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CLONE-DRONES AND THE REAL THING

**by
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I scratched my ever growing bald spot; the chaffing mess a testament to my two weeks of SCUBA diving on Caymen Brac.

"I'm bored as hell, Myra." I said.

"Artie D'ammato," she admonished, "you just got back from vacation, and already you're bored?"

"I know. I should be ashamed of myself, but since I've been back I have been pretty upset."

She pulled back the long blonde strands that were partially hiding one of her wide ice blue eyes. "Silly, you're just having adjustment problems. It's hard going from coral walls to antiseptic labs."

I stared at her awhile before smiling. My wife--or should I say daughter. It was me, after all, who created her from nothing more than a tiny fragment of skin. I cheated the accident which took her from the world so prematurely. But the boss men had no idea that I had performed "unauthorized cloning". It was grounds for instant employment termination, even for the Chief of Bioengineering for the Museum of Living History.

Her soft caress of my furrowed cheek sent my thoughts scattering from the work place to the bedroom. "You up for some exercise?"

She turned, walking down our long hall towards our room. "Let's go."

She didn't have to ask twice.

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Work was a bore, as it had been for the last few years. Even when calling all the shots I felt like a pawn, and of course I was. Bur-ass-crats kept me from doing what I really wanted, just like they did millions of others. I wanted to expand on Gerard Darby's work of the past (he is the father of modern clone theory for all readers ignorant of science history). He wanted to actually clone famous persons of history; not just dress up living mannequins with computer driven response.

"Is Asimov almost ready?" blurted Renny, the lab coordinator.

"Yeah Ren, he'll be reciting speeches on visionary twentieth century science fiction within the week."

I had tried to sound upbeat, but Renny could always read me like a comic book--only faster.

"What's up, Artie?"

"Same old, same old. I want out of here. This corporate boredom will be my undoing yet."

"Why don't you take a couple weeks off. Go down to the Caribbean for a little r&r..." he said, sarcastically referring to my recent two weeks off.

"Renny, I swear, the older you get the older your jokes get."

* * *

Another sleepless night brought me to the reason I started this half-assed journal in the first place. At this point in life my only problem was that I didn't want to **work** any more. I had done enough for the company. If I were in sales I probably would have tucked away a cool million by now, but scientists were on the low end of the pay scale. For the life of me I never understood that one. The corporate goons and their dollar sign ethics at work again. For over twenty years I averaged eleven hour work days, toiling over old research disks, subelectron microscopes, dysfunctional cloning pods, and computer generated DNA mapping errors. All for what? A tiny apartment and a beat up hover with only three fans.

operational. At this point in my reverie my "master plan" hit me like a cyclone. I spent the next week planning and plotting my escape from mundania!

Following the planning stage, I worked on the first of what I was to later dub my clone drones. The drone would be my double--at least physically. His thoughts and actions would be controlled via the latest personality matrix programs, which Renny had introduced over ten years ago. They added much more realism to the once "sterile" exhibits in the museum.

It took Renny over a month to complete the program; he probably would have been faster, but was out of practice after two years working in an "admin" capacity. The program was a basic "host format" personality matrix, customized to fit my sometimes sour personality.

While Renny worked on the hard part (the actual cloning was always easier than the artificial intelligence), I fine tuned the plans. I took a "semi retirement" type position with the company. I needed my lab clearance for my "after hours" work, but would not have the time to do a job such as mine so I requested a transfer to the administration unit, ala Renny's assistant. It was perfect! The honchos, as we **affectionately** called them, thought that I was just getting to "old", but still needed a job to get me my thirty year pension level--wrong as always!

Another eighteen weeks saw the fruition of my most coveted experiment. Renny and I had an army of over forty working clones, our "breadwinners" so to speak. We accessed the museum's bio-records which indicated past personas which for some reason or other were never created for display; displays which gave the people the opportunity to "travel back in time to meet the makers of history", as the company's slogan read. In most cases the honchos felt there would be a lack of knowledge of the historical figure, hence lack of interest. This suited us perfectly.

Our flesh puppet army was sent out to find work; to find the few remaining positions of menial labor. True, such jobs were hard to come by in the 22nd century, yet some exist. Renny customized their persona programs to fit their particular tasks.

We sent Charles Darwin off to the Holo-mat, Anne Bolin worked as a maid at a country motel, east of Rochester. We had Lizzie Borden stocking axe handle lathes (I do have a sense of humor, you know). Our whole army was lifelike but very boring. But that's what we needed. No one who wasn't boring would take such a job in these modern times. All we needed was for our "employees" to go through their simple motions, returning to my rented-for-the-purpose flat to give us the money. Renny took care of the actual credit deposits, and I don't even know exactly how he did it. He would just type feverishly at his keyboard saying "don't sweat it", grinning like a kid in the cookie jar all the while.

Things began to pretty much run on their own, so I had a lot of time and money to travel with Myra. Myra, the clone that was an exact reproduction of my wife; the clone that was now my clandestine lover.

