

The Book of Adam: Part I
Autobiography of the First Human Clone

by Adam Elwell-2

A Novella by Robert M. Hopper

Part I of IV in *The Book of Adam*

For Complete Series Information:

<http://www.robhopper.com/>

Copyright© 2009 by Doublethumb Press at Smashwords

Smashwords Edition

License Notes:

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each person you share it with. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then you should return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

A baby is an inestimable blessing and bother.

– Mark Twain

PROLOGUE

Nine months after I died, my daughter gave birth to me.

It was more than fifty years after my birth when I first saw the recording of our umbilical cord being severed.

“May I hold him?”

I caught my breath. I hadn’t heard my mother’s voice in so many years. Her gentle intonations conjured forgotten memories of an old form of happiness, before shadows of loss and sadness began to dampen even the best times.

I walked toward my mom’s holographic image, my fingertips trying to touch the laser plasma that comprised her face. She looked so much younger than the images in my mind. Her blond hair untouched by gray, her smooth cheeks and chin unblemished by worry, her blue-gray eyes still looking like those of a child delighting in an unexpected present.

Her name was Sarah. She was the daughter of the man I was cloned from. And she had just become the mother of her father’s clone with my birth. Or “Adam’s Rebirth,” as the home video was labeled. A video discovered in one of my Grandma Lily’s storage boxes.

Lily is in the holotape as well, hovering nearby as the nurse begins wiping off my small body. “Is Adam okay?”

I tense when I hear my great-grandfather voice from behind. Lyle Gardener, the man who recorded the event. The man who made human cloning possible. I turn to see the doctor and Lyle reviewing the medical scans. “Everything’s in order,” Lyle says. “Fingers, toes, organs, and brain.”

“But is it really Adam? I mean, his soul?” Lily asks. “Does he remember me?”

The nurse finishes my initial cleaning. Lily opens her arms to receive me, but frowns as the nurse instead walks to Sarah’s side. She eases my newborn body into my mother’s arms. My tiny head wobbles so that my face looks up at hers. Naturally, on that night of March 11, 2034, I did not yet realize that my mother within whose womb I had spent the previous nine months was the newborn daughter I had once cradled in my own arms.

“You have a beautiful soul,” my mom says, smiling before kissing me on my forehead and nose. “I love you, Michael,” she whispers, calling me by my middle name as she cradles me to her, not bothering to wipe away her tears, breathing in the scent of her newborn who had moments before been a part of her own body.

I notice my own tears as my fingertips again attempt to somehow touch the 52-year-old images around me. Did I have a soul? If so, part of it must have come from my mother. Sarah's hologram closes her eyes as she gently rocks me back and forth, humming a familiar lullaby. She seems to have become oblivious to everything else. Oblivious to her mother and grandfather, to the doctor and nurses. Even to the throngs of people who had gathered outside the hospital in spite of a thunderstorm, the din of which I can just hear in the background.

A couple of the bystanders were awed; awed at me, awed at science, awed at the uncertain future my birth represented. The other thousand-plus were protesting "The Blasphemous Birth," the baby created not by God, but by humans who believed they were gods. They saw the thunderstorm as a sign from an angry deity proclaiming the end of the world. As did Gabrielle Burns, the drenched woman standing quietly to the side, her calm face upturned to the hospital room window – the woman who would eventually murder my mother.

Even if I had known all this, my reaction would have been the same: the newborn image of me began to cry. A sure "sign" that the first human clone was a healthy baby boy, soul or not.

A half-century later, and the end of the world still has yet to arrive. What did come to an end was my early fame. The widespread furor over my existence occurred while I was still the only clone, too young to realize what was going on, or to comfort my mother who bore the brunt of it. Cloned births became commonplace while I was still a child, removing me from the spotlight and affording me a mostly private life, if still not a peaceful one.

So why call renewed attention to myself by writing an autobiography? In part, I'd like to set straight the rumors attached to my life. In part, I've decided to sell my questionable soul for an embarrassingly large advance from my publisher.

But it's much more than that. Since my earliest memories, I've been told that I would be seen as the primary example of human cloning, and that humanity's acceptance or rejection of human cloning might depend on how I was perceived. By writing this autobiography I hope to give others some insight as to what it was like to be the world's first human clone. I hope to help fellow clones deal with similar issues, and help convince non-clones that we are all human beings. Whether we are conceived naturally by a mother and father or, as in my case, manufactured in a laboratory from the cells of dead ancestors, we are neither more nor less perfect than others.

Most importantly, I hope to convince myself of this.

My dead ancestor's name was Adam Silva Elwell, after my birth referred to as Adam Elwell-1, and he was my grandpa. Or, as far as some people are concerned, he was I. Which is why, unlike most autobiographies, the story of my life begins some sixty years before I was born.

Part I:

The Book of Sarah

I used to almost wish I hadn't any ancestors, they were so much trouble to me.
– Mark Twain

1

I was born too early.

That was how it began.

I received the journal of my clone-father on my eighteenth birthday. He handwrote his memoir late in life in the hope that his next birth – my birth – would correct the mistake of his initial one. I read it for the first time while sitting next to his grave, the setting of my recurrent nightmares since I was very young.

Adam-1 was born at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center on the sunny morning of June 12, 1974 to Michael and Sarah Elwell. Born too early. And his childhood stolen from him too early.

As his father opened the door, Adam walked into the hospital room alone where his mother lay. He had to force his legs forward. His chin was trembling before he reached the bed. He felt like he should say something but didn't know what, as if he'd forgotten how to talk to his mother. As if the person he loved most in the world was a stranger.

She looked like a stranger. Her bald head. Her emaciated body. Sarah made a weak smile, and then lightly petted his head. Neither said a word. There was only her shallow breathing and the sound of nurses passing outside the door.

The silence wasn't broken until his mother began reciting familiar lines from their favorite book, *The Hobbit*, as Bilbo Baggins joins the quest, leaving his hobbit hole and setting off on his adventure.

Adam hid his eyes against her shoulder. He wanted to be near her, but he didn't want to see her like this.

"I know, sweetie. I know," she soothed. She kissed his head.

"Please don't die," he begged.

Sarah sighed. "I think I have to go, honey. I have to go on this adventure. But we'll meet again in Aslan's Country, okay?"

Adam didn't answer. That was just another story they'd read. Made-up stories like the kind his father wrote. Places like Aslan's Country and the Heaven mentioned in their ancient family Bible could be equally imaginary.

He held her tighter. She kissed him again.

"I love you, sweetie."

"I love you too, Mommy," he cried, but choked at the end.

She made a similar sound, as if mocking him. He felt her shudder and then relax. He pulled away, looking into her blue-gray eyes. They stared blankly through him, her chapped lips only slightly parted.

He prodded her timidly on the shoulder to wake her. The movement made her mouth fall open.

Adam jumped and must have screamed something. His father opened the door and a nurse rushed in behind him. Michael clutched him to his body and gently held his dead wife's hand.

"We'll get that," the nurse said to Michael, glancing at the floor. Adam looked down and saw that he stood in a puddle of his own urine.

His Aunt Mary pulled him out into the hallway and wiped his shoes. Michael came out of the room several minutes later, his face pale, eyes red and puffy. He embraced his son for a long time. Then he straightened up and slowly, silently led them out of the hospital.

Fifty years after his mother's death, Adam was dying on a hospital bed.

"Where's Sarah?" he asked, words he'd repeated for a half hour as the poison paralyzing his extremities moved slowly towards his heart.

"She's on her way," Lily answered again, more wearily by then. But Adam died minutes before his mother's namesake, his daughter Sarah, rushed into the room.

His last journal entry, written the night before his death, appears to be an attempt to reassure himself: "It's with great fear I end my life, but the hope outweighs it. With this cup I'll escape the Gardeners, and have another mother named Sarah. My hemlock is not the cup of death. It is the cup of new life. The life I should have had."

Yet I often wonder what was going through his mind as oblivion approached. Did he second-guess himself, wondering whether his dream of living forever had just slipped through his fingers of his own volition, fearing that he would never exist again?

Regardless, less than an hour after he arrived at the hospital, the man who had once sworn to himself that he'd never die was dead by his own hand. His murderer was never found.

Sarah reached the hospital shortly afterwards, Lyle Gardener a bit later. While Lyle talked with the doctors in Adam's room, Sarah tried to comfort Lily in a private office. Sarah told her mother how fortunate it was that Adam saved her by knocking the glass of poisoned wine from her hand, but Lily was despondent.

"I wish I'd drunk it too," she mumbled, a shoulder strap of her evening gown dangling around her elbow.

Sarah grabbed her arm. "Mom! How could you say that?"

"I can't imagine life without him. There's nothing for me now."

Sarah was quiet for a while. The last statement stung. She thought of her father's clone with whom she'd soon be implanted, and wondered whether mentioning it would help her mother. On the other hand, she'd long since determined that her father's clone would not be made to feel like he was the original Adam, but instead be raised to believe he was his own individual free to live any life he chose. It wouldn't be right to tell her mother that Adam would soon be alive again.

"Adam would have wanted you to enjoy your life after him," Sarah said as she righted her mom's strap. "That's why he knocked your glass away. If you don't go on, then the murderer will have succeeded in killing you both in spite of Dad's efforts."

Lily shook her head, then leaned slowly into her daughter's arms and cried quietly on Sarah's shoulder.

"Besides," Sarah continued as she found a more comfortable position in which to embrace her mother, "I'm going to need your help raising my son."

Lily stopped her sobbing. After a minute she raised her head from Sarah's shoulder and looked her daughter in the eye, a glimmer of a smile on the widow's lips. "You're right. We have to be strong for Adam's rebirth. That's what he wanted."

Sarah smiled at her mother's brightening, but worried over her choice of words. Adam's rebirth. Perhaps she'd made a mistake in mentioning Adam's clone.

Within a couple weeks of Adam's death, a fetus was growing within the womb of his 33-year-old daughter. In that way my daughter would become my mother and, just like the old vaudeville song, I would become "my own grandpaw."

As he'd been the CEO of the widely known U.S. Cloning Systems, Adam's murder received some press. But it was nothing compared to the commotion over Adam's rebirth when it was announced six months later. Sarah's pregnancy was made public January 2, 2034 in a news conference that began with a low buzz (reporters figured USCS had made another boring, minor medical breakthrough) and quickly erupted into a firestorm that blazed among satellites, televisions, cell phones, computer monitors, and every radio tower on the planet.

It wasn't the first time such an announcement had been made. In 2004 the Raelians claimed to have cloned dozens of children, and by 2034 several more supposedly successful human cloning attempts had been proclaimed – none of which had been scientifically verified. But the world knew this announcement was different. U.S. Cloning Systems was a giant in its field, the organization most capable of pulling off such an achievement.

Two months of chaos followed. Politicians convened from recess early to argue and spout off sound bites. There were calls for more intensive government oversight of all companies dabbling in the science of cloning. Religious leaders invited the largest protests, some demanding that the company be shut down, the executives jailed, the mother jailed, and the baby taken away so that it would never know it was a clone. A few extremists even suggested the baby should simply be killed. Some argued that since abortion was legal, and cloning was illegal, killing me while in the womb was the only legal remedy. Others argued that it was not a child of God, did not have a soul, and therefore lacked the precious quality that gives humans their right to life.

Then came the next big revelation. One of the obstetricians let slip that my mother was a virgin.

Post-Mary virgin births had been documented going back to at least 1994 thanks to artificial insemination, and none of those births had resulted in a devil so far as anyone could prove. But for some, the new development made it clearer than ever that the Antichrist was on his way, mocking the original Virgin Birth. Others assumed my mom was a lesbian, stoking the homophobic fear that this was the beginning of a social revolution in which homosexuals would breed through cloning and propagate an unnatural family structure that would decimate life as we know it.

My mother attracted more attention than the baby she was carrying. Her doctors and USCS were largely successful in keeping the press and public physically away from her, but she did answer what questions she could via USCS spokespeople. As for whether she was gay, she stated that her virginity was due to a fear of sexual intimacy stemming from a childhood incident, but that she had no problem with people believing she was gay. She was simply saddened by the bigots who attacked lesbians to make themselves feel more righteous.

In response to the question of her fetus being the Antichrist, she said that it was only a clone created with her father's DNA, which had been fused into her egg, mingling it with traces of her mitochondrial DNA. This made it even less clone-like than an identical twin, and unlikely to carry any genetic material from Satan.

Asked if she felt the endeavor bordered on incest, she answered that in her opinion it would only have been incest if the DNA *hadn't* been artificially inseminated.

And finally, as to why she had broken the law against human cloning, she replied that, although she personally was not interested in being cloned, she was of a mind that if she wasn't hurting someone physically or financially, then no true crime had been committed. Thus she didn't condone the anti-cloning law, which she felt was another example of government over-involvement in the lives of its constituents. More importantly, it was what her father wanted, and if she hadn't been willing to deliver his clone, he would have used an artificial womb. And unlike her critics, she wanted his clone to start with as normal a beginning as possible.

Within weeks, criminal charges were filed against USCS and Sarah Elwell for violating anti-cloning legislation. There were even attempts to file lawsuits against me, claiming that Adam Elwell-1 had broken the law and that, as Adam Elwell's clone, I should be held accountable as the same person.

Cooler heads prevailed. The courts ruled that I was a separate person and therefore not legally responsible for the sins of my clone-father. Although, it turns out, that was merely the tip of the legal iceberg. What rights and assets carried over? Was it now possible to take it with you? Questions over inheritance claims and more would require decades to iron out and, indeed, occasionally new cloning issues continue to crop up and befuddle my colleagues and me on the Genetics and Cloning Board.

Regarding USCS, they made it out of the courts relatively unscathed. As has often been the case, the well-connected corporate executives were never brought to justice. Lyle Gardener, a good friend of the administration and congressional power brokers, escaped all culpability by arguing he knew nothing about the secret experiments until he was told of the pregnancy. The company paid a small fine and was opened up to federal oversight. But the oversight proved to be lax to the point of insignificance.

The only fervor that didn't subside was that of the religious conservatives, including those who had never supported abortion until my case. One group tried to get a court to order my termination, claiming that to not do so would violate the anti-cloning laws. But the courts shied away from forced abortion. Other self-proclaimed Pro-Lifers suggested I be executed immediately after birth.

Several people were eager to end my mother's life as well, and USCS hired bodyguards for her. They proved helpful. There were two known attempts on her life before I was born. The murder attempts and threats were played up by the media, eventually garnering sympathy from the majority of the population who began to see the anti-cloners as the extremists. Thanks to those few fanatics, the paradigm shift that USCS had hoped for was underway ahead of schedule. Which I guess is why a couple of those demonstrators out there on the dark and stormy night of my birth were there to welcome me into the world.

My clone-father had asked that I be named Adam, and my mother followed his wishes. Instead of Adam Silva Elwell, I was christened Adam Michael Elwell-2 – the “Michael” for Adam-1’s father and the “-2” to indicate I was the second person to use the DNA. But while everyone else called me Adam or Adam-2, Mom always called me Michael or Mikey.

I don’t remember the tempestuous night of my birth captured on the holovideo found in my Grandma Lily’s belongings. The night that protestors cursed my existence while the rest of the world watched uneasily as news footage of the first human clone was broadcast, finally giving the monstrosity a face. But a face that looked less like Frankenstein’s monster and more like the Gerber baby.

Nor do I remember a time when I didn’t know that I was the clone of the man I considered my grandfather. Grandmother Lily and Great-Grandfather Lyle talked about him all the time, often comparing me to him physically or in little habits I had like not wanting to get my hands dirty at the beach. Grandmother Lily visited almost every day, forcing herself between my toys and me, or clutching me to her body. Great-Grandfather Lyle never touched me except to put me on his knee every now and then. He always seemed to be examining me, and he made me self-conscious whenever he was around. Mom rescued me as often as she could from both of them. I counted on her for that. More than I realized.

Each birthday there were letters and holocards from my late grandfather congratulating me on another year, telling me that he knew I was making him proud and that he hoped I was being a good boy for Sarah. As I grew older the handwritten letters, videos and holovideos would give me far more information about him and glimpses into his life, but during my early childhood they gave me only the feeling that Grandpa Adam was the nice man whose holographic ghost I would sit in the lap of while he wished me happy birthday, and whose genes (whatever those were) had made my life possible, and that this gave us a connection that was very special in some peculiar way.

I never had any reason to think there was anything special about myself in the eyes of the rest of the world. Mom didn’t watch the news much while I was awake. I did go to the doctors for tests and checkups every few days, but I assumed this was normal. The street I grew up on was a small, secluded court in an old section of La Jolla, and the few neighbors we met often stared at me but rarely said anything, and exchanged nothing but pleasantries with my mother. And by the time I was four years old, dozens of more clones were born and the media only cared about me when my birthday rolled around. Thus, when I began to form lasting memories, I was not recognized in public. People recognized my mother first and then realized who I must be.

My mom never did go to jail. A jury sentenced her to one year’s probation for her part in the illegal cloning. She left her job in child counseling to spend time with her new baby, and didn’t really want to leave the house much anyway. Her inheritance from my clone-father assured her a lifetime of financial security, so she began working from home, volunteering for the United Nation’s UNICEF program, but mostly just playing with me, teaching me, and saving me from Lily and Lyle.

Even as my mother's trial was going on, others had begun challenging the constitutionality of the anti-cloning legislation. A few atheists claimed that a cloning ban deprived them of the only sort of afterlife they could hope to have, and was therefore an infringement on their basic rights of life, liberty, and happiness – not to mention their freedom of religion, as their “religion” required them to be able to clone in order to reach their afterlife. A few new religious sects, including Christian offshoots, followed the same reasoning, arguing that cloning was the resurrection or reincarnation that their religions had been expecting, and they hadn't realized till now that God or the spirit world would use human methods to resurrect or reincarnate the dead.

Those were intriguing cases that were initially defeated in 2034 and 2035. A few requests from death row inmates to be cloned were quickly thrown out as well. But in early 2036 the landmark cloning case began winding its way up through the courts.

Shannon Smith had captured the hearts of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in 2034, during the midst of the terrible Mideast War. More than three million were already dead, including almost 200,000 civilian Americans murdered in a string of terrorist attacks. The escalation to nuclear war seemed as inevitable as it must have felt during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Ten-year-old Shannon wrote to Iran's ayatollah, asking him if he wanted to kill all Christians and Jews, and saying she hoped everybody would stop fighting and live with each other in peace as God wanted.

