

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

A couple is shown in profile, embracing and kissing. They are positioned in front of a large, glowing globe that has a digital, grid-like texture. The globe is illuminated with a bright light from the center, creating a lens flare effect. The background is dark with some faint digital patterns and light trails.

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A SCIENCE FICTION THRILLER NOVEL

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a novel

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

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

PROLOGUE

Johnny Morelli is celebrating his thirtieth birthday in his luxury villa in Thailand. His wealth allows him to celebrate it anywhere he wants to in the world, but this is an extraordinary occasion, so he decided to throw himself a party hidden from the world. The house on Phuket's prestigious coastal hill is the perfect spot for such an event. There will be a party with his friends in Miami too, where he lives, however before that, he has organised this private celebration for himself. It starts today, on Friday, and will last until Sunday. After a few days of rest, he will set off to the United States.

The party is attended by one host and twenty-five guests, twenty of whom are women, all of them celebrities: top models, beauty queens, actresses, singers, porn stars, and the distressingly beautiful new meteorologist from CNN. Johnny is convinced that he is having the time of his life with the twenty prettiest women on earth.

Johnny is by the swimming pool, sunbathing in the company of an actress, the previous year's Oscar nominee, Hollywood's latest starlet, and a blond porn star—the embodiment of many men's secret desires. They are chatting, laughing, and drinking tequilas, one after the other. The meteorologist is relaxing in the pool with a cocktail in her hand. She had lost her bikini top about an hour ago.

Johnny has been a ladies' man all his life. He is tall and handsome, a modern-day Don Juan. He inherited his American mother's and Italian father's attractive features, and his mixed-blood skin creates an illusion of being under the sun all year long. Moreover, he is blindingly rich, thanks to the prospering companies of

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his parents and the family inheritance, including the hundreds of millions his grandfather made through shady dealings, then laundered clean.

Johnny was born and grew up in the United States. In high school, he abandoned his given name, Gerald, and started using Johnny. After graduating from Stanford, he plunged into the business world at his father's company. The company prospered so Johnny had as much free time as he was unashamed to take. He knew times would eventually change so he tried to make best of his younger, responsibility-free years.

Johnny Morelli bought a twenty-thousand square foot villa in Thailand, a fact known only by a handful of people. This is where he brings the women dearest to his heart, those he wants to spend more than a day with. Maybe even a week.

There is a breath-taking view at the Andaman Sea from the balcony where Johnny is standing and from the terrace where a pool is located. The turquoise blue water sparkles like the most valuable diamond in the world. The sea is dotted with lush green islands and white beaches. The sight always set Johnny's—and of course the girls'—hearts throbbing, and the current guests feel the same, although being well-connected and having a fortune means they must have visited many places all over the world.

The air is warm, the sun is sparkling brightly, and the colours are vivid. Only the salty sea breeze, the ice-cold drinks, and the cool water of the pool alleviate the blazing heat.

One of the singers—though no more than nineteen, two of her songs have already appeared on the hottest American billboard lists—tells Johnny that she thinks this is the best place in the world and Johnny

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agrees. Johnny promises her to bring her here every year. She giggles at this, and so does Johnny as he unclips her bra, which comes loose obediently and falls on the snow-white stone of the balcony. Her beautiful, curvy, suntanned breasts spill out from under her long brown hair. "Lovely!" thinks Johnny. Not everyone can become a star. The singer keeps on giggling as if nothing had happened.

Loud music is blasting in the house, and the girls are dancing in flimsy summer clothes, some in bikinis and others half-naked. Then the music transitions to soft melodies, the light and gentle vocals of a female singer, and rhythmic drumming. Johnny is dancing with two girls, then with three. They dance around him and adore him. A black American singer busts the best moves. The host stares in amazement as she dances to the rhythm of the music as if she had the body of a panther. Now and again, she darts a glance at him and smiles. She is glad that Johnny enjoys the show. Her breasts obediently, but with a little delay, follow the rhythm of her dance under her short, black top, momentarily and playfully slipping out, but never putting everything on display. Not yet.

The villa has four bedrooms, and Johnny has just entered one with two bombshells. On his right side, the action star of a blockbuster movie hitting last year eight hundred million dollars at the box office, and the other woman, with disproportionately large breasts compared to her hips, is the current Miss Sweden, whose blonde hair attracts men's eyes like a muleta teases a bull.

The party is frenetically wild. They are drinking the most expensive drinks, snorting cocaine, taking speed, smoking pot, or doing all of these together, listening to the music seeping out from inside, enjoying the sun and Johnny's company. Everything is allowed here, there

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are no taboos, and anything that happens here will remain Johnny's secret. The stars don't know this. They are just having a good time. Johnny has brought so many drugs and booze to the party that it will certainly last until Monday without anybody having to leave the house for more. There is no way that twenty-six people can drink so much beer, champagne and spirits, although they do look like they are doing their best to achieve this feat.

Johnny is standing on the balcony and kissing a singer, who grabs him by the hand and pulls him inside the house. Johnny looks back down to the lower balcony and sees Johnny in the pool making love to the meteorologist, another Johnny feeling up a Thai model under a room-sized sunshade, being caressed by an Oscar nominee and a porn star without clothes, except for her rectangular, secretary-style glasses she left on at his request, because that is how he remembers her from a movie.

The singer leads Johnny from the balcony into the house. They walk past a room, its door wide open. Inside, on a queen-size bed another Johnny is lying with the most beautiful Japanese actress. The past few hours have visibly exhausted them. Johnny has just passed a joint to the Japanese beauty. They are smiling at each other playfully, like a couple sharing a secret. The singer steps into a spacious bathroom with Johnny and pushes the door closed, but through a crack they are still visible as she undoes the side-knot of her bikini bottom.

There are twenty-six people in the villa, twenty of them are women, and the rest are Johnny. It's his birthday, completely out of control with drugs, booze, and endless sex with the most beautiful women in the world. It is Friday afternoon, and the party lasts until Sunday.

There are twenty-five guests, but no one has been invited.

1

The men in suits rose from the oval conference table on the sixth floor of a Tokyo skyscraper. Robert Turner, the American multi-millionaire contentedly shook the hand of Yūto Sakuraba, the owner of the skyscraper.

“Once again, we are pleased that you have come, Mr. Turner,” said Sakuraba. The other two Japanese men were the general manager and the legal advisor of Sakuraba’s company. His secretary was standing by the door smiling, clutching a folder to her chest.

“The pleasure is mine, Sakuraba-san,” said Turner.

“Thank you,” added Brody Calvert, who was Turner’s business associate, administrator, legal and business advisor in a single person.

The west side of the conference room was occupied by a window wall with a fine view of Tokyo’s business district including several office buildings and a small park. The houses across the street were covered with Japanese characters, logos and displays of various sizes alternating between advertisements. An hour earlier, as they had stepped in, Turner quickly concluded that his New York office had a far better view.

During the conference, the parties negotiated in their own native languages, which were then translated and relayed into their counterparts’ earpieces by a mobile device. Turner knew a few Japanese phrases but did not exert himself to use them, except when he wanted to impress their business partners—or Japanese women, if given the chance.

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As the two Americans were leaving, the three Japanese men kept bowing in quick succession. They waved like children and took turns saying goodbye and sayōnara.

The secretary escorted the two Americans to the lift and made an elegant and polite bow. Turner stepped a little closer and asked her in Japanese when she would leave work that day, but the secretary, after a prudish smile, said goodbye again and headed back to the office. On their way down in the lift, Brody congratulated Turner, but did not extend his hand for a handshake. It was pointless, he knew his boss well enough.

“Congratulations, Robert,” said Brody.

“Thanks. The Japs must be jumping with joy that they’ve made the deal of the century, but they did not do as well as they think,” said Turner and slicked back his curly hair in the huge mirror of the lift. The undulating, dark and silver curls on the back of his head evoked the brushstrokes of a black and white painting. He was a few months away from his fiftieth birthday, but from a certain angle, he could shave off ten years. Five at any time.

“Although,” continued Turner, “thanks to today’s yen-dollar exchange rate, they can call themselves lucky. A week ago, they would have paid millions more.”

“What matters is that we’ve made a good deal.”

“That’s right, Brody. That’s what always matters,” said Turner, although he generally put it as “A deal should be good for everyone, but a little better for us.”

Turner was handsome and always elegant, but he was not the type of man who smelled like money. His suit was tailored, but although he paid a healthy sum for it, you could not really tell its value, like in the

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case of an Armani or a Brioni. He wore a modest, leather strap, mid-range watch. Nice, but not particularly expensive. He did not wear any jewellery, and when he was not wearing a suit, he did not bother to put on his watch either. His early athletic years left a mark on him, but it was also apparent that he had not paid that much attention to physical fitness in the past ten years. He did not plan to grow a paunch; however, he had been neglecting the business squash games. A long time ago he was good at it, and at tennis too, although he never came to like golf.

Turner was having a good day. This usually meant that in addition to his regular, astonishingly high earnings, he also earned a large amount of money from some kind of extraordinary sale or share in profits. This time it was the former. He had sold his thirty percent share in an American car brand. Not a large brand though, it was not even in the top ten, but so far, he had made good money off it.

Turner has always had a good nose for business, and now he had the feeling that the automotive industry would slump in the following years, something he did not want to be a part of, so he was selling off his assets. Since he was a reputable investor, if he did something like this, several magnates often followed in his footsteps blindly. When he was worried about something, and decided to close a position, and others followed him, from time to time it triggered an avalanche and his fears became reality. Occasionally, he wondered if the changes would also have occurred if he had not done anything. He did not believe, though, that the same would happen in the automobile industry, because it rests on multiple pillars, but he was certain that Sakuraba's deal, while not as profitable as he thought, also was not a bad one. As long as Sakuraba does not start making

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foolish investments, he can make a lot of money, but that is none of Turner's concern anymore. He needs to worry about the hundreds of millions arriving in his account, money with which he has no idea what to do.

It's not that he does not like money. In fact, Robert Turner idolizes it and spends it whenever and wherever he can. However, in the past few years a slight melancholy had taken hold of him. He no longer found anything pleasurable and knew that it had to do with an upcoming anniversary: he would soon be fifty.

Turner had been to every corner of the world worth visiting, as a rule sleeping, eating and partying at the most expensive places. He enjoyed the hospitality of important people, had an apartment in New York, and a plane that now was waiting for him at Tokyo Narita International Airport to take him wherever he wished to go. He made purchases only with investment purposes, never for personal reasons. When he needed something, he rented it.

His mobile device was a handheld supercomputer, with 24/7 Internet connection from any point in the world, access to the database of his companies, real-time stock market and real estate news, a translator, a projector, and plenty of similar applications. That was all the modern technology he needed or cared for. Innovations such as nanotech tablets, self-driving cars communicating with the traffic signals of major cities and each other in order to optimise traffic, or contact lenses displaying information of anything the wearer looked at disinterested him.

In front of the building that displayed the name of Sakuraba Corporation under enormous Kanji letters, a black Lexus—one of the most expensive models—reserved exclusively for the distinguished clients

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of the company, was waiting for them. The chauffeur opened the rear door of the car, showed a friendly smile, and bowed slightly.

“Hold on for a second,” said Turner to the chauffeur, “I need a smoke. Do we have the time, Brody?”

Brody looked at his watch.

“Just barely,” he said. Turner took out a cigarette from the inside pocket of his jacket and a Zippo lighter adorned with a gilded eagle from his trouser pocket. This was his lucky charm and he always carried it. The chauffeur bowed, indicating that he understood. He closed the door and stood at a military-like at-ease position.

Turner lit his cigarette, inhaled deeply into his lungs, and with his eyes closed, he exhaled a cloud of smoke. Oh, the first drag! There weren't many things in the world he clung to, but smoking was one of them. Not many people smoked these days. The health campaigns, as well as eradicating cigarettes from movies and public places, were effective. These did not bother Turner. He did not start smoking because it was hip, or because he was indifferent toward his health. He liked smoking; that was all. As harmful (though not as much as it had been fifty years ago) and foul-smelling as it might be, yet he needed it. It helped him think and relax between tasks. He watched the flow of pedestrians of all nationalities, men wearing suits and women in dresses. The weather was nice, and everything was working out.

All of a sudden, a tall, slim, athletic man stepped out of the stream of passers-by. He seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. As he stepped up to Turner, Brody automatically put his hand between them, prepared to push Turner behind him, like a bodyguard. Although protection was not part of his job description, he always thought he had to safeguard his employer to the best of his abilities. In other words, it is

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advisable to protect the hand that feeds. In the past six years they had spent together, only once had he had to stand between Turner a potentially threatening person. An aggressive beggar approached them in front of a bank and tried to persuade them that Turner could easily buy him an apartment because he was homeless, and that was his sole wish. Turner wasn't the charitable type, as Brody knew, so he grabbed the beggar and drove him off. The guy was rather dirty and unkempt, and Brody felt his smell on him even days—and several hand-washes—later.

