

XQ-28

The Story of a Gene

Chapters 10&11

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Adrian Challis



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Although he believes the concept of authorship to be dead, Adrian Challis asserts the contradictory and dubious moral right to be identified as the author of this work under the Copyright and Patents Act 1986.

To all the friends and family who encouraged it, to all the great minds that inspired it. But mostly, to Adrian & Anthony, who lived it.

Chapter 10 Dirty Harry

We stood before an admiral blue door, the summer sunlight casting shadows of trees over the Georgian townhouse in a part of the city unfamiliar to me. The houses were the domain of a different class of people, and the entrance to the street was appointed in such a way as to suggest that we were not normally welcome. For the first time I could remember, I had fallen asleep after Martin, and woken before him, and something in my attitude at breakfast had made him soften, and bend down until he was squatting between my knees, take my face in his hands, and say softly ‘In sickness and in health y’know?’ It helped, and now that we were standing at the threshold of discovery, I felt almost calm.

Martin reached out, and pressed a button in the centre of a brass plaque that read ‘Saul Moon - Genetic Services’. A muffled buzzer sounded beyond the heavy door, and as we waited for a reply, I tried to still my softly shaking legs, looking at the back of Martin’s head, trying to see inside it to discover what he was thinking. In many ways he had more to fear than me - he had said himself he was no angel - and I wondered if he too was nervous. He gave nothing away.

The door opened and a small man in his mid-sixties, with a sharp Jewish face framed by grey curly hair and a thin beard, greeted us. He shook Martin’s hand, and beckoned me inside,

walking off holding Martin's arm until there was twenty feet between us. Martin flashed a look at me that said 'stay there', and I stopped and watched them as Moon turned and began a whispered conversation. This paranoia must stop, I thought, everything today seems to have a dark significance. As I watched them talk, I saw Moon shoot a look at me, watched as he scanned my entire frame and pout noticeably, looking back up at Martin and raising an eyebrow. With Martin's back to me, I had no idea what he was saying. Then all of a sudden they moved off again, and finally Martin looked at me and motioned for me to follow.

Down a flight of narrow steps lay a damp basement, the ceiling so low I had to stoop to not scrape my head. In a room full of microscopes and large plastic drums, Moon finally acknowledged me, and shook my hand.

-Ian, isn't it.

I nodded, still unsure whether I was allowed to speak. The whole atmosphere in here was furtive, eldritch almost, and the mood one of silent conspiracy. Moon sensed my trepidation.

-You can relax, it's okay, you're amongst friends. Martin tells me you're nervous?

-Well, not as a profession, I joked, and an ease spread over the three of us - I'd said the right thing.

-A profession, yes, very good. Well as you probably know, things are getting difficult for people like me. The authorities are trying to shut us down. Luckily I have some very important clients who do what they can to avert attention, but this is no guarantee, and the way things are going it is less of one every day. Only yesterday the Goo's were here, demanding non-existent paperwork and permits nobody has. They tipped nearly 500ml down the sink - can you believe it, down my own sink...?

I felt my brow furrow, and Moon saw it. Martin explained.

-Saul is a fertility facilitator. Is that a suitable euphemism?

-As good as any. I provide clean sperm for couples who lack the necessary material. I am very discrete, and ensure that the donors I use are good matches for the clients. Most are very pleased and often return for more. But the current climate is making things very difficult, what with all this talk of 'natural' lifestyles and the general mood of moral panic. There are some in

the Government who want to see all clinics shut down, and are trying to make it impossible to even get tests - they seem to think that if people can't test, they'll just stop having sex altogether. Idiots, what can you say...

His voice trailed off, but he seemed to be still lost in thought as his eyes turned to scan the laboratory benches, and suddenly his face became very sad, and he shook his head.

-I built this place up from nothing, you know? Thirty-five years I've stayed in business - if I still had my records, I could tell you how many lives I've helped bring into the world - it is in the thousands. Now it is becoming less certain whether any will make it to full term. It is why I have stopped keeping records - it is simply too dangerous for the children.

Martin was looking puzzled.

-But Saul, I thought your services would be well suited to the times right now - everyone is so obsessed by genetics - surely you are a very qualified man...?

-I would be if I hadn't also been born with a conscience, and the way I am... I refuse to screen for political propensity, for the likelihood of same-sex attraction, for mild psychological disturbances - I ask you, where is the next Van Gogh to come from, the next Jackson Pollock, the next Glen Gould, if we are obsessed by some shibboleth of mental purity? My parents didn't flee Nazi Germany for this. Your friend here would not have made many couples so happy if I had to screen his DNA before I allowed him to donate...

I looked at Martin - you never told me that, my face said, but he gave me that three-word look and I let it pass. Moon was too engrossed in his own recollections to notice.

-I am afraid to say there will come a time, and I think sooner than we expect, when any foetus with a chance of being less than 'normal' will be aborted by government order. And what constitutes 'normal' shall become more and more narrow and arbitrary, based on whatever fetish the Minister for Social Health is harbouring this week. It may not be blue eyes and blonde hair - too many connotations, and besides the ChrIslams would never agree to that - but autism and anti-establishment predisposition today, anti-social indicators and mild depression tomorrow. You

mark my words, it's coming. You can see it yourselves - it is becoming harder and harder to get even the most menial jobs without a certificate of genetic well-being.

Martin was nodding as if he was following every word. I couldn't say I'd noticed - I'd had so little contact with the world in general for the past three months that seemed like years, that I had no idea if this was an accurate description of a brave new world, or just self-indulgent miserablism...

-I can see I am boring your friend... So, to work. My nurse is expecting you - you Martin she knows, but you Ian - she has been told you are the XY of several babies she has dealt with. Please be careful and play along - she is a good person, but a little too 'correct' in her outlook. Bear with her, and try and pretend you know what she is talking about. I am afraid you will have to put up with some discomfort, as an HIV test alone would arouse too much suspicion, even amongst the technicians I use. The non-specific tests will be conducted by her husband...

