

# XQ-28

*The Story of a Gene*

## Chapter 18

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**Adrian Challis**



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*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 18 Babies

**M**y eyes flash open. I am alone. I stare at the blank ceiling and try and determine what time it must be. There is a stillness in the air, the sound of the city far away, a dull pause in the pulse of the metropolis. I move and feel a heavy torpor in my limbs, my mind coated in something thick and immovable. My consciousness just stopped last night, flicked off like a switch. Today it flicked back on, and nothing remains of the time in between.

I am standing beneath warm harsh jets of water, their darts failing to penetrate my skull and wash clean a brain polluted by unfamiliar obsessions. A darkness pervades me, a sickly feeling of self-dissatisfaction. A bolus of disappointment sitting heavy in my guts. There is something akin to self-loathing dwelling beneath my skin. I am angry with myself for giving in to such mediocre temptation, my morning brain suspicious that something has been changed within it, permanently besmirched by unworthy chemicals. I rub my head and will the water to permeate and cleanse me, watch as the steaming shower distorts my body, and moan involuntarily. I slump with my head against the wall, feel the torrent massage my neck, and stand until the water runs cold.

I'm sitting on the bed, staring at a nail sunk into the dark wooden floor. My body is dry save for a thin layer of perspiration. My mind refuses to clear, my eyes to wander from

the spot. My brain is telling my body to move, but it resists, a physical truculence disobeying orders. Suddenly I stand and move to the end of the bed, retrieve a pair of knee-length grey shorts from the floor, step into them and pull them over my legs, and move into the living room.

Martin is sitting with his back to me, the laptop open in front of him.

-Morning, he says, not turning to look at me.

-What time is it? I ask, walking over to him and wrapping my naked arms around his shoulders.

-Nearly three. You sleep well?

-I think I died, and nobody's had the courtesy to tell me to stay dead.

He kisses my cheek, and chuckles unforcedly.

-I know the feeling. I've been trying to shake this fog by reading Kurt's research. It's pretty fascinating stuff. You hungry?

-No, just empty. What's for breakfast?

-There's nothing in the house. Fancy a walk?

Once dressed, we left the building by the bottom door and headed towards the river. A solid covering of white cloud hung heavy in the air, a blanket of heat untouched by breeze. It felt like a storm was brewing, but there was no indication that it would break anytime soon. The city behind us seemed inert, the usual hum of traffic strangely quelled.

-My head feels like the sky, except so much smaller, I said, unsure of what I meant.

We stood looking out over the river, its dark grey waters moving slowly past, and a memory of an earlier self flashed before my eyes, like a snapshot of another life, as I remembered sitting beside it and crying, the night I searched for Martin.

-There's part of me in there, you know...

A breeze blew from nowhere, and brought with it the distant sound of traffic, and a shudder broke my trance.

-God, what is wrong with me? I growled, grabbing my hair and trying to shake myself back to life.

-It's the drugs I reckon. We got a hangover...

I looked at him and breathed through my nose, my teeth

gritted hard together.

-Martin, I don't like this. I don't want to do that again.

-What, the drugs or the TWOCing?

-Either. Is this really the life we want to live? I've seen enough of it to know I don't like it.

He looked down into the water, and slowly nodded his head.

-Seeing Filthy again made me realise it's not what I want either. I don't wanna be forty still nicking cars and robbing shops. That whole lot are on a hiding to nothing.

-Where the fuck did you meet them all?

-Oh, around. I used to run with Filthy, a long way back. He taught me how to drive actually; you saw the RVM, he does have the gift. He likes his gear too much though.

-They're all a bunch of junkies!

Martin looked at me with soft eyes.

-There's a writer called Ambrose Bierce who once defined an alcoholic as someone who drinks as much as you do, who you don't like...

Alcoholic. Junkie. Or cop killer, perhaps. I tried shifting the sights of my righteousness onto safer targets.

-And those two fuck-ups. Where did they crawl from?

-Filthy likes to surround himself with weak people, it makes him feel stronger. You saw how he treats them. I've no idea how he's got away with it for so long, I'm surprised nobody's chibbed him.

-How come he isn't inside? You said it yourself that disc was pure evidence.

-Nobody knows how he's stayed out of prison for so long, but we all got our suspicions... Tom better be careful though, if Filthy gets a whiff of how much he's moving, he won't be safe for long.

We walked along the cobbled path that ran beside the river, the breeze helping to shift our mood into something approaching normality.

-And Tom. I can't believe how much he's changed in so little time.

-That's crack for ya. You know how you're feeling now? Imagine feeling like that every morning you wake up. And imagine knowing how easy it is to stop feeling that way.

I shuddered.

-Why would anyone willingly put themselves through that? Especially for so little reward?

