IF YOU COULD SPEND TWO WEEKS WITH ANYONE IN THE WORLD, WHO WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

RONIL CAINE

Lilian

A SCIENCE FICTION THRILLER NOVEL

PREVIEW

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NOVEL

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‚We are born, so to speak, twice over;
born into existence, and born into life'

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

TURNER ARRIVED ON TIME, finding Olivier already seated in a booth in the corner. As Turner walked across the coffee bar, Olivier stood up and greeted him with a friendly smile. Turner judged him to be well below forty. Olivier's suit was impeccable, his face clean-shaven, eyes alert and bright. Turner, on the other hand, had shown up for the morning meeting somewhat bleary-eyed for lack of sleep and had not bothered to shave off his stubble, although it had always suited him well. After all, who was selling to whom?

Olivier motioned for them to sit and then waved over the waiter. The slim young lad who stepped over to their table—Dai, according to his name tag—spoke English fluently and took the order without taking notes. He returned right away with coffee for both of them.

"Well, Mr. Olivier, can you tell me more about your exciting offer?" asked Turner, smiling out of politeness.

Olivier also smiled. At last, the client was asking him the question he wanted to hear. "Mr. Turner, I know that you have everything you need, and you can get almost anything you want in the whole world. However, I am offering you something you cannot get anywhere else," said Olivier.

"Have you ever thought about spending your weekend with a celebrity?"

The faces of a few well-known women popped into Turner's head, but he kept his attention on Olivier. In business, he has always able to distinguish danger and traps from opportunities and acceptable risks. If this man were about to con him, it would be up to him not to fall into the trap. Turner felt he had the upper hand, but he should be on the lookout, nevertheless.

There were few things in life that could catch his attention, yet here he was, at considerable cost of money and time, and he had not even heard half the story. That he might be about to do something stupid crossed his mind, but he decided to hear the man out.

Olivier leaned closer to him confidentially and went on before Turner could utter a word. "Tell me, Mr. Turner, what is your deepest desire? Tell us who the person is you would like to spend a weekend with the most, and we'll bring her to you."

Turner did not ask any foolish questions about kidnapping people because if that was the case, they couldn't seri-

ously think he would be game for it. He was a smart, law-abiding guy who wanted to spend his money without fear of arrest or any brush with the law. If they had really looked into his background, they must know that his companies operate legitimately and pay taxes in every country where they do business. He saw to it that his companies were good corporate neighbours, actively participating in their host communities. Moreover, there had never been so much as a rumour about any dubious activities or scandal.

"How could you possibly do such a thing?" asked Turner.

Olivier once again flashed a smile fit for a commercial but also that looked completely sincere. "We have the technological capabilities to copy anybody, any living person on earth." That means that we can bring you a copy of your favourite actress, athlete, singer, or the girl next door—anybody you want. She will be a real human being too, not some android, double, or doll. A perfect copy."

Turner glanced away to try to hide his astonishment, and then laughed out loud at the absurdity of the situation. The person in front of him was speaking about something not yet possible according to the current state of science.

"Human cloning is illegal," Turner said, "but even if it was legal, and if what you say is true at all, as far as I know the process would take years."

"Long ago, it did take years. Now, a week is enough to create the selected person's copy. Cloning is of course illegal, but the law applies only to those who participate in the process. We take all the risks, and you will not be exposed in any way. You just meet a beautiful woman and spend a week or two with her. Payment is required only after the delivery of the copy, after you are convinced that you have received the person you ordered.

"One week?" asked Turner.

"The whole process usually takes two weeks from order to delivery, but one week is enough for copying as long as the chosen person's DNA is available," Olivier said.

Turner was speechless. He had not seen this coming. Copying? Anybody?

"Who stands behind all this?" Turner asked, though he wasn't sure he wanted to know the answer.

"I cannot tell you that," replied Olivier, "but the management consists of a group of wealthy businessmen who fi-

nance several similar research activities. I would not rule out that you might know some of them, but you will never know their identities. I can tell you that I am the manager of the Japanese branch."

Turner completely forgot about his coffee, as he pondered all he was hearing.

"So, tell me, whom would you choose if you could have a copy of anyone?" asked Olivier.

"Teenagers ask questions like that after their second beer," said Turner.

"Exactly. We are talking about a basic desire of human beings, but although once it was merely a conversational topic, now, for you, it can be a reality."

"Why me?" asked Turner.

"We choose our clients with the utmost caution, given the sensitive nature of our service. We run a background check on our potential clients to ensure the deal will be concluded with maximum security for all parties. Nevertheless, I can assure you that no one has been harmed, and our company has never even come under investigation," Olivier said.

Turner rubbed his chin while wondering whether coming here was a good or a bad idea. The fact that payment would only be due after delivery did seem to limit the risk of this being a scam; but still, the whole idea seemed preposterous.

"I know it sounds incredible at first," Olivier said. "All of our clients have felt the same, but in the end, each one was satisfied and gained an experience the rest of us just dream about. Sleep on it, Mr. Turner, and visit me in my office tomorrow. I will show you exactly what I am talking about."

Olivier stood up and offered his hand. Turner also rose and this time he shook his hand.

"Until then, Mr. Turner," said Olivier, and was already on his way out. Turner sank back into his seat and mulled over the proposition. He had to hold himself back from yelling Stop! He wanted to see some proof right away. He convinced himself to sleep on it, though. After a day's rest everything will be clearer, and he will be able to make an informed decision. He remained in his seat and weighed the options. If it was all true, then he was about to have an exceptional time.

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