Again his voice trailed off, again I got the impression he had more to say, but he was already moving towards the stairs, and motioned for us to follow. We were led up, and into a waiting room - from the decor it looked like it hadn't been touched since the '50's.

-The nurse will be through when she's ready. Tell her you are number 808. Everything here is anonymous, another advantage. And please, Ian, try to relax!

I *was* trying. Martin steadied my arm and guided me into a PVC arm chair, dating from a time when such material was still thought superior to leather.

-This place is like a museum, I said.

-It's also a private clinic. Most of the patients are in their dotage - it reminds them of their prime, a comforting continuum in an age they can no longer fathom. When I first came here I thought the same thing, but Saul pointed out to redecorate would be to... alienate.

His face lit up with satisfaction at his own brevity - he always seemed quite pleased with himself at such moments - a boyish amusement that I usually shared.

-And when was that?

-What? When I first came here you mean? Let me think... five years ago I think. Yeah, about five years - I was eighteen.

I did the maths and realised it was the first time I'd known his age - I'd always assumed we were of similar ages - this new information made him a year older than me. Only a year, to have learned so much more, to have earned such self-assurance. I wanted to kiss him, to wrap myself around him and garner a little of his confidence, but knew intuitively that this was not the place or time.

-Is Saul...

-What, queer?

I nodded, suppressing the squirm that word still elicited in me.

-Oh God yeah! And before you ask, no we haven't - we keep a professional distance. Besides he's hardly my type. But it is the reason he likes me so much - it's his method of subversion. We've talked about it - at heart he believes himself to be a materialist, but he likes hedging his bets. He reckons just in case there is genetic predisposition in sexuality, the more queer babies he makes the better for society in the long run...

I started to ask -Why?, but at that moment a tall woman in a white lab coat came into the waiting room and Martin shot me his familiar three-word glance.

-Ah, Martin! Would you like to come this way? We won't be long... and they disappeared together.

I sat gazing around the room. It smelt of old books, despite there being none in evidence. The carpet was a drunk's nightmare - yellow and purple paisley swirls, obviously expensive when first installed, now so garish it was hard to look at sober. There was everywhere the kind of silence that demanded whispers, and even alone, the absence of sound made me worry about running words through my own head. I turned my attention to the stacks of magazines on the plain wooden table, and again was shocked to see that none dated from this century. Most were of a title called *Hello*, and, glancing at the top one, I realised this must have been some glossy, lionising the rich and famous of the day. About three down, I found one featuring Diana before she became the People's Queen, before even the plot to have her murdered was discovered, and the then Royal Family sent into exile. She was

smiling, something she hardly ever seemed to do these days, and was also alone.

It was strange to see her without Dodi by her side, Nowadays, it was he that smiled, a broad, almost snake-like smile that seemed to hide more than it revealed. Looking at the pictures, her face wreathed in glamour and as skinny as ever, I wondered what had happened to that young woman. My mother had once been such a fan of hers, had told me how, before I was born, Diana had been the first public figure to meet with AIDS patients, and how it had helped break down prejudice and fear. She was disgusted with what had become of her, how she was now being used to promote a climate of intolerance, how it was only her that could get away with it, given her previous enlightened approach. I helped burn my Mother's commemorative tea towels on the day Diana converted to Islam, and despite the furore it caused with the neighbours, we drank all night and laughed until dawn...

The twin memories of my mother and Diana, before a kind of calamity befell them both, made me pause in sombre recollection, and I wondered with a chill if this was some inauspicious warning. Disease seemed to connect them both - my mother slowly rotting from the inside, until my only visual reference was to Auschwitz, or to the image of that AIDS patient that Diana stood beside so many years before my birth. A panic rose within me, and I suddenly wanted to be many miles away, never having heard of HIV, or its symptoms. Where is Martin - how long can a blood test take...?

I was aware that I was shaking, and tried to steady myself against the table top. All the fear, all the sorrow caused by impending mortality flooded in and threatened to drown me. Did I really want to know? What do they say - that which you don't know can't hurt you? And what if Martin was heading a similar way to my mother? To have to watch him slowly fade, to disappear by degrees whilst still clinging to a kind of life, despite every instinct one thinks one has before sickness distorts our senses and makes mere survival the only game in town - could I do that again? I knew I loved him as much as anyone since her, and if he wanted it I think I could do it, but to choose that path, to willingly place myself at a cadaver's behest, one still animated

despite...

-Ilan isn't it? Could you come this way?

I bet you say that to all the boys, I thought, and tried to let the half-joke shake loose the mordent obsessions I seemed to have so easily fallen into. We walked down the corridor and through a connecting partition to what must have been next door, and into a back room, complete with couch and examining table.

-Just pop your coat off for me and sit on the couch please. Saul tells me you're a regular.

-Yes, I suppose I am now, I lied. It's been a few months I guess.

-A bit longer than that I think. We had one of yours in the other day. Soooo beautiful!

-Really? I asked. I was genuinely intrigued.

-And actually the spitting image of his father, if you don't mind me saying so.

I had to stop myself from asking -Who's he then?, and instead took the compliment with -Well, thank you! and I think, a slight blush.

-I often think if only you could see the happiness you bring to these people, you would realise you are a modern saint!

-Steady on, I said. I was beginning to warm to my role as fictional father.

-I mean it. These people have tried for years to have a baby, and you come along - she paused slightly, aware of the pun -if you'll excuse the expression, and give them everything they've ever asked for. I don't think it's possible to have more devoted parents.

I contemplated this, and wondered if really that was such a good thing. I never knew my father, and despite my mother trying to make up for his absence, I sometimes wished she'd tried a little less hard. It made the shock of her loss even harder to bear. And being the repository for all her dreams and wishes meant there was so much about myself I felt I couldn't tell her...

-Just roll your sleeve up - you know the procedure by now I suppose.

-Remind me? I'm not very good with needles...

-Hold this, she said, placing a narrow bottle of thick glass in my upturned left hand, whilst fastening a grey nylon tourniquet

around my biceps with a smooth, practiced movement.