She was invited to Tehran for an audience with the ayatollah and then Jerusalem with the Israeli prime minister. The media and the people were fascinated by the sweet, adorable girl, and the video of her playing with Iranian and Jewish girls in Jerusalem helped galvanize the public of all warring countries to reject vengeance and come back from the brink, giving political cover to leaders to end the war.

On August 25, 2035, a young, obsessive fan kidnapped Shannon, drove her up into the mountains east of Salt Lake, and strangled her. The New York Times called her the last casualty of the Mideast War.

Her parents claimed that they had the right to have another child using Shannon's DNA. Not allowing Shannon to be cloned would perpetuate the murderer's deed, and her parents deserved access to full reparation. In extenuating circumstances, the mother's health problems left her body with no viable eggs, and the parents claimed that Shannon had expressed an interest in eventually being cloned when she saw Adam-2 in the news.

In a shocking 5-4 decision, the Supreme Court agreed with the parents. They told Congress that, as it stood, the anti-cloning law was an unconstitutional restriction on reproductive rights, recommending that cloning be allowed in cases where the original person was dead or in the case of couples who couldn't reproduce naturally. A defiant Congress tried to pass an anti-cloning constitutional amendment, but the Senate failed to get the two-thirds majority by three votes. Lyle Gardener had powerful friends.

USCS worked their cloning magic on Shannon Smith and more than twenty others before Shannon-2 was born in November 2037. That year and the next saw a rash of new cloned births,

all performed through USCS whose competitors were still behind in the race to commercialize the process. For most people, I was old news.

The Smiths lived in Salt Lake City, but they flew down to La Jolla for the cloning procedure and returned a few months after Shannon-2's birth to meet our family. I had recently turned four, and their visit was one of my strongest memories from that period of my life. They told me that she was only the second cloned child. I still didn't completely understand what being a clone meant or how it made us special from everyone else, but it was the first clue that in some way I was considered a unique person in the world.

The adults holotaped the historic meeting, took a lot of pictures and chatted, and I marveled at this tiny visitor who grasped her tiny fingers around mine as I bent over her carriage. We were destined to meet a couple more times at special functions as we grew up, and eventually became long-distance friends as adults. She also would join me as one of the members of the Genetics and Cloning Board.

"What was grandpa like?" I asked the night the Smiths left.

My mother smiled as she continued buttoning up my shirt, getting me ready for church. "Well, like all people, he had his good and his bad. He was really depressed when his mommy died. He was only seven, just three years older than you are now. Then your Great-Grandpa Michael died too, and your grandpa was really sad and lonely."

I put my hand on my mom's shoulder as I stepped into my shoes. "But you still liked him?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, laughing. "I loved him. Whenever I was sad and lonely, he always tried to make me happy. He loved me a lot." Finished tying my shoes, she playfully held both my feet down so I couldn't move. "He told me I reminded him of how much fun life was when he was your age. And that's one reason why I want you to be whoever you want to be, and not just try to be who your grandpa was. I think he may have wanted you to live the life he started before his mommy and daddy died. So if you grow up to be whatever you want, you'll end up making you both happy. Okay?"

I nodded, though I don't remember fully understanding.

That night I dreamt my first dream about my c-father. I was ensnared in the clutches of an ugly, cackling witch who had chased me through the rooms of Disneyland's Haunted Mansion. Her fingernails grew into long, curling claws and closed around me like a cage.

"I've got you now, Adam! And you'll be with me here forever," she said, and gleefully cackled again.

"He isn't yours to keep," my clone-father said from behind her.

She turned on him and hissed like a cat. "He's mine! I've caught him!"

“Take me instead!” he responded, another Disneyland fragment from their staging of *Beauty and the Beast*.

She grinned hungrily, released me and snatched Adam-1 in her tangled claws.

“Run away,” he ordered.

“Daddy!” I called, reaching out to him. “I won’t leave you!”

He looked at me sadly, defeated. “This is my home. Not yours.”

And so I awoke with mixed feelings, thankful he had saved me, disappointed he had sent me away. It was the first time I remember wanting a dad. The next time I opened my birthday letters from my Grandpa or sat in his holographic lap, I did it with new eagerness, sensing that he cared for me and wanted to protect me, even though he had never met me.

Shortly thereafter I had my first brush with death.

4

There hadn’t been an attempt on my mother’s life since her pregnancy, and with us out of the limelight there seemed little reason to believe we were still in danger. But no one realized that Gabrielle Burns was still obsessed with us, stalking us, as she had the night of my birth.

She had dreamed of being a mother since she was old enough to play house, but Gabrielle suffered a miscarriage eight months into her first pregnancy. Complications left her barren. A few years later her husband divorced her, promptly married his mistress, and they had a child together.

Gabrielle became intimately involved in a fundamentalist church where she formed the Cassandra Society, a group named after her unborn daughter, that lobbied and railed against the evils of abortion, extra-marital sex, birth control, artificial wombs and any sort of human intervention in the miracle of life.

She claimed that when she heard the first human clone was going to be born, her namesake, the Archangel Gabriel, told her that a great mission had been granted her. Cloning would doom mankind if she didn’t stop it. Humans would seek eternal life through their own means, forever trapping their souls in new bodies, never allowing those souls to reach God. Therefore, God was sending her to save humanity from itself.

Her first step was to send several urgent letters to Sarah warning her of the evil the clone would visit upon humanity. As March approached and it became clear that the clone would be born despite her warnings, Gabrielle changed tactics. First was a death threat. When that went unheeded, one of Gabrielle’s minions in her Cassandra Society posed as a nurse and tried to get into Sarah’s room with a silver knife. Nobody tied the attempt to Gabrielle until later.

That first attempt was foiled on March 5. Six days later, as news footage revealed, Gabrielle stood silently outside the hospital in the pouring rain as the devil baby was delivered. She did not join her colleagues and like-minded protestors who were screaming that doom was being born in a soulless child, for she knew it was a waste of breath. Gabriel had come to her that night in a flash of lightning and peal of thunder, bearing a message that the evil would be unleashed, and it would be protected by demons for four years, four months, and four days.

At the end of the time of his protection, the hand of God would scatter the demons, and Gabrielle was to strike down the Whore of Babylon and her unholy spawn. Her reward would be to become the Bride of Christ, and she would give birth to the child she had long desired – to the triumphant Christ Child himself.

The long-awaited four years, four months, and four days did not come soon enough for Gabrielle. A couple months before the appointed day, my mother and I met her in a park. While sitting on a bench feeding the birds on a Sunday afternoon, we were approached by a lanky, redheaded woman wearing a white dress. Her narrow face was mostly nondescript but for her large, dark eyes. The stranger asked if she could join us. Mom courteously encouraged her, and she sat next to me.

“You two look so familiar,” she said after watching the birds peck at our bread for a while.

Mom nodded. “I’m Sarah, and this is Adam.”

“Oh yes, of course!” she said with such false surprise that Mom wordlessly asked me to get off the bench and stand in front of her. “My name is Gabrielle. I’m about to be a mother too, you know. Isn’t it a wonderful thing, being a mother?”

“Yes it is,” Sarah replied, grabbing me from behind and tickling me. “Especially when you’ve got such a great kid!”

The woman frowned but then managed a faint smile. “Well, you’re all dressed up, aren’t you? Did you just come from church?”

“Uh-huh,” Mom responded. “We go to a Unitarian Universalist church. The minister there invited us while most were condemning us.”

“How nice for you. The Unitarians are very tolerant, aren’t they.”

It wasn’t a question, and Mom didn’t answer. Her eye had caught one of the stranger’s hands, which was clasped around something she couldn’t make out. But it had her attention.

“So many people are not that tolerant,” Gabrielle continued. “You never know what they’re going to do. They can take such a small thing as cloning and make it sound like it’s the end of the world.”

“Yes,” Mom said, “it’s people like that who will probably cause the end of the world. But I don’t think it’s the end yet.”

“No, not yet,” Gabrielle agreed. “But it will be a glorious day when it arrives and we can all be wed to God.”

Mom gave her a polite nod.

“But then you already are wed to God, aren’t you? The virgin mother?”

The question was so ridiculous that Mom didn’t initially notice the thorn of jealousy embedded in the woman’s voice. “Well, Adam can be a little angel at times,” she said, “but calling him the Son of God may be a stretch.”

“The son of whom, then?” Gabrielle asked, reaching out to awkwardly pet my head. I moved away from her, and Mom guided me to her other side.

“I guess that’s a question, isn’t it?” Mom admitted. “The son of his clone-father? The son of his clone-father’s parents? My son? Nobody’s son? But I don’t worry too much about his scientific classification – just so long as he lives a good, long, happy life. Probably the same as all mothers want.”

“Indeed,” the woman said. “That’s what all us mothers want.” She clenched her fist tighter in her lap, and we both saw a trickle of blood roll down her hand.

Mom stood up. “I’m sorry, but we have to go.”

“I’m sure we’ll meet again,” Gabrielle said, staying put and studying us over her blood-splattered lap.

Her eyes locked with Mom’s for a moment, and then Mom pulled me away.

5

On July 15, 2038, I woke to the soft, clear morning of the fourth year, fourth month, and fourth day after my birth.

My mother took me to the beach at La Jolla Shores, a short walk from our house. Gabrielle followed us there.

We set out our blanket on the sand, stripped down to our swimsuits, sprayed on our Detox Sunblox and walked down to the water. As one of the last local people-safe beaches, and with only a narrow strip of sand to its name, La Jolla Shores was packed towel-to-towel that morning. But it didn’t matter to Gabrielle if there were witnesses to the assassination. She didn’t pretend to know what God had planned for her after she fulfilled her mission. Perhaps she was to be

despised as a child murderer, or perhaps she was to be protected and even revered by people everywhere as God opened their eyes to the prophecy she was fulfilling, saving them all. It didn't matter. The most important thing was that she would have performed God's will, and would be rewarded with her own child by God himself.

As we made our way down to the water, God's brilliant plan sparkled ever clearer. Christ had washed away the sins of the world through baptism. God needed the entire Pacific Ocean to wash away *our* sin. Gabrielle followed us to the water's edge and waited.

Mom and I stopped when the water reached my waist. Holding hands, we awaited the next wave and jumped as it struck us, laughing as it swept us a little toward the beach, then preparing to do it again. The return water sucked the wet sand from under my feet, tickling, and looping some seaweed around my ankle. I tried to shake it free before the next wave came.

As we waited holding hands for the oncoming wave, my mother inexplicably turned toward the beach. A tall woman slightly older than herself and wearing a long white skirt and blouse was calmly walking through the water, only ten feet away, dark eyes fixed on us with an expression of jubilant peace. Walking into the water fully clothed. Coming directly toward us. Then mom recognized her – the disturbed woman from the park. Shouting something about “the finger of God.” The sun reflected off an object in her hand. A silver knife.

All that happened in a couple seconds, but by then Gabrielle was upon us.

The wave hit us, I jumped into it, and suddenly it was pulling me a few feet towards the shore. My mom had let go of my hands. She never let go of my hands! I floundered and spat out some seawater, my hands sunk into the muddy bottom. Then I heard my mother scream for help. I stood up in time to see her struggling with the woman in white.

As they fell over into the water, a couple of men splashed out to our rescue. One of them disarmed the woman and pinned her down while the other helped my mother to the shore. A lifeguard was sprinting over with a first aid kit. There was so much blood. The woman was screaming something about the “Whore of Babylon.” I ran clumsily out of the water to my mother's side.

“Don't worry, son. She's gonna be fine,” said one of the men who had rescued us.

I was too scared and confused to take it all in, but my mom gave me a comforting smile as they tied a tourniquet on her upper arm. Soon an ambulance was on the scene, and they helped us into it.

“Don't let them get away!” screamed the woman. “Can't you see them?”

As the paramedics gave me a seat next to my mother's gurney, a patrol jeep stopped near the shore and collected Gabrielle Burns. Her eyes found me through the ambulance window. I turned from her and watched as the paramedics worked on my mom.

“I’m okay,” she mouthed to me, and smiled.

I tried to nod, but couldn’t return the smile. It did reassure me. I believed she’d be okay. But not because of me. I had just stood there in the water as she had fought with the woman. She could have died. And I’d just stood there.

6

The hearing that followed revealed the details of Gabrielle’s life and her obsession with my mother and me, but found her mentally incompetent to stand trial. She was sent to the psychiatric ward at Standley Memorial Hospital in La Jolla.

My mom was far more nervous from then on, especially as the year progressed. Gabrielle Burns wasn’t the only Christian soldier out to rid the world of clones. Possibly inspired by Gabrielle’s attack, seventeen clone babies would be murdered by the end of 2038 alone. A member of the Cassandra Society sent mail bombs to four families with clone babies, killing eleven people, and then martyred herself when the police came to arrest her. Eight clones were killed by Allen Fisher in widely publicized ritual murders that included torture and cannibalism. We rarely left the house by ourselves for a long time to come.

Reverend Al Lewis, who lived nearby, began picking us up on Sundays for church, contending that we were less likely to be attacked if we were in the company of a minister. But his wife and their son Jack, who was a few months older than me, began driving to church separately. I realized much later that Reverend Lewis was still afraid we would be attacked, and he didn’t want to place his family in harm’s way. He knew he was risking his life helping us get to church.

I wish I’d known so that I could have thanked him.

During the weeks that followed the attack, Mom and I would often stay after the sermon and chat with Reverend Lewis in his private office. They were therapy sessions, but that was never mentioned, and I thought we were doing it because he had some office work to do before driving us back to our house. He shuffled papers around as he talked, like he was casually chatting with me as he got some filing done.

“Do you still feel scared about what happened on the beach?” he asked one Sunday.

“Sometimes,” I said. I didn’t want to talk about it.

“Do you know why Mrs. Burns did it?”

“She said it was because she was a Christian,” I answered. Almost blaming him.

Reverend Lewis nodded. “That is confusing, isn’t it? What’s important to understand is, just because a lot of people call themselves ‘Christians,’ they don’t all believe the same things or treat people the same way. No sir.”

“Why not?”

“Well, because everyone’s different, and we all have different ways of looking at the world and other people, and we’ve all got different ways of interpreting what we read in the Bible and what we feel in our hearts. One person can read the Bible and believe that God wants you to seek out possible sinners and stone them to death, while another person can read the very same Bible and believe that God doesn’t want you to judge others, and that He wants you to try to love and respect and forgive everyone and treat each other like equals. You can either believe in a god of love and charity, or a god of hate, greed, and fear. In the end, the kind of god you believe in reveals much more about your own nature than it reveals about the true nature of God.”

I just stared blankly. He tried to clarify.

“You see, some people, like Gabrielle Burns and those who support her or who hate you because of the way you were born, they read the Bible and think that you’re evil, and that God hates you for it, and that they should hate you as well. Although some of them might call that hate ‘love’ so it sounds like they’re still loving their neighbor. You know, just because someone says they’re doing something out of love doesn’t mean they’re not really doing it out of hate.”

I didn’t know that, but before I could say so, he went on.

“Those Christians look for differences and for sins, and believe it’s their duty to root out such things and label them as evil. But other Christians think that’s wrong. When they read the Bible, they see a loving God who wants people to be good and kind to everyone, and who wants people not to judge one another but to treat everyone like equal neighbors worthy of respect. They think it’s a sin to hate and be cruel to another person when that person isn’t doing anything cruel to them. Jesus says so again and again. He reached out to all the people that his society scorned and ridiculed – the outcasts like the poor, the sick, the tax collectors, the Samaritans, the Roman soldiers, and the prosti—,” he interrupted himself before continuing. “He loved all his neighbors, not just the popular ones. So how would have Jesus treated clones?”

He paused for my answer, but I didn’t know it.

“He would have loved you,” he answered for me, smiling, and making me feel surprisingly comforted. “And if Jesus was wrong, if God wants us to be hateful and cruel to one another, then why would any truly loving person even want to go to that God’s heaven? I surely wouldn’t want to go to some heaven ruled by a mean God who wanted me to treat clones like they were bad people. No sir.”

He conversed the same way he sermonized, a bit long-winded.

“Do you think being a clone is a sin?” My voice shook as I spoke, fearful of both the nature of his answer and its potential length.

Reverend Lewis stopped his filing. "I can't believe being born is ever a sin. No sir," he answered. "It's what you do with your life that matters to God, so long as God is truly good."

A sigh of relief on both counts. Then I pressed my luck. "Do you think cloning is a sin?"

He hesitated with that one, probably not wanting to hurt me but not wanting to lie either. "First of all," he began, and I cringed, "you always have to remember that just because someone says something is a sin doesn't make it so. No sir. That said, I personally believe it's wrong, but from a Christian perspective there's nothing specifically about it in the Bible and, of course, only God really knows for sure. Regardless, I can't believe a loving God would punish us for doing it since he didn't leave any clear instructions on the issue, it promotes life rather than death, it doesn't hurt anyone, and he made it physically possible for it to happen."

I was a little hurt that he thought my being cloned was wrong. But I felt better knowing that God and everyone who called themselves Christians weren't out to kill me. No sir.

7

Besides limiting our freedom of movement and creating tension whenever we went out, the beach attack had the additional unfortunate effect of prompting Grandma Lily to come over more often. If such a thing was possible, she seemed even more paranoid than my mom about my safety.

"He'll be completely home schooled, of course," Lily said to mom one day as she hugged me too tightly in her lap. My *Clone Ranger* coloring book lay on the dining table mere inches out of reach, but it may as well have been in another galaxy.

I saw my mom roll her eyes as she crushed some garlic cloves in the kitchen. Lily always had a lot of free advice to offer, and I'm sure it got on Mom's nerves. Especially since they had significantly different ideas as to how I should be raised.

"He'll go through virtual classes for the standard subjects," Mom said, "and use the Hill Creek Junior Academy for group activities."

"Group activities? But we can do group activities right here!" Lily responded.

"No we can't, Mom. We can't play baseball here or start a band or form a chorus. At the Junior Academy he'll be able to play sports and get involved in the arts and socialize with other kids at lunch and do group science projects and stuff."

"He doesn't need all that crap!"

I think she was so livid she forgot I was on her lap. Grandma didn't usually talk like that.

“Yes he does, and he’s going to get it,” Mom said calmly but firmly. She had a lot of patience with Lily, but I don’t know where she got it.

Lily pouted. “But we don’t know what kind of kids go there. Kids can be very cruel, you know.”

“I know,” Mom said, nodding heavily. “But there are plenty of cruel adults as well. Unfortunately, Mikey will have to learn to deal with cruelty.”

Lily put her face right in front of my nose. The smell of her heavy makeup suffocated me. “You don’t want to go to some nasty old school, do you Adam?”

It’s the question almost every kid dreams about getting asked, but most kids don’t have a Grandma Lily in their face. I didn’t really know what the school thing was all about, but I knew it could get me off her lap and in reach of my coloring book.

