two out-foxing him.”

Dr. Wasserman was on a crusade to keep same-sex couples from having children. When he found out about Peter and me, he warned all the fertility clinics to turn us and anyone associated with us away. Luckily my sister, who was our intended surrogate from the start, was a great liar and convinced the cloning clinic the child was for her.

You should have seen the look on Dr. Wasserman’s face when he found out he was our obstetrician. Not only was Lacey carrying a child for us, but my sister carried the double-whammy of being HIV positive to boot. Even the least bigoted fertility clinics in the world wouldn’t impregnate someone with AIDS. So Lacey didn’t tell them that either.

She did tell Dr. Wasserman, however, as it was crucial she begin therapy to prevent transmitting the virus to her fetus. The chances of Lacey passing the virus on to her child were now only a fraction of a percent. If our daughter caught AIDS, we would sue Wasserman into the gutter. Only his negligence could let her become infected now.

And if he didn’t know that, we made it a point to remind him every chance we got. We could have gone with another obstetrician, but Dr. Wasserman was the best, and we wanted our daughter to have the best of everything, even if that meant dealing with an insufferably prejudiced prick.

“Come on,” mom waved us to follow. “Let’s go see the little lady.”

Peter and I exchanged knowing looks. It was a relief to have mom here, a former RN who had little patience for hospital bureaucracy after dealing with it for 30 years. She took us to the elevator and hit the appropriate floor.

“But visiting hours...?” I began, but mom ignored me.

The nurse managing the floor gave us an alarmed look that turned to resignation when she saw mom. If it were just Peter and I, she probably would have called security. Mom marched past her like she had every right to be there, while Peter and I followed, trying not to look guilty.

We came to the door, and mom stood aside, nodding me in, “There you go.”

“That was too easy,” I said with a smirk and went inside.

lance and peter's clone

Sis was reading a book, Sallinger's "Catcher in the Rye." She was peaceful in her concentration. Her black hair pulled back into a bun, a hairstyle she had never worn before getting pregnant. Come to think of it, I had never seen her read before getting pregnant either.

I noticed the pair of headphones cradling her swollen belly and asked, "What's she listening to?"

Lacey looked up from her reading and her face brightened, "Sonic Youth. I was introducing her to Siouxi and the Banshee's earlier. You know, working my way through my music collection." She slipped the headphones off and whispered to her belly, "Uncle Lance is here sweetie."

"She's gonna have excellent taste in music from the get-go," I noted.

"Oh!" Lacey put her hand on her belly where the baby had apparently just kicked her. "She gets so excited whenever big brother Lance comes around."

I smiled and tossed my head, "She's probably just upset 'cause you killed her tunes."

"So which is it," mom said, announcing her presence, "big brother or uncle Lance?"

"How 'bout 'Daddy?'" Peter asked.

"Or 'Mommy,'" Lacey said with a smirk.

"It's 'Daddy,'" I asserted. "Technically it might be brother or uncle or whatever, but it's certainly not 'Mommy.' My genes might express themselves as gay, but they don't express themselves with a vagina."

"It's not genetics for me," Peter said proudly to my sis. "I was totally straight before I met your brother."

"Straight as a banana," I joshed.

"And twice as fruity," mom chimed in.

"So you're nurture," Lacey said, pointing to Peter, "and you're nature." She pointed to me.

"I can't help being gay," I said with an unapologetic shrug. "I think it is my genes. You know some evolutionary theorists think it's a side effect of having an overly sexual mother. Even though the gay kids don't reproduce, the over-sexed daughters make up for it by having plenty of children."

"Great," Lacey rolled her eyes. "So my clone's gonna be a nymphomaniac too."

"Uh..." I looked up into my head for a response.

c l o n e s

Sis pulled me close to her, “You better buy her a vibrator.”

I nodded, “Sure. On her sixteenth birthday. You got it.”

“Better make it her fourteenth,” Lacey advised. Then sat up, urging me, “And for godssakes, stress protection.”

“Okay.”

“I mean that!” she grabbed my sleeve and shook me.

I nodded with more sincerity, “Okay!”

“Condoms!”

“Yes.”

“Femdoms!”

“Ye—! Huh?”

“Female condoms, like saran wrap,” Lacey explained. “Promise?”

I held up my right hand, “On my honor.”

Lacey fell back onto the bed, looking distant, “Don’t let her turn out like me.”

“Now that I won’t promise,” I said, shaking my head.

Lacey’s eyes came over to me, questioning.

“My sister’s eclectic, artistic, a free spirit,” I explained. “She’s tough, independent, brilliant, witty... She’s... She’s...”

Lacey chuckled a little as I struggled for more compliments.

“A ray of starshine in the lives of everyone she meets,” Peter added helpfully.

“Sugar and spice and everything nice,” mom giggled.

“Not letting your clone grow up to express her true nature would be like...” my mind found the metaphor easily, “cutting the buds off a rose bush before they have a chance to bloom.”

The look Lacey gave me told me she wasn’t buying completely into what I had said, but I knew she would think about it later, that it would stick with her, and probably warm her heart as things got worse.

I let my words sink in. “You totally rock, Lacey,” I gently nudged her arm with my fist. “So what if you can’t keep it in your pants?”

That got a chuckle out of her, but she quickly stifled it, looking past me. I followed her eyes to the door, where Dr. Wasserman stood. His eyes were thin slits behind an impossible nose. That nose was the mantelpiece of many laugh-in sessions amongst the four of us. It came straight out from between those

lance and peter's clone

beady eyes and then dropped off like a cliff down his face, curling under to reattach at his upper lip. It wasn't a nose. It was a beak.

Peter surmised it was the reason Dr. Wasserman was such a bitter person. The Doctor was jealous of Peter's and my relationship. After all, there was no way the man was getting laid with a honker like that.

"Hello Mr. Was-a-ma—ouf!" Peter sucked air as mom put an elbow in his stomach.

"Hello Dr. Wasserman," Mom covered. "How is our little patient today?"