-Now just grip the bottle for me a few times please... that's right, lovely - you've got good veins, should be easy to hit that one...

Something convulsed in my stomach as I realised what was coming - she's gonna stick a needle in me and drain some of my life off...

-Oh God I hate this, I said, trying to swallow whatever it was that threatened to rise up my throat.

-Oh don't be so ridiculous, she said, without malice. It's a good job men don't have the babies or we'd be extinct by now. If it upsets you it's a bit easier if you look away.

I did, and over my right shoulder to the door I had come in through, but could still see in my peripheral vision her hands as she fixed a green plastic collared needle to the end of a syringe.

-Okay you'll just feel a little prick...

I felt a big prick for ever agreeing to this in the first place. It's my *blood* they're taking - how personal does something get? And the results of this could be fatal...

-Nice deep breath...

I felt the needle's tip cold against my arm, and then a sudden ache, but nothing like I had expected. It was hardly agony, and the relief made me look at my arm, and the syringe sticking out of it, and the dropper filling with thick, almost black blood, the nurse shaking slightly as she pulled back the plunger.

-God that's dark. Is it normal for it to be that thick?

-Oh yes, quite normal. You want to worry if it's thin. You'd be bruising every time you coughed otherwise. There we go, she added, placing a piece of cotton wool over the needle and withdrawing its tip.

-Oh my God, you didn't say anything about cotton wool, I exclaimed. I fucking hate that stuff, and shivered uncontrollably.

She ignored me, pressing hard on the wool and bending my arm over double to hold it in place.

-Now just grip that there for a few minutes, that way it won't bruise. All done.

I hesitated before saying -Thank you, wondering if it was really appropriate.

-What's your number?

I told her the number Saul had given me, and watched as she wrote it on the bottle of thick red blood in green marker pen.

-Now, the results shouldn't take more than a week. Saul will no doubt pass them to you. I'm sure they'll be fine...

I blinked. Then again.

-A week? I thought we'd get them today?

-No, it's only a routine test. You're not worried are you?

-N-no, just I thought we'd get them today. There's no way...

-You *are* worried. There's nothing specific you've done that you shouldn't have is there? her face suddenly suspicious.

Work *come on* get it together...

-No of course not, I said, as dismissively casual as I could be. It's just I hate waiting for tests, it's the waiting I hate, it causes paranoia where none would otherwise be. I'm not a very patient... I snorted... patient.

She looked me in the eye, and held my gaze to see if I was telling the truth. Suddenly satisfied she spun round to look at a chart on the wall behind her.

-Well they actually do the tests on Thursdays. I don't suppose they'd be any harm in you getting the results then. Talk to Saul and he can arrange a suitable time.

-Oh thanks, I'm really grateful - I don't mean to be an inconvenience, it's just I do hate the wait. Could...

Careful mate, don't push it...

-What?

-Could Martin pick his up then too? It's just we both drove in together and we could both come again on Thursday, if it's not a problem?

-That should be fine. Again talk to Saul, he keeps the diary of when he's around. You're having your swabs done now aren't you.

-I am? I mean yes, I am, aren't I.

-If you'll just follow me I'll get you settled down...

From my position on a leather examining table, I surveyed the room. Another decorating nightmare. The walls were covered in flock wallpaper, grey textured decals against a green-yellow

background, mirrored by the carpet, again with purple swirls. Did this stuff once pass for fashion, I wondered. There was something so impersonal about the space, something coldly clinical, that it was almost arousing, a place to play doctors and nurses for real, and as my eyes searched for something to fix on, they alighted on a velvet-lined box that leant against the mirror above the mahogany fireplace. Inside I could see a metal and glass syringe, with two ornate holes at its neck for fingers. Very Sherlock Holmes, very Moriarty. With the wallpaper suggestive of Chinese restaurants, and this single ornament, my mind turned to opium dens and bygone decadence, and I found myself thickening slightly. Stop it! I growled at my groin - you really do NOT want a hard-on here.

I was trying hard to think of something, *anything*, that would stop me from stiffening, as the door swung open and in stepped a small man in his late-forties, balding, and dressed in grey trousers and cardigan. My God, I thought, maybe being small is a necessary qualification for working here, and remembered the cramped basement, and wondered if I'd hit on something, and the consideration took my mind off my impending erection. The man was hovering by the now closed door, running his hands over the legs of his trousers, and I looked up at the stucco ceiling until he walked over to stand beside me.

-So then, tests.

-Yes, I said - there was nothing else to say. I could hear him fumbling with something, but continued to stare at the ceiling, tried hard not to think of my cock, or anything else of a sexual nature.

-Could you undo your trousers and pull them down please?

-Yes, sorry, I said and fumbled with the belt buckle, my hands suddenly shaking and making a bad job of it.

-Come on, he suddenly snapped.

-Okay I'm trying I'm a bit nervous I'm sorry.

-Yes yes, he said, breathing heavily through his nose.

I slid my trousers down my thighs, feeling the rough blue paper, that issued from a metal roller attached to the top of the table, under my cold buttocks. Again I returned my gaze to the ceiling, again tried hard to think of nothing. The man had

something in his hand, and with the other he roughly grabbed my (thankfully) flaccid penis and held it tightly.

-So tell me, what made you become a sperm donor?

The question took me unawares, and as I thought of what would be a suitable response I was suddenly catapulted into a zone of shimmering agony. White shards of blinding light boiled before my eyes as the sharpest and most intense pain I have ever felt twisted itself around the inside of the base of my cock - this can't be happening, I thought, and looked down to see a plastic rod poking out of the eye of my penis, as the man turned it repeatedly with a clenched fist...

-Wh-what the fuck are you doing, I screamed as my hands involuntarily tried to release his grip. But he just kept turning the rod, grunting with each twist, breathing noisily through his nose, lost in some grim determination, his eyes glazing over. I contemplated punching him in the face, my only hope of stopping this searing pain that pinned me to the table, augmenting his grasp as I tried to force myself through it and away from torture. I tried to calm myself by saying this can't last much longer, trying to remember to breathe, shutting my eyes and running anything behind them that would make this reality disappear. But it just kept coming, the most squeamish, squirming, sickening sensation as the rod was forced backwards and forwards in my most intimate place, which no foreign object should ever see...