-Depends what you mean by reward. There's a much bigger profit on crack than coke, and a much more determined client base. Tom can't really sell it without taking it. No-one would trust him. That's one thing I can say for Tom - he *has* been taking care of business. He's paid me in full every time now. If we do decide to knock this on the head for a bit we got plenty of collateral to live off...

-You mean we don't have to go ramming anymore?

-Not really. We could take at least a year off if we wanted!

I grabbed his arm, and pulled him towards me, but he resisted and shook my grip away.

-Not here, Ian. It's not safe.

-Oh fuck it Martin, nobody's watching.

-Neither of us know that for sure. And besides, best not get into the habit...

We walked further, and I considered our situation. Whatever was happening to Tom, I couldn't deny we were certainly benefiting from it. But what we had seen last night was such a sorry display of hopelessness - only Kurt had anything about him, and even he was in further than his obvious intelligence would have led me to believe.

-Kurt seemed sound though, didn't he?

-Very. His writing's really good. There's stuff in there that's amazing. He's done all this outside reading around virus research throughout the last century. There was some American guy in the thirties who reckoned he'd invented a microscope capable of seeing live viruses. Apparently they're crystalline in structure. He reckoned that they resonate at particular frequencies. If you can discover the frequency, you can shatter them with vibration.

-Is that what Kurt's trying to do?

-No. His stuff's serious. From what I can gather it's all based on trying to isolate the DNA of the virus itself from its coating. It would seem the government has other plans for what's called the transcriptase...

-Like what?

-It's not clear from Kurt's notes. I wanna ask him more about it. He was right about the images though - they're amazingly beautiful. Can't wait to see the full movies.

I looked up ahead of us, still not entirely sure where we were heading. About five hundred yards away a couple were walking towards us, holding hands. I instinctively moved away from Martin, suddenly believing what he had said, that we really couldn't be sure we weren't being watched. As the figures got closer, there was something about their outlines that seemed familiar.

-Is that who I think it is? I asked.

-Looks like it.

Eve and Pandora saw us, and sped up as they approached. We stopped and waited for them to reach us, each making for their usual partner.

-Pandora, I presume, I said, as her soft thin lips bestowed a kiss upon mine. She smiled and curtsied, a little laugh lighting up her boyish face. Eve kissed Martin, who looked equally charmed.

-We were just talking about you two, said Eve, wondered where you'd got to.

-We moved, just after the last time we saw you actually, I said. We live back there now, motioning in the direction from where we had come.

-Very nice, said Pandora, without emotion.

I looked at Eve, something about Pandora's demeanour unrecognisable.

-Don't mind my sister, she's in a mood.

-What's wrong? asked Martin. Has the weather got to you too?

-She's broody, said Eve. She's got it into her head she wants a baby.

I looked at Pandora, but she dropped her gaze, half embarrassed by the concept.

-Where are you going? asked Martin.

-Nowhere in particular, said Pandora. That's part of the problem.

-Well *we're* going for breakfast, I said, smiling at the unsuitability of the time. Wanna come?

We moved off in the same direction, easily taking an arm each, mine in Pandora's, Martin's in Eve's, and walked along the path together.

-Handy you showing up like that, I said. We can pretend to be normal couples now!

-*Normal?* What the fuck's that? asked Pandora contemptuously.

-We don't give a shit about what people think, said Eve. Nobody knows what to make of twins anyway, it's like we have a special dispensation.

-There's a new place opened not too far from here, said Martin. Seems no-one's told them there's a class war on!

-You're telling me, said Eve. That's what I keep saying to Pandora. I hardly think this is the right time to be bringing a new life into the world. There's too much uncertainty.

-But life is hope, said Pandora, emotion breaking in her throat. How else we gonna start again?

-But nothing's over yet, said Eve. It hasn't even begun.

-What happy little souls you are! I said. Things aren't that bad yet are they?

-Not where you're living maybe, said Eve, demurely. Less than a mile away from here things are starting to hot up real ugly. The evictions have started already.

I looked at Martin. It was true we had become disconnected from the world at large, our only contact with reality had been the previous night. And that had perhaps been too much reality...

-How is it where you're living? I asked, detecting a little bitterness in Eve's comment.

-Oh we're fine, said Pandora. Daddy left us well cared for. We have our own house you know, and the shutters keep out the marauders...

-My sister exaggerates, as usual. We'll be safe, for now at least.

We were approaching a large thin building, in the shape of a wave, coloured lights bedecking its roof.

-Looks posh, I said. Will they let us in?

-No problem, said Martin. They need all the custom they can get. And besides, such attractive people as us? We're good for

business!

We were met by a waiter in full naval regalia, who bowed graciously and opened the door for us.

-How many? he asked, as if innumerate.

I looked around me.

-Well, four, I said, aware that somehow I had become the spokesman for us all.

-Very good sir, please follow me.