It was apparent that the man now in front of them was not native Japanese, though his eye-fold suggested that he had Japanese ancestors. They both put his age at around forty. He wore a black suit, his dark hair was combed to the side, and he was clean-shaven. After looking at his shoes, Brody knew at once that he was rich, and he certainly wasn't pan-handling. Perhaps he is a gangster who planned to blow their brains out in the middle of the street for a reason never to be known, or a secret agent who intended to arrest them. In this case, the reason would soon be found out. But Turner wasn't a gambling man. He had always been careful not to get in the way of the big dogs, and he had always complied with the tax laws, at least to the extent that allowed him to sleep well. Whichever scenario it might turn out to be, it was odd that the stranger was alone.

The man did not seem to be threatening; on the contrary, he looked definitely friendly. Brody was surprised that his pulse did not jump when he saw him approaching them.

“Good morning, Mr. Turner,” he said and nodded to Brody too. His voice was even friendlier than his appearance. His accent was impeccable, akin to a National Geographic narrator's. Turner did not bother

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to return the greeting, indicating that being addressed by a stranger was not to his liking. Brody did not greet him either but could not stand there without saying a word.

“How can we help you, Mr...?” he asked with a rising cadence, letting the man complete the sentence.

“I am sorry for interrupting you like this, but I have a special offer for Mr. Turner.”

“Who are you?” asked Turner. It did not particularly bother him that the stranger knew his name. He was not a famous man, but he had been to many places, and appeared on television and in magazines too.

“My name is Rolland Olivier, and all I need is few minutes of your time, Mr. Turner. I am offering something you cannot get anywhere else in the world.”

It flashed through Brody’s mind that the chap might be offering some kind of a sex service but quickly discarded the idea as he could not imagine him being a pervert or a pimp, nor did he look malicious. He rather seemed like a crafty salesman, who once happened to be an athlete or a soldier. The mysterious offer was proposed as if he just wanted to pique their interest and wasn’t after Turner’s money. Regardless, Brody was certain that it was scam.

“Thanks, but no thanks,” said Brody and took a step toward the stranger.

“Hold on a sec,” said Turner to Brody, as his face was lit up by curiosity. Somewhere deep in gut there was a vague feeling he had not felt for a long time. He pointed at Olivier with his fingers holding the cigarette. “You have one minute,” he said, then nodded at Brody, indicating that it was all right. Olivier apparently knew who was who. He

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smiled at Turner pleasantly, ignoring what Brody had just said. Brody took a step back and crossed his arms.

“What I would like to tell you can be said only privately,” said Olivier. Turner glanced at Brody and then at the chauffeur.

“Hop in the car, Brody,” he said. “I’ll be with you in a minute.”

The chauffeur, hearing Turner, opened the door. Brody obediently climbed into the car, but he was frustrated for being outmatched by a stranger. He did not give the smallest sign of it, but he was a bit hurt. After all, he was Turner’s confidant: his business partner, secretary, adviser, drinking buddy, and in fact, his bodyguard as well. So how could he just say, “Hop in the car, Brody?” The chauffeur closed the doors and sat behind the wheel.

Turner looked around in the street but saw nothing out of the ordinary. Pedestrians passed by without end, and the cars on the road moved like a looped short movie. He did not notice anybody in the windows who might have been watching them. The summer sun shone brightly, but the heat was not unpleasant. The place—with all its noise and turmoil—was the perfect spot for a confidential exchange of information.

“Thank you,” said Olivier. “I hope you understand why I approached you this way; after all, you are a busy man who is hard to reach, and I did not want my proposition to get lost among the myriad of others that you probably receive every day. Not to mention that in this matter I prefer a private discussion.”

Turner nodded and took a drag off the cigarette. There was something in Olivier that led him to believe that he was telling the truth and that he was a serious man. He radiated a positive energy and did not employ any tricks that swindlers employ to appear friendlier. Hearing him out should not cause him any trouble.

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“I have to be at the airport in forty,” said Turner.

“Well, as I said, our company offers you a service you cannot get anywhere else. We make our clients’ most secret desires come true. All you need to do is enjoy yourself. We assume all risk, and you will pay only upon delivery. We seek out with this proposal only those who are rich enough and who enjoy life and everything else God put on earth.”

Turner did not ask how he knew how much money he had as this could be easily looked up on the Internet. Olivier read what was written on Turner’s face and answered the question.

“We did not investigate you, but we do know that you are wealthy, and that you have profitable companies and investments. We also know that you like spending your money, which, if you ask me, is a good quality,” said Olivier, glancing at the ground for a moment.

Turner realised that until then Olivier had been looking directly at him. He did not glance to his left or to his right like a suspicious person would do.

Olivier continued, “I suppose by now you have come to a point in life where only a few things might surprise you. Well, that is exactly my plan. We offer you something that will surprise you, something you have never done before—something you did not even know existed.”

Olivier’s familiar tone and gestures suggested that they had known each other for decades. He made a point of stressing the important words to ensure that Turner fully understood everything. The key was to plant the idea. He was careful not to invade his personal space. Olivier smiled frequently, and at the same time keenly observed Turner’s reactions and the micro-expressions on his face. He did not sound affected or mannered. “I cannot go into the details right here, and you have to promise that this conversation will remain between us.”

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“Go on,” said Turner, with a tone that Olivier interpreted as an assurance of confidentiality.

“Our services do not include anything you would condemn. And like I said, you don’t need to do anything until receipt of your order.”

“But what are we talking about?” he asked without a trace of anxiety in his voice, just a tinge of impatience.

Olivier straightened his back. “As I said, it is about the realisation of your most secret desires. Let me buy you a coffee tomorrow, Mr. Turner, and I will tell you the details.”

Olivier handed him his business card. On the snow-white velvety paper, only his name and a phone number were engraved in serif font. Turner took the card, looked at it, and slipped it into the inside pocket of his suit jacket. He turned back to Olivier, who shimmered with peacefulness, like a meditating monk.

“I will think about it,” said Turner. He stepped to the bin and stubbed out his cigarette.

“I won’t hold you up any longer then, Mr. Turner. Have a safe journey in case we don’t meet again.”

He extended his hand, but Turner did not shake it. Olivier’s smile did not fade. He nodded, turned around and blended in the stream of pedestrians just like he had appeared. Because of his height, he was visible for a few more seconds, and then vanished. Turner stood for another moment on the sidewalk and watched the people. Still trying to find a reasonable explanation of what has just happened, he climbed into the car, and asked the chauffeur to drive to the airport.

“What did he want?” asked Brody. Turner did not face him, just kept staring out of the window. Brody knew that he was thinking hard about something.

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“I don’t know yet,” said Turner after a long pause, “he has a business offer.”

“What kind of an offer?”

“I don’t know yet,” said Turner. Brody sensed that he did not want to talk about it anymore and was worried that without his input his boss might make a reckless decision, which would not be typical of him, but this situation was rather odd.

As the airport came into view, Turner leaned forward to the chauffeur.

“Turn back to the hotel,” he ordered.

The chauffeur signed with a deep nod that he understood.

“To the hotel?” asked Brody in an undertone so that the chauffeur wouldn’t hear him.

“Let’s postpone our departure until tomorrow evening. In the morning, I will hear Mr. Olivier’s proposal out.”

“You know that it will cost us a lot of money,” said Brody, “to rent a hangar for the plane and to accommodate the staff. And the Tokyo airport is one of the most expensive ones.”

“Make the arrangements, would you?” Turner said with a voice so low and distant that Brody did not argue. He took out his phone.

“Are you sure this shady, obscure proposal is worth it?”

“That’s not the point,” said Turner, which in fact meant that it was worth it because someone aroused his curiosity, and it was a feeling long forgotten. Yes, it was definitely worth it.

2

In the evening at the hotel, Turner filled the bathtub with hot water and brought a bottle of whiskey to the bathroom. Sitting in the tub, as the bubbles disappeared, he was listening to their faint, silky bursts. Taking a sip of whiskey now and then, he contemplated his life and the unusual meeting with the stranger who—he had to admit—intrigued him with his weird offer.

They had landed in Tokyo three days ago, and his jet lag had passed yesterday. When he was younger, he had taken it well but in the past few years he had become increasingly sulky after long flights. He did not want to blame everything on his age but could not deny that slowly but surely, he was getting older. Aging is a vile process, going unnoticed from day to day, then suddenly hitting you with, “Hey, buddy, time is passing, if you haven’t noticed.” For example, when an old photo surfaces and you notice in astonishment how much you have changed. Or when you realise that a hangover lasts for a day, whilst some time ago you were on your feet by noon.

The previous night, he and Brody had gone into the city to see the sights. They had lunch, stopped at a few places and had a few glasses. Turner noted early on and maintained the opinion that they make a fine whiskey in Japan, but what’s the point if you can have bourbon or Irish. Anyway, when it comes to that he enjoys all of them. As George Bernard Shaw put it, “Whiskey is liquid sunshine.”

The evening city tour quickly turned into bar hopping, and they ended up in a nightclub, as usual. Brody was a family man but in these cases he let himself unwind and let Thai, Japanese, and Black girls sit

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in his lap and pour whiskey down his throat. But he never went further than this. Turner considered Brody a decent man. He worked a lot for him. They spent almost all of their time together, but they weren't friends. Brody did everything for his boss to feel as if they were close to being friends, but a certain level of respect had to be maintained. He was good at keeping the balance between being an employee and a friend.

Deep inside, Turner knew that Brody condemned his lifestyle. Brody was an old-school guy: wife, family, work, children, retirement—unlike him, the adventurous type until his last breath.

However, Turner has changed a lot in this respect. Long ago, he brought the girls up to his hotel room in pairs and poured champagne on them as they were stripping. He was adored in places like that because he was handsome and spent money hand over fist. If anyone asked Brody, he would say that Turner had always enjoyed himself and had the time of his life. He did not care about anything except for the pursuit of pleasure as if there were no tomorrow.

In the past few years, however, he had slowed down. He was not so entertained by the nights out anymore. Of course, he was glad to have girls, but a drink and their company was enough. He did not desire more.

Now, sitting in the tub, Turner looked back at the past few years, and realised that the notion of growing old was closing in on him more and more often. Of course, when looking into the mirror in the morning he saw himself getting older. Though he often was able to overlook his deepening wrinkles, he did notice them from time to time.

He never doubted that he had made good decisions, not in the past, and not now. He would be fifty in a few months and had already achieved more than he ever desired: wealth, connections with impor-

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tant people, and endless freedom. This is the world we live in, and he had made the best of it. Perhaps he had achieved his goals too soon because what was left to do? Where now, Roberto? He had tried to suppress the question in his mind, so far with success, because he always found some novelty to try out, or a goal to reach. However, in the past two or three years, he had begun to stagnate into self-repetition. Was he burned out, as he was once told by his seniors he would be? Once the music is over, the band will stop playing and then comes the piercing silence and the seemingly eternal loneliness.

Turner never believed in that. There was always something to do, he thought, especially if you had the money. But for some reason his heart told him otherwise.

He took a sip of whiskey and winced because the ice had melted, and his drink was almost lukewarm. Turning to reach for the ice, he realised that his bathwater had cooled down. With a sigh, he opened the tap, threw two new ice cubes into his glass, and poured a little whiskey on them. He shook the glass in a circular motion and took another sip. This time, the whiskey was cold, and the water was warm again. Everything was in harmony again. Only a cigarette was missing to complete the picture, but it was too far away. Besides, smoking inside is forbidden anyway, so he decided against it, and instead imagined himself standing on the balcony in a bathrobe, staring at the stunning brilliance of nocturnal Tokyo and smoking.

Turner circled back to his thoughts. He continued to believe that there was nothing wrong with his life, but he also had to admit to himself that a change in lifestyle was necessary. Before it's too late.

The man I met today knows me, he kept thinking. He was also well aware that I am after adventure. I have met many swindlers so far, and

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plenty of canny businessmen, but every bone in my body is telling me that Olivier was telling the truth, and he does have something exceptional, but what could it be? Children? Sex slaves? Can't be! I could not care less about these things. At any rate, these are not even out of the ordinary. Anyone can acquire such services in several countries. Some kind of extraordinary drug? Not likely. Manhunt? Or murder with impunity? Perhaps, but in that case I would refuse the offer, and it wouldn't be surprising anyway. Space travel? That, he could he have told me in the street. So, what could he offer? Turner knew he would not be able to figure it out, and this is what made it so exciting. The fog that lets you see shapes and blurred outlines. The curtain and the top prize behind it. You don't know what it is, but you do have a feeling that it will make quite a bang.

He decided to listen to his instincts and not question the intentions of the salesman. If this is indeed a con, then it will be a good lesson. He swallowed the rest of the whiskey in a gulp and climbed out of the tub. After drying himself with a towel, he put on the dark blue hotel bathrobe. He stepped out onto the balcony and was able to light a cigarette at last.