“I want to go to school,” I stated as firmly as Mom had.

Lily looked shocked, but Mom grinned. “Well then, it’s settled.”

To my relief, the stratagem worked. Lily dumped me unceremoniously from her lap. “We’ll see what father says,” she said, checking her bejeweled wristwatch while avoiding eye contact with both of us, spoken with a coldness I rarely heard from anyone but Lyle.

Mom stiffened. Like me, she was always uneasy around Lyle. It would be a long time before I knew why. Before I read about the night of her molestation. And how Lyle threatened to kill her and her father if she ever said anything.

Did that memory go through my mom’s mind as she considered her response? Did that memory go through her mind every day of her life?

“Grandfather has no say in the matter.”

“How dare you?” Lily cried. “You’re just trying to take Adam away from me like you always did!”

“What do you mean?”

“You know exactly what I mean. You stole Adam from me as a child, and now you’re doing it all over again.”

“You think I stole Daddy from you?”

“You know you did, but you won’t get away with it this time, Sarah.”

Mom was silent a long time. I stopped coloring and looked at her. Saw her eyes glistening, like they did when she was sad, trying not to let herself cry. It would be another fourteen years before

I fully understood the tension between my mother and grandmother. My c-father's journal made his preference clear:

The little bit of home life I afford myself is more tolerable than I expected, as I'm able to spend most of the time doting on Sarah. She's also a type of immortality – the type that nature has been providing for hundreds of millions of years. She reminds me of my mother. There's an actress's vibrancy and her, and her face has the soft, rounded, girl-next-door features in contrast to Lily's chilly beauty.

In Sarah's eyes I see my mother, and even my own self, before my parents' deaths. She loves out of an inner light that radiates from all people who have a true passion for life and the world around them.

I don't share that passion for the world, but I guess I've always been drawn to those who possess it. I often take her alone to places where I can see that passion at its greatest, to the Zoo and Wild Animal Park – places I'd wanted to go to as a child. And I'll never forget the trip to Scotland to honor the tenth anniversary of the death of Dolly, the first cloned sheep. Watching Sarah's eyes brighten with discovery as we shared the sights and novelties of Scotland and Edinburgh and Dolly. She'd get so excited by the world that she would laugh out loud in delight.

That was something I'd still see my mom doing thirty years later.

Lily was never close to her daughter. She was understandably jealous of Sarah for the true affection Adam showered upon the girl. The Dolly trip was one that especially rankled Lily, as the tenth anniversary of Dolly's death was also Valentine's Day. Adam not only forgot to give her a gift – he only remembered to wish her a Happy Valentine's Day that night after giving Sarah a card. Fortunately for him, it took little for Adam to re-charm his wife. He made love to her, and all was forgiven. Or so it had seemed to him.

I put my crayon down, slipped off my chair, and walked into the kitchen. Mom saw me, smiled a little, and stopped crushing the garlic to pick me up.

"I don't know what you're talking about, Mom," she said, "and I'm sorry if you think I stole Daddy. But Michael is not Daddy, and no matter what you think, he is going to school, and I don't want to hear another word about it from you *or* Grandfather. Is that understood?"

And apparently it was. As far as I knew, Lily never said another word about it to Mom.

Grandma Lily did, however, have a few more words to say to me. It was just a couple weeks after the school argument. Mom had gone out for something and left me alone with Lily. We

were sitting next to each other at the dining table doing some preschool math games. Suddenly she grabbed both my hands in hers and leaned over for greater secrecy, despite the fact that we were alone.

“Tell me, Adam. Do you have any memories from before?”

I had absolutely no idea what she was talking about. I wondered when Mom was coming back, and prayed it would be soon.

“Before what?”

“From before you were born again. When we were together.”

I shook my head. When was mom coming back?

“You don’t remember the lilies?” she asked, shaking my hands in hers.

I paused, trying to think of something to put her mind at ease and get out of this highly uncomfortable interrogation.

“Did I give you lilies?”

Such a bright and ecstatic smile I’m not sure I’d ever seen. Lily was a young-looking granny anyway. As I would discover years later by looking at photos, she went to surgical lengths to look younger soon after my birth. But at that moment she looked like a schoolgirl. Like the young girl who had first fallen in love with my c-father. I guess I’d said what she wanted to hear. Or, more accurately, she’d heard what she wanted me to say.

“You do remember!”

I shrugged. “Maybe?”

It was, indeed, a question. I didn’t think I remembered. I was just trying to guess where she was going with the whole thing. And although I could picture in my head some things from Adam-1’s life, I was pretty sure the pictures had been formed by the photos and the stories I heard growing up. I knew that Adam-1’s parents had sung *The Rainbow Connection* to him as a lullaby, and when Mom sang it for me I’d imagine my c-father at about my age in a different bed being sung to by my great-grandparents Michael and Sarah Elwell, pictures of whom hung in the dining room not far from the dining table that had belonged to them. And there was the photo Mom loved of Sarah, Michael, and Adam-1 performing a home skit from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and I could imagine myself performing in it with Great-Grandma Sarah dressed in a white terrycloth robe and sunbonnet as the White Witch, Great-Grandpa Michael acting as her minion dwarf (wearing a San Francisco Giants cap for irony), and myself instead of Adam-1 as Edmund clutching our family’s own version of Turkish Delight – a package of Reese’s Peanut Butter Cups. So were they memories, or mere images I’d pasted together from photos I’d seen and stories I’d heard? Maybe I’ll never know for sure.

“How wonderful!” Lily continued. “Well don’t worry. Everything’s going to be the same again soon.”

“The same?” I echoed.

“Yes, the same – just like before. We’ll be together again. I’m coming, Adam!”

She’s coming where?

When was mom coming back!

Late that night the phone rang. Later than it ever rings. Mom began crying and saying things I couldn’t make out. There were footsteps, a light went on in the kitchen, and she came into my room, surprised to find me awake.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, raising myself up in bed.

“Sweetie,” she said, sitting next to me and giving me a hug, “I’m afraid your Grandma Lily has died.”

“So what’s *wrong*?” I thought to myself.

There was no mystery in the cause of Lily’s death. She holotaped her suicide for posterity. Or more specifically, for her clone. It was a gunshot wound to the temple as the song *Delta Dawn* played in endless loop. Her suicide tape made it clear she wanted to be cloned. Great-Grandpa Lyle oversaw that himself, and a little more than nine months after her death, Lily-2 was removed from an artificial womb.

We all went down to the USCS lab to see the newborn. While Mom went to the restroom, Lyle stiffly held Lily away from his body and up close to me. I touched her nose and little fingers. I felt sure this would be an improvement over the last Lily. Lyle introduced us.

“Lily-2, this is Adam-2.” He made her little hand go up and down as if waving. “Adam-2, this is Lily-2.”

I waved my hand playfully.

“She’s going to be your wife.”

I stopped waving.

By 2041, when I advanced to my second grade studies, human cloning was well on its way to the mainstream. More than 200,000 people had been cloned in America alone, with Europe catching up. U.S. Cloning Systems technology had a hand in almost all of it, leasing their technology to partner companies. About one third of the clones were for couples who couldn't reproduce naturally, including those in the gay community and those with other biological barriers. Most of the rest were for people who had died.

There were plenty of problems, and even more critics. The infant mortality rate was seven times higher than for non-clones, and significant birth defects that debilitated nearly four percent of the surviving clones were enough for many to cry for a renewed ban. The rates were declining a little each year, but not nearly fast enough.

Then there were the brewing legal battles. State and federal lawmakers struggled to adapt to this new reality, and one of the biggest legal issues revolved around probate. In 2039, a very wealthy man left his entire fortune to his unborn clone, entirely cutting out his children and grandchildren. The children sued. They also refused to make arrangements for their father's cloning, making his selfishness all the more foolish as you could only be cloned if an immediate family member or pre-secured legal guardian agreed to raise your clone. Why would the people you snubbed in life be willing to take on the tremendous time and expense of raising your clone – especially when you didn't even leave them the money to care for you?

He never was cloned, and eventually the children were able to divvy up his estate among themselves. But the case led Congress to pass federal guidelines for cloners. To be cloned after your death, you needed to have someone agree to raise you and leave him or her at least \$320,000 to take care of your expenses, a figure tied to cost-of-living increases. If you didn't have the funds, your clone's guardian could agree to waive that requirement. If you had more than the minimum amount, you were allowed to save one-third of the excess for your clone. The rest had to be gifted out.

There was also the issue of discrimination against clones. A few churches had already refused to allow clones and their parents to attend, and some private schools followed suit in 2041 when the first clones beside myself began enrolling. Scattered restaurants, especially in rural areas of the Deep South, gained notoriety by putting up "No Clones" signs, but that kind of mean-spirited bigotry was so reminiscent of the civil rights movement of the 1960s that it tended to work against itself. Polls showed that by 2041 a slim majority of the population supported the current cloning laws, and nearly eighty percent considered clones to be as human as non-clones. Most people by then had met a clone child, and their repulsion to the idea was ebbing.

Of course, those were adult polls. My classmates at Hill Creek Junior Academy were another population altogether.

Being a loner as a child was nothing new to my bloodline. A year after his mother's death, and days after his father's suicide, my c-father was driven from the home he'd known and loved in San Francisco down to San Diego by his Uncle Charles and Aunt Mary. His new guardians were aloof. Their children had long since left for college, and Charles and Mary weren't interested in

doing all the kid stuff again. They provided Adam with food, clothing, and transportation, but they seemed to dislike him almost as much as he detested them.

Uncle Charles was a biologist whose idea of a good story was the latest cytology textbook and who hadn't been to a play since his parents had to remove their complaining child from a production of *Peter Pan*. He did not believe in fairies. Except for going to Jack Murphy Stadium to watch the Padres win the 1984 pennant against the Cubs, Adam-1 couldn't remember ever having a good time with his new guardians. His uncle gave him a high-five during the heat of the game. It might have been the first and only time they unnecessarily touched each other.

My clone-father trudged through elementary school and entered junior high mostly friendless. Not because he was a biological oddity like myself, but because his mind had become fixated on one goal, and nothing else was relevant or worth noting. At school he'd spend recess with his Sony Walkman, listening to *Kansas* tapes over the headphones, endlessly replaying *Dust in the Wind* and *Carry On My Wayward Son*. At home he'd shut his bedroom door and read books like Augustine's *City of God*, Plato's *Republic*, the Vedas, Kabbalistic texts, and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. His obsession with death, his fear of it, drowned out all else.

When I started school, my fear of death was more abstract. But my fear of strangers was tangible, and was not at all alleviated by my classmates who saw me as a freak. I had a couple friends in kindergarten and first grade who would respond to me if I talked to them, but generally I was avoided once the other kids heard I was the first human clone. Which was always by lunch on the first day of school.

Mom chose the school because it was nearby and, partially, because it was where Reverend Lewis's son was enrolled. Despite the fact that Jack Lewis had never been more than polite to me at church, I'm sure mom hoped he would help me fit in with the other kids. I don't think she realized how uncomfortable Jack felt around me.

Jack knew better than we did what a dangerous position we'd put his family in. Reverend Lewis never mentioned the death threats they'd received, let alone that one of those calls had been answered by Jack when he was four years old. Jack was well aware, from his youngest days, that I was a direct threat. At the time I didn't understand this, but in retrospect, I don't know how he could have felt otherwise.

Meanwhile, closer to home, my former grandma and purportedly future wife Lily-2 had grown into a toddler who seemed especially drawn to playing with me. She was cute, and I liked her in spite of myself, but I always felt a nagging nervousness about becoming too chummy. Lyle had privately made it clear that she would be my bride, but I wasn't quite sure I wanted to settle down just yet. I mean, you never know who you might meet in second grade.

Her name was Evelyn Green.

We met on the first day of second grade in Mrs. Slater's class where we went after lunch recess – a class geared to English-related subjects like reading, writing, and the dramatic arts. It was my favorite class at Hill Creek. Perhaps a lot of that sentiment was because I ended up sitting at the same group table as Evelyn.

It all started that first day when, after introducing herself and having us say our names out loud, Mrs. Slater allowed us to talk among each other at our round tables, six students to a table. I'd never had a class with Evelyn, though I'd seen her at lunch during first grade and was excited that she was sitting at my table. But I was disappointed to see at our table Jimmy Preston, a spoiled and arrogant snob who had tormented me for two years. And he wasn't wasting any time.

"Hey, we've got the first human clone here!"

Everyone at our table, and most of the kids at the tables nearby, turned to stare at me. I purposely avoided looking at Evelyn. I'd been preparing to say something nice to her, and already I was blown out of the water. I focused my attention on a fly walking along the edge of the table. I was ashamed at being goggled at like an exhibit and not having the courage or cleverness to shoot Jimmy down.

"Isn't that *weird* being a clone?" he prodded, as he always did when introducing me to someone new.

I felt tears welling up and prayed that something would prevent them from spilling over. I considered jumping up and running out of the classroom. Better that than let them see me cry like a baby over such a ridiculous question.

And then I heard her voice. The words I least expected to hear.

"But I like weird."

I stole a quick glance up from the fly to see if she was teasing or being sincere. She seemed to be waiting for my sad blue eyes to meet her deep brown ones that curled up when she smiled, which she was now doing. I went back to the fly, but the tears were gone, replaced by tummy-dwelling butterflies.

"Why?" Jimmy asked. That wasn't the response he'd been expecting, and he was at a loss for words. Except that one.

"Being weird takes special people," she said. "Anyone can be normal."

"Then you're weird, too," he replied with a sneer.

"I hope so," she responded, and smiled at me again when I glanced up. I smiled back.

After that she was my hero, and as the weeks went by I could scarcely take my eyes off her. Her maturity and intelligence dwarfed mine, despite me being nine days her senior – an age

difference for which she'd find ample opportunities to razz me. And she was beautiful to boot. My heart fluttered whenever stray strands of her long, dark hair ran across her creamy olive complexion, which was dotted with a handful of freckles that seemed randomly but perfectly placed.

I had no experience liking a girl who liked me back, but I began following what I understood to be standard courtship rituals. I teased her incessantly and pestered her at lunch nearly every day, sometimes chasing her around the playground until she would suddenly turn and challenge me. She claimed she had a green belt in karate, and I always backed down, but with a grin. Sometimes she'd grin back.

Her friends thought I was obnoxious. And I guess I sort of was.

"Why do you like him?" her best friend Dawn Doremus asked once as I was walking away following the most recent karate threat. I slowed down, straining my ear closest to her, but couldn't make out her answer. But I was glad her friends thought she liked me.

Our relationship wasn't all about me pestering her. We talked both seriously and kindly in the classroom. I think I annoyed her a bit with the pestering at lunch, but she liked me anyway, especially when others were mean to me. Oddballs like me were like friendship beacons to people like Evelyn, people who know normal is boring.

10

Near the end of October our relationship reached a new level. We had to write a story for Halloween. Drawing on inspiration from my past, I began spewing out words as quickly as I could write them. Stuff about haunted castles, witches with long fingernails, a silver knife, and a phantom father who saves our entire class from a bubbly end in an enormous black cauldron. Only one page was required, but I churned out three pages and found myself frothing at the mouth for more.

Mrs. Slater was impressed. So much so, that she passed around copies of my story to all my classmates. An act that had several of my peers glancing at me in disgust, but also earned me a couple of compliments from people who had never spoken to me. But my biggest fear was Evelyn's reaction. Never imagining that anyone but Mrs. Slater would read it, I had named some small roles for a few people in the class. Jimmy Preston was the guy who stupidly got us caught by the witch, Jack Lewis slipped away to find help, and Evelyn joined me and my c-father's hologram in laying a trap for the witch.

The next day, after a sleepless night, I overheard Jimmy making fun of me louder than usual, I saw Jack flash me a quick smile as he passed by me after school, and Evelyn walked up to me on the playground, her friends in tow. I held my breath.

She was working on a lollipop, but took it out to say, "I liked your story."

“Really?” I asked. Still not breathing.

She nodded. And after a few moments, when it was clear that I could think of nothing else to say, she smiled, popped her lollipop back in her mouth, gave a little laugh, and led her friends to the tetherball poles.

Someone had just flirted with me. No, not just someone. Evelyn Green.

I didn’t have a ready response when it happened. But only a couple days went by before an opportunity arose. The last Friday of every month was movie day, and Mrs. Slater walked the class to a small, dark classroom at the end of the hallway that was used only for that purpose. It was the Friday before Halloween, and Mrs. Slater had us watch Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. My mom had raised me on the movie, but it was Evelyn’s first time seeing it. I managed to sit on the floor next to her.

Already familiar with each moment of the film, I spent most of it taking in Evelyn’s reactions from the side of my vision. I knew if I paid too much attention to the movie, I’d end up embarrassing myself by tearing up. Which is what Evelyn did when Scout saved her father and Tom Robinson by talking friendly-like with would-be lyncher Mr. Cunningham. I handed her a tissue from my pocket, and she gratefully took it and dabbed her eyes. She used it again when Tom Robinson died.

Despite my best efforts, I still got caught up in Scout and Jem’s longest journey together on Halloween night. I had to wipe my eyes when Jem tried but failed to save his sister from the bigoted Mr. Ewell (a name spelled far too similarly to my own, but an opportunity for Mom to explain that there was really nothing in a name). Evelyn handed the tissue back to me. Was she watching my reactions too? I reverently took it from her and touched my own eyes, marveling that our tears were now joined. I returned the increasingly damp Kleenex to her for the final scene.

Before we got up, Mrs. Slater explained our assignment – we were to write our thoughts on what Scout’s father Atticus meant when he said, “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb inside of his skin and walk around in it.” She was careful not to focus too long on me while she said it, but several kids did. It was the one time I didn’t mind being the center of attention.

“Thank you, Adam,” Evelyn said, holding out the tear-filled tissue with a broad smile. I carefully took it from her and put it back in my pocket. She made a face like that was kind of gross, but kept smiling anyway. I was glad Mom made sure I always had a Kleenex on me.

“Did ya have fun today?” Mom asked as I climbed into her Honda.

I nodded. “We watched *To Kill a Mockingbird*.”

“I know,” she said, and then laughed at my stunned expression.

“How did you know that?”

“Moms know everything,” she answered mysteriously.

“Yeah, okay,” I said in disbelief, wondering if it was true. “Do you also know where we’re going?” I asked as we passed the street we took home.

“To buy some Halloween candy so we don’t get egged.”

“Reese’s?”