He lead us to a large table in the centre of the room. There were a few couples spread about the place, as if it was the waiter's job to keep everyone as far away from each other as possible, and our entrance caused a mild stir of conversation that we tried hard to ignore. Once seated, the waiter took our orders for drinks and disappeared.

-Well, this *is* nice, I said. We should do this more often, Martin doesn't like us being seen together.

He gave me a dark look, but I smiled and winked to let him know I was teasing him. This was only the second time we had ever been out together, best not spoil it.

-So you're thinking about babies then, asked Martin, when the waiter had brought our drinks, together with four ornate menus we silently perused.

Pandora nodded.

-I've no idea why, but all of a sudden it seems to make sense. It shouldn't be my biological clock, not yet at least.

-I would've thought it would be Eve who'd get the bug first, said Martin, she was the first mother, wasn't she?

-Not me, said Eve. Can't stand the little fuckers!

-That's not true, said Pandora, you like them well enough.

-When they're somebody else's, granted. No. It is to be Pandora's box that opens first...

Martin was in mid-swallow, and he suddenly snorted his drink across the table, spraying me in the face and only mildly quelling my own laughter. We all giggled at Eve's joke, a happy ease spreading amongst us, as Martin mopped at his menu with a linen napkin. The other tables fell silent, and I could feel their occupants' gaze upon us, a general air of 'who let the oiks in' permeating the room. Pandora noticed it, and raised an eyebrow.

-Fuck 'em, I said, from behind the napkin I was drying my face with. I was beginning to enjoy myself.

-So who's the father? asked Martin, after the waiter had ostentatiously cleared up the remainder of his drink and taken our orders for food.

-Haven't decided, said Pandora. I've only just started thinking about it, her voice trailing away.

I looked at Martin, and tried to telegraph what I was thinking. His face remained stoic, but there was something in his eyes that didn't quite seem to dispel the obvious question.

-I take it you're not looking for a boyfriend?

-Oh God no, said Pandora, I haven't completely lost my mind! It would have to be by donation. It's just it seems to be getting harder these days.

-We know about that don't we Martin, but again he shot me that familiar three word look.

-I need the bathroom, said Eve diplomatically. You coming? she asked, looking Pandora straight in the eye.

The two of them stood up in unison, again their mirrored movements making me feel slightly disorientated. As they moved off together my eyes followed them, coming to rest on Martin, who was staring at me.

-You thinking what I'm thinking? I asked as they moved out of earshot.

-It'd be a miracle if I wasn't.

-What do you think?

-Well it's not up to us is it. It's Pandora's... box, after all.

We both giggled again, this time less heartily with the repetition. Something jumped in my tummy, a little excited squirt of adrenaline.

-Could you think of a better mother? I asked.

-Well it's hardly as if we know them that well...

-Oh come on Martin. After what we shared? You must admit we've got a pretty strong connection there.

-It's not something you just jump into though is it. It's another little life.

-But Martin, you felt it too. You must remember. I've never felt that feeling before, and it was so intense I nearly exploded.

Pandora is a lovely person, and despite what Eve says I'm sure she'd do her fair share to look after it.

-Ian there's a lot to think about. You can't just rush into something like this.

-But we can talk about it, can't we? You're not ruling it out completely?

He didn't reply, just sat playing with the stem of his wine glass, staring intently at the table before him.

-Can we at least talk about it? Please? You never know, Pandora might not want to anyway.

-Okay. We'll talk about it.

The food arrived, tiny ornate portions of fish in sauces of varying flavours and hues, that lit up the table's all-white crockery in rich, pleasing colours. I for one was grateful the portions were small, my stomach still shrunken from... oh my God, again only last night. At one point, the memory of the car chase reared up in vivid flashback, an angry reminder that we were hardly the most obvious choice to raise the next generation, and I had to shake my head to dispel the thought before it escaped and warned the room it was harbouring dangerous criminals. Martin noticed, and silently showed his concern, and with it all fear evaporated, replaced with a sudden confidence, and I turned to Pandora and waited until she swallowed her food before asking

-So then. Do you want to have our baby?

The room suddenly fell silent, as if everyone had been listening in, subconsciously waiting for the question. A charged atmosphere descended, and it was obvious Pandora had been taken by surprise, but it was not shock that passed over her face, rather a slight smile, like the *Giaconda's*, as her eyes closed lazily and she lowered her head. When it came back up her eyes were limpid, shining, fixing mine with a breath-taking gaze.

-I thought you'd never ask, she said.

Dessert came, and with it a plethora of questions. Who would be the father? It was obvious that Pandora seemed to have more of an affinity with me than Martin, just as Eve had seemed to naturally gravitate towards him, but I was still enamoured with

the idea of seeing Martin's baby, just as he had professed a desire to see mine.