After the cigarette, he went inside, sat down on the bed, took out the business card and stared at it for a long time. It was a nice card. "If you steal, you should steal big time," was a phrase regularly used by his bank manager friend. Well. We will see. Although it was past midnight, he dialled the number. Olivier picked up after the second ring. He did not sound tired or as if he had been wakened by the call. He was waiting for the call.

"This is Rolland Olivier."

"Robert Turner here."

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“Good evening, Mr. Turner!” he said, with a subtle, restrained pleasure in his voice. It was the middle of the night after all. “What can I do for you?”

“I would like to hear your offer,” said Turner.

“I’m glad to hear it. You won’t regret it. There is a coffee bar a block from your hotel, called Ashita. How about 8:00 a.m. tomorrow?”

The coffee bar was a public place, a perfect spot for a conversation intended to earn someone’s trust. Turner did not attribute much significance to the fact that Olivier knew his hotel address, although it was known only by five people in the world, and even they had known it for less than a week. That he might have been followed was a somewhat disconcerting thought. It was more likely that they bribed someone for the information. If they went to so much trouble, then the mysterious service they peddle must be worth a lot.

“Make it nine,” said Turner.

“I will be there by nine.”

“Great! Have a good evening!”

“You too, Mr Turner.”

After they hung up, Turner went to bed, but had some trouble falling asleep. His mind was running wild as he thought about the possibilities, but without getting anywhere. He could not remember the last time he was so excited about the schedule of his next day. “First day in school, Robert,” he heard his mother’s voice echo in the old, dusty chambers of his memory. It is strange when a certain memory pops into your head suddenly, and why exactly that one.

3

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 seriously 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 finance 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.

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“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 in-

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formed decision. He remained in his seat and weighed the options. If it was all true, then he was about to have an exceptional time.

After lunch, Turner visited the Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden. He strolled around, sat on a bench, watched the people, the lovely little pond, and continued the contemplation of his life he had started the night before.

Before now, he had given little thought to age, but lately it had been weighing him down almost constantly. It did not bother him at all when he turned thirty, then forty. But this time it was different. Fifty is an important milestone. It has weight.

It was the last summer of his forties, and he felt he needed to celebrate it accordingly. The handful of friends he regularly met were up to doing anything, but until now he could not think of anything that would sincerely excite him. Although, to be honest with himself, they are not really his friends. He had no friends, only business partners and occasional buddies with whom to celebrate a successful joint investment. The hundred thousand dollars he could easily blow on a weekend's entertainment with his so-called friends was, after all, only an insignificant fraction of his latest earnings. Only they could understand how good this feels. The few people who could have been his friends—but in the end settled down to have a family and got out of the business—could not understand this. Friendship requires commitment, and so do intimate relationships. In the long run, the only people who were able to remain close to Turner were those who did not bother him with questions like when he might settle down and have children. Instead, his friends were more likely to ask him what to drink and how many girls to invite to the yacht. And that was all good. Until now.

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The sad thing was that Olivier was right. The big parties were behind him. He was no longer that interested in tinted limousines full of young women, exquisite champagne, music, and dance. But, oh, the parties they had! He felt like a pirate captain who can buy anything, who takes orders from no one, with most people tying themselves in knots to please him. He has the booty, the wine is flowing, and the girls are beautiful.

The park closed at four, and he took a stroll to downtown Shibuya. He visited the famous scramble crossing and the statue of Hachiko. He was so immersed in his thoughts that he had walked close to five miles since lunch. As the sun set behind the buildings, advertisements and screens were lighting up in rapid succession, as if competing with each other, then assembled into a living electronic painting beyond compare. He had always believed that a person came to know the beauty of a city only at night.

He waved down a taxi to get back to the hotel, then changed clothes, replied to his messages, and went to the New York Grill with Brody, a place famous for having the largest American wine collection. After dinner, Brody was surprised that Turner was reluctant to have a night out. He shut himself up in his room and was deliberating over the proposition until the next morning, although he had already decided that he would get to the bottom of it, whatever happens.

4

At breakfast, Turner asked Brody to return to New York with the private jet. He would stay for another month. “The official statement shall say,” he said, “that I am on vacation, and I will be available from no later than the middle of next month.” He added that Brody could obviously call him anytime with critical issues, but during this period, he would be responsible for everything. Brody asked several times and in various ways what this was all about, but Turner would not tell him. This stung a bit since they hardly had secrets, not even about women. Not once had he ordered hookers for his boss, not to mention drugs. He could not imagine what had to be kept from him after so many years, but in the end, he did not pry. Turner said that he needed a time out, alone, and Olivier had come up with an excellent proposal. Finally, Brody gave in and told himself that he trusted his boss, knowing he would never get involved in something that would cause trouble. He told Turner that it was fine; he should rest and, above all, take care of himself.

Besides, Brody was not particularly sorry that he would get to spend a little time apart from his boss. He was fond of him, despite all his odd habits, but sometimes he had enough of his whims and sudden ideas. “Brody, put on your swimsuit, we are going jet skiing,” he once said on an ordinary Tuesday morning. Or, “Brody, book me a hotel suit for tomorrow night and get me some girls. Clients are coming from Germany. I have to entertain them properly,” he once said on a Friday night, when every hotel was already fully booked for the following day. Then, other times, he would disappear for days, leaving him with the respon-

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sibility of taking care of his duties without knowing all the details. He kept receiving phone calls from CEOs of international firms, claiming Mr. Turner had not shown up for an appointment. “I’m terribly sorry,” he had to reply, “Mr. Turner notified me that something has come up and he would not be able to attend, but I forgot to forward the message. I’m so sorry.” Or, “Mr. Turner had to leave the office unexpectedly for family reasons. Unfortunately, we’ve not been able to notify everybody about the change in his schedule. I’m terribly sorry.” In the meantime, the truth was that Turner was sleeping on a yacht with two women, who still had coke on their butts in the morning, champagne bottles were everywhere, and clothes were scattered on the deck. When once in a while he asked Turner what had happened, he replied that somehow, he had stumbled into a party. On a weekday. At noon.

Of course, Turner knew that he was not an easy person to deal with but at least he was generous to his employees, so Brody earned more than he would have in a similar position at any other job. For this reason, he never complained; in fact, he found his boss entertaining. And business was good. Excellent indeed. Brody had no idea where that enormous amount of money would go if Turner died one day. He had no children and no relatives, at least not to his knowledge. Turner once mentioned that should anything happen to him, Brody ought to open his office safe, the code is on the wall, but that was all. Brody did not have the slightest idea what he would find, maybe a wad of cash or a will.

He could imagine that Turner simply did not care about these things because this was a future problem, but at the same time he was very thorough, so he actually might have written a will. And if he did write one, how would he dispose of his companies and estate? Countless managing directors and employees—Brody included—ruminated over

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this question. The topic came up from time to time, but they didn't get anywhere. There was no point in worrying since Turner was only forty-nine yet guessing was fun and they all entertained the idea that he might divide his assets among them.

After breakfast, Turner lit a cigarette in front of the hotel, and they discussed a few projects with close deadlines. Finally, they shook hands and got into separate cabs. As Brody was heading to the airport, Turner called Olivier to ask where his office was.

The driver was familiar with the address. It was a downtown office building, one of many, where according to the logos displayed at the forefront about thirty companies rented offices. Most company names were written in kanji, but a few displayed their English name too. Sendai Media Group, Shinsha-Hosiden Operator and Service Company, Hao Trading and Investment Corporation, Yamashita Human Resources Consulting—that's it. Olivier told him over the phone to look out for a logo of people holding hands. Turner looked at the logo. Three similar silhouettes of people standing next to each other and holding hands: Human Resources Consulting. The identical shapes might well refer to cloning.

There was a coffee bar in the foyer, where men in suits were having a conversation. A young Japanese woman welcomed Turner at the reception desk and showed him the way after he mentioned his name and the company he was looking for.

The lift arrived quickly. It was spacious, bright, and silent. After stepping out of it, he was greeted by Olivier, as if his only job was to take care of him, which perhaps was the case.

“Mr. Turner, I am pleased to welcome you to the offices of Yamashita Human Resources Consulting.” He wore a dark suit, maroon tie and

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brown leather shoes. Turner had to admit that Olivier had excellent taste, and he looked like a man who pays attention to his wardrobe and has most of his suits tailor-made. “How was your night?”

“Fine, thanks.”

“May I offer you coffee or some other refreshments?”

“No, thank you.”

In the co-working space, the workstations were separated by folding screens. White and metallic colours dominated the office. Turner estimated that at least twenty employees were working there. But working on what? And how much did they know? Well, that was not his problem. He followed Olivier through a set of sliding doors.

Olivier’s office was modern, minimalist, and futurist, yet tasteful and friendly. So, this is what the future looks like, thought Turner as he stepped into the office and felt like a time-traveller from the past. Turner’s New York office with its massive, antique wooden furniture followed more conventional American traditions. Olivier’s desk was made of teak, just like his, but the difference was night and day. The surface of the desk was a glass display, connected to a monitor, Olivier’s phone, and the electronic devices of the office.

With an elegant gesture, Olivier invited Turner to sit in the armchair across from him, then walked behind his desk and sat down in his executive chair. Turner sat down and found the armchair so comfortable he wouldn’t have minded staying there for good. The upholstery was some kind of a hybrid material: to the touch it felt soft as a baby’s skin. From the corner of his eye, Olivier saw and acknowledged with a faintly visible smile that Turner, like all his guests before, was mesmerised by the chair. It was worth the six thousand dollars it cost.

“Thank you for coming, Mr. Turner.”

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“Would you please tell me once again exactly what you are proposing to me?” said Turner. He clasped his hands on his stomach, and his gaze fixed on the eyes of Olivier.

“Mr. Turner, there must be a woman for whom you would pay a fortune just to spend a night with. The woman of your dreams. Perhaps a tennis player? A singer?” He leaned closer to Turner. “Maybe a porn star? Somebody unapproachable under ordinary circumstances, regardless of the money you have.”

Olivier put his palms on the table and resumed: “We all have these dreams. It’s only natural. Men desire women, but not only that, they desire beautiful and famous women. Do you know why that is? This is evolutionary psychology. Man’s internal drive has been woven by reproductive instincts for thousands of years.” Turner did not appear to be irritated by this lecture, thus Olivier resumed.

“The human race wants to survive. Men subconsciously look for sexually attractive women because it advances the survival of the species. Moreover, it is an advantage if the woman is athletic, and her spirit is lively and energetic. Women, likewise, are attracted to men who are handsome, athletic, and are able to fight and work a lot towards something. This makes famous people so special for us. This is why we find them more attractive than an everyday person. We think that actors have worked a lot to be where they are. A singer in her fine dress and with her puffed up hair is more attractive on the stage than the barista in the coffee shop. On top of it all, there is the mystical appeal of the unavailable. The forbidden fruit if you like. These drive us to desire celebrities, and that is perfectly fine.”

Turner’s head was reeling with thoughts, but he didn’t say anything.

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“Our service aspires to satisfy the secret desire of those who can afford it. We copy people on demand. We can copy anybody you want, and you can do as you please with it. You can love it, use it, or even kill it, though I am not a fan of the last option, but the clients do as they wish.”

Incredulity was written all over on Turner’s face, just like yesterday morning. Olivier waited patiently; this was obviously not his first presentation.

“You tell us who you would like to spend a week with on the Bahamas or your private island, and we make a copy and bring it to you.”

Turner wanted to stand up and leave, but he had to admit that he was entertained by Olivier’s spiel and there was something appealing about the service he offered.

“So, you really are cloning?” asked Turner, surprising even himself. When he pronounced the word, it sounded unnatural, like reading it from a script, there was something otherworldly about it. How absurd! This could not be possible.

“Yes,” Olivier said as he nodded and clasped his hands on the desk. He appeared pleased, but not overly so. “I prefer the word ‘copying’, though it is true that my colleagues keep referring to it as ‘cloning.’ We copy people without their knowledge. Essentially, we secure the chosen person’s DNA, create a copy here, in our Tokyo laboratory, and then deliver it to the client.”

Turner sat in the armchair stunned.

“You must be thinking that an egg cell is necessary for cloning” continued Olivier, “and later, the embryo is implanted into the uterus of the mother.” In reality, that was not what Turner was thinking because he did not have a clue about cloning. “Well, that’s not how we do it. We can

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create an adult person's copy in a week. The similarity is perfect, and the risk is minimal. And, of course, the experience is unforgettable.”

“All I know is that human cloning is illegal, and I heard that scientists had tried to bring back a few extinct species. To be honest, I don't follow this kind of news.”