Then suddenly, with a yelp, it was over. I slumped exhausted, for a moment completely unaware of my surroundings. The man was now standing over the desk on the other side of the room, his back to me, fiddling with something, I cared not what. Part of me wanted to leap up and smash his head into any hard surface I could find, but another part of me was just so relieved it was over. I looked down at my groin, half expecting to see my cock oozing thick blood, but it just lay there, smaller than I have ever seen it, like it was trying to make itself less of a target should this psychopathic predator return for second helpings. The man was moving silently towards the door, carrying an opaque plastic tube through which I could see the long speculum that had been my instrument of torture. He paused with his hand on the door, looked down at my prostrate form, and without speaking, turned

and left.

-What the fuck is his problem? I heard myself saying, as I swung my shaking legs off the table and held my cock, cuddling it better with my hand. I squeezed around the base, as if to see if there was any permanent damage inside, and was distressed to find a sharp stinging pain as I gripped it. I stood and pulled up my pants and trousers, trying to be gentle as I rearranged myself - he'd been through enough already, poor little thing, with the accent right now definitely on little...

Back in the basement I held onto Martin briefly as I tried to stop squirming, but once he assured himself I wasn't seriously injured he lowered my hand and stood a few steps away from me. Saul was talking, and I tried not to cower too noticeably, as the image of the whole episode repeatedly flashed into my mind...

-Sorry to interrupt, Saul, but that was fucking horrible! I blurted out, cutting him off mid-sentence. He looked at me and paused.

-Harry? Yes I'm sorry about that, keep meaning to have a word with him. He's got it into his head you need to collect a good thick scraping of cells to make a test effective...

-The man's a psychopath!

-A bit strong I think, but I'll have a word. You're not the first to complain. It's just it's so convenient with Janice being his wife - keeps it in the family so to speak. As I said we like to be discrete.

-But there's definitely something not right about him...

Martin flashed me another look, this one closer to 'leave it for now'. I reminded myself that this was the first time I'd met Saul, and should perhaps be more interested in making a good impression, and marvelled how there was nothing like pain to cut through shyness.

We said our goodbyes and agreed to return on Thursday, and walked off down the Georgian street that resembled images of Dublin I had seen in books. I was still hurting, and was anxious to get home to see if I was bleeding, the previous impression still not completely dispelled.

-Did he do that to you? I asked as we left the street and turned towards home.

-Not a fucking chance. He knows I'd deck him if he tried. But

you're right he *has* got a problem. Total closet. That's why I didn't want you saying too much back there, arousing suspicions...

-How d'ya know?

-How d'ya think?! Had him in a toilet once. Fucking strange. His head appears under the wall, motions for me to move to a cubicle over the other side. I meet him in there, and he just silently gets me to stand on the toilet with my trousers down, then turns me round. I'm expecting a tonguing, but... nothing. I look round and he's just staring at me, breathing through his nose like a loud animal.

-Then what?

-Nothing! Just stands there, working himself through his trouser pockets. Then all of a sudden opens the door and leaves. Made me feel fucking horrible. Odd to feel so violated by something so... hands off.

-Fucking weirdo. Have you told Saul about it?

-Not my job. I don't out people with such obvious problems.

-But you should say something - the man's a menace.

-Like I say, if he did that to me, I'd deck him. Should've thought though before we went in. You okay?

I tried to ignore the sting that was still gripping me.

-I will be. No permanent damage, I hope.

Back at home I stood in my bathroom peering down at the inside of my pants, at the small stain of blood on the fly. A little was encrusted around the eye of my penis, and I pissed hard to try and disinfect the internal wound, remembering that urine is sterile until it meets the air. Washing the blood from the tip of my cock, I ascended the stairs to the living room. Martin was flicking through my records, relics mostly inherited from my uncle many years before.

-God Ian most of these are prehistoric. Need to get you some new sounds. There's been a few changes since this lot excited anyone.

-Cheeky bugger! I like them anyway, remind me of freedom.

-I can get stuff from America you know. Got my contacts...

I was impressed. Nothing came from America since the trade embargoes of years ago.

-How do you manage that?

-Like I say, I've got my contacts. And I even know people with access to computers, I mean *real* computers, not the work stations the 9to5ers have. You can get anything with a computer, if you know the codes.

-You'll have to bring some round. I'm bleeding by the way.

-Me too. He must've been braver than I thought. It's probably best if we don't...

-No fear of that. I think that's put me off sex for life!

-I've got some business to take care of. I'll see you back here Thursday. Big day huh?

-I guess so. Do you really have to go? It's not because we can't...

-Don't be silly! I don't just see you as a fuck buddy y'know.

-No? What *do* you see me as then?

In answer he walked over to me and kissed me, a slow, passionate kiss, that grew and lasted minutes. My aching cock suddenly sprang to life, and I breathed in his smell and wrapped my arms around him, and stood there entranced, as the distance I had felt since last night evaporated. He hugged me, kissed my forehead and moved off towards the door.

-See ya, Harry, I shouted, a smile on my face.

-Watch it, he said without rancour, winked, and was gone.

The dream was in the third person, and revealed itself as an opening scroll, like an illuminated text the monks once worked on, unfurling in tightly archaic calligraphy:

'Blind Milton saw the regality of Hades, the allure of the alternative monarchy. Why serve in the first world when you can be King of the Trashcan. So call me King Luis the Cipher, the Lord of non-entity and deceit, the valueless figure that elevates all the waste and detritus around it to the level of poetry. A sewer to channel the products of the street, the alchemical conduit that enables the base to be acknowledged as shimmering gold. To put an end to endless thought, to make a point of arrival from departure. To commit simony at the alter of excess.