Mom didn’t answer, and then I saw why. We were passing Standley Memorial where Gabrielle Burns was locked up. Mom was always quiet when we drove by it. I noticed the extra lines that now sprouted from the side of her forty-one-year-old eyes, and the gray hairs intermixed with blond. She looked older and tired, but I still thought she was beautiful. I didn’t want her to be scared by the hospital. I wanted to say something that would reassure her, as she always did for me. But I couldn’t think of anything.

“Are you going to be in the talent show?” she asked when the hospital was out of sight.

I was impressed by her omniscience and relieved she was talking again. “You know about that too?”

She nodded wisely. “Of course.”

“Well no way. I’m not getting up on stage.”

“You know what else I know?” she asked.

“Yeah, everything.”

Mom laughed, ruffled my hair. “That’s right. And I also know that Evelyn Green is going to be in the talent show.”

My mouth hung open. How did she know I liked Evelyn? Moms were spooky.

“If you did something,” she continued, “then maybe you guys could rehearse together.”

Moms were spooky, but they were smart too. The following Monday I got up the nerve to ask Evelyn if she would rehearse with me. She said yes.

Evelyn was a musical theatre fan and had selected a song written by Lynn Ahrens and Stephen Flaherty who had penned such musicals as *Ragtime*, *Seussical*, and *Once On This Island*. The latter included a vibrant song called *Waiting for Life to Begin* sung by Ti Moune, a young girl who as a baby was miraculously saved during a flood. She believed the island gods saved her for a great reason, and the song is her prayer for that remarkable life to commence. The capricious gods hear her prayer, and decide to answer it by forcing her to choose between her love for a man and her love for life.

For myself, I practiced singing the 1940s comedy tune based on a Mark Twain anecdote – Dwight Latham and Moe Jaffe’s *I’m My Own Grandpaw*. What else?

Like my c-father, but unlike Evelyn, I couldn’t carry a tune to save my life. *Any* of my lives. Fortunately this song would allow me to basically talk my way through it. All the teachers seemed amused and surprised that I was willing to go up on stage and sing a song that everyone would associate with my oddly branched family tree. Truth was, I just wanted to do it to give me more time with Evelyn, and I hoped she’d like me even more.

I was fine until our final dress rehearsal. Walking out alone onto that stage for the first time, reality dawned that I was actually going to have to do this. I told myself that somehow I’d get through it. But the next night, as all the students, parents, and faculty began filing into the school auditorium, I felt like I was going to throw up. What the hell had I gotten myself into?

Evelyn was slated to go on a couple acts before me. She took the microphone from its stand with a confident smile and began belting out *Waiting for Life to Begin* with the voice and charm she’d displayed in rehearsals. Her pleading to the gods for an extraordinary life was so real. Most of the kids had never heard the song before, but she landed the biggest ovation of the day. I was completely mesmerized, and somehow even more infatuated than before. She took her bow, and Mrs. Slater motioned for me to get ready.

I panicked. I couldn’t think of the lyrics to the song. Heck, I couldn’t think of the title to the song. Something about a grandpa...

I shook my head, tears beginning to fill my eyes. Mrs. Slater came over.

“Is everything okay?” she asked.

“I can’t remember the song!” I cried, sure that this would be the most embarrassing moment of my life. Not only would I not impress Evelyn, I’d disgrace myself to the entire school.

“Well, that’s okay, Adam. We’ll skip you for now and if you remember later, just come let me know.”

With a snap of her fingers she ended the biggest crisis of my life since the Gabrielle Burns incident. I didn’t know what I’d say to Mom, especially since she had even invited Great-

Grandpa Lyle to come. But my far greater fear was how embarrassed I'd be when Evelyn found out.

As Mrs. Slater walked away, Evelyn was standing there. She had overheard my admission about forgetting the lyrics. I felt myself blush as she sat down beside me on the backstage steps.

"Hey, don't worry about it," she said. "I really liked it in rehearsals."

I lit up in relief and adoration. "Well, you were amazing!"

She blushed and thanked me. I was sure at that moment we were destined to be married. It was no surprise that my future wife won the talent contest for the second grade class.

Evelyn's smile was my award. Lyle's scowl was my punishment.

"I'm sorry," I said as I approached them.

"Oh, it's okay, honey," Mom said as she gave me a hug. "I was the one who talked you into the whole thing."

"What happened?" Lyle asked.

"I'm sorry," I repeated. "I forgot the words."

"Forgot the words? I thought you were smart. Maybe you just don't like admitting that you are your own grandpa. Was that it?"

"Huh?" I didn't know where that had come from. But he was angry, and I shrank against mom's leg.

"Grandpa, you're being—" Mom started as Lyle continued.

"Part of being a proper husband for Lily will mean being a good provider. How are you going to be the next CEO of our company if you can't even stand up on a stage?"

I glanced over at two-year-old Lily-2 who was looking at me sideways as she sucked on the edge of an auditorium chair.

"That's enough," Sarah said. She fixed Lyle with an angry stare as she took me by the hand.

"Let's go, Michael. Don't worry about Great-Grandpa Lyle."

"Stop babying him, Sarah. We need to raise a man for Lily, not some sissy."

Mom led me out of the auditorium and to her car, letting me in before getting in herself and slamming the door. She started the car, drove a few feet, then lurched to a stop.

"I'm sorry about your great-grandfather," she said as calmly as possible. "He's a troubled man. The best thing to do with him is ignore his advice."

"Okay," I said, trying to smile for her.

She looked me in the eye and nodded, and managed to smile herself. "Good. Now have you remembered the lyrics yet?"

I thought about it. "I think so."

"Can you sing it for me?" she whispered conspiratorially.

I laughed at her jesting secrecy, and because she was happy again. I sang the song over and over until we got home.

12

A week later, as we milled around the door to Mrs. Slater's room a couple minutes before class started, Evelyn was standing a few feet away talking to Dawn. Which meant I was talking to no one.

"How's it goin', Adam?" Jimmy Preston asked from behind me.

It startled me. "Fine," I said, wondering what was coming next. Despite my hatred of him, I had such a strong desire to be accepted that I hoped he was truly being friendly.

"That's cool," he said. "Did ya finish the book report on *Where the Wild Things Are*?"

"Uh-huh."

"Me too. Did you flip up any skirts at lunch?"

I laughed nervously. "Whaddya mean?"

"Oh, didn't you know that today is Friday Flip-up Day?"

I shook my head.

"Sure! It means that if a girl wore a dress or skirt to school, we're supposed to flip it up. All the girls know about it."

"Really?"

“Yeah. If you don’t, it means you don’t like them.”

It sounded both logical and official. And I did want Evelyn to know I liked her. I turned around to her, reached out and flipped up the hem of her skirt. I caught a glimpse of the laced edging of yellow panties against her pale legs. She spun around as she forced her skirt down with her fists.

“Why did you do that?” she demanded.

I immediately realized that I’d done something horribly wrong. “It’s Friday...” I began clumsily. Jimmy and his friends were howling behind me.

I felt far more humiliated than I had during my lapse at the talent show. Evelyn shot me a look of anger I hoped to never see again. She quickly tracked down Mrs. Slater, who then pulled me aside, explained why it was wrong and had me apologize to Evelyn.

“I’m very sorry,” I mumbled, staring down at my shoes. “I didn’t realize how bad that was and I’ll never do it again.”

“It’s okay,” Evelyn said.

There was an uncomfortable pause. Was I supposed to say something else? I noticed that my shoelaces were loose and in need of retying.

“Adam?” Evelyn called, getting me to look up at her. “It’s *okay*,” she said with a sincere nod – a sincerity that made me feel closer to her and, yet, gave me a sense that I had no business getting closer to her. She was way out of my league.

And so for what seemed like forever, I stopped talking to her. We were no longer sitting in the same group during class. I didn’t chase her around or try to flirt. I did steal a glance every now and then, but to my dismay I never caught her glancing back. For all I knew, she had forgotten I existed, and I didn’t do anything to indicate that I missed her.

It was a cold November in La Jolla that year. Meaning that the mornings dipped down to fifty degrees. Mom had told me to wear long sleeves to school, but I still felt cold. And more alone than before I’d met Evelyn. During lunch recess, while everyone else played basketball, four-square, tag, and other games together, I stood by myself on the grass about ten yards from the basketball courts, focused on my handheld *Clone Ranger* game, trying to pretend that I’d rather be doing that than playing with the other kids.

“Are you busy?” asked a voice I didn’t place at first. Upon looking up, I saw Jack Lewis approaching.

“Sort of,” I lied as I paused the game.

“Maybe later?”

“No, what is it?” I asked impatiently. After the last Jimmy Preston conversation, I was suspicious of anyone who spoke to me.

“I’m sorry. I just wanted to say I liked your Halloween story.”

“Oh,” I said, a little embarrassed I’d used a guy I hardly knew as a hero. “Thank you.”

“Yeah. And, um...well, I just wanted to tell you about a Christmas play I’ve written that we’re putting on at church, and I wanted to see if you’d be in it.”

I knew his father must have put him up to it, but I was touched anyway. He could have asked me in passing with his friends all around him. Instead he sought me out alone.

“I don’t know,” I said, my tone softening.

I expected him to shrug and walk away. He had done his duty. But instead he said, “It should be a lot of fun. It’s called *We Three Kings*, and they’re all based on old rock stars. They read the stars wrong and think they’re going to Bethlehem to find the Song of God instead of the Son of God.”

I smiled. “Well, could I have a part with no lines, like one of the animals?” I asked sheepishly, pun intended. My failure in the talent show still made me cringe every time I thought of it, and Jack would want me in a small role anyway. An easy out for both of us, I thought.

“Actually, I want you to be a wise man,” he said.

“Jack, I—” A sharp pain on the back of my head stopped me. I fell to my knees and grabbed my head, and Jack spun around in time to see a couple of the older kids jogging back into the recess crowd.

The physical injury was not great – a little bump with no blood. But whether true or not, there was no doubt in my mind that someone had thrown a rock at my head because I was the only clone in school. This was far more personal than the attack by Gabrielle Burns when I was four. This was an attack by my peers at school where everyone knew me. Friends of Jack? Had it all been a setup?

“Come on!” Jack called, trying to pull me to my feet. “Let’s go find them!”

I stood up shakily. “No, I think I’m okay. It’s no big.” I just wanted to go home. And not come back.

“No big?” he responded in disbelief – the most emotional I’d ever seen him. “They could have really hurt you! Let’s go!”

I scanned the basketball courts behind us, which were teeming with kids. “I didn’t see who did it.”

“I saw them a little. Let’s try to find them!”

I went along, although at a much slower pace than Jack. What were we going to do if we found them? Jack had an inner confidence that made me think he could handle himself in a fight. I didn’t have a great deal of inner *or* outer confidence, and had never been in a real fight before. I was scared, and I was praying we wouldn’t find them at all.

There were all kinds of games in progress on the basketball courts, and of course I had no idea who I was supposed to be looking for. As far as I knew, any one of them could have thrown it. All of them at least wanted to have thrown it. So I simply followed Jack, hanging my head and rubbing it tenderly as we went. Then he stopped.

“I think that’s them,” he said.

I followed his finger to a group of four teenagers. They were standing around laughing with each other. They looked like jerks to me, but perhaps at that time I’d have thought the same of anyone. They definitely looked like they would kick our asses if we said anything to them.

“What’s wrong, Adam?” asked a soft, familiar voice from behind.

My heart jumped. I knew it was Evelyn before I turned around. Both embarrassment and relief flooded into me at the same time – embarrassment that I’d have to tell her that I got picked on, relief that she still knew I was alive, and was even willing to talk to me.

“Somebody threw a rock at me,” I said with as little shaking in my voice as I could muster.

She seemed to have already deduced something along those lines, probably from the way I’d been rubbing my bump and how Jack was pointing toward some older kids.

“Are you okay?”

“Yeah, I’m okay.”

“They did it?” She nodded toward the boys.

“I dunno, I didn’t see them.”

“I think so,” Jack answered, “but I only saw their backs.”

Evelyn didn’t need to hear anything else. Grabbing my hand, she led me to the nearest teacher’s aide. I couldn’t take my eyes off her hand. Nobody my age had ever held me by the hand before. I didn’t want her to let go.

And she didn't. Somehow she managed to tell the aide what happened and point the boys out without letting go of me, perhaps gaining additional sympathy from the woman for her effort. The aide told us to follow her. As we drew near, the boys started walking away, but the aide ordered them to stop. They acted surprised, but were worse actors than even me.

"Did you throw a rock at this boy?"

The leader, a tall blond boy named Victor Marks whose father I later learned worked at U.S. Cloning Systems, looked down at me with disgust. "No, ma'am. We've just been talking," he replied, not meeting her eyes.

"This boy thinks he saw you walking away after the rock was thrown," she continued, motioning to Jack.

Victor shot a sharp look at Jack and shook his head while his friends grew fidgety. "I don't know what to say. We've been standing here all recess."

"That's not true, I saw you do it!" Evelyn lied.

The blond leader sneered at her. "You weren't there."

Probably everybody but Victor realized he had fallen for a ploy even a second grader would have seen through. Evelyn beamed with satisfaction. Jack grinned, nodded to Evelyn, and slapped me on the back. I goggled at her with admiration. This time she did glance back and flashed me a smile that sent my head reeling farther than that little rock could have ever aspired.

13

I was in a different world the rest of the day, and was taken aback when I got home and my mom seemed so concerned with what happened at school. Oh yeah – that "rock" thing. She sat on the old family couch, asked me to sit on the floor in front of her, and parted my hair around the bump.

"Does it hurt, sweetie?"

"No, it's fine."

"Really?" She was quiet for a long time. "I'm sorry those bad guys did that. I guess there's always going to be someone like that. They just want to pick on someone else so they can think they're superior, and they'll find any reason they can. You know it's not your fault, right?"

I nodded. I hadn't thought of it that way, but it made sense. Actually, I hadn't thought about it at all, but it seemed important to Mom.

“It’s hard being first,” she continued, soothingly running her fingers through my hair after satisfying herself that the bump wasn’t serious. “You’re going to have to be very strong. Some people are going to want to hurt you, and others are going to try to tell you what to do, and there’s always going to be a lot of pressure on you. It’s not fair, but it’s true. And I’m very sorry about that.”

“It’s worth it!” I said, smiling up at my mom’s worried face.

She laughed and hugged me tightly. “You’re such a clever boy. You must have gotten that from my mitochondrial DNA.”

I sat down next to her. “Would you ever be a clone, Mom?”

She hesitated, pondering it as if for the first time. “I don’t think so, honey. But not because I think there’s anything wrong with it.”

“Why not?” I asked, suddenly fearful. Thinking of the day at the beach. “If you don’t, I’d never see you again.”

She frowned and was silent for a long time. It would be another eleven years before I knew what she was thinking about. The day Adam-1 asked her if she would raise his clone as her son. They both described that day in their writings.

It was the spring of 2022, and Sarah had just graduated from UCLA where she’d completed her BA in child psychology. She had accepted a job as a counselor with Children’s Hospital in San Diego. Adam took a rare day off work to drive up the coast and help pack her belongings. And see if she’d be his mother.

There wasn’t much to pack. Lots of books and papers, some dishes, and a few furnishings. But they were furnishings my c-father knew well from his childhood. Sarah had declined his offer to buy her all new things for her first apartment, instead asking for the belongings that had been sitting in storage since Michael and Sarah’s deaths. This included a 1970s paisley couch (which she had reupholstered) and the oak dining table, upon which they were packing boxes.

“I have something very unusual to ask you,” he mentioned as he took his mother’s portrait down from the wall. He gazed at her for a moment, then almost dropped the frame when her smiling portrait was overlapped by a vision of his mother’s death. “And I want you to know ahead of time that it’s perfectly okay to say no.”

“Up to no good again, Dad?” she said, only half-jokingly.

He nodded, and then frowned as he began carefully wrapping his mom’s portrait.

“Dad, what is it?” Sarah asked.

Adam again hesitated as he took down the portrait of his father. He fought a sudden urge to smash it. “Lyle and I have decided that whichever of us dies first will become our company’s first human clone.”

She studied him for a while, assessing the seriousness of the claim. She was used to hearing outlandish ideas regarding his work, most of them no more than that.

“You know how I feel about death,” he continued. “I mean, except that it means escaping your mother.” Sarah rolled her eyes. “And if I die, I at least want my genes to have another chance at life.”

Sarah remained silent. Her eyes locked on the old family Bible lying on the table among the rubble, waiting to be boxed. The Bible’s brass key hung on her gold necklace that had once belonged to her grandmother of the same name. She rubbed the tiny key between her thumb and forefinger.

“Now, if a woman gives birth to the clone, she’d face all manner of harassment from the public and media, so Lyle and I will have the clones gestated in an artificial womb—”

“Dad,” she interrupted, “if you’re really serious, then I wouldn’t want your clone to be born like that. If I’m still young enough, I’ll give birth to the baby and raise him as my own.”

“I don’t want you to go through all that. Too many people will hate you.”

She squeezed the key. “They won’t hate me as much as I’ll love my baby.”

He hugged her. “I’d like my clone to have a mother named Sarah.”

*

“Mom?” I asked, prodding her to answer my question.

She refocused and smiled at me. “I think I’d rather just live on through the lives I touch and through my children.” She kissed me on the head. “Which is one of the reasons I’m so thankful cloning came along when it did. If it weren’t for my dad wanting to be cloned, I never would have had a child. Now I have you.”

“I’ll try to be good,” I said, as my c-father always encouraged me to be for Sarah’s sake.

“I know you will, and I’m grateful for that. It’s nice knowing that what I leave behind will be good for the world.”

I hoped I wouldn’t disappoint her.

The next day at school began a new era for me. For the first time, I had friends. Jack started inviting me to sit with him and his friends at lunch. Those friends seemed lukewarm at first, but after a few days treated me like I was a normal person. Jack seemed very pleased by this.

As for Evelyn, I began flirting with her again and she spurned me as usual, but with the nice difference that she no longer ran away. She also began to praise the short stories I wrote for class. I enjoyed those more than any other coursework, even writing extra stories for the fun of it, some of which Mrs. Slater asked me to read aloud. I did, proud and nervous, while stealing glances at Evelyn. And she'd smile each time.

I began growing more and more dependent on her company and reassurance, needing to see her smiling at me. I was ready to marry her. But who knew I'd have the opportunity to do it so soon?

The Monday before Thanksgiving, Mrs. Slater and the other teachers brought the second grade classrooms together into an assembly to announce a holiday skit in a couple of weeks. The second graders would be part of a large production put on by the entire school. We were to act out the song, "Winter Wonderland." They would need some couples to stroll through the wintry streets, a couple of Eskimos, some kid-sized snowflakes, a bluebird and a new bird, the snowman Parson Brown, some alligators to knock him down, and of course a bride and groom for the good parson to marry.

