

Diary of a Clone by Jennifer Paull

Wednesday 26th February: Fog

I thought her thoughts again today. They're insidious, slipping into my mind without warning. They overwhelm me. It was only for a few moments, but for those few moments my mind is not my own. Uniques, originals, they can't know what that's like: to have your mind taken out of your control by someone you hate. Today she was lusting over one of the men in her office. A bland looking guy, all pastel shirts and too much cologne. Probably the kind of man who thinks a waffle maker for Christmas is a really considerate gift: it's the kind she normally goes for. It sickens me every time that I feel her attraction to a person I've never met as if I were her, as if for a moment we were one being again. I had been in the middle of booking a holiday for a customer at the time and I can only imagine what it must have looked like and what he must have thought was happening. No one knows that this happens to me, to us. No copy has ever confessed it I'm sure. Who would we tell? Not even our originals know that they invade our minds and take us over when they're inspired or angry or in heat. If they knew, what more control over us would they have? We are already the copies, the poor reflections of our parent cells, we don't need to debase ourselves further. We don't even discuss it amongst ourselves, but we understand, when the young ones come to us and say they don't know who they are, just how hard it is to find yourself when you're made out of someone else, when you came out of a jar while your original was being nurtured inside a loving mother. The only thing we can hold over them is that at least we are always older: they spur on our physical development to make our bodies ready in case they are needed. That's where it all started: when we weren't needed anymore, when our originals were born clinging to life on their own without any need for us.

I sometimes wish they had taken a piece of me then and there. Better that than this chipping away at me at unseen moments. My body was built to take it, to provide strong organs and healthy blood, with little enough regard for deformity or viability it's true, but my mind...it terrifies me that my mind was never mine in the first place.

Friday 7th March: Rain

I have a real job. Many people are uncomfortable with that fact, but I'm afraid it was unavoidable. The institutes that raise us only have so many jobs available for those who live through to adulthood and while at the start it wasn't a problem, now things are getting out of hand, though, in fact, I volunteered to look outside the institute for work before it was necessary. I hated the institution I was raised in, pitied by the older copies who looked after us and knew what awaited us and the staff who tried to pretend we

weren't people, that we would all become mindless if they treated us that way. Out here I am gawked at, the three livid spots on my wrist that denote me as a copy the subject of many stares and pointed fingers, but I suppose it is preferable.

My real job is in a travel agents'. I listen to people dream...until I tell them the price. Most of the interesting people I see are typically middle class. The truly wealthy have their own ways of getting things done and the poor are depressingly predictable in what they want from a holiday. However every now and then I get a customer come in who I never would have expected at all.

Today I had a copy booking a holiday in South America. He was handsome enough as uniques go and astonishing for a copy. I doubted his girlfriend appreciated what a rarity he was, but she had a budget that was at the higher range of what we see so who was I to argue? She had decided on an adventure holiday that would take them through jungles, down rapids and to some rather dodgy restaurants in the midst of countries poor enough to make food out of pretty much anything. It was a shame really that I had to tell her they couldn't go. I could see he suspected as much from the moment she opened her mouth, but he left it to me to tell her. All the interesting travel companies won't insure clones. Their excuse is that we are a liability since we are invariably defective in one way or another. The careful manipulation that makes the one or two parts our originals need to be viable compromises the rest of our bodies. And yet those pitiful few of us who survive to adulthood are no more defective than many of the uniques and originals they let on their tours. The truth is we are an investment, a commodity bought for an exceptional amount and the people who have paid for our creation can easily afford to invest as much on taking to court any tour company that leaves us damaged and useless. I explained this in simple terms to the woman, but she seemed to take it personally regardless of the fact that *she* could go on any tour she wanted. She was angry; she yelled while her boyfriend glared at the wall, his cheeks red with anger rather than embarrassment. I could have told her all the other things that copies are allowed to do: no plastic surgery, no driving, no children. All in all a quiet holiday in the sun doesn't seem such a bad second option, but I doubt she would have seen those things as comparable to her plans. They left eventually. I don't think she even realised, when she was yelling about the rights of copies, that the three little marks on my wrist matched her man's.

Monday 10th March: Stormy.