"Levels of the virus are staying satisfactorily low in her blood tests," the doctor said, looking over Lacey's chart. "The chances of the child contracting the virus are still negligible."

"I know we're at the 38 week mark," I said. "I guess that means...?"

Dr. Wasserman nodded, "I will be scheduling a cesarean sometime in the next few days."

"Few days?" Peter scoffed. "Don't you think that's cutting it a little close? What if she goes into labor?"

"Not likely," Wasserman's tone indicated he did not appreciate Peter challenging his wisdom on this. "Even if she does go into labor, we can still have a cesarean. After the delivery, we'll test the infant for the virus."

"I'll breathe a sigh of relief then," I said. "No matter what the outcome. It's the uncertainty that's killing me."

"Me too," little sis said and I squeezed her hand.

"If it's certainty you're after, then you'll have to wait six more months after our initial test," Dr. Wasserman said with his trademark insensitivity. "The test we conduct within 48 hours of birth only detects 40 percent of infected infants." He finally looked at me, but it didn't make him anymore human, "At the sixth-month, we'll know for certain if the infection spread to the child." He looked at Lacey and raised a finger at her, "We've been over the post-birth precautions."

Lacey nodded, "No breastfeeding."

"We got one of those life-like breasts you can fill with formula and hang on your chest," Peter chimed in proudly, making a cupping shape over his right nipple, which I noticed was hard.

Dr. Wasserman just looked at him.

c l o n e s

Peter winked at Lacey, "We'll let you borrow it."

"No more ultrasounds?" mom prompted then.

"There's nothing more to learn from them," Dr. Wasserman said, and I was surprised he did not take the opportunity to remind us of how limited his testing options were. For instance, amniocentesis would break the placenta's membrane and expose the fetus to Lacey's blood, risking infection. So there were some things we couldn't test for, but the baby looked wonderful on the ultrasound.

Dr. Wasserman restored Lacey's chart to its hook at the foot of her bed, "You've done very well, taking the Zidovudine and protease inhibitors to keep the virus at bay."

"I have to," Lacey shrugged slightly. "I have a responsibility to the little me."

Dr. Wasserman nodded, "I thank God that you have been so responsible. I maintain that it was very irresponsible of you to have yourself impregnated knowing you carried the virus, even more irresponsible for the clinic that performed the procedure, but I think all will turn out for the be—"

"Yeah, but if Lacey wanted to get pregnant the normal way," Peter broke in, "you wouldn't be able to stop her. Great big medical corporations get to decide who gets fertilized and cloned--"

"I see that as their responsibility," Dr. Wasserman interjected.

"—but anyone AIDS-infected, physically challenged, homosexual or otherwise deemed genetically inferior can still reproduce the old fashioned way," Peter's voice almost cracked the way it did when he was about to lose his temper.

Wasserman frowned and nodded grimly. "If it were up to me," he said, "I would have that option stripped from a few of them as well."

Peter's eyes were wide.

Mom spoke up then, coming over to take Lacey's hand, "Preventing people from reproducing would require sterilizations, eugenics. Those are methods far too inhumane to ever consider."

"I have misspoken," Dr. Wasserman said, he walked towards the door, but paused there, turning to address us once more. "You are correct that we cannot forcibly prevent people

lance and peter's clone

from reproducing. At the same time, private enterprise has the right to deny service to clients it does not want reproducing.

“Think about this,” Wasserman was urging us. “I’m not saying I’m right, but you have to acknowledge that civilization must take a position on the matter. Medical science gives people who cannot reproduce the power to have offspring, who will also need medical science to reproduce. We are birthing the next generation of medical patients.

“Then consider the uneducated are far out-breeding the educated,” Wasserman continued. “If any degree of human intelligence is genetic, then we are breeding our civilization into stupidity. What about all the people medical science allows to live despite their fatal mutations? These bad genes are spreading throughout our species. If any catastrophe were to occur to strip civilization of our medical supports, we would be doomed.”

“So that doesn’t give you the right to decide who gets to have children and who doesn’t!” Peter snapped. His face was red and his fists were clenched. I put my hand lightly on his shoulder.

Wasserman simply looked at him, “I’m not saying for certain the solution is to regulate breeding. I’m just asking you to think about it. We always concern ourselves with what kind of a world we are leaving our children. Think about who’s reproducing,” his eyes shifted involuntarily to Lacey--only for a moment, but everyone noticed it, “and what kind of children we are leaving to our world.”

“Prick,” Peter spat at Dr. Wasserman’s back as the man left the room.

“Well that was a downer,” Lacey said, kind of stunned.

“Don’t think about it,” mom urged, rubbing her arm. “It’s not something you should let bog you down right now.”

“Because I’ve already done the irresponsible thing,” Lacey squeezed tears from her eyes.

“You’ve done a generous thing,” mom put her arm around Lacey, trying to gently shake her out of her grief. “You’re giving a couple without a chance at having children of their own a baby girl to love and raise.”

“But that’s selfish,” Lacey sobbed. “I just wanted another chance... a chance to get it right.”

“We’ll get it right,” I promised, sitting down beside her bed. “I’ll make up for our parent’s mistakes.”

“They won’t even talk to us.”

c l o n e s

“All the more evidence of their being bad parents,” mom said.

Lacey looked at me then, “What if they won’t let you adopt her?”

“You’re my sister,” I said gently, but firmly. “They have to let me adopt your baby. I’m next of kin and I’m a fanfuckingtastic pillar of the community.”

“I know,” Lacey huffed, “but what about you being lifepartners with Peter?”

“What about me being in a stable relationship?” I prompted innocently. I knew what she was talking about.

“What if they won’t let you adopt because you’re gay?” Lacey asked at last.

Peter broke in then, his tone was as if he were stating the obvious, “Then we’ll move to Canada.”

A slight bark of laughter cracked through Lacey’s sobbing at this last statement.