One day, while sipping fizzle marguerites oceanside Palau she turned to me and said, "Artie, how are you getting all these days off? And who is paying for all this? I know where you work!"

I smiled. Her cute little one-liners always made me smile. "I took my sabbatical, and the one I missed seven years ago. And I've been saving for a long time to do the things we've always wanted to."

She was not yet convinced by my lie. "Are you sure you will not get into trouble?"

"Yeah, honey. Geez, don't be such a worrier."

"I guess you're right. Anyway, I've been having too much fun to stop now."

Presto! Myra the clone could be so gullible. She had no choice. There were gaping holes in her memory, and she had to rely on me for most of her information. She knew she was a clone, but to her she was just Myra with a little amnesia. At least she was enjoying herself.

Weeks turned into months turned into years. We never tired of each other. However, I just tired in general. My age was creeping up on me like an early evening shadow. Our age difference really came to the forefront, and that's when I realized I had to do something about it. It wasn't fair to shackle the thirty-something Myra with a nearly seventy year old man. When I cloned my dead lover's body, I used Gerrard's Age Extrapolator to bring her back somewhere in her early twenties. The machine could reconfigure the DNA at just about any approximate age, the only side effects being larger than normal gaps of memory. Little did I know that my selfish decision would haunt my "golden years".

* * *

I spent the morning of one of the last of my "check-in" visits talking to Renny. He usually spent the entire time telling me how he covered for one faux pas or another that my double had committed. We usually had a good laugh. This time, however he was not amused.

"What do you mean 'grand finale'?"

"Just what I said. I'm going to clone myself.."

He rolled his eyes and interrupted, "Listen Artie, even though the brass just thinks you're a bit senile these days, it's still hard trying to cover for you!"

I laughed. "Renny, shut up and listen. I'm not going to make another Arthur drone; I'm going to make an exact reproduction, only younger. A version of myself to keep up with Myra, Lord knows the me in this body can't."

"I don't like the sound of this, Arthur," he only called me that when he was **very** serious.

I tried bringing back his normal self with one of his own over used lines, "Don't sweat it."

"I'm just concerned that you..."

"Ren, I've thought long and hard on this, and it's what I want to do. I know I've gotten you involved in a lot of things you probably wouldn't have done without my arm twisting."

"Nonsense. Our little scam has made me a rich man. Who else in this scrounging company, besides the suits, could retire at fifty three."

"You're retiring?"

"Yep. This is my last year," he said smugly.

"Well, I guess my evil twin will have to be put out to pasture, also."

"Yeah. As soon as were finished with your last experiment."

It was good to see that my long time friend would stick by me, even if he did not agree with what I was about to do.

The actual "reincarnation" of myself was pretty easy to accomplish. The necessary equipment had long since been developed and was in place in Lab III. I basically just had to initiate the process, then make sure no one else in the lab caught on to what we were up to. Only three weeks passed before he was ready; ready to be locked up for the next few months while I filled him in on his vast memory gaps.

Myra thought I was back at work. I told her the company **needed** me for a special project. I told her I would be keeping late hours, and she believed me.

At the start of Arthur II's fifth month of life, I explained what I had really been doing to Myra.

"Pleased to meet you," she said, grabbing his outstretched hand.

"Myra, you already **know** him. He's me." I said.

"This is all very confusing," she whispered. She sat on the couch looking at me then at my younger self. The glimmer of a long tucked away memory began to surface. "Yes...I do know you. We were much younger..."

The young Arthur was also confused. He remembered Myra, but had never **met** her. I was also feeling strange. I sat with a younger version of the wife I had once lost; a withered old man introducing her to the man I once was! Believe me, it was weird.

* * *

The initial adjustment period lasted longer than I thought, but finally things began to settle down. I went from lover to kindly grandfather type. There was always uncomfortable situations, but they remained far and few between.

Sometimes, when watching Arthur kiss Myra I became jealous. It was me that was kissing her, but it wasn't. I didn't get to feel her soft, full lips on mine, or feel her whispery caress. Damn, and I thought the paradoxes of time travel were complicated!

I gathered our little "family" together one evening and said, "Arthur, Myra, I have to leave."

Myra's smile instantly vanished. Even though I was no longer her lover, she still loved me as a person. The future of her present lover. "No, Artie. Please stay with us."

"I can't. I **need** to leave. We can still see each other on holidays, and I'll send letters..."

The rest is a bit fuzzy, but I can tell you that I was a broken man. I, or I should say Renny, arranged for a monthly deposit into their credit accounts. I left the country, taking quite a bit of international credit myself. My evenings were filled with the sound, smell, and touch of the salty trade winds of St. Croix. I made residence in an oceanside condo in Christiansted. With the help of modern geriatric supressors, I was even able to do an occasional shallow shore dive. I never contacted the couple again; they had to live their own lives. Sure, once in awhile I still feel the hollow hurt in my stomach, but all-in-all I feel lucky. After all, how many guys get a second chance after losing the woman they loved?

The End