“The research leading up to this point encompasses decades of knowledge. For some time now, animals and plants have been successfully cloned, and extinct species, for example the Spanish ibex, have indeed been brought back to life. In 2009, a clone died after seven minutes, but approximately ten years later, they created another one, and now a whole population wanders the Pyrenees. If you go to the Moscow Zoo, you can see Wolly, a mammoth born to an African elephant a few years back. She is healthy and developing normally. Science has overcome the most difficult initial challenges of cloning by now. We took care of the rest. By we, I mean the scientists at our company. I, myself, do not know much about technology. The world's best researchers and geneticists work for us, in many cases without knowing the full scope and intent of our operations, though we have full-time employees too. We have reached a point where we can say that the copies are perfect replicas, and thanks to the method of one of the key researchers, we have also managed to reduce production time.” Olivier chuckled elegantly, like a footman, hearing his master crack a joke. “If the project wasn't completely confidential, it would probably receive the Nobel, the Novitski, and the Allan Prize.”

Olivier leaned back in his chair. A statue of self-confidence could have been modelled after him, but he did not appear presumptuous, not even for a moment. Although Olivier referred to his company, in reality, it was a company only in name. There was a human resources

consulting firm, a security service, a pharmaceutical company, a medical equipment trading company, a private clinic, and several other companies supporting the operation and the acquisition of assets. However, only in theory could an entity like a company that makes copies of people be said to exist.

“I am sure you have questions, Mr. Turner,” said Olivier.

He did. He wanted to ask how all this was possible, what copies had been ordered by which clients, but he could imagine the answers to these questions, and he knew he would not receive completely honest answers anyway.

Working outside the law, in the business of drugs or cloning, they must have a front business and several companies that launder the money, pay taxes, kick back a few percentages to the right places and to the right people, who, in this case, are often satisfied to be paid with a clone instead of money. It could not work otherwise.

Olivier watched patiently as Turner was ruminating, then said, “This is a well-oiled machine, and our company has a stable background. You can expect full discretion and maximum support from us.”

Turner was certain that Olivier was backed by a serious organisation. The fact that he is so laid-back implied that they had already found a way around most of the legal obstacles. However, he still could not imagine what a copy of a celebrity might look like, and what problems could emerge. For instance, what happens if someone asks for a signature, meanwhile the real person is on the other side of the world? This is possible. Information travels with the speed of light, and everything would be out in the open faster than the flap of the hummingbird’s wing. Clients could rest easy only if the company is able to handle these problems.

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He decided to give Olivier the benefit of the doubt that they could take care of all these things. At the moment, he could not disprove it, but sooner or later everything would come to light. At present, he had more important questions.

“If a copy is exactly like the original,” asked Turner, “then why would it be more willing to spend a night with me than the original would be?”

Olivier was sincerely glad to hear this question. It was written plainly on his face. Clients usually ask, “Isn’t this illegal?” or “Can you copy this and that person?” But Turner was a smart man, his reputation preceded him.

“We condition the copies before delivering them to the client. This means that we stimulate their brains according to the client’s specifications. We can get the copy to fall in love with you, we can intensify their sexual desire, or make them aggressive. These modifications have their own boundaries, and the effect of conditioning usually wears off after a month. In addition, the client plays an important role in this: we prepare the client to know how to interact with the copy, what to say, and how to act to elicit the desired responses. The client’s input can either facilitate or inhibit the copy’s development, much like a child. Olivier leaned back, seemingly very content with the comparison.

“And what about its memories? What makes a copy human if it doesn’t know who it is? I mean, without memories it is merely a robot, isn’t it?” Turner asked.

“Well, memory is an intriguing thing, as it is stored in the brain, not in the DNA; however, interestingly, our procedure aids the transfer of memories into the copy. It often happens that copies dream about the childhood of the originals or a trauma that happened in their life. This is still a blind spot, but so far it has not been a problem. I think the cop-

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ies retain memories like the copies of a vinyl record retain the sound. Identical grooves, identical music.

Olivier leaned forward again, and resumed, “We are capable of controlling the process of self-identification to some extent, leaving them with just enough memories to be happy for two weeks with the client. We suppress the rest of their personality. The experience obtained so far leads to the conclusion that after a month the copies begin to fully identify themselves with the original, meaning that their personality shifts toward that of the original. However, in the absence of proper memories they become entangled, unsure of themselves, and begin to ask questions. For this reason, the copies are provided to a client for a maximum of two weeks, then we take them back.”

And destroy them, thought Turner. A cruel but logical solution. He, who has participated in countless wild parties in penthouses and presidential suites, with drugs and prostitutes, cannot split hairs over the moral aspects. He unscrupulously had broken the hearts of naïve young girls and kicked them out after they had slept with the boss in the hope of climbing a few rungs higher up the ladder. Although he was not proud of everything he had ever done, he never regretted anything. Life is too short for that. But killing a clone is still murder. Isn't it?

“So, they come with an expiration date?” asked Turner.

“Not exactly. The service is provided for two weeks. The copies are healthy so if we let them, they would live the rest of their lives like the original. A month later, they would be exactly like the original. Not even their mother would be able to tell them apart. But you cannot have two of the same person live on Earth at the same time, can you? Moreover, the purpose of the copy is to serve the client. The two-week time frame was determined for the sake of the client's safety. During

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that period, thanks to the conditioning, the copy's behaviour will follow our specifications."

Olivier paused briefly. He preferred not to enter into the details as it might deter the client. For some strange reason, clients sometimes began to feel responsible. He never understood why. They sit there in his office and feel sorry for a copy—not even created—they intend to exploit. Its logic was beyond his understanding, but he had confidence that Turner would not be so sentimental.

Olivier continued in a more cheerful tone. "You don't have to worry about the technical aspects. All you need to do is choose someone and enjoy two carefree weeks at some exotic hideaway, far from the world. Only you and the woman of your dreams. Together." Olivier's positive attitude had carried Turner long away but he would not admit it. He talked to him like an old friend who can keep a secret, who can be trusted. "I won't lie to you, Mr. Turner. I am not the good fairy. Nothing we do is legal, just like cocaine, or prostitution in several countries. Still, people enjoy these things, and shouldn't we enjoy the good things?"

"So, just to be clear," said Turner, "I give you a name, and then you make a copy, and bring it wherever I ask you to. She will do whatever I tell her to do for two weeks, then you come and take her away. Then we go our separate ways and forget it all ever happened."

"In a nutshell, yes," said Olivier, flashing a wide smile. He suddenly pointed at Turner, "except that you won't forget it."

Turner did not smile with him, but almost fell out of the role of the serious businessman. In spite of his cautiousness, he had begun to fancy the proposition. Even if nothing came of it, it was fun to play with the idea. Olivier had a tremendously pleasant personality, a salesman

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to the bone, but at the same time infinitely friendly. He was the rare type who brightens your day when he is near you.

“I am bound to note that certain rules must be followed. We don’t copy politicians, rulers, clergymen, or their relatives. So, basically, nobody we cannot access in the capacity of a private person. You cannot order minors or deceased people, even if their DNA is available. The copy shall be used only for private purposes, no one else can see it or meet with it. At special request, we may make exceptions from the last rule, but it has its own conditions. This of course does not mean that you have to shut yourselves away in a dark room for two weeks. I usually recommend choosing a location where the celebrity is relatively unknown so there is no risk in walking outside, hiking, or going to the beach if that’s what you feel like doing.

Turner nodded. A far-reaching, professional, octopus-like organisation began to gain shape in his mind, and now he was meeting one of its arms, and thinking about taking either the red or the blue pill.

“How many clients do you have?” asked Turner.

“We have a couple of projects a year.”

As a businessman, Turner was curious how many orders they fill in a year, and how much profit they make, but he did not pry further. Even if Olivier answered, he wasn’t sure he would hear the truth, and in any case, he had several questions about his own proposal.

“How do clones perceive these two weeks?” he asked in the end.

“There is nothing to worry about,” said Olivier. “The clones live exactly the way we want them to, then we take them back to the lab and simply turn them off. For all intents and purposes, this is like a dream for them, and they begin to wake up after a month. We implant a tiny chip under the skin, to the back of the head of each copy. You can feel

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it by touch. It is directly connected to the cerebellum. Turning them off takes only a blink of an eye. They do not feel pain, so they will not notice it. The copies are not born in the traditional sense, so according to current laws they are not considered human; consequently, they do not have inherent rights, including the right to life, and so turning them off does not count as murder. In the event a copy escapes, their chip can be activated remotely. This has never happened before, but I think you understand the reason for the precaution.”

Olivier smiled again. It was time to change the topic to something more cheerful. “Let me show you something,” he said, pushing a virtual button on the display, and the glass door on the side of the offices faded into an opaque milky colour so no one could see in. A side-door opened at another push of a button, and two completely identical women stepped in, both wearing similar ruby red summer clothes. They were slim, and their attractive calves were emphasised by high-heeled shoes. Turner watched them and was looking for the differences.

“They might as well be twins,” said Olivier, half raising his hand, as if someone was pointing a gun at him. Turner shrugged his shoulder and nodded in agreement.

Then two other women stepped into the office, completely identical to the first two, and Turner could no longer conceal his astonishment. It is not possible that quadruplets resemble each other so much, he understood that much about biology. So, they must be clones. Good God!

He stood up and approached the women. They had sweet smiles, and they were seemingly undisturbed by the fact that Turner was circling them, examining their facial features from up close, like a scientist scrutinising an odd, new species he had just discovered in the heart of the forest.

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“This is incredible,” he said.

“It is indeed,” said Olivier. At another push of a button two other women stepped in. Six copies were standing next to each other, identical down to the most miniscule detail and dressed exactly the same. Turner watched in astonishment, almost dizzy, not only from the sight, but also from the possibilities. He would sooner find a difference in their dresses than in their bodies, no question about it. They stood there like identical backup dancers in a music video, waiting for the song to start.

“Dear God. They are copies.”

“What do you think, Mr. Turner?” asked Olivier. Turner settled back into the armchair, and the model products tiptoed out in a single row.

“Incredible,” said Turner once more. Olivier nodded proudly. “Has it ever happened that someone ordered more than one?”

“Yes, it has,” said Olivier.

“What is the largest number of copies ordered?”

Olivier smiled, and recalled a funny story that had happened long ago.

“A Russian billionaire once ordered eight women. The world of Arabian harems was his weakness. He lived in a villa the size of a village, with its own Turkish bath and helipad. He showed me around when I brought him the copies. He did not leave the palace for two weeks. It is interesting to note that though he employed full-time prostitutes, for him it felt completely different to assemble a harem of celebrities.”

Turner had to smile at the story. Olivier pretended not to notice, then continued, “The majority of our clientele order women, which is understandable, but there was also a female client who wanted to be pampered by middle-aged Hollywood actors. There are no restrictions

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regarding quantity, but the risk increases with each copy. In our case, the risk is higher than the risk of an ordinary investment. Making a mistake is bad for the client and bad for us.

“Would you be keeping an eye on me?”

“Yes, that is necessary, but we do not intrude into anybody’s private sphere, as our objective is the maximum satisfaction of the client. However, we do have to monitor the functioning of the copies from a respectable distance. Should any problems occur, we step in and remove the clone, and the deal is null and void. We will not sign a contract. It would not be legally binding anyway. Both parties will abide by the given word, and obviously you will be given the detailed conditions which you will be able to read here.”

Turner realised how skilful Olivier was in shifting the subject from general to personal. So far, he was speaking about clients, and now about him as a contracting party. Olivier was expert at his job, and he clearly enjoyed it. After all, why wouldn’t he give it a try?

“So, what do you think?” Olivier asked as if he was reading his thoughts. “Is there someone you would like to see as your guest? There must be a woman you cannot reach, no matter how rich, handsome, or influential you are.”

Turner seemed to be lost in thought. Perhaps he was already thinking about who he wanted to pick.

“You don’t need to give an answer right now,” said Olivier. “I know this is too much information for one day. Sleep on it.”

Turner nodded but remained seated.

“How much does a copy cost?” he asked.

“That depends on who you would like to copy. The cheapest category goes for three hundred thousand dollars. The sky is the limit,”

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said Olivier, but Turner didn't even bat an eye when he heard the price. Olivier was glad for that but didn't give any sign of it.

"What does the cheapest category include?" asked Turner.

"Your own copy."

"I assume this has already been done."

"Yes, though it is not common."

Olivier patiently waited while Turner was thinking about what he had just heard. His clients tended to place an order at the second meeting, but clearly it would take longer to persuade Turner. He was very cautious and vigilant, and Olivier found it to be a sympathetic trait.

"Why do I have the feeling that I won't be attracted to a clone?" asked Turner.

"I completely understand your reservations. At first, everybody keeps their guard up. The reason is that the brain cannot really place a copy. They are neither real human beings, nor robots covered with skin, nor realistic silicone sex dolls. The brain cannot comprehend it, so it rejects the idea or tries to associate it with something. This is strange for you, so in your case the brain does not make a mental connection between clones and humans, robots or sex dolls. You should try to imagine that we introduce you to a real human being, who looks exactly like the person you order. A human being. Exactly like you. Its heart is beating; it has cells, muscles under its skin, and so on."