Peter came over and put his arm around my waist. I leaned back against him, appreciating his open affection. We were going to be a family soon. I believed it, and looking at my sister looking at my lifepartner and me, I knew she believed it too. We had a whole lifetime together of me taking care of her, and we were going to embark on a second one soon.

“It’s funny,” Lacey said, her eyelids drooping, suddenly exhausted from this outburst, but her expression was transformed into one of pure joy.

“What’s funny?” I smiled because she was smiling.

“There’s an old Faith No More lyric I always liked,” Lacey said after reflecting a moment. “‘Growing a life within a life, the lips of wonder kiss you inside.’ I always loved that imagery.”

“Yeah,” I said. “That’s pretty.”

Lacey giggled a little, apparently suddenly intoxicated with the thought that had occurred to her, “I’m growing a me within a me.”

“So it’s a homunculus—owf!” Peter was cut off with a jab to the midsection.

“Peter!” mom warned.

Lacey and I didn’t notice. We just stared into each other’s eyes, pouring warmth into each other. I leaned in close to her

l a n c e a n d p e t e r ' s c l o n e

belly, placing my hands on it. The little one inside kicked in greeting.

“Welcome to the family,” I whispered. “It’s only going to get weirder here on out.”



dana's clone
qanuz, z ciong



d a n a ' s c l o n e

My clone was my only hope.

We woke up at 0600 sharp. Thean took a single aspirin and I a double dose. I additionally took my diuretic, lasix, and captopril to relax my arteries. We put on our sweats, jogging shoes, and ran through some routine stretches in front of the house to warm up.

I set the pace for the first kilometer, which was merely a warm up for Thean. When I dropped to a quick walking pace to cool down, she took off to elevate her heart rate into the cardio training zone for an additional twenty minutes. This translated into four more kilometers, passing me six times as she circled the lake. I used the privacy to pop some nitroglycerin for the chest pains.

A shower at this point in the day was unnecessary. Neither of us had anywhere else to be except around one another, and neither of us could detect the other's body odor. We theorized this was because our identical genes and diet also made our personal scents similar.

Oatmeal for breakfast, although the "heart-healthy" reputation of this staple was no longer certain. A multi-vitamin, an aspirin, a banana, and decaffeinated green-tea rounded out the meal. I took lasix to thin the blood in addition.

Morning mental warm up: phylogenetic taxonomy. I found tracing the millions of evolutionary paths along this system furnished me with greater insight into biochemistry. Seeing not only how life's outward expressions of genes progressed, but the refinement of its molecular complexity was the thought exercise that showed me what lay ahead in the road.

"Is that a new subject?" I asked Thean.

She nodded, "Cyclic and noncyclic photophosphorylation."

"Ah," I smiled, remembering when I first tackled the subject. I was eight years older than her at the time, "the molecular pathway to generating energy for all plantae. Welcome to the plant realm." The photosynthetic process would produce the oxygen necessary to support the first vertebrates 2.5 billion years further down the timeline.

c l o n e s

I silently envied the intellectual journey my daughter was progressing along and the wondrous feeling of discovery that would accompany it. She was still decades away from the quagmire of applying all this data. I was now marking my fifteenth year into just this, my days on the intellectual playground were long gone, and now my life was running on borrowed time.

Seven kilometers with the sun just reaching the sky's apex. I power walked the dirt path for nearly as long as Thean jogged it. The mountain air was cleaner and the higher altitude's lower oxygen levels made the heart work harder. I was holding a perpetual debate with my doctor over whether or not this was a good thing, with her sending me weekly research into high-mountain disease and enlarged hearts, and I responding with the positive cardiovascular effects. I would eventually let her have the last word over my gravesite.

Farm-raised albacore was more expensive than the free-range tuna inhabiting the ocean, but the latter's mercury content offset its heart-friendly nature. Fresh, uncooked greens sprinkled with lemon juice and a pint of orange juice rounded out our lunch. With more lasix and captopril for myself, and, when Thean was distracted, more nitroglycerin for what were becoming ever-present pains below my chest plate.

"Have you seen the research on the effectiveness of this tumor necrosis factor alpha inhibitor?" Thean asked me, pointing to the 3-D model of a molecule rotating on her screen.

"A peripheral membrane protein," I noted, trying to stave off her line of inquiry, "we are looking for something more integral. That molecule is too water-soluble."

"Correct; however, if I modify the electron spin orbitals in a few places..." she drifted off, considering the possibility.

"That's quantum chemistry," I said, bringing her out of it, "purely speculative. We must adhere to concrete scientific solutions to maintain progress."

"Mmmm," she intoned, unwilling to forsake the possibility simply because I said so. I would do the same thing at her age, "Too bad we can't evolve a new kingdom out of halophiles. I bet they could benefit from such research."

"Now you're delving into xenobiology," I said with a smirk to let her know I appreciated her humor. "I'm sure some of

d a n a ' s c l o n e

my discoveries would benefit unicorns and dragons, but we don't have those on this planet. So we deal with what chance has given us."

She shot me an odd look, not accusatory, but knowing, at this statement.

Fifteen minute break. I ran through some yoga stretches while Thean buried herself in her favorite intellectual pastime.

"I'm having trouble with this proof," Thean said and I looked over her shoulder at the textbook. "I've followed it nearly to completion, but am stalled at this transition."

I smiled, "Another proof of Pythagoras' Theorem? What is this, the hundredth one?"

"I've got a thing for Pythagoras," Thean shrugged. "After all, you did name me after his wife. Most proofs are pretty easy, but this one is frustrating."

I returned to my yoga mat and resumed warrior one stance, saying, "Feeling frustrated is usually an indication that one is about to learn something."

Nine kilometers. I don't know how she did it, and in under an hour no less. Breathing heavily, I ambled back to the house. If could not even walk for as long as my clone could jog, then I could at least make her a nice dinner. Maybe salmon or mahi mahi, with fresh Portobello mushrooms.

I was still steaming the asparagus when Theano came in and set the mail down on the kitchen table. I saw her toss several letters into the trash.