-Does it really matter? asked Pandora nonchalantly, whichever one of you will make a beautiful child.

I found myself blushing, and looked at Martin with doleful eyes, 'see what I mean' conveyed in a tightened smile. Eve merely rose her eyes to the ceiling.

-Do we really have to decide yet? asked Martin; it was the first time he had spoken since Pandora had agreed to... *have our baby*, and a sudden whoosh of excitement made me realise that he too was taking the prospect seriously.

-Well I'd like to move on it as soon as possible, said Pandora, matter-of-factly. We're both menstruating now, that means a couple of week's time would be ideal.

Something suddenly occurred to me, and my brow furrowed with the thought.

-That's not why you're so adamant is it? I've heard women get the strangest ideas...

-Are you kidding? blurted Eve. She's been on about it for months. Since we met you at the solstice party she hasn't shut up about the two of you. She seems to think you have the perfect wetware...

I looked at Martin, and he was smiling too.

-Nice expression, he said. Like software I presume, but... wet? Pandora didn't even acknowledge the question.

-I can't wait. Besides, laying off the alcohol is getting boring.

I noticed for the first time that she was drinking water, in contrast to the pale white wine the rest of us had.

-She's been taking magnesium tablets, and she's obsessed with iron, aren't you?

Pandora nodded silently, almost embarrassed by her sister's revelation. I looked at Martin, a little smile playing on my lips.

-You're really taking this seriously, I said.

-Yes. Aren't you?

-I am now. Two weeks you think? My birthday's in two weeks...

-How romantic, said Eve, and how appropriate.

-How do we do this, then? I asked.

-Oh I've read all about it, said Pandora enthusiastically. As long as everything's sterile it's very easy...

-Well let's hope not *everything's* sterile, joked Martin. There wouldn't be much point otherwise.

-Do you think Saul would help? I asked.

-Who's Saul? asked Pandora.

-We've got a friend in the fertility business, haven't we Martin. I was being careful not to say too much, unsure if it was a good idea.

-I can have a word with him, see if he's up for helping. He'll probably have some advice about the best way to... proceed.

-Well that's settled then, said Pandora emphatically.

-Hardly, said Martin. Who'll look after it? Children are a big responsibility.

-I will, said Pandora. *We* will, all four of us. It'll be easy.

I looked at Eve, trying to see if she shared her sister's confidence. She nodded resignedly.

-Don't worry, I'm prepared to do my bit. I *suppose* I'll get used to it, she added, smiling to let it be known that the idea was hardly anathema to her either.

Pandora suddenly breathed heavily, and wrapped a hand around mine and Martin's. Eve copied the gesture, and the four of us squeezed our hands and smiled excitedly.

-I would like to propose a toast, I said, lifting my glass and pausing until everyone else did the same. To the next generation...

-To the next generation, we all said in unison.

-May they make a better job of it than this one, added Eve, emptying her glass.

The next two weeks flew by. Martin made arrangements with Saul, who suggested it might be a good idea if we stopped smoking draw for a while, as THC made your sperm 'docile' as he put it.

-He reckons it makes them swim round in circles. Seriously 'demotivated'!

We decided that my birthday, the last day of the month, would be a perfect time, almost exactly at the centre of Pandora's cycle, and like Eve had commented, romantically auspicious.



Martin had told Mr Calyx that he couldn't guarantee him any more cars for a while, blaming our near capture, which he accepted, more than satisfied with the amount of business we were generating, courtesy of Tom's kitchen. Kurt's disc arrived, and the images it contained entranced me; 3D models in lysergic colours, viral surfaces that shone like oily metal reflecting luminosity as I spun them on the laptop, invisibly beamed to the enormous TV. At last I had found something as entrancing as the PS-V, and I began cutting them into our home movies with the edit software I was now beginning to master, until I realised it hardly constituted a good omen, and deleted the scenes, satisfied to manipulate the virus footage on its own, changing their colours and exploding them.

-If only the real things could disappear as easily, said Martin, impressed with my handiwork. Imagine how boss they'd look projected huge, he said, suddenly lost in thought.

Then it was my birthday, and I awoke with Martin wrapped around me, his solid cock pressing hard between my cheeks, his hand gripping my already pulsing manhood and wanking me hard, the sudden excitement a beautiful awakening, as he forced me over and pumped himself and me into the bed.

-Tell me when you're close, he said through gritted teeth, we don't want to waste it.

I was very close very quickly, and I hissed a 'Now' into the pillow, and he stopped moving and held me tight, and I tried not to allow the pressure to take me any further towards climax. He waited a while until both of our breaths slowed, then began to rub his perfect hardware between my cheeks again, rolling us both over and wanking me, until I sat up and turned round, returning my hole to his cock, taking my weight on my raised legs and grinding into his groin as he pumped my cock with his hand.