"I understand. But it is still difficult to process," said Turner, rubbing his chin; then he nodded and stood up. "Thank you for the information and the offer, Mr. Olivier. I will think about it."

Olivier cracked a smile, stood up, and stepped out from behind his desk. They shook hands and Olivier escorted him out of the office.

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“All right, Mr. Turner. Please, call me as soon as you have made up your mind.”

A short, fragile looking Japanese woman approached them. Her straight, brown hair was bound up in a bun. Her thin, rectangular glasses were in a harmonious contrast with the round curves of her face.

“This is Kyo Han, my secretary,” said Olivier. Turner awkwardly extended his hand but pulled it back quickly. Kyo bowed so she did not see it and Olivier pretended not to notice. Turner made a somewhat stiff bow.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, sir,” said Kyo with an unmistakable Japanese accent.

“Kyo, please escort Mr. Turner out,” said Olivier. Kyo nodded again and showed him the way to the lift. Turner stepped in, and Kyo made another polite bow. Turner nodded.

On his way down, he kept replaying what Olivier had just told him, even hearing his melodic voice. Perhaps, it would be wiser to stay out of this, but isn’t life about trying out new things? Shouldn’t we seek new experiences and adventures that ultimately make us happy, that create lasting memories?

After lunch, he strolled around in Yoyogi Park and visited a museum that had an exhibition of Japanese swords. Later, he walked back to the hotel. Ambling around in this foreign city felt good. It was easier to clear his head there than it would have been at home, for example, in Central Park.

On the balcony of his room, with a beer in his hand, he played with the idea that Olivier was telling the truth. The six women he had seen were not a trick, they were clones. If all this is possible, then who would he want to be with for a week? Or for two. Who would he take to bed?

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He had always been a movie enthusiast, and he knew the cream of Hollywood, he even had a few favourite actresses he would have liked to invite to his house after seeing them in erotic scenes.

He did not follow the tabloids, so he was not familiar with the current top models, television presenters, and girls who stepped into the spotlight without any talent or morality. Very few athletes were to his liking because he found their appearance too muscular, and their personalities too aggressive. A woman—in his opinion—should stay feminine, fragile, be good in bed, dress nicely, and not harbour ambitious plans. She should stay a woman and let men pamper her.

Since he had never been a fan of music, he was not up-to-date on singers and musicians. There were a few classic bands he could name and even talk about knowledgeably if someone insisted on the topic. These were bands whose talent was uncontested, no matter how old they were, and based on whose music no one could really determine Turner's personality. Nowadays, singers come and go as quickly as the tides. It is impossible to follow them. Every now and again, you can see a few pretty ones, but you cannot know whether they are worth spending two weeks with.

Looking back at his life, he tried to recall someone he could not conquer for any reason, but nothing came to his mind. Porn stars? It is true that some of them are exceptionally pretty, and technically speaking their clones will be virgins. He had to laugh out loud at this thought. A virgin porn star—that would be something!

He did not discard the idea, but basically—in this case—he did not see much difference between an adult performer and a prostitute. He had the pleasure of spending time with the latter on several occasions. Both professions are about sex, a lack of meaningful communication,

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but meanwhile in a movie, the director specifies the poses; with a prostitute, he does that himself.

He knew he had to pick a special woman, someone beyond his reach. As Olivier suggested, he could choose someone who otherwise would be out of his league. He focused on women who were not widely successful yet, but that he had heard about several times, not well-known sex symbols or divas, but uncut diamonds. Beautiful, wild, but modest and open at the same time.

A few names came to mind, but he decided to conduct a quick on-line search, hoping to stumble upon someone he had not taken into account.

In the evening, he talked to Brody over the phone and told him not to ask questions, and Brody complied. He discussed the most pressing business matters of the following weeks, then said goodbye.

He had been browsing the internet for over an hour when he decided to continue it on the balcony with a cigarette, where for the last time he reconsidered and made up his mind.

5

On his way up to Olivier's office, Turner smiled when he saw the three identical figures in the company's logo. After the previous day's discussion, it now looked like an elegant flick of the finger at the unknowing public.

They sat down in Olivier's office, just like the day before. Turner enjoyed sitting down again in that wonderful armchair. "I have to admit that I've spent the whole night trying to figure out if this is a scam." Olivier did not appear surprised or offended. He sat comfortably with his hands resting on the desk, perfectly composed. He was clean-shaven, had an air of peace about him, and his expensive perfume emanated a sweet scent. From their first meeting, Turner had the impression that Olivier had been through all this many times. This led him to the conclusion that it was not a scam. If it had been, Turner thought he already would have noticed the red flags. However, one can never be careful enough, after all, this man—with his flawless elegance and nice manners—appeared out of nowhere with his proposal.

"It's not a scam, but you don't have to believe me. Our interest is the successful conclusion of our business, so our payment conditions stipulate that it is enough to order the service verbally, from me. Naturally, you don't need to sign anything, but you have to assume the obligation of paying the fee. You have to wire the money only after we have delivered the copy of the selected person or persons, and you have confirmed that the performance is in accordance with the agreed upon specifications. Advance payment is not necessary. This is our standard

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procedure and so far, every client has been satisfied and paid us. Several of them have returned with further requests.”

Until then, it had not crossed Turner’s mind that he might as well place several orders or order several of the same. It was a dizzying thought and for the time being he decided to be content with a single copy. As a dry run. Then we shall see. Olivier did not pressure him to order more, probably because for the first time one copy is enough of a financial and emotional burden.

Turner nodded, indicating that he accepted the payment conditions. He had to admit that the conditions were fair. He did not have doubts that a secretive, illegally operating company like this one had its own methods to collect a debt in case anyone decided not to pay. But still, what if it is a scam? What if they dress someone up, and she arrives with two thickly muscled men demanding payment? It is unlikely that he would be able to make a complaint with customer service. Olivier would vanish, together with the office, exactly like in that 1997 Fincher movie.

This scenario was not probable because then what was stopping them from demanding payment right then and there? There must come a point when he would comply. Although in this case they would have to kill him because they must know that he would not leave things at that. Best case scenario, he presses charges, worst case scenario, he hires a few men to track down the culprits. This wasn’t his style, but he does have a breaking point. Turner thought that there was something wrong with that picture, and that the reasonable explanation was that they wanted to make a deal that would ensure satisfaction and ongoing confidentiality.

These suspicions did not dampen his curiosity and excitement in light of the possibility that this whole thing was true and that he

could really meet, spend time, and sleep with any woman on earth. Any woman.

“I did some research,” said Turner. “In Japan, a ten-year prison sentence and a hundred-thousand-dollar fine is imposed for cloning humans.” This did not seem to derail Olivier—Turner did not expect that—but he wanted to know more about this aspect.

“That is right, but it shouldn’t concern you. In accordance with the applicable legislation, cloning is illegal, however, the statute does not specify what you can and cannot do with a healthy, developed specimen. What do you think the public would say if it turned out that healthy and conscious human clones are walking among us? They would be shocked, in my opinion; and half of them would wish for their freedom, the rest for their death. There are churches that have declared that they will not allow clones into their services, while others claim that clones are as much human as anybody else. At any rate, I am certain that no legislative power is aware that cloning is already feasible, so their arguments are merely theoretical. We take responsibility for the cloning. You, as a simple customer, can deny that you had any knowledge of it, and you can claim that we merely provided you a double. They cannot prove the contrary, but even so, you cannot be charged with anything under current law. This has not been an issue in the past six years since our company has operated in its current form and offered these services. Smooth sailing so far, and all of our clients were satisfied.” In reality, this was not true, but a good salesman does not speak ill of the product or its manufacturer.

He paused for a moment, letting Turner think through everything, then he picked up where he had left off, in the direction he wanted to steer the conversation.

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“So, what conclusion have you reached, Mr. Turner?” asked Olivier, with sincere interest.

“I decided to stay for a month, and... I would like to order a clone,” he said, but a shiver ran down his spine as he said the words. To order. A clone. They sounded like taboo words, punishable by hanging if the gendarmerie found out. What the hell am I doing here, he asked himself, at the same time trying to convince himself that with time he would get used to it, and it would be a special memory that he would recall with a naughty smile in his older years.

“That’s great!” said Olivier, spreading out his arms and putting them back on the desk. “Is there anyone particular on your mind?”

For a moment, Turner lowered his eyes, then rubbed his forehead.

“Lilian Bailey, the actress,” he said, noticeably doing his best to hide his embarrassment and the awkwardness he felt.

Olivier nodded. “Sounds good!” he said as he began to type her name into the browser’s search field, then downloaded her data and read out her brief bio, mainly to himself.

“Lilian Bailey. Twenty-eight. American actress. Born in England, her father a British engineer, her mother a German violinist. Lilian began modelling at an early age and made more money in her teenage years than her mother as a classical musician. At the age of twelve, she was awarded a role in a British historical film, and at the age of fifteen in a Hollywood blockbuster where she, thanks to her exceptional beauty, was chosen from two thousand applicants. After this, the family moved to the United States, and around this time she started using her middle name, Bailey, as a surname, and abandoned her original family name. The following nine years were about learning and professional growth: she played in a few series and got smaller roles in big budget

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movies, but the major success came with her role in the previous year, for which she was nominated for an Oscar. Since then, she has been unanimously considered to be the latest star of Hollywood and the new favourite of the audience. She has gained international popularity with her new movie. Yesterday, one of the online magazines named her the most beautiful woman in the world. Lives in Los Angeles. No data on her marital status.”

“Yes, that’s her.”

Olivier was familiar with her name, but nobody had ordered her yet, which was understandable since her star had just started to rise. He turned the monitor so that Turner could see the picture next to her biography. It showed Lilian in a glittering, mauve mid-thigh dress standing on the red carpet lined by a wall of photographers in the background. Her shapely leg caught Olivier’s eye too. Her angelic face, childishly sincere smile and her sparkling eyes blue as the sky were framed by the wavy curls of her naturally blonde hair.

“Very pretty,” said Olivier.

“Do you... can you copy her?” asked Turner.

“Almost certainly. The following will happen. We need a few days to prepare a quote. This will be based on the feasibility of the project. The subject’s level of security may affect how soon we can obtain a DNA sample. After that, we need nine days for delivery.”

“All right. Let’s do this.”

“Great.” Olivier passed to Turner a digital paper sheet that was already on his desk. “Please read this. This details the most important rules. Both you and I must strictly abide by them.”

While Turner was reading, Olivier stepped out of the office and had a few words with Kyo, the secretary. Turner skimmed through the

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pages and found nothing objectionable. He had to accept that he would be monitored during the project, but no photos, audio or video recordings would be taken of him. He was forbidden to take photos or video recordings of the copy. This would be easy since Turner had hated photographs all his life. He believed that photographs stifle memories and in the end people remembered only the photo, not the event. He felt that his memories were more vivid of events of which he did not have photographs than of those of which he did.

The contract included a clause that said that in the event the copy escaped, they would turn it off and the fee he had paid would be refunded. The same applied if the copy was injured, or the project was not sustainable for any other reason. And finally, the fee previously agreed upon had to be wired within two days following the receipt of the order.

Olivier came back and looked content.

“It looks like there is no obstacle to copying Lilian,” he said. He went behind his desk and sat down, turning with his chair towards Turner. “When the copy is ready, it will gain consciousness in a hospital. We will keep her in for a day for a few tests, and then I will take her to you. She won’t be asking questions about what has happened. Her life starts with the vacation with you.”

“Her non-existent life,” said Turner. He put the paper down on Olivier’s desk and settled back to the armchair.

“Yes,” said Olivier, unfazed, and added in a pleasant tone: “She will have a passport that she can use to identify herself. The name in the passport will be Lilian Turner. This will solve a lot of problems, but we still need to be careful. How much time would you like to spend with Lilian?”

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“Make it two weeks. That’s the maximum, isn’t it?”

“Ideal choice. Two weeks it is then,” said Olivier and typed in the information. “Where do you plan to spend these two weeks? Perhaps you own a secret place?”

Turner paused to think.

“Unfortunately, none of them are hidden enough. I think I will stay here, in Japan.”

“All right. Two weeks in Japan with the most beautiful woman on the planet. Sounds great, doesn’t it?”

Turner stifled a smile, but his eyes sparkled, and Olivier caught this. The deal is on.

“Of course, you don’t have to lock yourselves away for two weeks, but I need to warn you about public places. If anyone recognises Lilian and the fans storm her, then we will have to take her out.”

“To my knowledge, she is not as popular in Japan as in the United States. Maybe they don’t even know her.”

“I will look into it,” said Olivier in an agreeing tone. “In any case, it is advisable to wear a hat and sunglasses, and to avoid crowded places. It will be your choice. You know the risks.”

Turner nodded.

The sliding door opened silently and Kyo stepped in. She handed a tablet to Turner, bowed and left. The screen was all white, with a START button in the middle.