'From my garbage empire, I took to the skies to propagate useful illusions. Ascended and arranged the stars to spell AMAZE across a magenta sky. From my vantage point, I spotted the wasteland with points of crimson and orange, tail-lights my roses, coroneae of sodium street lamps radiant through prismatic clouds.'

He begins to fall, first ethereally then faster, like disheartened rain, and collects in a pool on the damp pavement. About him all is cold and grey and mortal. He slopes off, deposed and alone, crawls into jaundiced sheets where tight sleep floods in, bringing dreams of defeat and crowns rusted with impotence.

He is truly alone. Not because he dreams of being a king, but because he dreams of being, while all around him dream of not being. Of not being poor, of not being hated and scorned, of not being alone. He commits the worst sin. He likes his position. Further, he champions it, embraces its truths and triumphs its despairs. He knows he must be punished. For every dream is always denied. Even dreams that seem to come true. For these are the worst dreams of all...

Chapter 11 Results

The first thing I am aware of is arms gripping me. I fight hard for breath, as if coming up from a great depth, kicking my legs to the surface. As I feel sunlight on my face, I realise, too late, that there is a net over the water, and try to stop myself from breathing in yet, knowing that if I do my lungs will fill with liquid and I will sink back down to the bottom. There is a shooing in my ears, and I shake my head violently to try and free myself. Suddenly my lips part, and with a rush the air is forced into my chest and my eyes open, and see the ceiling above my head, and feel Martin's face next to mine. A dream. Another fucking dream.

-Hey z-boy you're awake.

I convulse, the sunlight reflecting off the windows of the houses opposite pouring through the open doors at the bottom of my bed. My entire body is bathed in sweat, and the cloying sheets stick to my skin as I turn on the mattress, and shiver as beads of sweat trickle off me.

-There's a coffee here for you. Made it special.

I shake my head. The thought of coffee as attractive as poison.

-Water... Must have water, I say, like a melodramatic desert scene from some black and white movie.

Martin passes me a glass and I raise my head to allow the cold liquid to pour down my throat and instantly spring from my

pores, like I am merely a tube for its passage directly into the sheets. I hand the empty glass back to Martin, who refills it from a clear plastic bottle on the bedside table. It is three glasses later before I feel even slightly human.

-I didn't think you were coming back til Thursday, I say, when water has revived me enough to string a sentence together.

-It is Thursday! Don't tell me you've been asleep all this time?

I blink, trying to remember anything since... two days before? There's nothing there, save for an image of an ancient scroll, uncurling before displaced eyes.

-I must have been, I say yawning, I'm coming back now. I feel different. I'm soaking wet...

In one smooth motion, Martin pulls back the covers, to reveal my naked form, my cock standing solidly to attention, perpendicular to the bed.

-Well *hello!* says Martin, a smile in his voice. I look down at myself, and remember that the last time I looked at my cock there was no hint that it harboured such a beast inside.

Without warning Martin is all over me, his hot mouth engulfing my solid erection in electric palpitations. His breath on the wet skin between my legs tickles tantalisingly, and I'm gripped by a passion so strong I can do nothing but pump my cock into his mouth with thrusting motions, his weight upon me pushing me into the plashy sheets, like sodden blotting paper, as his groin forces itself into my face and I bite him hard through the frictionless fabric, smelling the musk of his pleasure centre through a haze of fabric conditioner. I can stand it no more, and shoot my hands to his waistband and pull up to release his now lithic hardware into my hungry mouth. He too is rampantly horny, and I force my head back to allow him smoother access as he suffocates me with the totality of his lust, the two of us synchronising with angry élan as my hands grip his head and force myself deep into his throat. His balls are dancing on my face, and the loose obscene flesh fills my nostrils and I have to open my mouth wide to try and breathe around his enraged cock as I retch but move one hand to his buttocks to force him further inside me, and as if from nowhere I can feel my orgasm rising, and his accelerating thrusts imply his is likewise imminent, and I

shoot deep into his throat and gag as he does the same, and we roll sideways together so that we can both suck hungrily for air, and slow, and untwine slightly, and lay in the bright sunshine with our heads in each others' laps, and rock ourselves back to normality.

-God I needed that, we both say at exactly the same moment, and laugh easily before the last word rings in both our ears, and part to stare at each other's upside down faces, a mirrored smile playing on our lips. I want to believe it's going to be a good day, and breathe in with the easy perfection of it all so far, but the memory of what today means shakes the smile from my face, and Martin sees it too, and we lie for a few seconds stilled by significance, until we are both sitting on separate sides of the bed, facing away from each other.

-Guess we better do this, said Martin, and I rose and dressed in silence.

As we walked past the rows of Georgian terraces of Dixon Street, I tried hard to stop feeling like a condemned man walking to the gallows. Martin had been the model of support, producing a bag of pastries to soak up my breakfast of cum which, on a very empty stomach, had made me feel wretched. I could even face the coffee that he had made me and reheated on my electric stove, the sugar preventing it from bitterness, and contrasting perfectly with the sticky confections he had brought. We had eaten in silence, but the complicity we seemed to share had now vanished, and I couldn't dispel the sensation that although I knew he walked beside me, he wasn't really there. I was attuned to his every thought, but something contrived to make us more separate than we had ever felt before. In my present mood, the memory of that morning's sex struck me as an extremely irresponsible thing to have done, but acknowledged with certainty that whatever we were about to discover, I wanted to share with him completely.

Saul welcomed us in with a cheery -Hallo, and bade us into yet another examining room, and indicated for us to wait whilst he retrieved his files.

-I haven't looked at the results myself yet, had another visit from the Goo's this morning. They had no warrant this time, just

wanted to let me know they haven't forgotten us. So caring, he added ironically.

Neither of us spoke. Time had seemed to slow to a full stop. It feels like a funeral, I thought to myself, and pictured our own corpses laying on a slab, with us being ushered in to pay our last respects to ourselves. The wait was almost unbearable, and I began intoning 'just ten more seconds, ten more seconds' through my head; 'if you can make it through the next ten seconds, you can go home.'