"What are those?" I asked.

Theano retrieved them from the garbage and set them down in front of me without a word. The handwritten addresses meant they weren't junk mail. I looked them over, not needing to open them.

Instead I held them up to Theano, "You may read these, if you like. You have that right."

Theano shook her head, refusing to even look at them, "Unnecessary. Those people have no understanding. Their time would be better spent tending to their own lives."

I nodded and walked the hate mail over to drop the letters in the trash, "I was wondering why I wasn't seeing these letters anymore."

c l o n e s

“They aren’t worth our time,” Theano said, studying her calculus text.

“So you decided to dispose of them,” I observed neutrally.

“I did,” Theano replied without looking up.

“I realize I’ve told you this before,” I said, “but there are many people who believe having myself cloned, knowing you would inherit my fatal heart defect, was a selfish act of cruelty.”

“You’ve told me,” Thean replied, keeping her head buried in her work. “You had to find a clinic in the East to provide the service because no Western clinics would permit it. I’ve given it much thought, and you know what?” She looked up at me, “I don’t care what other people think. Our work is too important. I’m with you on this.”

We took turns showering after dinner. This was the best time of day for it hygienically, not to soil our bed sheets with the day’s activities. Tooth brushing, flossing, and a half hour or so reading for enjoyment until drowsiness made it the opportune time to turn the lights out.

“Mom?” Thean whispered in the darkness a few moments after putting her copy of Marie Curie’s doctoral thesis *Radioactive Substances* on the nightstand.

“Yes Thean?”

“What if the cardiomyopathy kills me too early to complete our work?” she asked.

The corners of my mouth ticked upwards involuntarily at her calling it ‘our work,’ and I replied, “Highly unlikely. If you discipline yourself to maintain the strict lifestyle I’ve prescribed, you should live twenty, maybe thirty years past my expected expiration date.”

Her eyebrows lowered slightly, and her mouth followed suit, “Or the lifestyle might have no effect at all, and the heart defect will kill me the same time it does you.”

“A very real possibility,” my eyebrows raised, and I nodded my head in acknowledgement, “but I have also lived long past the doctors’ estimates on my lifespan. I should have died over five years ago, but here I am. I attribute that to changing my lifestyle patterns, eating a proper diet, exercise, and drug regimen.”

d a n a ' s c l o n e

“It is possible you would live this long regardless,” Thean noted.

I half-nodded and shrugged, “Possible, yes, but the correspondent science supports my hypothesis.”

“Only through corollary examples,” Thean countered. “The specifics certainly differentiate our case from studies others have conducted on median survival rates.”

“Of course it would seem improbable that we would fall within the statistical median,” I argued, “but research conducted on average human beings provides the best data we have to base our decisions on.”

We lay in silence. Despite the prolonged lapse in dialogue, I knew our conversation was not finished. I could feel Thean’s mind still churning away in the darkness. There were epic thought processes taking place inside her teenage mind, and I waited patiently for them articulate through her vocal chords.

“You should have made multiple clones, not just place all your hopes on me,” Thean said at last. “You could have tried a variety of lifestyles and observed their different outcomes on our lifespans.”

“I considered... or rather, I entertained such a possibility,” I said, “but I lacked the resources to carry it to fruition.”

Thean frowned, “You could afford five, maybe six clones easily.”

“I was referring to time.”

I could see Thean’s eyes widen in the moonlight, recognizing her naivety, “Ah.”

I nodded, “To conduct such an experiment would require too much of my attention and would have detracted from the quality of my research. Even the effort of raising a single genetic copy of myself was an immense distraction. Imagine raising six more just like you, testing out different diets and lifestyle choices. It would be abandoning my line of research for a completely new, and fairly narcissistic, line of inquiry.”

Silence in the darkness resumed. I knew this topic was only peripheral to what was really vexing her, and again I waited as Thean’s mind sorted out what was bothering her. It was obvious she did not know herself, but would not sleep until she

c l o n e s

understood. Until then, I would remain awake as a vigilant sounding board for her thoughts.

“My point...” Thean tried jumpstarting the articulation process with this, diving into the formulation of her argument, “is that you have very likely placed too much faith in me. I am still fifteen years, at the least, from even beginning to pick up on your work wherever you leave off at death.”

I blinked, “If the weight of responsibility is your concern—“

“I will rise to the challenge,” Thean interrupted. “I will excel at continuing to solve this puzzle you have spent a lifetime decoding, but only if I live long enough to carry on the work. That possibility relies on many factors all out of our control.

“And then what happens if I cannot see the end of our lives’ work?” she asked. “Will I then also place all my faith in a clone, raise it to maturity, and hope that it lives long enough or even desires to continue our research?”

“You see,” she continued. “This a very precarious situation we find our lives’ work in. My point is that there might be ways to reduce the risk.”

“I have exhausted all those possibilities in creating this life we are presently living,” I assured her. “There are no more precautions for us to take.”

“No cure then,” she whispered. “No certainty.”

“The human body is a very complex system,” I replied. “There will always be factors beyond our control.”

“And there is nothing else we can do,” she said, and then added, “beyond what we are presently doing.”

I only answered, “The world is a very complex system.”

After breakfast, I clicked the dropdown menu of recent web addresses to locate my e-mail. One of the cached entries was familiar, but I had not entered it.

“Thean?” I asked. “Were you researching heart transplants?”

“Yes Dana,” came her simple reply.

I swiveled my chair to face her back, “I thought I explained this. We have preformed antibodies that disqualify us for transplants. Our bodies’ immune systems would attack any foreign organs.”

d a n a ' s c l o n e

Thean looked over her shoulder at me, “Consider this a peer review of your findings.”

We regarded one another with that same neutral expression.

“While I maintain, and will continue to maintain, the primacy of your freedom to choose your own academic pursuits,” I said, standing up, “I must also communicate my perspective that your preoccupation with our mortality is not constructive.”