-Wo wo wo, I said, grabbing his hand and holding it still to stop from coming, and looked at him to see that he was close too, and stopped moving until we both calmed down. He grabbed me and pulled me to him and kissed me hard, rolling us both over to lie on our sides pressed close together.

-Happy birthday beautiful, he said, then rolled over and produced a rectangular box from beneath the bed, wrapped in

shiny red paper.

-Is that for me? I squealed.

-Well is anyone else around here a birthday boy?

The phone was ringing, and Martin left me to open the present by myself. Inside was a video projector, a small white oblong with a bevelled lens.

-Oh my God, I screamed, it's fucking amazing! and scooped it up and ran with it to the living room. Martin was laying on the sofa, naked, the cordless telephone pressed to his ear. He put his finger to his lips, and mouthed 'It's Saul'.

Something delicious suddenly occurred to me, and I placed the projector on the table and walked over to the sofa, dropping to my knees and sucking Martin's cock between my lips. He tried to force me away, but I gripped his waist and wouldn't move, feeling him harden as I worked him with my tongue, looking up into his eyes which he closed, nodding and 'uh-huh'ing, trying hard not to let Saul hear what was going on.

-Okay, he moaned, a little too seductively, and coughed to cover the obvious desire in his voice.

I built up the pressure, and he swiftly grabbed my head to stop my movements, and pulled himself from my mouth. A loud slurping noise accompanied his extraction, and Saul must have heard it because Martin suddenly had to explain that it was nothing, that it was my birthday and that I was being silly.

-Hi Saul, I shouted, mopping my mouth with my hand.

-Hi Ian, said Martin, passing on the greeting. Saul says happy birthday.

-Thank you!

-It would seem Saul's had another visit from the Goo police, said Martin after putting down the phone and grabbing me, kissing me harshly in punishment for my playfulness. He wants to meet us at his house, reckons the surgery isn't safe anymore.

-When?

-About an hour. I said we'll pick up Pandora, I've been to Saul's before.

Whilst he called a taxi I turned on the projector and pointed it at the wall. Even with the light coming through the blinds the image was vivid, the familiar Sony logo almost completely filling

the wall.

-Oh my God Martin it's incredible!

-Nine thousand ANSI lumens, it's the best one you can buy.

Or steal, I nearly added, and bit my lip to stop myself from ruining the moment. I opened the laptop and pointed it at the projector, booting up the edit software. The image flickered, and the splash screen for the edit suite burst across the wall. I was so excited I nearly pissed.

-We'd better get dressed, we can play with that later.

-Okay, but just one little movie, I said. It is so brilliant Martin thank you so much.

I clicked on the home movie we'd made many months before, which I'd re-filmed from the Super-8 original with the camcorder. The colours fizzed, the grain enhanced at such a huge scale, the flicker making it look like a proper movie. As the image faded, Martin applauded, and came and kissed me.

-Come on Mr de Mille, it's time for your close-up.

We pulled up in the taxi outside a walled garden, rowan and nectarine blossom trailing over the top from trees within, and told the driver to beep his horn. Through the gates I could see the door open, and one of the twins emerge and walk towards us.

-That's Eve isn't it? I asked, unsure.

-I think so, said Martin. I'll know when she kisses me!

The taxi door opened and in stepped a twin. She leant over and kissed Martin.

-Yep, he said, thought so.

-Pandora'll be out in a second. She wants me to be there too. She's had an idea.

-Me too, said Martin. There's something I want to ask Saul about.

-What mystery, I said, smiling at Eve. She returned my smile with a little wobble of her head, and turned to watch Pandora as she locked the heavy gate, opening the taxi door to allow her sister in.

-Hiya stud, said Pandora, kissing me on the lips.

We travelled in silence, through dishevelled streets that contrasted strangely with the late summer sunshine, and back

into the city. As we pulled up outside a row of white Georgian terraces, I noted that we were only a few blocks from my old flat, and instinctively lowered myself into the seat, furtiveness a natural reaction to this area. It reminded me how much had changed in me, how I had become so much more confident since our move, and consciously raised myself up and out of the taxi.

-Keep the change, said Martin, passing the driver a large note.

We stood at the top of a short flight of steps. Martin pressed a brass button, and a deep bell rang beyond the maroon door. Soon we could hear footsteps, and the door swung open and there stood Saul, dwarfed by the frame, a long stairway stretching up behind him.

-Hallo, he said cheerily, stepping back and bidding us inside.

-Can I get you all a cup of tea? he asked after leading us into a reception room off a long corridor.

-No caffeine for me, said Pandora, it's bad for fertility.

-So I take it you're Pandora then, said Saul.

-I am, said Pandora, stepping forward and taking his hand.

-Lovely to meet you, he said, if you'll come this way I'll get you settled. It's very straight forward and nothing to be embarrassed about...