The door suddenly opened and Saul walked through it, holding an open file, white pages curling over the top of it. His eyes ran down the page, and he continued reading as he closed the door behind himself without looking. He stood and turned more pages, then his face raised and he looked at us both.

-Well gentlemen, you will be pleased to know you are a pair of clean machines!

I blinked, unsure what the fuck he was talking about.

-Y'mean, we're fine?

-As the proverbial dandy. You are as clear as spring water - not a blemish on either of you. Well, physically at least.

A whoosh of relief threatened to break a huge smile on my face, but before it could register I heard a loud thud, and spun round to see Martin slumped in a crumpled heap on the floor. Saul and I both moved toward him, and as I squatted to pull him into a sit, his head was shaking and he was moaning in a low rumble of grief.

-Martin what's wrong? I asked, as Saul seemed to be checking for something in Martin's glassy eyes.

-It's okay he's just shocked - classic symptoms. Help me get him up...

I did, and was amazed how frail and heavy he suddenly felt. I'd never seen him like this, had got very used to an aura of invincibility that seemed to surround him at all times. We walked him to the door and Saul took over, supporting him along the corridor, looking back and telling me to stay put, he'd be back in a moment.

-What the fuck was all that about? I asked, when Saul returned alone. Is he alright?

-He will be, just needs a few minutes to himself. He may be sick, but it will pass. I've seen this before. One expects it is only positive results that cause this. It is what we imagine.

I agreed. I think I would have reacted that way had the results been different.

-But after a life like Martin has had, the opposite is true. He was probably convinced of the worst, and knowing him, perfectly prepared for it. He has probably been focussing on how to help you get through it for the past few weeks. This is possibly the one thing he had never accounted for. It's understandable, and to be celebrated, if you think about it...

-Well, yes, I suppose so, as long as he's alright.

-To be honest, Ian, I am grateful for the chance to talk with you alone. I have to warn you that you are about to enter a time of great danger, that this is not quite the blessing you may see it as.

I had no idea what he was talking about, and was beginning to get a little tired of how everything seemed to be the opposite of what I had expected. I was feeling nauseous, and wondered whether I should join Martin in the vomitorium...

-I have never seen Martin like this about anyone. I do not mean how he is now, I mean how I saw him the other day. I have known him for many years, and believe me we have shared a lot of private information. But the way he looks at you, the way he brought you here without hesitation, the way he agreed even to take a test with you - these are signs of a... love, for want of a better word, that is so strong I fear that neither of you is safe.

-Saul look I really don't know what it is you're saying. I'm beginning to wonder if this place is really an asy...

A raised hand stopped me before I said too much.

-Simply this. Until now you have been careful, yes? You have taken necessary precautions and been responsible. This alone proves something to me about Martin's feelings for you. I have no doubt you share them, I can see it in your eyes even though I do not know you. But here is the point I am trying to make. From now on in, there will be no excuse not to share everything. But this does not mean that you will both remain faithful...

-There's no question of that, Saul, we're totally

monogamous...

-I have no doubt - for now. But there is a very good chance that one of you will do something - there will be an argument, a falling out, and in a moment of pique one of you will be unfaithful...

-But Saul the idea of sex with anyone else is completely abstract to me - there would be no point...

-You say that now, and I believe it is true - I even believe it of Martin, and I never thought I would ever see that in him. Today you are devoted, but one day... and that is when the danger comes.

-You're jealous! You don't want us to be happy.

-Believe me, Ian, I want that more than anything. I have seen Martin in times of abject misery, and watched him wrestle with his demons until it was clear he thought he was losing his mind. I never want him to return to that. You have been seeing him for, what, three months?

I nodded, -To the day almost.

-I thought so, because that is when he started being happy. His sperm count even increased!

I must have looked surprised because he added

-You didn't know he was donating, did you. You see my friend, we can never really know everything about another human being - we would love to it's true, but we never do. And in many ways we have no right to, either. People are people, not property...

-But that's quite a personal thing, Saul. I can see why he wouldn't tell me about that immediately...

-How much more personal is infidelity?

It stopped me dead.

-Especially to our lovers?

-Saul I think you better shut up now...

-Me too, here comes Martin, but held a look that said 'mark my words'.

-Sorry about that folks, don't know what happened there...

We both turned and welcomed him back, and I put my arm around his now solid form and kissed him on the cheek, a gesture he shrugged off with an -I'm fine, followed by a smile to soften

the rejection.

-Well, said Saul, clapping his hands and inducing a sudden freshness in the room, I have no doubt that you two lovebirds have some celebrating to do! I'll bid you good day.

He walked us to the door and shook our hands, and despite a certain reticence on my part smiled at me warmly, a look that seemed to say 'I meant well'.

-Don't be strangers, he added as he closed the door behind us.

We barely wait until the door to my flat closes before ripping off each other's clothes in a frenzy of motile fabric. We are both stark naked before we know it, and Martin pulls me close against his back as my rigid cock rubs hard against his buttocks, forcing him into the wall by the fireplace, knocking trinkets and postcards in every direction. He grabs my legs and shunts me onto his back, and carries me down the stairs, kicks open the door to my bedroom and spins round, depositing me on the still damp bed with him on top, knocking the air from me and grinding himself into me, my cock catching deliciously in his private places, then rolls over and on top of me, filling my outstretched arms with his angry totality. I wrap myself around him, my legs raised over his waist, and he kisses me hard, neither of us caring now what violence could do. We are both lubricating, and I feel the air in cold patches as our bodies part and reconnect, and I want him completely, inside me, this moment long imagined but as yet unshared. He grips me with desperate hands, and turns me over forcing my face into the cool damp sheets, and runs an abandoned mouth down the length of my back, and roughly grabs my waist and buries his face between my cheeks. I gasp as his tongue begins lapping at my hole, the feeling so intense I am fighting for breath, his hand grabbing my cock between my legs as he forces his tongue inside me, and an involuntary groan escapes from my lips muffled by the bed my face is buried in as his articulate tongue fucks me, each lunge more pleasurable than the last. I try and reach round blindly clutching for his cock, but he is too far away, and instead just give myself over to his lust as he grips my cock and balls in his hand pulling me towards him in muffled suffocation. All the energy is leaving my body, I am