Thean did not take her eyes off me as she swiveled her chair around to bring the rest of her body around to face me, “Any research I conduct in my own free time to increase our lifespans is constructive.”

“Life is not important,” I asserted, “only ideas are important.”

Thean’s eyebrows raised slightly in appreciation of this statement, “That is the truth, as we both understand it, and also my sole reason for pursuing this line of inquiry. You detract from the productivity of your own research with these distractive concerns for mine.”

Again we regarded one another with that same neutral expression. Finally I resumed my seat and returned to browsing papers online.

I recognized the heart attack early enough for Thean to drive me to the emergency room. Although I was always taking aspirin, the doctors gave me more and heparin additionally. Thean and I tolerated these feeble attempts at medical care, patiently waiting for my heart specialist to arrive and explain how futile they were.

This was far more serious than a simple blood clot, and I had waited for it all my life. My heart rhythms were far too abnormal. I could see it on the heart monitor. There was no restoring their functions. It was merely time now to wait and die.

Every step of the way, Thean was at my bedside, and I tried to explain everything to her as my strength would allow. Perhaps there was something she could learn here, something additional she could take into the experience herself, when it came for her. This was, after all, her staring into her own future, the sights, smells and sounds, what she would look like lying on her death bed.

c l o n e s

This last must have been fairly grim; although, she tried not to betray how much it disturbed her. She could dissect cadavers with ease, but this was herself she was looking at. She took my hand and squeezed it in hers, rubbing my arm with her other hand.

“Just doing my part to get the oxytocin flowing through your blood stream,” she said with a warm smile, referring to the pleasant-feeling hormones produced in the human body through affectionate contact. Apparently sexual intercourse produced the greatest surge of the hormone in the bloodstream, but I and Thean were asexual.

I squeezed her hand as much as my weakened state would allow. “Just adding a little prolactin as well,” I said, referring to the opiate-like hormone generated in women as a reward for performing motherly activities.

“Does it feel good?” Thean asked.

I nodded.

“But that might just be a placebo effect,” we said simultaneously and laughed.

“Unfortunately,” I paused to administer another dose of morphine, “the organ is finally damaged beyond recovery. I will not leave this bed with it. I have a broken heart.” I smirked, “A more poetic mind than mine might come up with something special to say about that.”

Thean squeezed hard, “We both have broken hearts. It’s just that time has worn yours down a little further.”

“I perceive more than one level of meaning in that statement,” I nodded, and my eyes fluttered closed momentarily with exhaustion and morphine. “Perhaps there is an emotional dimension to what you just said?”

Thean nodded, “Of course.”

“Me too,” I whispered and fell asleep.

The ceiling was moving. No, I was moving, being rolled down a hallway on a gurney. A bag of something was dangling just above and to the right, jostling as I was jostled, a tube leading from it to somewhere on my body. It was difficult to tell where. There were so many tubes.

“She’s awake,” a male’s voice said beyond my periphery.

d a n a ' s c l o n e

My heart specialist's face filled my vision, upside down, "Dana. Can you hear me?"

I nodded. The gurney was jostled as we passed through double-doors into a brighter room. Spotlights filled my vision, casting my doctor's face into darkness.

"We're taking you to surgery," her voice was gentle. "You'll be going under systemic anesthesia momentarily."

"Cardiothoracic surgery?" I asked weakly.

"Yes," she answered--too simply--and pulled a face-saver surgical mask over her features.

I looked around for answers, and noticed the sternal retractor waiting to spread my rib cage apart. This was major surgery. Amid the nurses prepping, I saw one bring in an ice box.

"Not orthoscopic surgery?" I asked the doctor, who was now drawing a scalpel line between my breasts.

"Heart transplant," she said without pausing in her work.

"But my preformed antibodies—" I began, but someone slipped a mask over my face, and my olfactory receptors were overwhelmed with the strong smell of anesthetic gas.

"Take deep, steady breaths," the anesthesiologist was gently urging me.

"No," I protested. "My daughter. Give the heart to my daughter, don't waste it on..."

I woke up, I would later learn, three days after my surgery. The doctor kept me in a drug-induced coma during that time. My heart specialist was present when I woke up. She was not smiling.

"Welcome back Dana," she said simply. "The transplant was a complete success, but of course it would be, the organ was perfect for you."

"Thean..." I whispered. "You should have given it to Thean."

The doctor shook her head, "Thean..." She cleared her throat, "Dana, there was only one heart in this entire world we could have given you."

She looked at me expectantly, waiting. The drugs were still hindering my cognitive capabilities, so it took me a few moments. I drew a sharp intake of breath when the pieces finally fit together in my mind. The drug-induced coma made perfect

c l o n e s

sense then. The stress of this news would have killed me immediately post-op.

“But... But I...” I blinked, shaking my head. “I didn’t want this... Not like this...”

The doctor nodded and patted my hand, “We know. The suicide note she left us was very clear on the fact that she conceived the idea entirely on her own.”

“H-how... How did she--?” I stammered. My vision was blurring with something my body had not produced since early childhood.

“She was very meticulous,” the doctor said. “She called the ambulance just before she committed the act. She used a gun purchased within the last year and was careful so that the bullet wound would damage enough of the brain to prevent resuscitation, but keep the heart beating slightly longer to make sure we would retrieve it, along with her instructions for giving it to you and why your body would not reject it.”

“I see,” was all I could manage.

“She left you this,” the doctor handed me a small sheet of yellow paper, folded over once.

I took it and she walked out, leaving me alone in the room. I held the paper between my thumb and forefinger, considering it. What could it possibly say? Something to assuage the guilt hanging so heavily on this unfortunately acquired heart? I unfolded it with closed eyes, and then opened them.

All it read was, *Continue our work. Love, Theo.*

My hand fell aside with the note, and I looked away from it. My eyes fell on the nearby heart monitor. One could set a watch to its perfect time.