-If you don't mind, my sister's coming with me, said Pandora. I definitely want this to work and we've had an idea.

-Very well, said Saul, if you'll both follow me...

-We still haven't decided who's to be the father, I said when we were alone.

-There's something I want to ask Saul, said Martin, but I reckon if we both donate, nature can decide that for us.

-What, you mean mix it up before hand?

-Why not? That way whichever is the strongest swimmer takes the prize!

-But will that work? Is it a good idea to risk it not working?

We could hear footsteps approaching, and turned to see the door swing open and Saul step in.

-Well they seem quite, quite charming, he said. A very good choice by the way!

-Pandora sort of chose us, I said.

-Then I must congratulate her too. Please remind me to do so.

I blushed again. I must stop doing that, I thought.

-Sorry we have to do this here, Saul was saying. The Goos came back yesterday. Forced their way in and started sacking the place. They smashed up everything, all my equipment, including both of my microscopes. They didn't say a word to me, just gave me a look that said 'try and stop us, we'll smash you too.' I was shaking for hours afterwards. It reminded me of what my father said the Stormtroopers were like. It set me thinking and I remembered he left me an old microscope in the attic. He brought it out of Germany when he and my mother fled. I was looking at it last night. It took some cleaning but it's surprisingly powerful, much better than the ones they smashed in fact.

Martin seemed lost in thought, and I looked at him to see if I could guess what.

-Wasn't there something you wanted to ask Saul, Martin?

-Was there? Oh yes there was. What happens if two lots of sperm inhabit the same uterus?

Saul smiled at the directness of the question.

-I wondered who the lucky father was to be. It's an interesting question. There has been some research on the subject, it's far from uncontroversial by the way, but it would seem to suggest that the two sperm fight with each other, an emotive anthropomorphism...

It was that word again. Kurt had used it.

-Excuse my ignorance Saul, but what does that mean?

-Ascribing human characteristics to non-human things. I know sperm *is* human in this case but it's still less than a whole human being. Part of the recipe for one if you like.

-And they fight? asked Martin, intrigued.

-Sort of. Whichever hits the lining of the uterus first divides off into different roles. Some become barrier sperm - they thicken and form a wall. Others will actually attack what they see as intruding sperm. I have read descriptions of it - it is quite remarkable. Apparently one set of sperm will actually 'head-butt' - you must excuse my shorthand, but it is the best way of describing it - 'head-butt' the 'intruder' sperm and attempt to break their necks! Evolution is an amazing thing. There is also evidence that when a man is stressed his sperm will flatten out -

making fertilisation impossible. But these flattened sperm will likewise respond to healthy sperm and produce a barrier to stop the healthy sperm from getting to the egg.

-Wow Saul, that sounds amazing. It'd look great projected!

-Excuse Ian, Saul, he's a little obsessed. I bought him a projector for his birthday!

-Oh yes, happy birthday Ian. I forgot, Martin did mention it.

-It's okay Saul, you said before on the phone.

-I did, you're right. So I take it you're both thinking of donating then.

-It would seem to be the best solution. We simply can't decide who the father should be.

-What are the chances of Pandora getting pregnant by either of us? I asked.

-Well she is young and healthy, and from what she has said it would seem she has been doing everything to keep up her fertility. Martin I know has a very high sperm count, like I said before it's been getting higher since you two met.

-And we got each other to the point of coming earlier, said Martin. I know that helps...

-With both count and volume, said Saul. What well informed young people you all are!

-I wondered what all that was about, I said. I thought you were just winding me up!

-As if I would, said Martin, on your birthday too...

-If you go and do the deed, Saul was saying, we can see if my microscope is up to the job of showing what happens. It's unlikely, to be honest, as I think the reaction is dependent upon pH balance and the different secretions of the uterus. There will be some left over in the syringe, it's worth taking a look at least. There's a room at the top of the stairs you can use. You'll need a couple of these, he added, passing us a clear plastic bottle each.

-You're joking! We haven't got to get it in there have we? I asked, disbelievingly.

-Don't worry I'll help you, said Martin, and the thought made something in my trousers twitch.

We moved up the long staircase, and as we were about ten steps from the top a door opened and out stepped Eve.

-Pandora wants you to do it in here with us. She says the more aroused she is the more likely it'll take.

I looked at Martin, and he raised his eyebrows and a little smile lit up his lips. Before either of us knew it we were taking the remaining steps two at a time. We followed Eve into the room. Pandora was naked, laying on a leather chaise longue, and she turned her head languidly to watch us walk in. I noticed her hand was between her legs, and she was moving it there slowly, playfully.

-We've just been talking, said Eve. We think we should all be naked, and slipped a tiny pair of white panties down her legs from beneath her short summer dress before pulling it over her head, and stood staring at us defiantly.