At first copies were merely a way of helping terminally ill infants have a chance. It sounds so noble. A baby would be tested as early as possible after conception for any likely genetic conditions. If any were found, a copy would be grown to provide what was needed, since growing single organs or blood without a body had produced such terrible results when transplanted, the synthetic stuff they had to be steeped in causing more problems than the replacement parts solved. It was certain the copies would be used: the tests had proven they were necessary and they would never breathe a single

breath of air before their valves or bowels or blood was taken. Only 100% positive tests allowed for a copy to be made, that was until someone with enough money bucked the odds. Not only did they get a copy of their son made, but their son lived to meet him. Now anyone with enough money can get a copy of their son or daughter made for some jumped up reason. I saw six copies walk pass our office today. When I first left my institute there weren't more than six out in the real world and these new copies: they look so healthy. I suppose when you don't have to put all your effort into perfecting one element the whole composition is more harmonious.

It hardly matters. The court order came through today for Marty Stalks in the US to hand over his kidney to his original. If he fights any harder to keep it they'll have to take it from his lifeless body. There have been precedents before where originals have found their copies to beg a transfusion or half a liver, but those copies who have gone through with it have done so voluntarily. I often wonder what the response would be if a copy requested to get in touch with their original because they needed something. I wonder if maybe some have already been refused. For one brief moment Marty gave us hope that our lives were our own if we managed to survive, but not any more. We are copies, commodities, medical accessories: just a bag of transplants, floating in transfusions, wrapped in a bag of grafts. In that court we lost our only hope of rights.

Thursday 13th March: Partly Cloudy.

Today was a day for a check up. Like the Christmas story I must go back to the lab of my birth and be counted, measured, tested and probed. Like the Christmas story there was no room at the inn, but luckily one of my young fellows finally succumbed to her poor design and a bed was made available. I have been instructed never to travel more than two hours a day, which means The Woodmans Institute is just within reach. I am worse since last time, but that is only to be expected: all we do is get worse. One of the nurses asked me to talk to some of the younger ones, to be a mentor. I refused and was not surprised that every copy on the staff had done so before me. We cannot inspire them because we are not inspired and can never hope to aspire to anything more than we are given.

Tonight I am sleeping in another girl's bed and writing this by the light of a torch like a teenager, as lights out was some time ago and I have no desire to sleep just yet. The machinery, the humming and buzzing of equipment, reminds me of my childhood and makes me wish I was at home, where the only sounds that bother my sleep come from drunks causing trouble in the street outside my window.

And yet there is one good thing about coming to this place today: I know her name now.

The doctor dropped my file as we were leaving his office this afternoon. It was stupid, but I automatically bent down to help him gather it all back up together again and my joints froze. It took us both quite a while to straighten me back up and all the while my file lay scattered across the floor. My joints may be swollen almost to the

point of uselessness, but my eyes work fine. Her name was right there, staring up at me the whole time as I eased passed the pain in my elbows, knees, hips, even my ankles and the bones of my feet. I saw that entry in the file and the pain etched it into my memory: "Base cells taken from: Heather Finch".

I don't know what I'm going to do with this information. As far as I know no copy has ever sought out their original and succeeded. I wonder what they fear we would do if we could.

Monday 17th March: Heavy Cloud.

It wasn't hard to find her. A short internet search brought up only a brief list of Heather Finch's in the country, and fewer still who had my face. Her face is not identical to mine, no one would mistake us for the same person, but I would recognise the eyes and the cheek bones and the hair anywhere, regardless of the lack of hare lip. She's very active on quite a few of the funkier networking and dating sites. She lives at the other end of the country, which I suppose was planned by the institute. She works for a multinational corporation, though not in the most high-powered of jobs. She has a lot of friends, an older brother and both parents, though they divorced just before she was born. I would like to think I had something to do with that sundering of their family; that I didn't come into this world completely unnoticed by the people who asked for me to be created. This Heather had a heart defect when she was born, but it was much smaller than they had been expecting: far less risk than the surgery to transplant a new heart. I had known that since I was old enough to ask questions, but nowhere on any of the sites I searched did I find any mention of it. It was a non-event in her life: something that didn't even enter her awareness. Something with no relevance to her present or future life at all.

Tuesday 25th March: Sunny.

She's dead. It took me five trains and as many days to get here but I did. Her body is useless to me, there is nothing of it that can help me, but the slow, agonising, steps that brought me to her bedside could have had no other conclusion. I am sitting now on the floor of her room, her body lifeless on the bed above me and I think of all the copies like me, in the institutes and seeping into the real world, and I wonder what I have started.