It was strong, the heart of someone who jogged 21 kilometers daily. The woman who owned this heart took great care of it, eating healthy and not smoking. She babied it with routine aspirin doses to thin the blood and prevent putting any undo pressure on the organ. She researched the uniqueness of her particular heart, the defects her mother intentionally, however reluctantly, made her inherit along with her otherwise brilliant genetic expression. She learned what made it so irreplaceable in a world where medical science had overcome so many other obstacles. She cared for it very dearly over 15 years of life, and then she gave it to me.

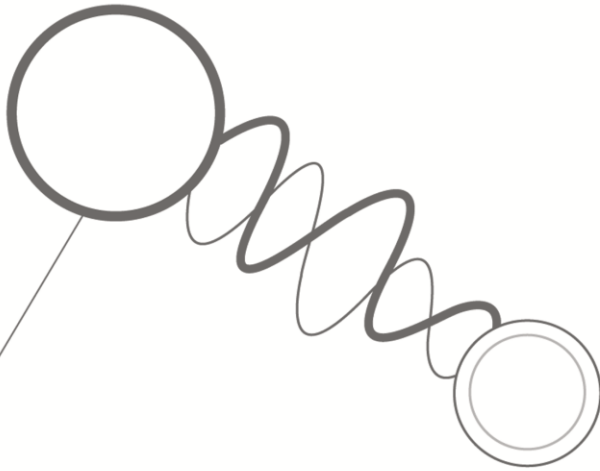
d a n a ' s c l o n e

There was thirty years of life left on this heart, easily, but there was no time to ruminate on all of this any longer. It was wrong and dishonored Thean's memory to do so. I called one of the graduate students at the University, and told them to bring me my attaché case with the latest findings it contained.

I had a great deal of work to do.



ryan's clone
ryan's clone



ryan's clone

My clone was me.

It was freaky, like looking at a mirror with a mind of its own... No, that metaphor sucks. How about this: It was weird, like watching a video of myself or hearing a recording of my voice. I felt awkward, slightly embarrassed seeing him interact with the world. My denial mechanisms kicked in. *I don't sound like that do I?*

Jeeze, I was a goofy-looking kid.

I shook my head, banishing the unhealthy, however true, thought from my head. Yosha was waiting in line at the music store we were browsing, fidgeting uncomfortably, playing with his hands and the digital media carried between them. I was perusing the soundtracks section for neoclassical works, or at least my fingers were, as my eyes were watching Yosha.

We were enjoying one of the great modern pastimes, mall walking. Who needed intemperate parks and fields to play in with their bugs and dirt and whatnot, when you could have three stories of climate-controlled pristine façade of the local mall to explore? Besides, you couldn't buy anything in a National Forest.

Just kidding, we did outdoor stuff too, and most of our shopping online seeing as how the mall shops couldn't cater to our obscure media needs, having to dedicate the majority of their shelf-space to the lowest common denominator. Still, it was cool to get out and see what the average mediocre person was into these days. You know, mindless fads and whatnot.

Right this moment I was seeing an average and mediocre hot blonde girl my clone's age staring in his general direction, twirling her hair with one finger absentmindedly. I casually sauntered around the aisle to stand in front of the "Gangsta Rap" section for a better view, and then relocated to the "Polka" section to confirm my suspicions. Yosh finished his transaction, oblivious. I averted my eyes just as the blonde girl's were following my clone over to me.

"All set?" he asked and I stole a quick glance at the girl, still staring hard at my younger self. "If you're all done browsing..." Yosh's one eyebrow cocked at the selection in front of me, "'Country' music?"

c l o n e s

“Huh?” I looked at him and shook myself back into the moment. “Sure. Yeah. Fine. Let’s go.”

He continued to give me a funny look as we left the store, but all I could think of was, *Why didn’t girls stare at me like that when I was his age?*

I whimpered inaudibly as we rounded the corner towards the next waypoint on our journey, the Video Game Boutique, losing sight of the blonde and the realm of possibility that road, more or less traveled, held in store. In my day, the next stop would mean no possibility for female interaction, but modern day women shared equal space with the men surveying the gaming options. I always predicted this eventual outcome.

What I didn’t expect in my futuristic visions, was that the girls would be as goofy looking as the guys. It was a reproductive nightmare. All these kids were doomed to produce goofy looking offspring, perpetuating a vicious cycle of nerds prone to bully victimization. Where was the prescience?

My eyes fell on my younger sunken-chested self checking out the latest release of “Squid Fighter 7,” *Oh yeah.*

I shuffled in behind him, surveying the titles. Demons, space aliens, extreme sports... gaming hadn’t changed much except to look more and more like real life. A set of curves caught my eye and I instinctively grabbed the box, but another hand was already gripping it.

“I hate it when that happens,” Yosh said, letting go of the box with a slightly disgusted look on his face.

“I can’t help it,” I defended, “our brains are attracted to...” I surveyed the full-bosomed scantily-clad space-vixen, “...science—*ahem*—fiction.”

I returned the game to the shelf and tried changing the subject, “Did you ever conquer the Indian empire in that Civilization Ten game?”

“Nah,” he shrugged, pulling a game off the shelf. “Gandhi developed WMDs before I did and keeps nuking my cities.”

“Hm,” I intoned, craning my neck to get a look at what he was showing interest in, an action game I disapproved of.

Apparently so did he, as he returned it to the shelf and said, “Lemme buy this real-time strategy game and we can hit the arcade.”

“Does being clones mean we get two souls?” Yosh asked with a smirk as his animated squid executed a perfect spinning

r y a n ' s c l o n e

tentacle attack, knocking my mutant sperm whale into disorientation.

“Of course!” I grunted, slamming the joystick back and forth in a vain attempt to make my avatar shake it off. “Cloned people are better than everyone else!”

Yosh’s hands blurred into the secret combination that unlocked his giant squid’s special move. Twin tentacles launched across the screen to ravel up the whale, followed by the squid, which chewed it in half with a *cruncha, munch, munch*.

“Whoa,” I said. “Cool.”