"I want to be the bride," Evelyn told Dawn excitedly.

I was sitting next to her, of course, and didn't miss a beat. "If you're the bride, I want to be the groom."

"If you're the groom, I'm not going to be the bride," she replied coolly, dropping me down a peg, but still smiling.

We all wrote down the roles in which we would be most interested and handed them to the teachers. I can only assume Mrs. Slater overheard our little exchange, because when the roles were announced the next day, Evelyn was cast as the beautiful bride and I as the handsome groom. Jack was chosen to be Parson Brown. Between *Winter Wonderland* and Jack's upcoming Christmas show, my unlikely stage career was off to a strong start.

"Don't worry, Adam," Mrs. Slater whispered to me later on the sly, "There aren't any words to memorize!"

Great-Grandfather Lyle and two-and-a-half-year-old Lily-2 came over to our house for Thanksgiving dinner. It was the first time they had been over since the talent show argument.

"Anything new going on at school?" Lyle asked, breaking a few minutes of awkward silence.

I shrugged. I didn't want to talk to the man who thought I was a stupid sissy. Though fear of talking to him was a larger factor than anger.

"Well," Mom began, putting down her silverware and folding her hands, "I don't think you'll want to go, but you might be proud to hear that Mikey is actually going to be on stage two times next month. He's going to play a Wise Man at church, and at school he's going to be the groom in *Winter Wonderland*."

I saw Lyle's face change the moment she hit the word "groom." Clearly he wanted me to marry Lily-2. But, looking back, I'm surprised he was jealous over a staged marriage during a school skit. Or did he somehow sense that this was something special – that there was, indeed, a real threat to his plans? I thought there was, sure, but a child has no idea how many things change in life as we grow older.

"Well," he said. "And who's the lucky bride?"

"Evelyn Green," Mom said, giving me a quick wink.

Lyle frowned. "That Jewish girl?"

There was complete silence in the room. I knew Mom didn't like him, but I'm not sure if she had known he was a racist. Actually, according to my clone-father's journal, Lyle used any sort of bigotry as an opportunity to tear down others so that he and his family could stand taller. Racism and bigotry were tools. And anti-Semitism was a popular one at the time.

In second grade, I knew next to nothing about the recent war or the rise in hate crimes against Jewish Americans, and therefore had no idea what was going on in the conversation except that somehow being a "Jewish girl" was a bad thing in Lyle's eyes. Which made me hate Lyle even more. But I didn't say anything.

"Is that a problem for you, Grandfather?" my mother finally asked.

Lyle took his napkin off his lap and laid it on the table. "Well, it's just that it's a Christmas play, right? Why would a good Jew want to be in it?"

Mom clutched the edge of the dining table, but her voice was controlled. "For one thing, it is a play, and people can pretend to be anything they want on stage. Secondly, it is not a 'Christmas play.' It is a song about winter and romance. And finally, I don't like your attitude."

"Of course it's a Christmas play," Lyle shot back. "They're married by a parson, not a rabbi. Do they step on a glass after the ceremony?"

"You..." Sarah began, then stopped and regained herself. She gave her grandfather a look of embarrassed disgust. "I guess we'll just have to watch the play and find out."

Lyle turned to me. "Do you like this girl, Adam?"

I shrank in my chair. It was clear what he wanted to hear. And perhaps everything that happened afterwards could have been avoided with a simple lie. But at that moment, I felt like denying Evelyn would be like taking the girl who had held my hand and stabbing her in the back.

Not having the courage to speak, I nodded.

Lyle frowned. "Adam, why don't you go to your room," he said. "Your mommy and I have something to discuss."

"No stay, Michael," Mom said. "Remember, sweetie, how I was telling you some people like to bring other people down to make them feel better about themselves? Well, I'm afraid Great-Grandfather Lyle is one of the worst in that regard. He'll find any reason to think everyone is lower than him." She looked at Lyle. "To make things even more ridiculous, he's putting down an entire people for their religion when he doesn't even believe in God. Why are you doing that, Grandfather?"

Lyle twitched and his entire face and neck went beet red. I'd never seen anything like it. It scared me enough to wish I *was* in my bedroom.

"That's not what I'm doing," he answered.

"Oh, I believe you. This has nothing to do with her being Jewish. You're just trying to find some excuse to make her an unfit bride for Michael so you can make sure he marries Lily."

"And what's wrong with that?" he snapped. "You know what your mother did so she could be with him."

"If they fall in love, then that's fine. But I'll be damned if you're going to lay that guilt on my son and try to force him to marry someone he doesn't want."

"Your son?" he scoffed, and then grinned. "This is coming from the virgin?"

Mom went pale.

"He's your father, not your son," Lyle continued, "And he will marry my daughter."

My mother stood up and leaned over the table toward her grandfather. "He is my son, and he's going to marry Evelyn Green two weeks from now. Don't you dare try to tell him who he should or shouldn't marry."

Lyle slowly stood up as well. "Very well, Sarah. It's up to you."

"No, it's up to him."

“It’s up to you to leave it up to him. And it’s up to me to look after my daughter’s future. Which I’m afraid puts us at odds.”

“Then we’re at odds.”

“In that case I’ll be on my way,” he said, beginning to collect Lily-2.

My mom was squeezing the back of her chair over and over. “Grandpa, I’ve let you continue to be a part of our lives out of respect for Mom, and because I felt sorry for the abuse you went through—”

“What?” Lyle blurted, spittle spraying the table. “Sarah, I don’t know what lies your father told you, but my childhood won’t be discussed.”

My mom nodded. “Do you want to discuss my childhood instead?”

His eyes narrowed. “You need to be careful.”

“You’re the one who needs to be careful if you want to be any part of Adam’s life.”

He picked up his pipe and pointed it at her. “Take care, Sarah.”

They stared each other down for a moment, and Lyle picked up Lily and turned to go. Mom didn’t show him out.

There was a long silence after he left. I was frightened. Mom was both scared and angry. She was trembling. She was the bravest person I’ve ever met, but no one knew this. Least of all her.

“Don’t ever be like your great-grandfather,” she said. “Don’t ever be mean to people for no reason or because they’re not like you.”

She started to cry. Out-of-control crying. I’d never seen her do that. I was shocked that Lyle could upset my mom like that. I jumped out of my chair and hugged her, and she hugged me back.

“I won’t,” I promised.

“And don’t feel like you have to marry anyone or do anything you don’t want just because your great-grandpa or anyone else tells you to. Okay?”

“Okay,” I repeated, but with less conviction. I wasn’t sure I could stand up to Lyle like she had.

Mom dried her eyes and grabbed me by both hands, forcing a smile. “You like Evelyn a lot, don’t you?”

“I love her!” I shouted proudly.

She brightened. “Well, it’s a good thing, mister! You’re marrying her in a couple weeks!”

We both laughed, and for a moment forgot about the ugly scene with Lyle.

15

The big day arrived two weeks later. Friday the 13th, of course. I was sick with nervousness, my highly uncomfortable little blue suit exacerbating my condition. And then Evelyn came out of the dressing room in her lovely white wedding gown. She looked more beautiful than ever. I gulped, my head swimming. I was really going to marry Evelyn Green. My lonely days were finally over. I imagined taller versions of us sitting at our dining room table with a couple of half-clone children scampering about.

We took our positions backstage, ready to skip out on our cue.

*Sleigh bells ring, are you listenin’,
In the lane, snow is glistenin’*

We had a few more stanzas before our entrance. Evelyn and I stood straight ahead, Evelyn watching the performance out on the stage and preparing for our cue, me sprouting gray hairs, sure I’d somehow screw up our entire wedding ceremony. I had to wrestle with both the pressure of getting married and a mounting sense of stage fright. The whole thing would have been so much easier if I’d just been cast as a snowflake. What on earth had Mrs. Slater been thinking?

*A beautiful sight, we’re happy tonight,
Walking in a winter wonderland.*

Evelyn grabbed my hand. One more line and we would be skipping across the stage. We were standing right at the edge of the curtain. I could see some of the audience sitting in the dark, watching the stage and taking pictures. I didn’t know what an understudy was, but I desperately wanted one.

In the meadow we can build a snowman.

With that, Evelyn tugged me out onto the stage.

We’ll pretend that he is Parson Brown.

I forgot how to skip. I just kind of awkwardly threw my legs out there in front of me. Evelyn stayed focused despite my herky-jerky movements at her side. My face grew hot, and my hand started to sweat in hers. I hoped it wouldn’t slip out, as I was pretty sure her grip was the only thing keeping me from crashing to the floor in a mangled, pathetic, but dapperly dressed heap. I hoped beyond reason that no one was watching.

Suddenly we were there in front of the snowman waiting to perform our nuptials. Jack's painted face was examining me with a mixture of laughter and sympathy. Well, mostly laughter. I shrugged. He must have started having second thoughts about asking me to join his Christmas program.

*He'll say are you married,
You'll say, "No man,"*

Jack motioned with his arms as if he were posing a question to us, and I shook my head no in response, immensely gratified that I'd remembered my "line." Relishing in my achievement, I began to turn away and lead Evelyn off to the side where we would finish the skit. She yanked me back, jolting my memory. I had one more critical line. We weren't married yet.

But you can do the job while you're in town.

I dutifully wagged my finger at him like I was telling him what to do, and just like that we were hitched. The only thing more gratifying was that we were finally done with our time in the spotlight. We all sang the closing lines of the song, and the hard part was over. How difficult could the honeymoon be? I was thinking Disneyland...

We were still holding hands as we took our bows. I used that opportunity to pull her close and whisper, "Thanks for stopping me."

Evelyn laughed. As she would later say, we had merely been reinforcing the universal myth of the reluctant groom and the determined bride. At that moment, she simply said, "Well, I didn't want to be left standing at the altar."

I grinned. "Altar" was a pretty unusual word for my vocabulary at the time, but I was sure I'd never leave her at one.

Later that night I was surprised to learn from Mom that Lyle had attended the event, leaving Lily-2 with his younger sister, my eccentric but kind Great-Aunt Louise whom Lyle detested but used when necessary. Mom saw him talking with his employee Jacob Marks and his rock-throwing son, Victor. She hoped he was upbraiding his employee for the earlier attack. Lyle didn't reply when Mom thanked him for coming. In fact, she said, he completely ignored her. That Sunday *Winter Wonderland* became the first second grade skit ever to be reviewed by the *SanDiego.com*'s theatre critic – a big article about the first clone's first time on stage and the first clone to "get married." Evelyn received praise, but my reluctance to marry her was noted with some well-deserved humor by the critic. A conservative op-ed columnist writing within that same Sunday edition considered my hesitation at the altar to be an early indication of my sexual orientation, concluding it was proof that either homosexuality was not genetic or that my c-father had been a closet gay.

When our class returned from lunch that following Monday, we found the room vandalized. Anti-Semitic markings had been spray-painted on tables and the chalkboard in yellow, and “Evelyn the Lesbian” was painted in pink on the table where she sat. Her blue-jean backpack had a pink triangle and a yellow Star of David painted on it.

Mrs. Slater called the principal, and we all went to the assembly room while the police inspected the vandalism. Our teacher asked Evelyn if she wanted to go home, but Evelyn said she wanted to stay. Mrs. Slater then told us that the people who had done that were hateful, small-minded bigots. The next day a counselor entered the cleaned-up room to tell us about the importance of embracing diversity and being kind to others regardless of race, creed, religion and sexual orientation. A lot of the kids looked at Evelyn during the counselor’s talk. Evelyn ignored them outwardly, but surely she was aware of the attention she was drawing. She was still carrying the backpack with the Star of David and the pink triangle.

Evelyn’s best friend Dawn stopped joining Evelyn for lunch that day. Probably the whole “lesbian” thing bothered her more than the Jewish part. Jack and his closest friends were the only ones still brave enough to join the human clone and the Jewish lesbian at lunch. Everyone else kept looking over at us. Maybe it didn’t help that Evelyn decided to start wearing her vandalized backpack while eating. We ate in self-conscious silence.

Then came the taunt from Jimmy Preston a couple seats down.

“Boy, Adam. I can’t believe you married a lesbo!”

He said it like he was only kidding. Evelyn frowned and stared at her food.

I smiled like he really was kidding. “Well, we’re getting a divorce.”

As soon as the words were out of my mouth, I regretted them. Evelyn looked up at me for a moment, long enough to know I’d really hurt her, and then left so I wouldn’t see her cry. Jack got up and followed her. Most of the other kids around us laughed, and Jimmy stood up to pat me on the back. “Way to go, Adam!” he said.

I had lost my friends, but I guess I was finally accepted in the group.

“How could you do that to Evelyn?” Jack asked me the next day.

“I know,” I admitted, so mortified I could hardly speak.

“It’s wrong,” he said.

“Who are you, the police?” I shouted back. “You treated me like a weirdo for two years!”

“I’m sorry,” he answered. “But Evelyn was always nice to you.”

I told Jack I was sorry, and he told me I needed to tell that to Evelyn. I went up to her once, but she wouldn’t look up at me. Instead of apologizing, I walked silently away, feeling more ashamed than ever. Winter break was coming on Friday, and I was certain I’d spend the entire time miserable. But on Thursday came the fight.

A couple girls and boys, led by Jimmy, were teasing Evelyn who had been standing alone on the playground. She was giving them some words right back. Jimmy Preston didn’t like what she said, and he pushed her to the ground. I went running towards them and launched myself at Jimmy. It was the greatest tackle of my life. We must have landed about ten feet from where he’d been standing. What happened after that was a flurry. The other guy began kicking me, and the girls attacked Evelyn.

After what seemed like an extraordinarily long time, but probably was only twenty seconds, the school aides were tearing them away. I had a swollen eye and cuts and bruises. Evelyn made out much better than me, and did a lot more damage to her opponents. Turned out she wasn’t bluffing when she said she had a green belt in karate.

16

We were both sent home early that day. As we waited for our parents to pick us up, I apologized to Evelyn for what I’d said about the divorce.

“It’s okay,” she said, with perfect sincerity. And I knew everything was all right.

“And I’m sorry for what they did to you today.”

She shrugged. “Some people are just mean. You’ve dealt with more than me.” I didn’t answer. I had a vision of Gabrielle Burns thrusting her knife into my mom as I stood in the seawater, frozen in confusion. Or fear.

“So what’s it like? You know. Being a clone.”

I had to think about that one before slowly spilling it out. “Sometimes it’s bad...sometimes it’s kind of nice. Sometimes I have no idea what it’s like. My mom wants me to be whatever I want, but my Great-Grandpa Lyle wants me to be my c-father. That’s the bad part. I mean, that and people being mean.”

She frowned, then reached out to grab my hand, pumping it up and down a couple times. “So then what’s nice about it?”

My eyes lingered on her hand holding mine. I almost forgot what the question was. But eventually I formulated some thoughts. “Well, it’s almost like I’m not all alone, and like I’m somehow connected to what’s happened long ago and what happens later, and like you might

have more than one chance to do what you want with your life.” I pried my gaze from our hands to her eyes. “You know, like even if we’re not the same people exactly, we can help each other and make each other better. I mean, when we talk about history when my c-dad was alive, I really feel like I was there. And when we talk about doing things to help the world way out in the future, I feel like that’s still about me because of my clones.”

Evelyn’s eyes were wide with wonder. “That’s really cool!”

I nodded. That part was really cool. My mom and I had talked about that kind of thing a lot.

“Do you know much about your clone-dad?”

“Yeah, they’ve told me a lot about him, and I’ve seen some videos that he made for me, and each birthday I get a letter that he wrote for me and get to sit in his hologram’s lap. He left a big written journal of his life, but I don’t get to read that till I’m eighteen.”

“Are you writing a journal, too?”

“Yeah, I do a little. My mom tells me to.”

Evelyn stared into space for a while. “I wish I were a clone.”

I wasn’t exactly sure if she meant it or if she was just trying to make me feel good about myself.

“What’s it like being a...not a clone?” I asked.

“Well,” she said, letting go of my hand as she began to play with the zipper on her backpack, “I guess nobody expects you to be exactly like someone else that lived before, but sometimes they still want you to be a lot like whatever’s ‘normal’ or just like your parents. But my parents are like your mom – they just want me to be whatever I want.”

I nodded. “So I guess it’s kinda the same.”

“I guess,” she agreed. “But I think it’d be nice to know that someone like me had lived before, and that I could talk to someone like me later with letters and stuff. It’d be like a good pen pal that went on forever, but we were all closer than pen pals because we were all related, you know?”

At that moment the windowed door of the principal’s office clacked open. Mom walked in wearing her jeans and her old UCLA sweatshirt and looking worried. She saw me and gasped as she knelt beside me. “What happened, Michael?” she asked, examining my eye with trembling fingertips. “You got in a fight?”

“He was protecting me,” Evelyn responded.

“Well then good boy!” she exclaimed, making the principal frown. “Are you okay?” she asked Evelyn.

“Yes, Ms. Elwell,” she answered. “Thanks to your son.”

Mom scratched my head proudly as Evelyn’s father walked in. She ran to hug him as he bent down to receive it. He was a tall, strong man with kind brown eyes.

“Are you okay, sweetheart?” he asked as he gently inspected her scrapes.

“I’m fine!” she answered. “Come meet Adam and his mom.”

“It’s an honor, sir,” Sarah said, shaking his hand. I noticed she was still trembling.

“I’m the one who’s honored – the man who protected my daughter and the mother who raised him,” he said, shaking my hand and then my Mom’s.

“Mr. Green’s a war hero,” Mom told me with admiration.

He laughed. “Or a war criminal, depending on who you ask.”

“You’re a hero,” Sarah responded with certainty. Evelyn held her father’s hand and leaned up against him, smiling. Mom would later tell me how Mr. Green had worked in the State Department where he helped broker an end to the Mideast War with equally brave Muslim negotiators, working despite objections from extremists on both sides who were eager to continue the escalation, helping use the goodwill generated by Shannon Smith-1 to end the war.

I smiled in awe at the towering, square-jawed, yet modest man. Having Mr. Green say that I was the man who protected his daughter filled me with a rare feeling of confidence.

We all stepped out of the office with Evelyn still leaning against him as they walked hand in hand. I imagined myself and my clone-father walking like that, leaving me with a comforting warmth and an aching void.

While Mr. Green told me about his job and asked me about my story writing, mom ducked back into the principal’s office for a couple minutes. She handed him a photo, explaining that she had just been informed of Gabrielle’s release.