Martin grabbed at my crotch which was already filling out, and I reached for his belt and undid it hurriedly. He too was hard, and I struggled with the buttons on his fly to pull them open, as he slipped off his t-shirt and kicked off his shoes before ripping open my belt and clawing at my jeans to undo them. I pulled him towards me and kissed him roughly, letting him take care of both of our trousers as I lifted the shirt over my head, breaking the kiss for as little time as possible. We were both naked then, and I pulled him hard against me and let our cocks rub together, looking over his shoulder to see Pandora rubbing herself roughly, rolling her head from side to side as Eve straddled the chaise longue and pushed her groin into Pandora's face.

I forced Martin to the floor and lay on top of him, then started to slide down his body, but he grabbed me and spun me round, grabbing at my buttocks to press my cock against his face, and mine instinctively went to his groin and began taking huge gulps at his straining cock, feeling thick pre-cum on my tongue and smelling his irresistible musk coming in waves from his hot scrotum. I was lodged inside his throat, and I pumped myself into him, gripping my head between his thighs as I gagged on his solid length, lifting my head to breathe and looking back at the twins. Eve was sitting on Pandora's belly, her legs spread wide allowing her to see her obscenity, and the two of them turned to look at us and both rubbed themselves more urgently. A similar circuit to last time was being completed - as I lunged into Martin's throat I

could feel a white wave bunching up and returned my mouth to his cock and forced myself down him. Eve and Pandora both let out a simultaneous yelp, and I looked up to see if they were coming, but they were both still working themselves with something approaching anger. I was getting very close, and started to disengage from Martin's mouth, suddenly unaware where my little bottle had gone, but he pulled me tight by wrapping one arm around my buttocks, and a little moan made me look down at him and saw he was waving his bottle in the air. Like he said, he'd help me. I let go of resistance and fucked his throat harshly, then felt him turn me over onto my side and, without stopping sucking me, undo his bottle. I was on the brink of coming and he could feel it, smoothly disengaging me from his mouth, and, wanking me with one hand, held the ridiculously narrow bottle to the head of my cock. I released everything as white boiling clouds filled my vision and I could feel myself spurting hot cum, stopped thinking completely as I felt Martin direct my cock and just lay there on my side, an enormous and seemingly never-ending orgasm shaking me on the floor.

It was Martin's lips that brought me back to reality; he was kneeling over me and kissing me ferociously, breath pulled either side of his mouth as he thrust himself against my belly, his cock enraged as he forced his weight down upon me. There was something approaching delirium in both of us, and despite me having been thoroughly emptied by my orgasm, my ardour was not diminished, and I pulled him into a kneel and shoving a hand between his legs forced his tumescence into my hungry throat. He is holding the bottle in his left hand, and as I plunge myself against him, his hips meet me but I refuse to gag - I want to stay impaled by him forever, to never let our membranes part, and he has to grab my short hair and pull me off him, shooting the quarter-full bottle to his cock and wanking himself, until thick spurts of white cum squirt against the inside of the plastic, taking its contents to over half-full. I look up into his eyes but he closes them, a look of awe mixed with relief on his perfect face, and I turn to look at the twins. Eve is squatting, her head bobbing between Pandora's legs as she writhes on the chaise longue, her eyes shining, her mouth open in an obscene gawp.

-Get... Saul... quickly...

Martin shuffles back on his knees and I stand, my still-erect cock a source of wonder rather than embarrassment, and I move to the door.

-Saul, I shout, we're ready!

Pandora is holding Eve's head, her breath coming in short gasps. Martin stands and holds up the bottle, gazing through it.

-Fuckin' ell, he says, there's gallons of it, and shakes the bottle to mix our material together.

Saul walks through the door, and is stilled for a second as he takes in the scene. Martin is likewise priapic, and as he passes the bottle over I notice with a small smile that Saul misses it on his first attempt to grab it, his gaze obviously elsewhere. He holds up the bottle, a little backwards move of his head acknowledging the unusual volume of its contents. Retrieving a long, needle-less syringe from his pocket, he places it in the bottle and sucks up the contents, handing back the now empty bottle to Martin before moving towards the couch. Pandora stares up at him, and with a little nod rubs the back of Eve's head, who again begins to work her mouth between her sister's legs. Suddenly Pandora arches her back, her head is thrown back and a huge shudder quakes her body, a shaking moan approaching a scream shattering the room. Eve pulls away, and Saul squats between Pandora's legs and inserts the syringe. Pandora grabs the edges of the couch and tries to move away from the intrusion, but resists her own instinct and pushes herself against the implement, a long stream of air forced out from her lungs. Saul slowly removes the now empty syringe, and Pandora slumps back onto the leather, turning her head to face the wall as her sister moves towards her and strokes her head, kissing her tenderly.