“This program will help you specify the parameters of the copy,” said Olivier, pointing at the tablet. “Just run the application and everything will be clear. I think I have not told you yet, but it should be evident, that the copies are free from infectious diseases and they are infertile. These are set conditions,” said Olivier. Turner nodded, then

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pushed the button. “Certain parameters can be modified, for example sexual desire, bust, waist, or hip measurements. We cannot perform miracles, but in certain respects the copy can be adjusted to your requirements.”

Questions popped up on the tablet. Turner could skip any question. According to the explanation in the small print, this meant that the original values would be set. The values based on the DNA.

“At the end of the questionnaire, we will ask a few questions about you too,” said Olivier. “We will need these in order to calibrate Lilian’s knowledge about you. However, do not think of it as lexical knowledge. It is more like her opinions, attitudes and such minor details.”

“For example?” asked Turner as he had been reading the next question on the tablet. “Please provide the breast size,” prompted the application. Turner pushed the Skip button.

“Essentially,” continued Olivier, “Lilian will think of you as her partner. You will live in her mind as the man she can rely on, as her long-time partner. She will not know any background information about you, unlike in a real relationship, but we can embed a few things into her memory that you think are important, for example your birthday or your favourite movie. Anything you would like the copy to know about you.”

Turner glanced up and began thinking.

“And won’t she get confused because she won’t understand why she is with me or who I am?”

“No, not within this timeframe. Conditioning is a state-of-the-art technology, and Lilian will not think about these things unless somebody prompts her to. As I said, she will accept everything as it is.”

Turner nodded and turned his attention back to the questionnaire. “Please provide Lilian’s hair colour.” Turner could set the colour on

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a colour chart. Skip. Lilian is blonde which is perfect. Turner noticed Lilian's name in the program; he was not surprised.

“Please provide the level of Lilian's sexual desire.” Maximum. “Please provide the eye colour.” Skip. “Please provide the athletic level.” Skip. After this, he could select clothes, hairstyle, as well as the length and colour of the nails. Turner chose the default option at almost every question. It was like building a character in a computer game. Once, the son of a friend of Turner's showed him how cool an orc knight looked that he had built in a console game, but it wasn't Turner's cup of tea. As a child, he had only a few games, and later, he was interested in other kinds of entertainment. He chose the default option at questions about attitude, diet, and similar topics. Other options, such as shyness, or preference of favourite dishes, were set to minimum. He specified that Lilian should love him, accept him as he is, and she shouldn't mind his smoking and drinking habits. According to his specifications, the copy would have a positive impression of him, in addition. She would both love and desire him. For the time being, that was enough. In the end, his name appeared on the screen and the application asked him to take a picture of himself to embed into Lilian's memories. Turner held the device a bit farther away and pressed the shutter button. The photo was fine, so he confirmed it.

It took ten minutes to complete the questionnaire, and—though he tried to conceal it—he was eager to meet the woman of his dreams. Moreover, she wouldn't be like the original. She would be like he imagines her.

“There are a few other things I need to tell you,” said Olivier, “although I don't like bringing up this subject. The clones, as you had the opportunity to see for yourself, are perfect copies, but that is all

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they are: copies. You need to keep this firmly in your mind, or else you might feel that you are with a real human being. Several of our clients became too attached to the copies and wanted to stay with them forever. And then there was someone who fell in love with it.” Olivier uttered the last sentence with an air of incredulity, as if falling in love with them was an utterly childish mistake. He laced his fingers on the desk and continued in his usual tone: “I know you won’t make a mistake like that, but I cannot emphasise this enough: no matter what, we will take away the copy two weeks after delivery. The deal is valid and safe only with this condition. That is what you get for your money.”

“All right,” said Turner, knowing that Olivier was waiting for an answer. At any rate, he did not have other intentions or plans, at least not at that time.

Kyo entered and took the tablet away.

Sooner or later, Turner grew weary of all his girlfriends and lovers—whether it was true love or a paid partner. There were a few relatively famous women among them, but they were no exceptions. Popularity does not go hand in hand with being exciting and interesting. He had no illusions about Lilian either. She was just a fish in the sea. Young, pretty—like a dream, but the novelty will wear off soon. Two weeks is exactly enough.

“Tell me, Mr. Olivier. Is this the only company in the world that offers this service? Just out of curiosity.”

“Our technology is proprietary. The whole process cannot be patented, but its elements are protected by patents. Of course, it is possible that someone copies our technology and uses it in secret. I have no knowledge about others, but I would not go as far as to exclude the

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possibility. Nevertheless, it is possible that someone else has arrived at the same results as our researchers. The writing system was developed by the Chinese, the Mayans, the Egyptians and Sumerians independently of each other.”

Turner could have thought of additional questions but concluded that he already knew enough. Now, the proof of the pudding is in the eating. He was really excited to order the copy of Lilian, to meet that beautiful actress. After all, it surely would be one of his most memorable dates, wouldn't it?

“I am thinking about renting a beach house somewhere in the south,” said Turner. “I will let you know the address.”

“Good idea,” said Olivier. “Just the two of you, far from the mad-ding crowd.”

“Something like that,” said Turner, his thoughts wandering. An image of him and Lilian walking on the Japanese beach and holding hands flitted through his mind. Olivier, as if reading his mind, smiled contentedly.

“You will have a wonderful time, Mr. Turner. I have no doubt about that. We will be in contact.”

“Thank you.”

The secretary entered with the tablet in her hand.

“This is your order form,” said Olivier. “Please read it once more to confirm that everything is according to your specifications because we will work based on this.”

“I see,” said Turner and took the tablet. Now, instead of the application, he saw a three-page list detailing his specifications. He skimmed through the data and found everything in order. It showed the parameters he had set a few minutes before.

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“Everything is all right,” he said as he passed the device to Kyo, who bowed and left.

“Great,” said Olivier. “That’s it then.” He stood, buttoned his suit jacket, and stepped out from behind his desk. “Needless to say, all data and every file will be destroyed after the project is closed. For both of our sakes. In a few days, I will contact you with a quote and the expected date of delivery.”

“Thank you, Mr. Olivier. I’ll be waiting,” said Turner and stood up from the armchair.

They shook hands, and just like yesterday, Kyo escorted Turner to the lift where she bowed and left. This time Turner only bowed, without extending his hand, although the bow came out friendlier, and less official. He let himself loosen up a bit in the lift and studied himself in the mirror contentedly.

Crazy day, huh, Roberto? Turner smiled. He was excited, something he had not felt for a long time.

6

After the meeting, Turner took a cab back to the hotel. After smoking a cigarette at the entrance, he had lunch in the ground floor restaurant. In the afternoon, he called Brody to discuss some business matters then went sightseeing in the city.

He decided to manage on his own for the day, and he would use public transportation to reach the Tokyo Skytree. He had read a lot about this tower and knew he couldn't miss it now that he had some time in Japan. The hotel's receptionist was glad to arrange an entry ticket, so he got in easily, then up three hundred and forty meters to the observatory with a glass-covered skywalk.

On his way back, he headed towards Akihabara, which after sundown looked like a structure made of light. The advertisements, the billboards, and the LED lights turned the stroll into a movie-like experience.

He spent the night in his hotel room hunting for beach houses online. Every hour or so he went outside to the balcony to have a smoke and revel in the panorama of Tokyo. A gentle breeze moved the curtains lightly and brushed his cheeks. The wind of change, he thought.

By 9:00 p.m. he had found the right house and stuck to his decision after another two hours of searching. He made a plan B and C and went to sleep.

7

The next morning, Turner went into a serious coughing fit on his way to the bathroom. He had to hold onto the cabinet to keep his balance. His head was spinning. The rest of the room—and the bathroom door, which was just an arm's length away—stretched into an unreachable distance.

He should stop smoking. He should have stopped a long time ago. But why? He liked smoking. Occasionally, he smoked pot and hashish, other times thick Cuban cigars. Smoking is one of the greatest joys on earth and he was not willing to give it up. On the previous day, he had hardly smoked and the coughing fit made no sense to him. He attributed it to the A/C and the Tokyo air.

When the fit was over, his day started. He had lunch at the hotel and began the preparations to welcome Lilian. He had much to take care of. According to his plan, he and Lilian wouldn't need to leave the house for any reason during those two weeks, and nobody would disturb them. He wished he and Lilian might have the opportunity to go for a walk, or to the beach, to swim in the ocean.

Since the selected house was empty, he rented it for two months for a million yen a month. He managed to negotiate the price down under the condition of paying the whole sum in advance. The owner was glad to have only one tenant for the remaining two months of the season.

The house stood on the slope of a little hill in the Miura Peninsula, in a city named Hayama, located in the Kanagawa Prefecture. There were only a few houses scattered around in that area, so that the neighbours were not likely to disturb them.

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According to the photos, the porch offered a beautiful view on Sagami Bay, the Island of Enoshima, and Morito Beach. The real estate agent had also claimed that in clear weather the snow-covered volcanic peak of Mt. Fuji was visible in the far distance.

It will be the perfect spot; Turner thought and signed the papers.

“A few days and you can move in. We will call you, Mr. Turner,” said the agent, then shook hands as Turner was just about to bow.

At lunch, Turner was thinking about getting in a bit better shape. That’s the least Lilian deserves. He made up his mind to go for a run on the beach every morning, until the woman of his dreams arrived. He noticed that since ordering the copy he was increasingly crazy about Lilian.

So far, he had never been so enthusiastic about anything or anyone in his life. In the evening, he researched Hayama online. He wanted to be familiar with the sights, where he could go, and what was worth doing. He grew fond of the city as soon as he saw the pictures and read the descriptions. Beautiful beaches, scenic areas, and lots of tourists, which would be useful if he wanted to blend into the crowd.

It is a city with a population of approximately thirty-four thousand people, its main source of income is tourism, there are no railway lines, and two rivers flow through it: the Morito and the Shimoyama. He knew that he would probably forget all this information, but it felt good to read about it.

He found a few fun facts too, for example that in Hayama each cat and dog has to be registered between the age of three to four months at the Centre for Public Health, and the Centre has to be notified in the event of their death too. Turner did not have a cat or a dog, but he could picture an announcement aimed at him: “Register your clone at

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the Centre for Public Health! Inform us. Unregistered clones have to be disconnected and removed from the database. Thank you!”

The whole situation was bizarre. He found himself in uncharted territory, something he believed would not happen to him again. He was happy and worried at simultaneously, and he was trying to process what he had heard and seen in Olivier’s office. He vacillated from suspecting the whole thing was a scam, to being convinced he really would meet Lilian. Instead of worrying, he decided to keep himself occupied with minor tasks. He wanted to take care of everything so that by the time Lilian arrived, he wouldn’t need to do anything, except be with her.

Rolland Olivier's team swiftly evaluated the feasibility of the Turner-Bailey project. As a first step, they made a call to Hollywood, to Julien Maxx, who was the fashion consultant of several celebrities. He made a living advising successful girls and boys recently arrived from the country how to dress properly and what to wear instead of faded jeans and band T-Shirts. Julien's fee was high, so he was sought out only when money did not matter anymore. Thanks to the network he had built, the biggest brands paid serious money just to have their products promoted by him. Julien skilfully manoeuvred between the companies, and his slightly bohemian style, as well as his excellent organising skills, helped the once impoverished, gay New York journalist become a hip Hollywood trendsetter. For a fair price, Julien was willing to do anything. For example, he often sold information on the celebrities to tabloids, paparazzi, and private investigators. This was a sensitive area so any time he disclosed any information he made sure it was either already known by several people or that it would soon become public anyway. Therefore, when the information made the news, it never became obvious that he was the source.

There was one thing he was better at than organising: acting. He was every man's best friend and every woman's best girlfriend. He was considered to be reliable, which he had achieved by giving good advice and a little attention.

Julien owned three clothing stores under the name of Julien's where he sold only the most fashionable brands and became well known for selling at prices lower than other brand stores, although the price of

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clothes and accessories was still exorbitantly high. The big brands were content because Julien was a gateway to their own stores, where starlets—accustomed to Julien’s school of fashion—spent enormous amounts of money.

Julien was excited to hear Kyo’s voice. He did not know about Kyo’s company or its activities, but he did know that the call meant a serious premium for a little information on the whereabouts of an actor or a singer in the next few weeks.

Julien’s theory was that the caller was a paparazzo. They were usually the ones who needed information like this, although she paid suspiciously well. In fact, he did not care because it was safe to disclose this information and the financial compensation was very good. Lilian Bailey was not his client, but with a phone call, he managed to find out what Kyo needed. He called the Japanese woman back and informed her that at that moment Lilian was in LA, and two days later she and her girlfriends would leave for Cancún. They planned to recover from the tiresome film shootings and award ceremonies by the Caribbean Sea: in short, they wanted to party. He knew the name of the hotel too. They planned to stay there for four days. After that, there would be a photo shoot in Hollywood, and then she was scheduled to attend a movie premier in San Francisco. Kyo thanked him for the information and confirmed that the five thousand dollars would soon be wired. Julien—after hanging up—spread his arms and closed his eyes as if the five thousand dollars were raining on him right then and there.