pinned and swimming, every movement of his tongue a new definition of pleasure. As his face leaves my buttocks I can feel how open I am, and he switches hands to work my tumescence with his left from the front. I look through my open legs past my obscenely engorged manhood to see him pump his own cock, spreading pre-cum all over its glistening length and I collect thick saliva in my mouth and spit it onto my hand and spread it over my now dilated hole and he moves closer to me and rubs his glossy cock in and around me, pulling me to him by the waist. I'm fighting for air - each stroke makes me gasp more deeply as I feel his bunched fist around the base of his cock rubbing against my arse as his cock runs smoothly along the crease of my cheeks - everything is so fucking... *dirty* it's hard to identify specifics, and I feel him fall forward and steady himself with one hand against the bed and bite my neck as I force myself back to meet him. Then it happens, his solid cock finds the spot and he eases himself a little inside. It hurts but it is a pain worth bearing, combined with pleasure as it is in such an impressive duet, and it is not what I imagined - a thrusting in and out but a solid pressure that slowly deepens as my arse expands to accommodate him. I'm whiting out, and we both hold our breath as I feel him easing himself further inside - there is something that is trying to stop him from going further, something in me, an involuntary grip like I'm holding something in, and suddenly I consciously relax, and he eases deeper into me, us both gasping with the sudden release as at least half of him slides inside. The pressure between my legs is unbearably strong - these feelings are hard to comprehend, a mixture of discomfort and gratification I have never felt before, and as he just holds there, keeping the pressure constant but forcing no further, another wave of relaxation shakes my body and I press myself against him, and feel his loins against my buttocks and realise he is fully inside.

My head is swimming as his hand extricates itself from between us and moves to my cock and wanks me hard as he rocks himself, his cock making small internal movements, each one more magnificent than the last. I feel the hot air come in waves from between his clenched teeth, as every fifth or sixth stroke is a deeper, more solid and slower lunge, and I raise my head and

twist my neck until our mouths are biting hungrily together. There is such an intense totality centering around my whole middle - a feeling without focus, a warm oozing that has peaks in specific places - the tip of my cock which Martin is trilling with his hungry fist, a zone deep within me forced against his priapism lodged within - but it feels as though everywhere below my sternum and above my knees is now one enormous g-spot. His left hand shoots to my chest, a shift in balance that momentarily pins me harder to the bed, then without disengaging he shifts his knees and pulls me up until we are both kneeling, our straightened bodies pressed together, and the movement causes my hole to grip even tighter around him, and I consciously relax again as his strokes become deeper and faster as one arm wraps around my neck and tightens as his other hand wanks me vigorously, his forearm keeping me in place and something very white begins to flood my vision, even though my eyes are closed, and I shift my knees wider apart and again force myself back to swallow his cock as deeply as my hole will manage, and involuntary shudders of low angry moans issue from my mouth, and we both fall forward again and Martin slams into me as my whole body tremors, the sweat gushing from me in waves and there is no time, no limit, no shame or even consciousness - my entire existence is lost adrift in a weightless cosmos as my body ejaculates in clouds of white light and I am nothing, aware of nothing, transported to a place where I do not exist beyond time or being...

As I wake I am aware that he is still inside me, and I squeeze my buttocks to stop the now less-than enticing feeling, and breathe in as he slips out, his cock still semi-turgid. I panic slightly as I feel I am about to shit the bed, and try and close my gaping hole but have less control over it than I am used to. Martin's breath is deep, and I realise he is sleeping. I look down at his groin, and the vision confirms the smell - there are flecks of brown over his loins, the tip of his cock covered in brown mucous that emanates a rich, almost olivey smell. I roll off the bed and again try and hold in whatever it is that is trying to escape, and rush to the bathroom before there is a further accident. Sitting on the toilet I

am convinced I need to shit, but as I push, nothing seems to be coming. God he must have pushed it up so far it's gonna take a week to come out, I think, and am shocked by the easy laughter that it elicits in me. I push harder, and something very wet and oily plops out and into the bowl. I look between my legs, and see thick cum floating on the water. Of course. Why hadn't I thought of that.

It's hard to explain the way I was feeling. There was something about the whole experience that should've disgusted me, but instead I felt complete, righteous almost. It was true that as I awoke, a deep conditioning made me feel a spark of shame at the thought that I had shat myself, but really, what could you expect? We hadn't wasted any time in clinical preparation for this spontaneous act - it would have ruined the moment, and besides it didn't feel like either of us had planned it - it just seemed the right thing to do. As a release of air projected another stream of jism from my arse, I laughed at the thought that it now more resembled a cock, pissing cum. Or, I suppose, a fanny. This last thought was less attractive - I didn't want to feel I had been inverted by the process - I knew I felt like a man, if anything more of a man now. There was something more active about allowing Martin to fuck me than the expression 'passive' implied. It felt strong, empowering, to throw caution to the wind and just get on with it. We now knew that there was nothing too serious that could befall us as a result, and a warm sensation bathed my skin, a deep satisfaction that was genuinely strengthening.

I moved to the edge of the bath, and ran the hot tap until warm water came through the shower head that curled in the bottom of the bath. Directing it between my legs, I rubbed at the thick sticky liquid that clung to my arse until I felt smooth clean skin below. After drying myself, I soaked a flannel in hot water and rubbed some soap into one area of it, then went back into the bedroom, and gently mopped at Martin's groin as he slept, the smell of the sandalwood soap cutting through the ordure. He looked so beautiful, his sleeping face calm and tranquil, and I kissed him lightly on the lips, causing him to stir slightly and attempt a kiss in return, but failing to synchronise with my own, and I smiled to myself, teasing him with kisses, and he moaned

and carried on kissing the air. I was gripped by the desire to tell him too much, and ran my nose to his left ear, and whispered gently -I love you.