-All done, says Saul, and limps towards the door, rearranging his trousers with one hand and holding the syringe with the other, its end glistening with a tiny spot of blood.

Once dressed, we left the twins laying with each other on the couch, Pandora sobbing gently, Eve winking at us to let us know everything was fine. Downstairs a shout directed us towards a back room, which we entered to see Saul sitting with his back to

us, staring into an oversized microscope.

-It's like I thought, he said, there isn't really enough of Pandora's secretions to see the process. You would need to use an endoscopic camera to see it, if it really happens at all that is... Both of your sperm seem healthy enough though, they seem to like each other!

We moved over to the bench, and stood either side of Saul.

-Take a look, he said.

-After you, said Martin.

I placed my eye against the one of the eyepieces, and was met with huge tadpole-like creatures swimming feverishly around each other. The image was slightly scary, and I heard an involuntary 'Wo!' escape my lips.

-It's on a very low magnification for this microscope, Saul was saying, I really am quite impressed by how powerful it is.

-Oh my God, I said. Is this what flies out of us every time we...?

-Yes, said Saul. It makes you think doesn't it.

-Where did you say this device came from? asked Martin.

-I've been thinking, said Saul. I can vaguely remember my father talking about it. I think it belonged to one of his clients. He was anxious to get it out of Germany, I have no idea why. Like I say he brought it with him when we fled, which now I think about it was a little odd as we had very little else with us, just a few clothes and some money.

-I don't suppose you can remember the name of your father's client? asked Martin, as he pressed his eye against the microscope, and backed off again.

-It's weird isn't it, I said, putting my hand on Martin's shoulder, and kissing his cheek. It was our first contact since we'd cum, and I left my lips there, breathing in his smell, until I began to feel myself stiffening again and pulled away to stand beside him. Saul was tapping his lip with a curled finger, a little stutter trying to find the name.

-Rrr... it began with an R I believe...

Martin's head turned slowly from the device and stared at Saul. My hand, still resting on his shoulder, suddenly picked up a shake.

-It wasn't Rife by any chance was it?

Saul clicked his fingers.

-Rife! Yes, Raymond Rife! An American I believe. He came to dinner several times. He always brought me a little toy. How on earth did you know?

-Saul, what you have here is a very special piece of equipment. According to its inventor, it is capable of seeing live viruses. What exactly did your father do?

-He was an optical engineer. He worked for Carl Zeiss. When it became obvious the way Germany was going he got us, and that, out. He never quite recovered from the journey. Something inside him died. Shortly after we got here he died too. I was forbidden from playing with it when I was a child, he told my mother it was too important. I literally remembered it for the first time in decades yesterday.

The door opened and in walked the twins, holding hands. I smiled at Pandora, who returned my smile from a dishevelled face. I beckoned to them, and they walked over to the bench.

-Take a look at what's inside you, I said. It's a bit scary...

Pandora looked down the microscope, and a little laugh escaped her lips.

-They're kinda cute, she said.

-Let me see, said Eve, peering down an eyepiece after her sister had moved away. Oh dear, you are obviously insane if you think they're 'cute'.

-Saul I've been reading about this very device in the last few weeks. Everyone thought the only one that existed was in pieces. If Rife was right, this could hold the answer to a lot of things. There's an idea formulating in my head - if it comes to anything, would you be up for helping us, and maybe lending us this machine?

-Well to be honest I would be loathe to let it out of my sight, especially now I am aware of quite how special it is. It has sentimental value too...

-Of course, I understand. If my idea pans out you wouldn't need to be parted from it.

-What are you thinking mate? I asked.

-I don't want to say yet, I need to think some more...

-How intriguing, said Eve. What *have* we interrupted?

-I suggest dinner, said Pandora, ignoring her sister's question. It's your birthday, isn't it Ian. It would seem we have a lot to celebrate. Our treat.

-Count me out, said Saul. I have a lot to catch up with, thanks to our friends' visit yesterday.

-Are you sure you can't come Saul? asked Eve. We owe you one.

-You owe me nothing my dear, he said, avuncularly. It was my pleasure.

-We can't change your mind? said Pandora, placing a hand on his arm. We couldn't have done this without your help.

-No, I am sure. Go and have a splendid time without me.

We dropped the twins off at their home, Pandora suddenly becoming very tired and needing a rest. We met up again later that evening, and over three courses and far too much wine for all but Pandora, joked and laughed and discussed the future. An easy serenity had passed over all of us, and as Pandora bundled us into a taxi, it was almost possible to forget for a moment the slow but inexorable disintegration of a society we no longer recognised. To our drooping eyes, the fires that burned in the streets seemed set for us, a gesture of renewal eradicating dead history. Even as the sun set over the river, the call to prayer carried on a gentle breeze seemed a lullaby, and I held Martin's naked body in my limp arms, and let the day just fade away.

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