Mom returned, hugging me from behind while messing up my hair, as if no longer a care in the world. Though she kept glancing around – something I scarcely thought about at the time. She chatted with Evelyn for a while longer. They had met briefly a couple times, but it was the first time they had really talked. I didn’t know it would be their last. If I’d known, I would have soaked it in more. The warm, easy embrace of my mom. Her fondness for good people. Her delighting in me being social with Evelyn and her dad. I would have concentrated on remembering every word, every expression, every touch.

Friday, December 20, 2041 was the last day before winter break and the end of a busy week. We had practices for the Christmas show every night. But I wasn't so fixated on the play that I didn't notice my mom's nervousness. She didn't tell me what had made her tense, but she kept reminding me to always make sure a grownup was around and what I should do if a stranger approached.

"Are you okay?" I asked her Friday morning as she dropped me off at school. She had just glanced all around the car before unlocking my door.

Her reply was a nod and a hug. "Have fun today and be careful." She kissed me on the head.

"See you tonight!" I called as I pulled away and closed the door behind me.

School got out early, after which Reverend Lewis drove Jack, Evelyn and me to the church. Jack and I needed to do a last-minute rehearsal, and Evelyn wanted to watch as her family had plans on Sunday. Jack had me wear large sunglasses that teleprompted the script for me in case I forgot my lines. I sang *What Child is This?* in my best Ray Charles impersonation, which was really, really bad (and still is). My feet creaked as I was led down the hardwood floor through the middle of the pews on my way to the manger. I tried not to think about those pews being full of about 200 people.

Jack had the grand finale as King Elvis Presley, singing *Blue Christmas* as the Three Kings leave Bethlehem. And with that, we finished our last rehearsal a little before sundown as scheduled. Jack reminded the dozen or so kids involved to be at church early on Sunday, then Reverend Lewis led us all out of the church to wait for our parents.

"So it looks like you guys are ready for the play," Evelyn said, sitting down on the concrete steps leading to the church entrance.

Jack smirked at me. "I dunno. Is Adam ever ready to be on stage?"

I couldn't argue. "Just don't make me skip."

Evelyn laughed and shook her head at me – but in a loving rather than a mean way. "And so what are you guys doing for vacation? Sounds like you're going to have a *Blue Christmas*?" Evelyn asked Jack.

"Only if Adam tries to skip during the pageant."

"What are you going to do during the break?" I asked Evelyn.

"I'm going to have Hanukkah here with my parents."

"What do you guys do?" I asked.

“Well, the celebration lasts eight days, and this year it started a couple days ago and actually ends on December 25. So while you’re opening your Christmas presents, we’re going to be lighting our menorah and exchanging a gift that we’ve made.”

“What did you make for your parents?”

“I’m making them a Jewish calendar with pictures of our family and ancestors above each of the thirteen months.”

“That’s neat,” I said, pictures of my own ancestors flashing through my head. Michael and Sarah. And myself.

She smiled at me despite her eyes having to squint in the setting sun. “And what about you?”

“Um, on Christmas Eve day we always drive up to our cabin in the redwoods and have Great-Grandpa Lyle and Lily-2 over, and we string popcorn and cranberries to decorate the tree and then we take turns reading parts of *’Twas the Night Before Christmas*.”

“You read the parts for Santa Claus, I assume?” she said, teasing me about being nine days older than her.

“And then,” I continued, choosing to semi-ignore the comment, “we watch *It’s a Wonderful Life* and a musical version of *Scrooge* and open our presents Christmas morning.”

“What did you get your mom?” Evelyn asked.

“I made her a holodisk of me singing *I’m My Own Grandpaw*.”

“That’s perfect!” Evelyn said.

I hoped Mom liked it, and was pleased that Evelyn thought well of it. So pleased that I felt an idiotic grin cemented on my face. But she returned it.

Evelyn’s dad pulled up. “Well, I’ll miss you guys,” she said as she stood up and gave Jack a hug.

“I’ll – a – have – a – huh Blue Christmas without you,” Jack sang in his best Elvis impersonation. Evelyn went into a big Elvis-fan scream and swoon. I doubled over in laughter.

“Merry Christmas!” she said, recovering from her swoon to give me a tight hug.

“Happy Hanukkah!” I responded, almost breathless from the hug, hypersensitively noticing everything about her: her hair against the side of my face. Her pleasant smell, like jasmine. Her willingness, or even eagerness, to be so close to the human clone. It didn’t take long at all to come to the conclusion that a hug was even better than holding hands.

She kissed me on the cheek and went running to the car.

“See ya next year!” she called from the open car door.

I stood there stunned and glowing and thinking I could never be happier than I was right then. Her father gave me a friendly salute and she waved at me from the car as they pulled away. I barely recovered from my delirium in time to wave back.

Jack pushed my shoulder. “She likes you!”

I felt myself blush, but I was grinning.

An ostentatious luxury car slid up to the curb. Recognition began to dawn as the tinted passenger window hissed down. “Hello, Adam!”

“Who’s that?” Jack asked.

I didn’t move or answer. I was seeing Lyle out of context, like when we ran into Mrs. Slater at the grocery store. He must have been driving by and happened to see me. I waved, expecting him to wave back and then keep going on his way.

“Come on, Adam,” he called, gesturing for me to come to the car.

“Is that your great-grandpa?” Reverend Lewis asked, placing his hand on my shoulder.

“Uh-huh.”

“Is he picking you up?”

I didn’t speak.

“Is everything okay, Adam?” Reverend Lewis asked.

“I guess so,” I said, and started walking toward the car.

“See you Sunday!” Jack called behind me.

I turned and nodded. “Right, see you guys Sunday.” Then I walked up to the car and opened the door. Lyle was forcing a wide smile that I’d never seen before. I could see Lily-2 in a safety seat behind him.

“Mom’s not coming?” I asked.

“No, she asked if I could swing by and pick you up. I guess she had a couple holiday errands to run.” He chuckled. “Don’t worry, we’re not mad at each other anymore. It’s all water under a bridge.”

I slid into the passenger seat and closed the door.

“Are you looking forward to Christmas?”

I nodded vaguely, my pulse speeding up.

“Cwismiss!” cried out a thrilled Lily-2 from behind.

Lyle put the car in gear, which locked the doors. The entrance to the church began drifting away. I saw Jack shouting something, but Lyle’s car was well insulated from the outside world.

“What errands?” I asked. I hated that word. It had always meant my playtime was over, and I had to go on some boring trips to the store when I could be doing fun things instead. But now I wanted to be shopping with Mom more than anything.

“Oh, probably to get some stuff to make Christmas cookies and such, or maybe new decorations. I don’t know.”

Why was he lying? I realized then that never in my life had my mother left me completely alone with Lyle. There must be an emergency he was hiding from me. We drove the last couple minutes in silence.

When we pulled into the driveway, the front door of the house was ajar. My first thought was that flies would be getting in. Maybe Mom left the door open as she was bringing groceries in and forgot to close it. There were darker fears lurking behind those thoughts, but I kept them pushed down. Surely it was the groceries.

“Better stay here for a minute, Adam,” Lyle said. He stared at the open door and turned off the engine. “Let me just make sure everything’s okay in there.”

My eyes were already wet with unrealized terror. Everything wasn’t okay in there.

A few seconds after Lyle disappeared through the doorway, I opened the car door and crept toward the house, over the fresh-mown grass, and up the two tile stairs to the doormat covered with little sheep that Mom had crocheted a couple years before. I paused before putting my foot through the open doorway, and then paused again when I realized I was standing in the entryway, wondering which way to go and whether I was willing to find what I might find – that dark reality I sensed, but kept pushing away.

I found silence in a house that felt unfamiliar. I was seeing the furniture for the first time. Family photos on the wall now reminded me of the portraits of early presidents, staring at me with stoic eyes. The calendar filled with my mom’s handwriting had the impersonal feel of a museum artifact. I prayed she was okay.

But the response I heard was not from God. They were voices coming from the kitchen. The first voice was my mom's.

"Grandpa, please," she begged weakly. Such a weak and frightened voice from the strong, all-knowing mom who had always protected me. She wasn't that powerful after all. Lyle was the stronger. The reality I tried not to see was mocking me, prancing in my face, forcing me to yield to it. Fear and flustered resentment overwhelmed me. I started to sob without making a sound. I wanted to turn away. Run away.

"You have to die, Sarah," came Lyle's voice. "You and your spawn."

"No, please."

"What did you expect?" he asked. "You betrayed your God."

"No, Grandpa," Mom said, her voice still shaking but a little louder. "I only betrayed you."

"I'm not your grandpa."

"What?"

Then came the voice of a woman that sounded distantly familiar, conjuring up disturbing memories of trials, nightmares, and witches with long nails.

"Feel it, whore. Feel the weight of the finger of God!"

I ran at the sound of the voice, running as fast as I could, everything around me blurred. A gunshot jolted me to a breathless stop. I blinked, sure that I'd been running toward the kitchen. But in front of me was the welcome mat and Mom's crocheted sheep.

My mom.

I turned around, shaking so hard I nearly fell over. I felt sick, like when you've made a mistake you can't ever take back. Like when I dreamt I cut off my finger. Or when I told my classmates that I had divorced Evelyn.

I knew my mom was dead. And I'd been running away.

My mind numb, my legs began walking me toward the kitchen door.

"Now give me the gun," Lyle demanded.

"But I get to kill the boy," said the woman.

"I said give me the gun," repeated Lyle. "It's God's will."

“No!”

I stepped into the kitchen. It was the woman. Her hair had gone from red to gray, but it was her – Gabrielle Burns. She looked like a skeleton in her white dress, the skin around her eyes had shrunk so she looked as crazy as she was. Lyle carefully placed his pipe on the counter, then darted for her gun. They struggled. It went off. And Gabrielle was jolted back against the kitchen cabinets. She gaped at the blood on her white dress. As she slumped to the floor, she withdrew a silver knife from her skirt pocket.

And then she caught sight of me standing in the kitchen entryway. Her already large eyes widened further. I wasn’t sure what all raced through her mind as her eyes locked onto mine. A realization that she had failed her God and would never be given a baby. Perhaps second thoughts about what she had just done as a glimmer of sanity returned.

The only thing that raced through her mind for sure was a bullet. Lyle held the gun at her even after she was dead.

My mom was sprawled on the floor next to Gabrielle. There was blood on the cupboards above her – the one from which she had grabbed my cereal box that morning. I pushed past a surprised Lyle and slid to her side.

“Mommy?” I heard a voice cry. “*Mommy!*”

I lifted her head in my hands, pulling her surprisingly heavy head into my lap, then brushing her hair out of her soft but still face, expecting to see her wake. Her eyes were wide open, dilated so widely that her beautiful blue-gray irises were scarcely visible. Eyes that for the first time ignored me. Or accused me.

I bent over and pressed myself to her tighter, as if the life in my body could return life to hers. But she made no reply.

“I...I’m sorry I was too late,” Lyle said from behind, laying his hand on my shoulder. I shrugged him off. Couldn’t bear his touch. Could focus only on my mom, gently running my fingertips over her eyebrows, and the edges of her face. Her soft, rounded chin. I tried not to look at her eyes, but they kept drawing me back.

Lyle took his hand away and remained standing behind me, not making a sound. Yet I saw movement. My mother hadn’t moved. The movement had come from the reflection in her dead, staring eyes. The hair pricked up on my scalp as I saw Lyle pointing the gun at my head. He didn’t know exactly when I had arrived or what I might have seen or heard before he began struggling with Gabrielle for the gun. And the way I shrugged him away may have convinced him that I knew he was responsible for my mother’s death. He would shoot me now, and explain to the authorities how Gabrielle had killed both mother and son before he could get the gun from her. Then he could start with a new Adam, an Adam-3, whom he could influence without Sarah’s interference. My great-grandfather was going to kill me as he had just murdered his granddaughter. Unless maybe I pretended not to know. Pretended to look to him for comfort.

“Oh, Grandpa,” I cried, not turning around, burying my face against my mother’s still warm cheek.

Would she have wanted me to try to preserve my life, or was I betraying her by not facing down her murderer? Would a human child, a non-clone, have done the same? I felt ashamed. I was no longer scared that she was dead, but that she would awake and see me doing this thing. That she would see her son wasn’t human after all. Half of me wanted him to kill me. Kill the freak who would run away as his mother was murdered, and then think of himself as he hugged her dead body.

There was a hesitation that seemed like forever. Would I know if he fired, or would I be dead first? Relief and revulsion flooded my body when his non-gun hand rested back down on my shoulder.

Lyle wasn’t going to kill me today.

Instead he picked the silver knife out of Gabrielle’s hand, slipped it into a plastic bag and placed that in his pocket, and then called 9-1-1 on his cell and used it to beam a hologram of the scene to the paramedics, police, and the physicians at Ingenuity.

They arrived within five minutes, but I had no hope the paramedics or Ingenuity doctors could resuscitate my mother, and no hope the police would arrest the person who truly murdered her.

18

I was in the news again as background on the investigation trickled out. Police found conclusive evidence that Gabrielle had fired the shot that killed Sarah. The official story went as follows: Gabrielle Burns began stalking us after her release from the mental hospital. On Friday, as my mom walked out the front door, Gabrielle was waiting. She forced Sarah back into the house at gunpoint, ordered her to call Lyle and ask him to pick me up from church, and held her in the kitchen until Lyle pulled up. Surely she was waiting for me to arrive so she could kill mother and child together. If she had killed Sarah right away, neighbors might have heard the shots and called the police.

When Gabrielle saw Lyle enter the kitchen, she must have shot Sarah, hoping to shoot Lyle and myself next. But Lyle was able to tear the gun away and kill her.

Though I had no proof, I was convinced of a different story. After the Thanksgiving argument, Lyle met with the recently released Gabrielle (released, as I learned much later, by a psychiatrist with an indirect connection to Lyle). Lyle probably told her that he wanted to repent for his sins, and that God had told him he needed to help her destroy the unholy child and its mother. With some help from Lyle, Gabrielle was able to get into the house and hold Sarah at gunpoint until Lyle brought the child to join them. When Lyle entered the kitchen, he ordered her to kill Sarah, and then demanded Gabrielle’s gun.

I now believe that he wanted my mom out of the way so he could raise me directly, a suitable husband for Lily. He set it up so he would look like the hero, saving me from the crazed Gabrielle, though unfortunately unable to save my mother. And if I hadn't distrusted Lyle from as far back as I could remember, perhaps it would have worked.

My mother's funeral was set for Monday. I wanted to go to church on Sunday and even participate in the Christmas pageant, knowing I could hide behind the sunglasses. I mostly wanted to go and be comforted by Jack and Reverend Lewis. But Lyle said there were too many things to do before Monday, and I was kept away.

On Sunday morning, as the sirens wailed down the main cross street near our house and a helicopter hovered in the distance, the noise barely registered. I couldn't take my eyes off a photo of my mom and me at the entrance to Disneyland. Lyle, who had spent the night in my mom's room, walked into the living room and turned on the news.

"I think something's happened," he said.

I ignored him except that my hands gripped the frame of my mom's photo a bit tighter. But the words on the news began to drift into my consciousness. Suicide bomber...Cassandra Society...Unitarian.

I looked up to see the camera panning over the stone steps where Evelyn had kissed me two days ago. Now they were littered with debris. One of the mangled church doors was lying at the bottom of the stairs. Most of the wall along the street was gone. At some point I'd stood up, but my legs grew wobbly and I knelt in front of the screen. Over forty people already confirmed dead. A group now calling themselves the Gabrielites in honor of their martyred leader had claimed responsibility. All those who harbored clones were enemies of God, and His vengeance would be swift and terrible.

I spent hours believing that everyone I'd known at church was dead because of me. They kept promising to announce the dead as soon as loved ones were notified. Unbearable hours crawled by. Finally a link for the list appeared on the screen. Lyle chose it before I could. Fifty-three dead listed in alphabetical order. I scanned down to the L's. Albert Lewis. Melinda Lewis. I closed my eyes. Jack wasn't on the list.

"Isn't that your friend's dad?" Lyle asked.

I nodded, eyes still closed. Reverend Lewis shuffling his papers. *I can't believe being born is ever a sin. No sir.* A belief that had killed him and his wife.

"I didn't know Evelyn went to your church."

"She doesn't," I said. It was several seconds before I put Lyle's words together. I forced my eyes back to the list. Green. Aaron Green. The war hero. I saw him shaking my hand. Saluting me.

Evelyn proudly leaning up against him. They had gone to see the Christmas play after all. Maybe after they heard about my mom. I shook my head. It wasn't true.

"That's terrible," Lyle said.

I didn't take my eyes off the name. It was another Aaron Green. Or a mistake. They would take the name off soon. Apologize for the confusion.

"Terrible," Lyle repeated as he turned off the news.

19

Sixty years before my mother's funeral, at the funeral of my c-father's mother, the pastor said that God had wanted Sarah early for a special purpose in heaven. But my clone-father had found no comfort in that. All he saw was his mother's lifeless mouth falling open, and no loving God would allow such an ugly thing to happen.

"I felt then," he wrote, "that Death was the only true evil in the world. And since the Bible said that Death had been a curse by God on Adam and all his descendants, it seemed as if the heavens had aimed it specifically at me. I hated God for it. And I grew determined to do what the original Adam was unable or unwilling to do. I will undo God's curse on humanity. No more Sarahs will die."

On the morning of Monday, December 23, 2041, I attended my own mother's funeral. If God was angry on the stormy night of my birth, did the warm sunshine reflecting off our slowly moving limousine mean that God was smiling over my mother's death? Or gloating? Authorities tried to keep the hundreds of protestors at a distance, but I saw them as the funeral procession made its way into the cemetery. They were shouting and jeering at us, waving signs that said such things as "God Hates Clones," "The Whore of Babylon Burns in Hell," and "Antichrist's Mother Returned to Sender."

At our now-gutted church, I'd been told that Christ wanted us to love our neighbors like ourselves, even to love our enemies, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and to never judge our fellow man. They were beautiful sentiments, and Reverend Lewis managed to convince me that, Gabrielle Burnses of the world notwithstanding, heaven would welcome me, and that it would be a pleasant place to spend eternity. But on the morning of the funeral, I began to wonder if perhaps I truly was the Antichrist. Maybe that was why God didn't grant my prayer to save my mom. Maybe God had my mom killed because I, the Antichrist, had begged him to save her. I looked at my small, thin arms and legs covered in a black suit. I stared at my palms. Were these the limbs and hands of the Antichrist?

I promised myself I would never pray for anything again. If all these Christian protestors represented the views of God, and they would celebrate my sweet mother's murder and taunt her son, then God must have been very disappointed with all the absurd sentiments Jesus had preached. And I would be against their God with my limbs and hands and every part of my body.