I knew he didn't hear me fully, but watched as his lips moved silent words I couldn't read, and a squirt of hormone warmed my stomach, and I returned my lips to his ear and said, a little more boldly -I love you, and kissed his lobe as the words again caused a flood of hormone to animate my guts. One more time, for luck.

-I love you.

It didn't matter that he hadn't heard it. The important thing was that *I* had. I knew it like a truth of greater intensity than any I had hitherto known. I loved this man, and I giggled to myself and felt hot stinging tears spring to my eyes, and rolled onto my back and lay staring at the ceiling, saying the words in my head as the tears rolled down the sides of my face. I had never said those words to anyone before, and just because I was their only witness changed nothing. It was fact now, and the events of that day had proved it beyond all doubt. I wanted to jump up and dance, and sing out the words at the top of my lungs, but instead just lay there, feeling happier than I had ever felt allowed to be.

I rolled over and hugged him, and a sharp intake of breath signalled his waking, and pulled his head back to look at me through unfocused eyes, and smiled and returned my kisses, and we lay holding each other, as the fading sun cast a deep golden light on our bodies, and we kissed, until Martin remembered something, and looked at his watch, and said

-We'd better get ready. We've got a party to go to.

He had presented me with a tissue paper package, -A little present to celebrate, and on opening it I had found a beautiful red cotton t-shirt inside, a thick navy X on the chest.

-It even has your name on it, he joked, and I wondered for a second if he had somehow discovered that my name was an alias, but realised quickly that neither of us knew our whole names.

-And before you say it, I don't want to know. It's safer this way. And besides, it makes it sexier, like those bad court reports you read in the Sunday rags - Mr X.

I thanked him, and pulled the tight shirt over my head.

-It's a bit small, I say, its soft cotton constricting my chest.
 -Looks really good though - makes you look like you got muscles!
 -I have got muscles ya cheeky sod.
 -You wish, he laughed, and pulled me to him.
 -I've gotta go get the car. While I'm gone, I've something for you to listen to.

He retrieved a small opaque plastic disk from his pocket, with two audio connectors poking out of it, and moved over to my arcane amplifier, turned it round and inserted the plugs into an empty socket, flicking the switch on the front to 'Aux'. His hand appeared from another pocket, this time holding a white plastic square, about 5cm across. He pushed some buttons flush with the square's surface, and handed me the object.

-What's this? I asked, intrigued.

-It's called a MusQ - wireless solid state music. From America - I told you I had my contacts. Now you play it with this button - press it and it starts. Judging by your collection, you could do with hearing it a few times, you've probably never heard anything like it. I'll be back in a bit.

I sat on the sofa and pressed the button. Two deep cellos began playing, one a low long note, the other augmenting it with trills, contrapuntal style. After a brief intro, a female voice began singing in a thick accent, a breathy quality that made my ears tingle...

*All these accidents that happen
 Follow the dot
 Coincidence makes sense
 Only with you
 You don't have to speak I feel...*

Her voice shoots up an octave, as a sibilant distorted half-rhythm augments the strings...

*Emotional landscapes
 They parcel me
 A little gets out*

*And you push me up to
 This state of emergency
 How beautiful to be
 State of emergency is where I want to be*

A stuttered rhythm, made of distorted electronic detritus, accompanies the voice as it continues. I find a frown playing on my brow - Martin was right, there was something about its signature I found hard to understand, with the contrast between the calm of the strings and this unusual lolling rhythm...

*All that no-one sees you see what's inside of me
 Every nerve that hurts you heal deep inside of me
 You don't have to speak I feel
 Emotional landscapes
 They parcel me
 And confuse...
 A little gets out
 And you push me up to
 This state of emergency
 How beautiful to be
 State of emergency is where I long to be
 State of emergency how beautiful to be...*

Her voice alone, stutters into crackled echo and reverberates around the room, flickering between the speakers. The rhythm only, fizzing with distortion, beats made of high frequency fuzz and deep booms, breaking down into pure noise, epileptic and at the margins of understandability, until her voice and the strings return, on an off-beat, destabilising, to repeat the 'chorus'...

A line I cannot understand, her thick accent otherworldly, her voice high and rising, her own voice double-tracked over the top, makes me want to return to the beginning and capture the lyrics, and I walk over and turn up the amplifier to its limit, and press the button again as I sit back down.

This time the music makes a little more sense, and her voice seems to enter my head, and I realise Martin is playing me this for a reason, and as the lyrics echo around my room I understand

why he didn't want to be here as I listened, and the words etch themselves deep into me, and tears flow down my face. Is this how he feels too? It is as if this strange woman had looked into my soul, and was speaking its secrets through a haze of percussion.

I play it one more time, the lines '*All that no-one sees you see what's inside of me! Every nerve that hurts you heal deep inside of meeeeyou*' forcing hot tears to my eyes, and its following line - '*You don't have to speak, I feeeeel...*' - was this a reference to the other night, when words had seemed superfluous? Was Martin telling me he now understood, required no expression from me, being, alone, enough?

As the track ended, I sat in the silence, and tried to stop myself from shaking. To think I may never have met this man, could easily have stayed in that night, like I had for upwards of a month before. I could have never met him on the motorway, was shocked by the coincidence... the voice returned - '*Coincidence makes sense only with you...*' I hear the horn of a car, and flicking off the amplifier, run to the street.

He is sitting in a silver Maelstrom, a very fast Japanese sports car I had only ever seen in glossy magazines. I grab the handle and feel its satisfying clunk as I swing the door open and climb inside.

-Another posh motor, I say, and contemplate asking Martin where he gets his money from, but know with certainty I wouldn't like the answer, know also that he would never tell me if he didn't want to, and as the seatbelt automatically extends itself over my shoulder, I pull it the remaining three inches and locate it in its clasp, as Martin's foot hits the accelerator, and the engine kicks me in the kidneys with a satisfying roar, and we're dust.

**This PDF is the sixth part of the novel
XQ-28: The Story of a Gene.
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