Yosh looked at me, frowning, “Seriously Dad. Have you ever considered the theological implications of having a clone?”

“Not in the middle of an arcade,” I defended.

“Right,” Yosh said. “It’s the buying multiple lives with quarters thing that made me think of it. So let’s say heaven is real—“

“We’re agnostic,” I said.

“You’re agnostic,” he countered. “I haven’t decided yet.”

“That’s what ag—nevermind. Go on.”

“So there’s a heaven, and we both die and go to...”

I gave him *that* look.

“So we both go to hell,” he corrected. “We both have the exact same genes. So we also have identical souls.”

“We don’t have the same experiences,” I interjected.

“True,” he appeared to think about it. “Either way, genes or experiences, freewill is screwed.”

I smiled, *That’s my boy!*

We stopped to savor a Zen moment by the water fountain. Streams of H₂O leapt up and down obsidian staircases in a dancing optical illusion. Holographic 3-D advertisements for the mall stores played out in a fine watery mist filling the air above the fountains’ center. We paused a few moments to appreciate its artificial beauty, and then set to the joy of surveying our consumerist booty.

Yosh was consolidating his recent purchases from the music store into the video game shopping bag, taking a moment to examine each mini-dvd case. I understood the interest. He was observing the music-dvd from the new perspective of owning it rather than it being a purchasing option in the store.

“What’s that one?” I asked tapping the case in his hand.

c l o n e s

“Funkarelics,” Yosh answered. “It’s a hip-hop band.”

“Hip-hop,” I frowned. “Never got into hip-hop. Tried to, but it never grokked with me.”

“Well, it groks with me,” he frowned defensively and then lightened. “That’s probably because it was already here when I was born; therefore, it’s part of the natural state of things.” He winked at me, making sure I got the Douglas Adams reference.

I narrowed my eyes and smirked back at him, “It’s wrong, and it’s against the laws of nature.”

“We’re still talking about hip-hop music, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Well you’re wrong.”

“It’s an opinion. How can it be wrong?”

“I distinctly remember pwning you in a game of Pirate Baby’s Cabana Streetbattle for the title of ‘Undisputed Supreme Master of the Universe,’” Yosh said with a cocked eyebrow, leveling the pointy finger of authority at me, “meaning my opinion trumps yours.”

“That was no fair,” I waved him off. “My controls weren’t responding well. If we’d switched sides like I asked, I would have kicked your butt.”

“I would have kicked your butt Undisputed Supreme Master of the Universe,’” he corrected.

“Fine,” I folded my arms over my chest, “but you have to start referring to me as The Alpha.”

His mouth quirked in confused amusement, “Okay Dad, explain the ‘alpha’ thing to me.”

“Not ‘Dad,’” I corrected, lifting my nose into the air, “‘The Alpha,’ with a capital ‘T’ and a capital ‘A.’ I was here first and you are a digital copy of my genes; ergo, you must acknowledge my genetic originality to your genetic plagiarism by properly addressing me as ‘The Alpha.’”

“Yeah Dad,” he said, rolling his eyes, “screw a whole bunch of that.”

“Screw a whole bunch of that Senior Alpha Number One,” I corrected.

“Fine,” he folded his arms over his purposefully inflated chest, “then you will refer to me as The Omega.”

“Whatever you say amiga.”

r y a n ' s c l o n e

“No.” He corrected, “‘The Omega,’ with a capital ‘T’ and a capital ‘O.’”

“So you’re not gonna have kids?” I asked.

“I’m not going to clone myself,” he replied. “I’m happy with myself just the way I am.”

“I’m happy with myself too,” I countered. “I had you purely out of curiosity.”

He cocked an eyebrow at me like Mr. Spock from *Star Trek*, I loved it when he did that, “You played with the laws of nature because you were curious?”

“Yeah,” I shrugged and skipped another penny across the pond. It made a *clink-bloop* sound as it bounced off the far side of the fountain and sank, “I dunno. I just thought it would be fun to have a younger me around.”

“Huh,” he grunted neutrally, narrowed his eyes, and smiled considering my answer. “That’s pretty cool Dad.”

“Alpha,” I snapped in mock seriousness.

“Dip,” he corrected.

“That’s fair.”

We sat in silence for another long moment, watching the pool’s hypnotic blue rippling, and I said, “Alpha and Omega, so when we’re together we equal god, huh?”

Yosh didn’t get it, and I explained the reference.

The food court was a great big closed-in ultimate expression of capitalism, where major food chains of every kind were placed in direct competition with one another. It was like a great big arena where burgers, cheese steaks, Chinese foods, and hotdogs prostituted themselves out to the consumer Johns strolling past.

I explained all this to Yosha as we stood in line at the pizza place. I don’t think he was listening. He was doing that “Uh-Huh” thing I do when I’m pretending to listen to someone. It was incredibly infuriating.

“Could I get two slices of cheese?” Yosh held up his first two digits in the universal symbol for “two,” and semi-universal symbol for peace. Well, universal to species homo sapiens anyways. Whatever, the guy behind the counter understood the communication, “Two peaces of pizza,” and that’s what’s important.

c l o n e s

“You should try the spinach-stuffed thingy they got there,” I said. “You got cheese slices last time.”

“My previous experiences with cheese slices were good ones,” he countered matter-of-factly. “I’ve established a report with them.”

I didn’t know if the word ‘report’ worked in that sentence, but there was no Internet handy to verify it, so I let it go, “You should try new things though. Be adventurous.”

“I don’t know if I’ll like that spinach wrap thing,” he said.

“I like it,” I said, “and we share the same taste buds.”

“Not necessarily,” he countered. “The taste for spinach-stuffed pastries might not be something I’ll develop until my cells are oxidizing and I’m old and withered up like you.” He shot me a goofy grin, “Plus think of all the environmental factors that affect this.”

“Wuss,” I shot at him with a wry grin.

He didn’t miss a beat. Raising his eyebrows, he said, “You should try the cheese slices. Be adventurous.”