I didn't hear a word of what the chaplain said. The next thing I noticed was Lyle grabbing a handful of dirt and throwing it on my mother's coffin. I heard it hit with a sickening thud. Was she still glad that cloning had allowed her to have a son? Someone told me to throw some dirt, but I shook my head.

As Lyle's gritty hand took mine and led me from my mom's grave, a few of my mom's friends and several employees of USCS offered their condolences. And then, to my surprise, there was Jack. His downcast face was cut and bruised. Our eyes met briefly, then he fixed his attention on the procession of cars leaving the cemetery.

"I'm sorry," I said.

Jack didn't respond. He was orphaned because of me. I should have been grateful that he had come at all. But at the time, all I knew was that the only Christians who had ever accepted us were now rejecting us. God had punished those who had welcomed us, turned his back on my mother and me, and chosen the side of the protestors and bombers. Lyle pulled me from Jack without another word said.

I never thought I'd feel so alone as I did that morning. But I was wrong. Lyle took me out of all but my virtual school during the holiday break, and by doing so eliminated Lily's competition. I never returned to Hill Creek Junior Academy, and so was unable to say goodbye to Evelyn.

I had a dream about Evelyn on Christmas Eve, waving at her on the street while she rode away in her father's car. I wasn't sure whether she saw me or not, but she didn't wave back.

20

My clone-father first met Lyle Gardener in 1988. Adam-1 was given a tour of Ingenuity by his Uncle Charles not long after my clone-father developed his obsession with genetics – the key to life, and therefore Adam-1's key to immortality. His only hope of not meeting the same fate as his parents.

He described the meeting in great detail. Uncle Charles led him into the spacious room. Around the perimeter of Lyle's office stood an array of antiques – mostly scientific or military, ancient guns and microscopes. Behind the desk loomed an eight-foot-tall grandfather clock, a family heirloom. "Its loud tick-tock seemed to count down the seconds of their lives," he wrote, "as if the clock knew it would long outlive everyone present, and it wouldn't let a second pass without reminding us."

The only thing in the room Adam-1 found more threatening than the clock was the man sitting in front of it.

"Um...Mr. Gardener," Charles began, "this is my nephew Adam. Adam, this is the founder and owner of Ingenuity, Mr. Lyle Gardener."

Lyle was still in his mid-thirties. He was unusually thin and his hair was already silvering, and he had an arrogance about him that made Adam feel inferior. He scrutinized Adam for an uncomfortably long time, an elaborately carved pipe protruding out of the left side of his mouth. Then he rose, taking his pipe out with his left hand and extending his right hand to Adam, forming a stiff, alarming smile. I would come to know that same smile on a face fifty years older, and the memory of it still makes me feel like a child.

“It’s an honor to meet you, Adam,” Lyle said.

“Thank you, sir,” was all Adam could muster. His hand was encased in Mr. Gardener’s surprisingly solid, enveloping grip. Adam knew right away this man was dangerous, but he also knew Mr. Gardener may be the one man who could give him what he wanted. If he wanted to live forever, he would have to fly as close to that alarming smile as possible.

I went to live in Lyle’s house on December 25, 2041. It was sterile, not a speck of dust, and elegant in a clinical sort of way. The room in which I now resided was a shrine to Adam-1 filled with his pictures and diplomas on the walls – constant reminders that I was him and that I should live my life as if it was a continuation of his. That might have comforted me, seeing my grandpa as a father figure who loved my mom and would protect me from Lyle. But with my mother’s murderer forcing my c-father on me, I began to wonder if Adam-1 had always been in league with Lyle, and if he had only used my mom for his own selfish needs. Needs that had led to her death.

For the first time, I began to resent my clone-father.

I never worked up the courage to ask Lyle to take the stuff down. Once I took a framed picture of Adam-1 and Grandma Lily off the dresser and put it in the drawer, replacing it with the Disneyland photo of my mom and me. The next day the other picture was back out and mine was nowhere to be found.

“Why did you put your picture in the drawer?” he asked at dinner that night.

“I just liked my other picture better,” I said. I kept my eyes on my food.

“It’s disrespectful, Adam. Remember who you are.”

“I don’t remember him at all,” I whispered.

“Don’t ever answer back to me again.”

I didn’t answer back or move any of Adam-1’s relics again. But it made me begin to loathe my c-father every time I walked into my bedroom, and every time I woke in the morning. If Lyle thought he could force me into becoming my c-father, the strategy was backfiring.

So I thought. What he knew, and I didn't, was the power of a ticking clock.

In the world beyond my bedroom, change was happening quickly by 2042. Cloning moved further into the mainstream. More than 100,000 clones were born during that year alone. The first private schools exclusively for clones opened their doors, though most people encouraged the integration of clones and non-clones in schools and society, and nearly all early divisions proved to be short-lived. The majority of the new wills were written with a "cloning clause" that indicated whether or not the person wanted to be cloned upon death, and if so, who should be the guardian and what the financial arrangements would be. Most churches strongly discouraged cloning – especially upon death – but nearly all of them began allowing clones to join their parishes.

More sensationally, a few "clone cults" sprang up on the fringe that believed humans should become their own gods as a form of ancestor-descendant worship. They believed that eventually only the people who cloned themselves would live forever, and that those who put their faith in an external God were doomed to die and pass into oblivion. This, not coincidentally, was exactly what Lyle wanted the people to believe. If people were convinced that cloning was the only possible afterlife and Lyle controlled the cloning establishment, he could theoretically hold the keys to heaven. Lyle was not directly responsible for these religious movements, but some of his friends and associates encouraged it by writing books and quietly bankrolling the new churches.

On the extreme opposite side of the religious fence stood the growing cult spawned by Gabrielle Burns. Her journal, now a holy relic, described how she believed the archangel Gabriel had charged her to save the human race by killing the first human clone. If she failed as savior, all humanity would perish. The "Gabrielites" believed that her two failed assassination attempts demonstrated that God had decided to spare Adam-2 and instead destroy everyone for their acceptance of cloning. They therefore no longer called for my destruction, but prepared themselves for the end times that I would visit upon the earth.

There were other monumental social developments underway. Much of conservative America adamantly opposed cloning, but liberals decried what they considered the far more damaging development. What had begun as medicinal gene therapy to cure serious defects in embryos was gradually transforming into wholesale manipulation of the genes. Several years ago, some wealthier parents began picking out their child's gender, eye color, hair color, and height. Now they could start choosing better looks, nice teeth, a genial disposition, strong immune systems and, naturally, greater intelligence for their babies-to-be. Initially only the rich could afford such perks, increasing their advantages over the lower and middle classes. And even now the greatest enhancements can only be had by the wealthy.

Although conservative members of the lower classes had initially opposed such procedures on moral and religious grounds, it was only a matter of time before their rich and powerful shepherds convinced them otherwise. It was all in how you phrased it, and they knew they could sway most of their sheep into believing anything they wanted them to believe as they had done before on such issues as taxation, education, healthcare, and the environment. In this case, their

arguments in favor of genetic manipulation were that it was a moral imperative to provide the best possible start for your children, God wanted humanity to constantly improve ourselves and therefore gave us these tools with which to do it, other countries would do it and we needed to follow suit to maintain a competitive edge, and it would be un-American to stifle the freedom of parents to develop their children as they saw fit.

By 2040 the first intelligence-enhanced babies were being born. Within a few months new private schools were already being prepared for them. Although safe, effective, and relatively inexpensive memory-boosting “smart pills” were already on the market, the genetically enhanced brain would always be steps above a non-enhanced one and would get a bigger boost from the smart pills. It began to look as if babies like Lily and I had been born a few years too early.

The entertainment industry hopped on the cloning and gene-enhancement bandwagon. The story of the years between my birth and my mom’s murder was quickly made into a made-for-holovision movie and another even more popular one came out about the life and death of Gabrielle Burns, infusing the Gabrielites with thousands more converts. Then there were the several cloning-related series bombarding homes including such classics as *C-Father Knows Best*, sitcoms like *The Addams-2 Family*, the cheesy new soap operas *As the Brave New World Turns* and *Two Lives to Live*, a serio-comedic take-off of the old police drama *Adam-12*, and the action series *The Clone Ranger* for which I had coloring books, action figures, and a lunchbox.

Pet cloning had been going on for decades, but it was seeing a similar resurgence as the ability to clone mammals became more routine and less expensive. Lyle, as you might have guessed, was not exactly a big “pets” person, although I’d have loved one during that time of my life. Anything to get away from my great-grandfather and Lily-2. By the time she turned four, I was beginning to feel increasingly uncomfortable playing with her. She always wanted to re-create scenes that Lily-1 had told her about in letters, like when they went on their first real date to see *Sleepless in Seattle*. It was awkward to treat Lily like a kid sister when she was always trying to kiss me on the mouth.

“Like before, Adam,” she said, showing me Grandma Lily’s letter about their first romantic kiss when Lily-1 was 16 and Adam-1 was 22. She knew every detail of Adam and Lily’s courtship. It would be many more years before I would read my clone-father’s brief summary of his “romance” of Lily. Giving the daughter of Ingeneuity’s CEO a white lily every time he came over to visit beginning with Lily’s ninth birthday party. Lily was immediately won over, and Lyle encouraged him to keep wooing her.

“She seems only really happy when she knows you’re coming over,” Lyle told me. “But I hope you’re serious.” He tapped me on the shoulder a couple times with his pipe. “I’d be extremely upset if you ever hurt her.”

I guess it was the kind of thing any lovingly protective father might say, but stated with his usual calm severity that always made me uncomfortable.

“Oh, yes sir,” I answered, “I’m very serious.” And I was. I was then. When I was eighteen, working for Ingenuity was all I cared about. I would’ve dated Bob Dole, little blue pills and all.

On Lily’s eighteenth birthday they made love for the first time, sans Bob Dole. Six weeks later Adam became the oldest date at her prom, with Lily graduating from high school and Adam completing his doctorate in bioengineering soon after. About that same time it grew clear that the night of their first union had also seen the zygotic union of their two gametes. As Adam had hoped. They were hurriedly married on June 5, 1999, and their daughter was born seven months and one day later. They named her Sarah.

*

Lily-2 started playing Helen Reddy’s rendition of *Delta Dawn* as it indicated in Lily-1’s letter, and then she puckered up for her first romantic kiss from me.

“But it says here we have to wait till you’re fifteen,” I noted scientifically.

“No we don’t!” she insisted.

I turned off the music and shrugged. “That’s what it says, Lily. I’m sorry.” I smiled sympathetically, said the years would go quickly, and made a small excuse to go back to my room.

Which was really Adam-1’s. But I slowly learned how to function in that bedroom. I ignored most of Adam-1’s photos and personal items. Unable to block them without assistance, I hid my c-father’s things behind holograms. I immersed myself in holo-books, played the new homnivision games, and inserted myself into homnivision movies, interacting inside new and old films. In those I could perform the heroic acts of Indiana Jones, Luke Skywalker, and Harry Potter, at times changing events through my actions. I saved Ben Kenobi, Albus Dumbledore, and a bunch of people in *Hamlet*. Once I played the homnivision version of the film *Gabrielle* intending to modify the outcome by coming to my mom’s rescue. But like my character in the movie, I ran away.

I hid my cowardice inside my e-journal to my future clone, telling him not to worry about being the same as Adam-1 and me, and not to follow orders from Lyle. I guess I was asking him to have the courage we lacked. I didn’t include the fact that I believed Lyle killed my mother, figuring I’d add that after Lyle was dead. Although the e-journal was encrypted, there seemed too much risk in including such information. If Lyle ever found out for certain that I knew he had murdered my mom, I would surely be next.

Sometimes I’d v-chat with other clones, but I always hid behind an avatar. I didn’t want them to see that they were talking to the first of their kind. Other times I’d create a hologram from a picture of our old dining room or my old bedroom that would make me feel like I was back in my mom’s home. There I daydreamed about mom and Evelyn and Jack. And about killing Lyle.

I plotted my revenge thousands of times in countless different ways. Could I pull it off as perfectly as Lyle had pulled off my mother's murder? Would I be able to kill him at all? I felt small, intimidated, and inferior every time he was around. Where would I ever find the courage to murder him?

21

The first nightmare came a couple years later, soon after my tenth birthday. The media had just interviewed me about my life, my health, and how I was doing in school. They wanted to see if I was a normal, healthy boy, or if I was going wrong in some way. No doubt many anxious parents of clones were watching as well, as they knew I could well be the proverbial canary in the mineshaft. Fortunately, I was physically fine.

My mind was another matter. After a couple years, the strain of living in my c-father's shrine while being raised by my mother's murderer and living with the young girl who thought she was my wife had begun to take its toll. My sense of self-worth was zero, my sense of self-loathing overwhelming. I had no friends, not even in the virtual schools.

Then there were all those photos of Adam-1 at practically every age, scattered throughout the house. I could see myself turning into the images in the pictures at nine and ten years old, and I could assume that, as the years continued to flow by, I'd eventually look like all the photos of Adam-1 when he was older. I could see myself in the future, and I was him.

I found myself wondering if I was wrong to fight against becoming my c-father. I had his DNA, and I owed my entire existence to him. In a real sense, I could be him. My imaginings of his life could be authentic memories imparted from a soul we both shared.

And then there was the most compelling argument of all. Trying to have a separate identity was difficult. Maybe it was difficult because I was fighting against my soul's true nature.

I'd still want to kill Lyle for what he had done to my mother, but I wouldn't have to fight him every day for my identity. Becoming rich and powerful would be a snap – simply a matter of assuming a position of importance at USCS, which the board of directors had already assured. And the photos promised that Lily-2 was destined to grow into a stunningly attractive woman. It wasn't like I'd have to work that hard to woo her. We were already married.

As I let such ideas fester in my head, life grew easier. Only when I thought of my mother did an inner voice tug at me. Begging me to be my own person. Live a life I really wanted to live. The card Adam-1 gave me for my tenth birthday amplified that voice. No longer a sentimental hologram having me sit on his lap. Now it was just letters like this:

Hello Adam,

And congratulations! Ten years old. Double digits. When I was ten I saw the San Diego Padres win the National League pennant.

Unfortunately I was already an orphan. Let's be sure to hug Mom after you read this.

This is a big year, and I know it's going to be a great one for us. I need you to start reading some beginner books on biology and chemistry, and I've taken the liberty of compiling some notes and experiments for you to go over. You'll find it as fascinating as I did, and the earlier you start laying the foundation the better. With any luck, we'll find a way to live forever without cloning before your life is over, and then we won't have to worry about being cloned and losing all those memories from our past lives like we did this time. The power to give us, and the rest of humanity, the remarkable gift of immortality is in our hands. An exciting chapter in that quest begins now!

– A

Adam-1 had never spoken for both of us so much, or given me such specific instructions. It was written with an easy, familial style, but he was telling me what to do with my life in no uncertain terms. For the first time the thought crossed my mind – what would Adam-1 do if I disobeyed him?

Three nights later I had my first encounter with a nightmare that would haunt me for the next forty years of my life.

I found myself standing in an old, snow-dusted cemetery late at night. Some stars glittered through the branches of tall, dead trees, and moonlight reflected brightly off the snow. In front of me was an ornate headstone with an epitaph that read “Adam Silva Elwell, Beloved Husband, Father, and Clone-Father (June 12, 1974 – June 5, 2033).” Lyle didn't want to remind me that Adam-1 was actually dead, but Mom had taken me to his grave once, and the dream grave resembled the real stone except this one was bigger and the whole “Clone-Father” thing wasn't on the original.

Another notable difference was that this grave was open.

I peered over the edge, sure I'd see my grandfather's casket. Instead I saw myself – a ten-year-old boy peering over the edge of a grave pit. It unnerved me, but I couldn't back away. Instead I waved. The image waved back. That shook me up even more. What a stupid way to see if it was a reflection. For my next test, I crouched and quickly stood back up. The image did the same thing. It was definitely me. In fact, I could even see the wooden outline of the mirror. I relaxed a little. Until the image waved again, this time of its own accord.

I froze with fear, but that fear dissipated when the figure welcomingly stretched his hand out to me. I thought of Evelyn's father holding her hand, and of the father who had saved me from the witch in a more distant dream. He wanted to be my loving father after all. One who would also

feel the loss of my mom, whom he had loved as much as I did. And a father who would stand by me and protect me from Lyle.

I jumped feet first into the shadowed hole, trying to land on the wooden frame of the mirror, but the edge was narrower than I thought. My feet hit the glass, which cracked. The hands of the mirror image lurched toward the cracks, grabbing my feet. I was being yanked down into the mirror before I could fully comprehend the betrayal.

A frantic struggle ensued between my mirror image and me. He managed to get on top of my chest. I struck him in the nose, and it shattered off like glass, revealing a hole with a bit of skull showing around it. For a moment I thought I had an advantage, assuming the rest of his body could be easily shattered. But before I could act, the image grabbed a shard of mirror and stabbed through my hand, pinning it to the dirt floor. He climbed out of the mirror and out of the pit. I yelled, but I heard nothing. I pounded on the mirror that trapped me, but I couldn't break it. I searched for a way through it like a fly on a windowpane, but the invisible barrier was solid.

Adam-1 stared back down at me from where I'd stood a minute before. He was older now – the same age as he was in pictures taken not long before he died. His stare was passionless and grim. Great-Grandpa Lyle walked up beside him. He had a deep, disapproving frown on his face. Finally Grandma Lily appeared on the other side of Adam-1. She leaned against my c-father and smiled in a way that made my blood run colder than it already was. Both Adam-1 and Lyle began shoveling dirt onto the mirror, each shovelful landing with the same thud I heard when Lyle threw dirt on my mother's coffin. The last thing I could see was my grandpa's stony face. He saw me looking back at him and threw in another pile of dirt. I was in darkness.

That's when I woke. In the darkness, I imagined all those photos of Adam-1 staring down at me in my bed as the Adam in my dream stared down at me in my grave. I pulled the covers over my head and didn't sleep again that night. Scared of myself.

In the years that followed, everything about the dream remained exactly the same except that as I got older, so did my mirror reflection.

As the months went by, I found myself fighting less and less to stay separate from Adam-1, while at the same time liking myself as a person less and less. Adam-1 was winning the battle of wills. It became increasingly rare for me to fight for my individuality. Whenever I realized this, it frightened me. Frightening me even more, Lyle appeared to be far more pleased with me.

I jumped when his hand patted me on the shoulder. "Good boy," he said, picking up my e-reader and nodding. "This is a great intro on genetics."