Next, Olivier’s team made a plan to approach the target person as soon as possible. They did not have enough time to organise the collection of the sample in Los Angeles, neither to wait until she returned from the vacation, so they decided to do the job in Cancún, where they

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would have several days at their disposal. Lilian was not familiar with the place and they could leverage that.

They calculated the costs, the profit, the delivery time, and the number of staff necessary to steal Lilian Bailey's DNA. They also examined the risks associated with their client, although they knew almost everything about Turner. It was important to evaluate who might call him, who might drop in unexpectedly, how well-known he is, or if anyone might hold a grudge against him.

It turned out that Lilian did not employ a round-the-clock bodyguard. She hired protection only when she visited crowded places, and in countries unknown to her, for example during a vacation or at an event at a remote location.

After all the data had been compiled, Olivier looked over the almost four-inch-thick folder. He arranged the documents on his desk like a detective working on a complex case, wishing to see all the details at once, like the pieces of a puzzle. Although everything was administered digitally using state-of-the-art encryption technology, Olivier preferred to make the final analysis and decision after looking at the printouts.

There was something romantic in it too, but Olivier liked it for its practicality and silence. Even the tiniest machines whir and vibrate, but paper is silent.

He combed through her detailed biography, the list of places she regularly visited, people who had daily, weekly, monthly contact with her, and the list of people who could assist him. He had a look at Turner's order form too, together with the specifications and the lab's feasibility report, which included the schedule of the conditioning, the type of template to be moulded into Lilian, and the participating staff members. The collection of the sample, which was a two-man job, would

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take approximately four or five days. Creating a copy from the template, conditioning, along with quality control would take a week, but anything might come up so he would tell Turner that they needed sixteen days.

Everything was there. The whole Turner-Bailey project, from start to finish. The guys had done a good job, as always. The system worked like a charm, and this thought always brought a faint smile to his face. Unless something unexpected happened, everything would go smoothly. He knew that it was not possible to be prepared for everything, but so far, they had always managed, though there had been a few close calls, for example the one with the drummer the previous year.

Olivier took a deep breath, closed his eyes, and let his instincts and mind foreshadow any danger. Fortunately, nothing came up. His instincts told him that everything would be okay. So, time to start.

He called Turner to tell him the details. He picked up after the third ring.

“Hallo?”

“Mr. Turner, this is Rolland Olivier. I have good news. We can make a copy of Lilian without any difficulties, just as you specified,” said Olivier. At the other end of the line, he heard Turner’s breathing, but he did not stay silent for long.

“Really?” asked Turner in the end.

“We can talk, this is a secure line. No trace will be left, not even on your phone.”

Turner stayed silent.

“The final price is exactly one million dollars, if you accept it. The expected date of delivery is sixteen days from now.”

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Turner was not worried about the price, but he felt a little sour at the date. That's more than two weeks, he thought. What would he do until then in Japan? But Olivier is hardly interested in that.

"Mr. Turner? Are you there?" asked Olivier without any impatience.

"Sixteen days?" he asked in the end.

"Just to be on the safe side, we always calculate with a few extra days," said Olivier. "Unfortunately, we have to travel to the other side of the world to acquire the sample and copying takes a week. In case we manage sooner, I will let you know."

Turner paused for a second. Olivier heard him sigh.

"Let's do this then."

"All right," said Olivier. "Have you found a place yet?"

"Yes," said Turner, and gave him the address in Hayama. Olivier complimented him on his choice, as it was one of the most beautiful beaches in Japan. He had been there several times, in fact, the emperor was also a frequent guest of the city. He promised that he would call in the event of any further developments. Turner could expect to hear news after a few days. They said goodbye. Olivier greenlit the project, and the wheels started turning.

Turner kept thinking after he hung up. A million for a copy. That's how much it takes to create a human being. This was the first time he reflected on the meaning of materialism: "We live in a materialistic world," as he often heard people say. As long as the value of money is represented in cars, planes, and real estate, it is difficult to feel what it is worth. Until you put a price tag on a life. There are people who spend a million bucks on a bottle of brandy, a woman's bag, or a night in a luxury hotel, or ten million, if not more, on a car they never even use or two hundred million on a vacation house used once a year.

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According to the previous year's balance sheet, his net worth was close to a billion dollars. He had been earning five to ten million dollars a year, depending on how cautious he was, as well as the volatility of real estate prices, markets, and exchange rates. Compared to this, the price of a human copy, the price of Lilian did not seem unreasonable.

Turner was sitting on the bed, surfing through the channels, but he was so immersed in his own thoughts that he hardly understood anything. He wondered how much money the real Lilian would ask in exchange for two weeks with her, but it was not probable that such an amount existed. Perhaps for a porn star, the girl next door, a television presenter, or a starlet wishing to climb higher on the ladder. However, that would be fake and forced. Olivier said that the copy, meanwhile retaining the personality of the original, would love him. That is why the price was high.

He felt a little uncomfortable paying for a life, even if it was to create a life, not destroy it. Perhaps by making the order he became responsible for her. In any case, the copy must go after the two weeks are up. He tried to convince himself that it was merely a service, one amongst many, even if a bit unusual, at least for him, because there must be others who regularly order clones, perhaps not even for sex, but for hunting (for prey) or to have a conversation partner. Anything is possible. It is a weird world we live in, getting weirder with every passing decade.

In the evening, Olivier was driving home in his company car and had just finished a conversation on the speaker in Japanese: “Yes. And once again, thank you for letting me know about Mr. Turner’s Japanese trip. Yes, Sakuraba-san. Have a good evening.”

As Olivier was approaching his house, his mobile device asked if it should open the garage door. Olivier approved it with the push of a button on the screen. His car automatically pulled into the subterranean garage and stopped near a top range model jet black Kawasaki, and a convertible Corvette of indeterminate colour. Depending on the lighting, it was somewhere between metallic maroon and crimson. In the shadows of the garage, from a certain angle it looked black, while under the blazing sun it was rather blood-red.

Olivier’s house, hidden among many similar buildings, stood in Den-en-chōfu, a Tokyo district inhabited mainly by businessmen, top athletes, and politicians. The one-story house was two thousand and seven hundred square feet and was equipped with technology not many could boast of in the neighbourhood.

Olivier did not brag about his devices and did not call his neighbours over to show them his latest light control system or the intelligent television set, which he could control almost fully with his mind. He bought these gadgets for himself, to serve his comfort, and nothing more.

He lived alone but was rarely lonesome, in this regard he and Turner were very much alike. They both loved spending money and enjoying life without thinking of tomorrow. That was the life he hung on to so

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dearly. His luxury house, his fat bank account, the powerful motorcycle in his garage—which he drove over the speed limit on the weekends without caring for the fines—the convertible, the pleasures of gastronomy, and women, of course.

He had been in this line of work for three years and planned to maintain this lifestyle for the rest of his life. He did not ponder questions of morality, empathy, or right or wrong. He was beyond and above these. He did not consider himself a cold-hearted villain, but as someone who was exceptionally lucky, and simply born to do this job. He was the best in his field, and he deserved the life he had and everything that came with it. The rest was beside the point. That is how the world works, and he, Rolland Olivier, would rather work for the devil for a nice sum of money than for the Lord for free. There was nobody to pass judgment on him because the people he knew weren't any better, they were bad in other ways.

He kept in touch with a few people who lived on the same street, and he was on good terms with Shuji Himura, the de facto chief operating officer of the front company, Yamashita Human Resources Consulting Co., Ltd. Of course, Himura knew about everything, but did not ask Olivier about his job, and did not want to get involved in the peculiar background activities of the company.

In his heart, Olivier liked to keep to himself. He preferred spending his time alone, or in the company of paid women, geishas, masseuses, or B-girls, sometimes at his home, at other times in hotels or nearby resorts. That is why he liked Turner so much. They were birds of a feather. All his clients were wealthy, with very different lifestyles, but Turner was smart and always alert also, like a predator, which distinguished him from the crowd.

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Olivier was fluent in Japanese and English, and he was half Japanese, half French, so he could hold a conversation in French as well. Though he had difficulties understanding certain Japanese dialects and accents. The company's leadership expected the use of English, but it was also the language of the studies relevant to his field, and the cloning equipment operated with English instructions for use and commands.

His house was as modern and elegant as his office, but instead of a futuristic style, it was dominated by friendly colours, fine materials, and elements imitating the style of forest houses.

Olivier put his suit jacket on the back of a chair in the dining room, and his phone, wallet, and car key on the table. He looked in the fridge and took out a can of orange juice, then ordered a few items that were running low on the screen of the fridge. He set the time of delivery to the next day at seven in the morning.

Once he finished drinking, he put the can on the kitchen counter, walked to the other side of the living room and settled down among the comfortable pillows of the couch. He spread his hands out on the back of the couch, covered with a material that repels dirt and water, so it was always clear without the need to wipe it. The television mounted on the wall in front of him automatically switched on upon his arrival and displayed basic data on the apartment; meanwhile, pleasant, faint forest sounds, such as the chirping of birds, a gurgling brook, and a sighing wind flowed from the speakers. According to the data the room temperature was 23 °C, the next full moon was in three days, the weather was clear, the outside temperature was 28 °C, the Corvette was charged at 100%, the other car was at 73% and charging... He did not turn the television off but did not look at the data either. His sub-

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scription allowed him to watch the latest movies at home, but today he was not in the mood.

Olivier enjoyed these modern solutions that made his life simpler, more comfortable, and contributed to his well-being and good state of mind. Lately, he was eager to get wallpaper that could change to any pattern or colour based on a custom setting or depending on his mood.

The most useful function of the building—besides that he could not leave anything turned on by accident, and everything switched to stand-by mode as soon as he left the house—was that he could shut down certain parts of the apartment with the push of a button on his phone. So, when he had an evening guest, he could leave her behind in the morning because the guest could not enter his study or access his private things, but she could move around in the house, take a shower, have breakfast, and leave.

He was constantly busy due to his work, almost every single day of the year. He worked on projects back-to-back, with projects often overlapping each other. If a problem arose with any of them, he had to take the matters into his own hands immediately. Although it was never spelled out, Olivier knew that he answered with his life to the company that every copy must be brought back to the lab for destruction, and that every client—without feeling threatened—must keep his or her mouth buttoned. This did not necessarily mean that he would be killed in the event he made a mistake—although it might—, but he knew he would be the first to be thrown under the bus to control the damage. He would be a pawn pushed forward for the enemy to capture. His current projects would be taken over by someone else without a hitch. The show must go on.

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All things considered, he really was the single best person to do what he was doing. He set up the operations with the expertise of an experienced secret agent, gained the trust of clients better than most salesmen, and only twice did he run into problems over the past three years. Neither of them was his fault, but in the end, it would not have mattered if he had not been able to solve them. However, he did solve them, obviously, since he was still breathing.

What had happened was that a client—who simply called himself Kosta—the spawn of a wealthy Russian family decided to keep a copy for himself and ran away with it. It was a dramatic escape, just like in a movie, as they fled with a car through the California woods until they ran out of gas. Two of Olivier's men were on their tail and kept reporting back on radio. Olivier was on his way there, but he fell behind. For the duration of the project, he moved to San Francisco and lived a few blocks away from the house that Kosta rented, but it was not close enough.

The lovebirds dashed into the woods hand in hand. They were rushing to their own destruction as the pursuers caught up with them and turned off the copy remotely. The girl collapsed like a ragdoll, as if she had been shot in the back of her head. The boy fell too, as the weight of the lifeless body pulled him back. He knew what had happened. He realised that it was all over. In his desperation, he attacked his pursuers, who subsequently brought him to the lab after knocking him out with a stun gun.

Olivier joined the events at this point. The boy was threatening them with his father, something not to be taken lightly. Olivier knew that Kosta's father was an important person in politics, business, and in circles outside the law. He could easily hunt down the company's

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employees who would point fingers at each other like disciplined children caught red-handed by their parents. The Russians certainly have their methods.

Olivier did not dare imagine what would have happened if they had been in Russia, and not in the United States. In that case, had Kosta gone straight to his father and asked for his help to keep the copy, and if his father had approved of it and stepped up for his son, the result would have been disastrous. They could not face a man of such calibre, a man who—if he wished—had a small personal army at his disposal. Olivier vaguely hoped that his company's management was equally powerful and that they would have found a diplomatic solution at a level above his pay grade. However, that was merely an assumption. His downfall would remain a fact.

After capturing Kosta, Olivier knew that he could not let him go alive, no matter how much he wanted to resolve the issue peacefully. If he had let Kosta go, then best case scenario, he signed his own death warrant, worst case scenario, the company's. He could not kill Kosta because there would have been a manhunt for him. Although he hoped that in that case he would not be found, but he could never be completely certain, especially because money did not matter much to the man who would have been after him, and he would have unleashed the best private investigators, Russian ex-agents of questionable past, and merciless head-hunters to get him.