“That’s all right,” I said, waving off the suggestion, “I like the spinach whatchamacallit.”

I sat down and Yosh consciously sat down a moment later. I watched him with knitted eyebrows as he saddled up to his meal in a very awkward fashion. How much parmesan and ranch dressing to pour on his meal seemed to take some time, as if he were conquering a real conundrum.

I recognized the behavior immediately. He was going through one of his “individuation” moments some clones were prone to, trying to distinguish his body language and mannerism from my own, asserting his difference. I frowned and shook my head inside. There were only so many ways to eat a damn pizza slice.

“Hot chick at three o’clock,” I whispered conspiratorially and took a noisy slurp of my cola.

“Dad,” Yosh said with a stern glare, “That girl is way underage. Are you some kind of pedophile?”

“Not for me. I was thinking you could ask her out,” I gave him a knowing wink.

“She’s not my type,” he said with a shrug.

“Of course she’s your type,” I scoffed, elbowing him. “She’s my type, so she has to be your type.”

r y a n ' s c l o n e

“No,” Yosh corrected patiently. “I’m looking at a girl who’s wearing too much makeup and jewelry. She probably doesn’t know anything about literature or cult films, and I can just imagine the vacuous, drooling stare she’d give me if I brought up current events.”

“Ummm...” I intoned with a frown.

“However,” Yosh continued, “when I get to be your age and the ‘dirty old man’ genes kick into action...” he left off with a big goofy grin.

I smirked and shook my head, “You little shit.”

“Pervert,” he retorted.

“Hey,” I snapped in a mock disciplinarian tone, “she’s probably legal.”

“In West Virginia maybe,” he laughed. “That girl’s like 15 years old.”

“Don’t forget you’re half West Virginian,” I countered.

“Yeah... Thanks for that legacy,” he said sarcastically.

“You should ask that girl out,” I said, between bites of spinach pastry.

“Dad,” Yosh warned.

“What?” I shrugged defensively. “You should. It’s a good exercise. Don’t you have a class dance coming up soon?”

He rolled his eyes, “Ring dance.”

I loved it when he did that, my own father hated it, “So you should ask her out to that. It’s a good practice at social interactions.”

“I’ve already got a plan for Ring Dance,” he countered, sipping soda through a straw, “I’m gonna sit outside with some friends and laugh at the kids attending it.”

I frowned, “That’s what I did.”

“I know,” he said. “Grandma told me.”

“Yeah, that was pretty cool,” I acknowledged, “but I should have gone. We can mock school social functions for their institutional nature, but their intentions are good. It’s practice for dating and sex; otherwise, you’ll be all neurotic about it like me. A few high school dances will break you in, show you it’s not a big deal.”

“I’m too busy with my intellectual pursuits,” Yosh said.

“I call bullshit,” I said with a smirk. “You think I don’t recognize my own rationalizations?”

c l o n e s

He didn't answer, only looked at his plate, and I decided to let the matter drop.

"Grandma says you should have married before having me," Yosh said after a bit.

"Yeah, well, Grandma..."

"Other kids have mothers," he noted. "It gets them in touch with their feminine side."

"My overly sensitive feminine side is the problem," I pushed my glasses up on my nose.

"Other kids have two grandmothers," Yosh went to push his glasses up on his nose, and remembered the eye surgery had made them obsolete.

"Maybe technically," I acknowledged with a shrug, "but not all kids get to meet their grandparents. Many die before the grandkids are born."

"But those are not..." he rushed to counter and watched his mouth catch up to the idea his mind was trying to express, "conscious decisions. You chose to have a clone that wouldn't have a mother or maternal grandparents."

"Technically," I raised a finger, "you do have two pair of grandparents: mine. We both have the same grandparents, and the woman you call grandma is really your genetic mother."

He slouched in his chair and took a noisy slurp of cola, "So my mother and grandmother are the same person."

"You have two possible perspectives on the same woman," I nodded my head. "Genetically she's your mother. Generationally she's your grandmother. It's all how you look at it."

Yosh sulked noticeably, "Whatta gip."

"Yeah," I grinned and nodded in agreement.

We sat in silence again, exhaustion from the day's explorations catching up to our immobile selves. The blood diverting from our extremities to our digestive tracks in response to the carbohydrate influx was adding to the slow down. My droopy eyes found his and I gave him a goofy grin.

"What now?" he asked, wiping his lips with a napkin.

I pointed at the line of movie posters leading into the multiplex cinema I'd been eyeballing absentmindedly during our lunch, "We've got a whole afternoon to kill. That's like three or four movies. Right?"

"Dad..." Yosh began sternly.

r y a n ' s c l o n e

“Eight bucks to watch movies all afternoon?” I cocked an eyebrow. “You don’t want to exploit the system?”

“Buy one ticket and hop theaters till midnight,” he shook his head. “One of these days we’re gonna get caught.”

“Is that a bad thing? What’s the worse that would happen? They’d kick us out?” I argued. “Really it would be a good thing... a character-building experience.”

We exchanged looks for a moment and both broke into peals of laughter.

“Come on,” he said standing up with a beckoning wave. “We can just make the four o’clock showing of that new horror film, ‘Humunculus.’”

clones collective

An Invitation to Speculation

The Clones Collective blog is an experiment in creative writing. We want to hear about **your** clone. Why did you have yourself cloned? What aspects of your personality do you think would change if you had grown up with yourself as a parent? What activities do you see yourself engaging in with your younger self?

Or you can explore some entirely different aspect of the potential cultural impacts of cloning. It's the *exercise in creative futurism*, predicting the future in such a way that provides insights to the present, that most intrigues us.

Stories of any length and format are welcome. A popular new format is flash fiction, a story told in under 600 words. We are also happy to accept previously-published content. So, if you've written a flash fiction piece, consider submitting it to 365 Tomorrows (365tomorrows.com) first, and then pass it along to us after they publish it.

Join the conversation at:

clonescollective.com