I nodded. Lyle played with the screen for a few seconds, then placed it back down in front of me.

"Keep it up, Adam. You're turning out just fine," he said, patting me again. Almost looking proud.

As he walked away, I turned back to my reader. Although the same book was on the screen, it was now a version with Adam-1's notations.

On December 20, 2044, as I sat in bed looking at a framed photo of my mom on the third anniversary of her murder, I grew determined to end my downward spiral. Killing Lyle would break me away from my c-father and avenge my mother at the same time.

It was time to implement the murder plot I'd daydreamed about for years.

I had to do it before I lost what little fight was still lingering within me.

22

I couldn't orchestrate the kind of ruse Lyle had used to kill my mother. There was nobody to frame. Nor was I willing to get caught. I was the only one who knew Lyle's evil heart, and I wasn't going to have the entire world condemn me – the first human clone – for killing his own great-grandfather in cold blood. Ever since my mother's funeral, I'd had the desire to prove the anti-cloners wrong by being seen as an upstanding citizen. Murdering my great-grandfather would disgrace my mother, myself, and perhaps all clones. And it could convince even the non-fanatics that I was indeed the Antichrist.

That left me only two options: Lyle had to die either by accident or suicide.

I dreamt up many accidents: falling down the stairs or off the balcony, drowning in the bathtub, electrocution in the bathtub. But they were all either too complicated, too hard to conceal, or not fatal enough. His death had to be absolutely certain.

That left suicide. A gunshot to the head by a large caliber gun would suffice.

I couldn't arrange it at Lyle's house. Lyle had a live-in butler and maid, and I couldn't risk those variables. It would have to be at the cabin in the Sequoias. In the cabin's master bedroom, Lyle kept a 9 mm. semi-automatic pistol in a locked drawer of his antique nightstand. I assumed that the key was somewhere nearby in case he needed to get the gun in the middle of the night. I found it in a slit in his mattress near the headboard. The gun wasn't loaded, but the ammunition was hidden under a false floor in the same drawer. The gun's handgrip had built-in fingertip sensors so only he could fire it.

I took a photo of the gun in the drawer and used it to help me find information on the web. There were instructions on how to load the magazine into the handgrip and how to take the safety off. As I suspected, the sensors on the handle detected fingerprints, and there was no override unless he authorized it. Which meant I had to get Lyle to hold the gun while the trigger was pulled. No problem, since this was going to be a suicide.

I considered incapacitating him with chloroform or slipping him a Mickey, but I knew they would leave traces in the body and the district attorney would realize that foul play was afoot. But there was one drug that wouldn't cause suspicion. He already used it.

Lyle Gardener was an insomniac. Not too surprising; any man plotting to be a god would have a lot on his mind at night. Not liking to swallow pills in his old age, he'd taken to a liquid "sleep drink" that he always poured into a glass of wine before retiring.

That made it all too easy for me. I just had to figure out the correct quantity to make him sleep so soundly I could put the gun in his hand and force his finger to pull the trigger without waking him. Too little and he would wake up and kill me. Too much and his heart would go into cardiac arrest, triggering an alarm that would send emergency vehicles to his aid. If they successfully revived him, he might conclude that I was behind the overdose.

In which case he would kill me.

I researched his sleep drink and how large of a dose he was already giving himself, and guestimated an amount that would knock him out more than usual but not kill him. I felt about ninety percent confident that I'd guestimated correctly. If I'd learned anything from murder mysteries, there was no such thing as a perfect murder. Ninety percent would have to be an acceptable risk.

My second concern was to avoid the nights he didn't use his sleep drink. About once a week, even when we stayed at the cabin, he would welcome a female guest late at night, after Lily and I were put to bed. I eventually realized they were high-price call girls. I caught glimpses of some of them from my bedroom window as they approached the front door. Most of them were tall, beautiful blondes whose faces and hairstyles were reminiscent of an adult Lily. Some resembled my mother, but I tried not to think about that.

I had to slip the extra sleeping potion into his wine on a night he wasn't having visitors, and obviously I had to do it when he wouldn't see me.

On December 20, the third anniversary of my mom's death, it all came clear. I would kill Lyle on Christmas Eve.

I could hardly contain my excitement. For one thing, I was confident he wouldn't have any guests on Christmas Eve. He wouldn't want a restless Lily to hear someone enter and think Santa Claus had arrived.

Each year we left milk and chocolate chip cookies for Santa Claus. Though I was too old for such a thing, it still made Lily's eyes brighten at bedtime. Lyle would drink the milk and eat the cookies after his daughter was asleep, even though he hated milk. Drinking it was the most unselfish thing I'd ever known Lyle to do, especially considering that he did it without anyone supposedly knowing that he was doing this charitable act. He could just as easily have dumped it

down the sink. But it complicated my plan. He would taste the drug in the milk. My solution was to convince him to do away with this charmingly unselfish “milk” tradition. Instead of leaving milk for Santa like everyone else did, I’d suggest that we leave him a glass of wine.

The only stumbling block I could foresee was Lily. If she found the whole wine idea offensive, Lyle wouldn’t do it. But on Christmas Eve, to my delight, Lily clapped her hands and laughed at the plan, apparently thrilled at the idea that our family had a special relationship with Santa, and could give him the drink he really wanted.

“Well, I guess it’s settled then,” said Lyle to the happy girl on his knee. “I’ll break out the best bottle of wine I have, and maybe Santa will be extra generous next year.”

Lily’s eyes got big for a moment, but then she frowned. “You can’t *bribe* Santa Claus, Daddy!”

Lyle and I burst out laughing – real laughter. I don’t think either of us had known that Lily was aware of what a bribe was. It looked like kindergarten was teaching her well.

“You’re right, sweet pea – Daddy was just kidding,” he responded, and shot me a knowing wink. It made me feel sick to my stomach, but I managed to keep grinning.

We put the glass of wine and the plate of cookies out near the fireplace, and then Lyle took Lily upstairs to get her ready for bed. As soon as they were gone, I put on my gloves and measured out some of his sleeping potion using a small vial from the chemistry set Lyle had given me last year – another blatant encouragement to follow in my c-father’s footsteps, but one that now might come back to bite him. I carefully poured the measured amount into the red wine. Rinsing out the vial in the kitchen, I began imagining the courtroom drama that would unfold. The hearing for my mom’s attempted murder six years ago gave my imagination plenty to work with. I could picture the attorney asking me about the events of that night, and whether I had any idea that my great-grandfather was distraught.

“No at all,” I’d respond. “I thought we all went to bed happy. It was Christmas!”

“Of course,” my imagined attorney responded genially. “Can you describe what happened after you went to bed on Christmas Eve?”

“I woke up to a loud bang and ran down the stairs. I called out for my great-grandpa, but no one answered, so I went into his bedroom.

“And what did you see there?”

I would shake my head in mock horror.

“Steady son,” the attorney would say, “I know this is hard.”

I would gulp. “I saw my Great-Grandpa Lyle. Dead.”

“Was there anybody else in the room when you arrived?”

“No. Not that I saw.”

“And where was the gun?”

“It had fallen to the floor next to his hand.”

“That’s all, son,” would be the attorney’s tender reply as he gently helped me down from the witness stand.

Then the experts would begin to testify.

“Due to the fingerprint sensors, could anyone other than Lyle Gardener have fired that gun?”

“Absolutely not. And, in fact, tests proved that he did indeed fire the weapon himself.”

Finally the doctor who performed the autopsy would come to the stand.

“Did your autopsy reveal any hint of foul play?”

“Not at all. The only kind of drug we found in his system was from the medicine he always used for his insomnia. We found traces of that in a wine glass near the fireplace with Lyle Gardener’s fingerprints and saliva on it. In my opinion, this could be nothing but suicide.”

*

It seemed foolproof. I smiled as I dried off the vial and put it in my pocket.

Lyle was coming down the stairs as I was on my way to my room.

“Good night,” I called as innocently as I could.

“Come on down for a second, Adam.”

He sounded friendly, but my heart leapt into my throat. Somehow he knew. Did he have secret cameras in the living room and kitchen? I followed him back down to the living room, searching to make some excuse, but with a growing dread that Lyle was about to kill me. I glanced at the front door. Should I make a run for it? But where would I go? It was more than a mile to the nearest neighbor. I’d freeze to death trying to hide in the mountains. I was trapped.

He led me to the fireplace and turned, smiling and holding out a cookie.

“Santa won’t miss one cookie,” he said.

I forced a smile. “Thank you.” Was it poisoned?

“Thank you for the great suggestion. Santa will sleep more happily tonight.”

I nodded.

He picked up the wine and cookies and led me into the kitchen. There he added his regular dose to the wine and poured me a glass of milk, and we ate and drank together. Lyle asked me about my studies and talked about Christmases with my c-father at the cabin. I watched every time he took a swig of wine. He didn't seem to notice anything special about the drink, and seemed oblivious to my intense interest in his drinking of it.

“I guess we better get to bed before Santa comes,” Lyle said rubbing his eyes after the wine and the milk and the cookies had disappeared.

I agreed. The cookies didn't seem to be poisoned, and his wine was already taking effect. I'd been worrying for nothing. Lyle wasn't on to me after all.

23

By my calculations I had to wait two to three hours for Lyle to be in his deepest sleep. I lay in bed, going over the plot again and again until the monotony began to make my eyes feel heavy. I glanced at the clock. Only thirty minutes had gone by. With my adrenaline up, I hadn't imagined staying awake would be a problem. I went over the plan again, but felt myself slipping into sleep. I set the alarm on my cell for midnight just in case.

The next thing I knew my clock read 3:00 A.M., and I was late. Did my alarm ever wake me? I couldn't remember. I felt flustered and stressed, my mind in a fog. I ran down the stairs and entered Lyle's bedroom. He was breathing gently and steadily.

I wasn't. I put my gloves on and pulled the little golden key out of its hiding spot in the mattress. The key fit into the lock. As I turned the key and opened the door, it felt like I was watching myself do it from above rather than doing it myself. I saw myself crouched, staring at the gun in the drawer. Was I having second thoughts? Would I actually be able to fire a gun at a sleeping man's head? Even Lyle's? I began moving again, taking the gun out and slipping out the fake bottom to reveal the magazine. I slipped it into the handgrip, removed the safety, and stood up to face him.

There I hesitated again. I needed to put the gun in Lyle's hand. But what if he woke up? He couldn't – not with all the drugs in his system. But what if he did? They'd been wearing off for two or three hours. He would have the gun in his hand. He would kill me right then. I could be dead five seconds from now.

With that same detachment from before, I saw myself place the gun into the palm of Lyle's hand; carefully wrapping his warm fingers around the grip and making sure his fingertips fell on the sensors. He didn't stir. I turned the gun towards Lyle's head. I was panting hard, my blood pounding in my temples. There was nothing to stop me now. I would kill the almighty Lyle who

had intimidated me since my earliest memories and finally avenge my mother. If I could just bring myself to do it.

But my stomach clenched. Something was wrong. Something about Lyle being so deeply unconscious that he let me put a gun in his hand and point it at his head without stirring. The cross-examination of the autopsy began playing in my head, the prosecutor asking the autopsy doctor about the drugs in Lyle's system.

"Did you notice anything unusual about the sleeping agent in Mr. Gardener's system?"

"Well," began the doctor. "It seemed unusually high. Like maybe he was trying to kill himself with a drug overdose before he decided to shoot himself."

"But your tests revealed that he had consumed the drug approximately five hours before the shooting. Could Lyle Gardener have been awake five hours following the overdose on his sleep drink?"

The doctor was confused for a moment. "Why no," he said, "he couldn't."

"So someone else must have forced him to pull the trigger while he slept."

"Yes, that's the only way."

"And who would have done something like that?" sneered the prosecutor, turning towards the audience and directing everyone's attention at me.

The doctor stood up and pointed in the same direction. "It must have been the clone!"

I had the gun ready to go. All I had to do was force his finger to pull back on the trigger. But would I be killing myself as well? Did I just now realize a gaping hole that would scuttle my scheme and leave me as the obvious murderer? How could I have missed such a conspicuous problem? If only I'd been born a little later and given enhanced intelligence.

Something in the room caught the periphery of my vision, and I looked up to see my image reflected in Lyle's bedroom mirror. Then it wasn't me anymore, but Adam-1 in his grave, exactly like the vision in my nightmares. He began banging furiously on the mirror, trying to stop me. But was he trying to stop me for Lyle's sake or for my sake – or for his own sake?

The gun was wrenched out of my hand and pointed at me. I cried out in shock and fright. Lyle was glowering at me, completely awake, aiming the gun at my forehead.

"Did you really think I'd let you kill *me*!" he bellowed, standing up and pushing me to the floor. He grabbed my shoulder with his free hand and began shaking me against the floor. "You're dead, Adam, and you'll never wake up!" He repeated the last two words, "Wake up! Adam, wake up."

I woke up with a start. Lyle was looming over me, but not with a gun. He was only gently shaking me awake. The light of dawn was filtering through my bedroom curtain. It was morning, and I'd slept through the opportunity to kill him.

"There you are, sleepy head," Lyle said. "Come on, we're going to open the presents."

"Yeah," I said. "I'll be right there." My head was so hazy I don't know if I actually managed to speak out loud.

"We'll be waiting," he replied merrily enough, as if I hadn't just now tried to kill him in my dream.

After he left the room, I checked my cell alarm. It had indeed been set for midnight. I must have slept straight through it.

I made my way down to the living room. He was seated in his leather armchair. Lily-2 sat by her mountain of gifts.

"Yea!" she cried. I tried to look equally enthusiastic as Lily bounced up and handed me a present with a card attached. "Daddy said we should open these first," she said, holding up a small box and card for herself.

"You first," I said before she exploded from pent-up excitement.

She didn't argue as she ripped open her Christmas card and scanned it.

"From before?" she asked Lyle, her eyes lighting up even more.

He nodded and smiled. "It was Adam's wedding present to you. You were holding it the night you transitioned," he said, a euphemism for Lily-1's suicide.

She tore away the wrapping paper from a little white box and opened it. With a great deal of ceremony, for a five year old, Lily-2 lifted a gold chain from the box that led to a locket attached at the end. She opened it up and gazed at the tiny, oval photos.

"Look, Adam! It's us!" She showed them to me. Portraits of our clone-parents right before they were married.

"That's great," I said.

"Now open yours!"

I opened the envelope and took out the Christmas card. Inside was a short note in Lyle's handwriting.

Deep sleep last night?

My breath left me. He nodded at me, half-grinning around his pipe.

“Now open the present.”

Tears flooded my eyes as I forced my hands to unwrap the heavy present. Inside was a wooden box, and inside the box was some wadded-up paper. Each piece of paper had a picture of my murdered mother printed on it. It was a still shot from the holovideo he had sent on the 9-1-1 call as I hugged her limp body. A close-up. Only her lifeless face and eyes were visible over a tuft of my hair. I took the wads out one at a time, slowly unraveling each one, not stopping until I saw what lay at the bottom.

“Well, what is it?” Lily asked.

My fingers touched the cold steel of a pistol. It was identical to the one in his nightstand, but for one difference. This one didn’t have fingerprint sensors.

How stupid I had been. It was clear now. Of course Lyle had the house monitored by hidden cameras. He also tracked my web use. He had pieced it all together, and had seen my wine-for-Santa Claus ploy for exactly what it was. He had turned it around and spiked the milk last night with some sort of sleeping tonic.

“It’s a toy gun,” Lyle lied, answering the desperate Lily for me. “And it’s loaded.”

I met Lyle’s confident, challenging eyes.

“Would you like to use it, Adam?”

My focus dropped back down to the gun. Was he bluffing about it being loaded or really giving me a chance to kill him? I pictured myself grabbing the gun and firing again and again into his evil body, Lily-2 screaming in horror as her father’s blood splattered over her festively wrapped presents. Feeling the climactic rush and release flow through my body. Release from so much anger, pain, humiliation, and loss. I stared at one of the unraveled pictures of my dead mother.

“Adam?” he persisted.

I’ll never know if the gun was loaded or not. I was too frightened to call his bluff. I slammed the box lid down and ran up to my room in shame as Lily cried out for me to come back. I buried my face into my pillow and whispered the same three words again and again:

“I’m sorry Mom, I’m sorry Mom, I’m sorry Mom...”

The next few months were a time of steady fear. I knew then I couldn’t beat Lyle and lived only at his mercy. I did everything I was told without question, never daring to meet the old man’s

eyes. And he looked down on me with satisfaction. My uncontested submission might have put him at ease, but my defeated capitulation gave him deep pleasure.

In late April, Lyle had a massive stroke. He regained consciousness on April 29 and the doctors predicted that he'd survive with some impairment. But early the morning of April 30, 2045 he was pronounced dead.

Relief filled me at the announcement, followed by despair that I'd wallowed in fear and cowardice instead of avenging my mother's death. The power had been in my grasp, but my Hamlet-esque inaction had allowed my mother's murder to go unpunished, and now the opportunity for vengeance was forever gone.

As Lyle's casket was lowered in the ground, and I held a crying Lily in my arms, I realized that I would never be able to forgive myself for that.

I vowed to never run away again.

Part II:

The Book of Lily

Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.

– Mark Twain

To continue the four-part series of The Book of Adam, please visit

<http://www.robhopper.com/>

Dedicated to Dolly, the first cloned mammal, and with love to my own Grandpa, Rev. Rick Drew. Thank you for all the love and wisdom you gave me, your encouragement of my writing, and for sharing your ideas on religion and discussing them with such sincerity and openness, always treating my thoughts with the same respect you had for your own. Including, of course, our last big religious discussion – about Dolly and cloning. If I am even a little bit like my own Grandpa, I am a far better person for it. This one's for you.

*** Acknowledgements ***

For all their encouragement, advice, and inspiration, this work could not have been done without my editor Sarah Cypher, my agent Ken Atchity of AEI, Mary Caete, Joseph Campbell, Frank Capra, Tom Chung, Michael Crichton, Miss Cullar from Lemoore Elementary, Dad, Charles Dickens, Walt Disney, Dolly, Grandma, Grandpa, Roshelle Hall, Aldous Huxley, Stephen King, Jonathan Knox, C.S. Lewis, George Lucas, Mom, Rob Reiner, Shannon from Hill Creek School,

Mary Shelley, Mrs. Jan Slater (second grade teacher), Stephen Spielberg, Aaron Watson, Dr. Ian Wilmut, my family and friends both past and current, the people I met on the train between San Diego and Seattle and the great city of Vancouver while working on the book, and the amazing theatre community of San Diego. You're all a part of who I am, and I'm grateful for it.