So, they made a copy of Kosta and let his clone go free. During conditioning, they made sure that he became his old self as soon as possible, and naturally no chip was implanted into him. His one-month disappearance did not raise any eyebrows because that was not the first time it had happened. Nonetheless, they fabricated an accident

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and a hospital treatment, and cooked up a case history and medical reports so they could produce it in case someone started asking questions. He regained consciousness in a hospital ward. He was confused and amnesic. They told him that he had been in a car accident but got away scot-free. That's all.

Olivier knew that it was a close call, but he was certain that the swap would work. Nobody would suspect anything if the difference was not apparent, and the company's copies were perfect. Obviously, his tattoos and scars had to be replicated as well, but they had a man for the job. For a few weeks, the boy would be confused but soon everything would be fine. His memories would return, and he would be his old self again. It was possible that later in the future he would have a vague memory, a fragment of a dream, that he spent time with his favourite actress. That he was trying to outrun some bad guys in a forest. But he would believe that these were just the incoherent jumble of his secret desires and past nights' dreams that never actually happened.

The original Kosta was killed with a lethal injection and incinerated in the laboratory's furnace, where malfunctioning or "retired" copies come to rest. With this, the case was closed.

Sitting on the couch, Olivier once again found himself brooding over the affair, though it had happened long ago. The other case did not go so smoothly, but he forced himself not to think about it on that day. Things were going so well, and this warranted cheerful thoughts.

He prepared a chicken salad and opened a bottle of South American red wine. He sat down on the porch and enjoyed the evening breeze of the summer. He watched the cars and the few pedestrians passing by his house and thought about his next holiday destination and how he could improve his home.

10

When Olivier gave the green light to the Turner-Bailey project, two agents from the company, the Japanese Haru Kinoshita and the Iceland born Magnus Valsson flew from Tokyo to Los Angeles in a hurry, where after a few hours' layover they boarded a plane to Cancún, Mexico. The hotel was fifteen miles from the international airport, so they took a cab. They had one day to get ready, evaluate the situation, make some plans, and collect the sample of the target's DNA.

Rather than approaching one of the hotel's room attendants to bug Lilian's room for a couple of thousand bucks, they decided instead to monitor the hotel to learn the girls' schedule. At any rate, they could not do anything as long as the girls were in their room. They would follow them when they left their room. That simple. The fewer people who know about the operation the better. Hotel employees, club bouncers, and restaurant waiters are willing to do anything for money, but when things get out of hand, they save their own asses above all.

Obtaining a sample is easier in clubs, at least according to Magnus. Everybody is pushing and bumping into each other, drinking, and people pay less attention. There was one time when the target person was passed out drunk, sitting outside, leaned up against the bumper of his own car, vomit all over his expensive suit, his trousers torn at the knees, and his friends nowhere near.

Magnus walked up to him and obtained a sample by putting the sampler right into the athlete's hand, as if he were drawing his own DNA. By the time his friends arrived, Magnus was halfway back to his

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hotel. He could tell countless stories about stars behaving like everyone else. How alike they are.

This was his twelfth sample collection, and so far, all of them had worked out perfectly. A successful mission has two pre-conditions: first, a usable sample is obtained, and second, nobody follows them or presses charges. He had been working for the company for three years. He started a few months after Olivier. When Haru and Magnus were not in the field collecting samples, they supported the work of the physicians in the lab, worked as the researchers' assistants, or they were sent out to keep an eye on a client. The advantage of an illegally operating workplace is that you are not limited by your job description, and of course, you are overpaid to keep your mouth shut and never think about leaving.

Magnus was certain that Lilian and her friends would go out to a party, and then they would have an opportunity to obtain a sample.

The two "DNA hunters" reserved a room across the street to have a view of the entrance of the hotel. They looked like two good friends on a quick trip from the United States to have a good time with young, underdressed girls, but someone might as well have mistaken them for a gay couple who wanted to spend their money earned in the media business. While one of them was monitoring the hotel, the other strolled around the neighbourhood. They surveyed the area to get familiar with the location of the restaurants and bars. Magnus strolled into the hotel where the girls were booked and retrieved a map at the concierge stand. He lingered to one side, studying the map, but also eavesdropping as the concierge told a young couple where the hottest clubs were. Neither he nor his partner had been there before, so they wanted to get a general picture of the place.

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Lilian arrived the following evening in the company of two girlfriends and a large black man, obviously a bodyguard. They quickly changed and left the hotel. They climbed into a huge rental SUV and drove off. Haru fretted. A car should not be necessary in a place where everything is easily accessible on foot. Magnus wondered whether Lilian and her friends might have some destination out of the immediate vicinity, in which case all their preparations would be wasted. More seriously, their effort to collect a sample quickly could be thwarted. Rather than worrying needlessly, they adopted plan B and rented a car themselves so they would be prepared for the next day's hunt.

Magnus and Haru watched the hotel from 7:00 a.m., although they had a sneaking suspicion that missy would not wake up so early during her vacation, especially after a night out.

They noticed the first movements at eight: Lilian and her girlfriends only then returned to the hotel. It was apparent even from their balcony that they were dead tired and needed to sleep and sober up after a long night. One of Hollywood's favourite starlets dragged herself through the entrance like a rheumatic grandmother. The bodyguard escorted her and two other girls—who were the same age as Lilian—and in no better shape. Magnus knew that they were going to bed, which was the worst part of the job since they would not be able to leave their posts even though nothing was likely to happen for eight to ten hours.

They took turns watching the hotel. Haru, in his downtime, hacked Lilian's phone on his laptop, but her correspondence did not contain any usable information, and unfortunately there were no naked pictures of her either.

Magnus was reading about Cancún on his mobile phone. He found that according to some, Cancún means snake pit or a place that has

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something to do with snakes. The world's second largest coral reef is off the coast, and the sea is 26-29°C all year around. Magnus liked the place and decided that one day he would spend his vacation there. He would have liked to visit the Mayan ruins but doubted that Lilian would go there, and he could not just go off by himself to indulge in hiking.

The girls' group emerged from the hotel at 4:00 in the afternoon. They seemed to be on their way to the beach so Magnus and Haru, after putting on their swimsuits, followed them.

Cancún was teeming with tourists, but there wasn't a large crowd on the beach. A chain of hotels, bars, and restaurants occupied the shore near the white sand beach. The colour of the water was turquoise near the shore and deeper blue farther out. The sun was shining brightly, and the temperature was about 30°C. The clouds were floating only at the horizon, as if they were avoiding this paradise on purpose.

Magnus took with him the black handbag that contained the necessary tools for the collection of the sample. They settled down under a beach umbrella at a distance, from where they could watch her inconspicuously.

Haru was not fond of American women. He preferred Asians, not only because American women were a foot taller than him, but also because he found them too masculine. He thought that Asian women had gentler, rounder features. In contrast, Magnus was bewitched when Lilian walked to the shore, threw off the shawl wrapped around her body, her ruby red bikini appeared, and she threw back her hair to tie it up. He had to pause to think whether he had ever seen someone so beautiful. The curves of her body melted into a dreamlike harmony. The lines of her shapely thighs curved into her hip, then to her waist and her back in a way that made men dizzy. Her blue eyes and the

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subtle waves of her flaxen hair completely enchanted Magnus, and not only him. Soon, there wasn't a man on the beach whose eyes did not linger on her, even though in Cancún pretty women are a fairly common sight.

If anyone recognised her, they betrayed no sign of it, but Magnus suspected that for the vacationers in this place the presence of a star was not a big deal.

“Hey!” said Haru. “Wake up. Focus.”

“I am focused, calm down,” said Magnus.

“You stay here, in case she goes to the bar, or anything like that. I am going to down to the water.”

“Okay.”

Haru took off his shirt and put the sampler—disguised as a ballpoint pen—in the side pocket of his swimsuit. The sampler was suitable for writing, but after unscrewing it, a head appeared in the middle that could absorb hundreds of cells upon a brief contact with the skin, and then store them for twelve hours. During this time, they had to return to the hotel and put it into the delivery bag. Although DNA also could be obtained from saliva and hair, provided the latter had intact hair follicles, these were far more difficult to obtain, and once collected, the samples were more fragile and cumbersome to store, so they were allowed to use only the pen.

Haru went for a dip, occasionally glancing at the target. Lilian and her friends were fooling around on the shore, laughing and taking pictures with their phones.

The key to obtaining a sample successfully is to get close to the target person, to bump into them, and to keep the pen on their skin for a whole second. Under laboratory conditions, the target person feels

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like being pinched by a thumb and index finger. It is unpleasant but the pain goes away quickly. If the agent is good at setting the scene, then the surrounding chaos diverts the target's attention, and they don't feel or notice anything.

It was Haru's third sampling mission. He had been hired by the company one-and-a-half years ago. Before that, he had been a member of a gang that robbed online bank accounts, hacked profiles, and sold company secrets on the black market.

One day, they were selling materials to Olivier's company and Haru asked the intermediary if there was a job opening. Haru wanted a change because he did not consider hacking safe enough. His instincts and timing were good, as soon it was discovered his gang had been under surveillance by the Japanese police for a time.

After Olivier's company had done a background check, he was called in for an interview, where Haru convinced them that he could be useful. He was proficient in the field of computers and mobile phones.

In the end, Olivier employed him and overall was pleased that he had. Haru was a bit absent-minded and did not always take matters sufficiently seriously, which led to some friction between them, but it remained a fact that his expertise was invaluable. He developed the system to protect employees' phones against eavesdropping and geo-location.

Shortly after Haru left the hacking group, it was dissolved, two of the six members were jailed, and several million yen, along with the gang's computers and servers, were seized. One of Olivier's men looked into the case and found that Haru Kinoshita remained under the radar of the police. There was no more news about the others.

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At the company, he learned English, and the company helped him launder his previously amassed money so that he could afford to buy himself a nice house and a car. He had a quiet new life.

Magnus—before joining the company—also used to be a member of a criminal gang in London, but they employed tougher, more conventional methods, and rarely worked with keyboards. The police uncovered and eliminated the gang at the price of the life of six gangsters and one policeman. Magnus was the only one to get away without a scratch, without a bullet or handcuffs, as he was the only one who had prepared an escape. As soon as he saw that the house of cards was about to fall, he vanished, leaving behind houses, cars, friends, and girlfriends.

After that, he was hiding in Europe for a few years, living from one day to the next. He never stayed in one place for long, and in the meantime, he learned basic Spanish and German. After the storm blew over, he returned to London and paid a visit to a few old acquaintances. Nobody dared employ him, but in the end one of them picked up the phone. After a few calls, they reached Shuji Himura, who was known for being able to help guys like Magnus, guys for whom it got too hot but were not yet ready to retire. Magnus borrowed money to travel to Japan and sought out Himura's company, Yamashita Human Resources Consulting. He was thoroughly vetted, received all kinds of odd jobs, and when it was certain that he was solid, he gained their trust and received training.

It was at that time that he changed his name from Erlendsson to Valsson. Since then, he had received a good salary and married an Icelandic woman he had met online. They lived in Tokyo and expected their first baby by the end of the year.

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Magnus was on good terms with everybody and worked hard for his money. Olivier trusted him, but Magnus knew that if he ever made a mistake Olivier would jump down his throat. He had received a second chance from life, and he intended to make the most of it. He was fully aware that without this opportunity he would still be washing dishes in a dirty bar, or loading containers at a port for a pittance, every day terrified that somebody might identify him and tip off the Interpol. Himura assured him that as long as he was working for them, no harm would come to him, and this was the most he could wish for in life.

Magnus woke up with a start on the folding chair. He was not sure whether he had fallen asleep or had just become too immersed in his thoughts. He glanced around but nothing had changed. Lilian was still in the water, as was Haru. He was thirsty but he did not want to leave his spot. He let out a sigh and kept watching Lilian. The job was not that bad, he thought.

Magnus considered her an easy target, but he was getting increasingly impatient. Time was passing and no suitable opportunity had presented itself yet. They had barely slept four hours in the past day, and a whole afternoon and evening were still ahead of them.

Lilian and her girlfriends jumped from programme to programme, as if they were just teasing them, raising difficulties to organising any kind of sampling operation. They had cocktails in the bar, ate burgers at the buffet, water skied on an inflatable banana, sunbathed in the sand, played volleyball in the water, and—according to Magnus—took way too many photos. They could not approach them, and Haru began to worry because she would stay only two more days, then return to California, and they would have to start all over again. But the real problem was that Olivier would be mad.

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In the late afternoon, the gang went jet skiing into the mangrove forests of the Nichupté lagoon. Magnus and Haru could not follow the girls there because a reservation had to be made in advance. They had to wait until they came back. The service provider informed them that snorkelling was part of the excursion and the complete tour would last close to two hours. The young man telling them this enthusiastically blabbered about the exotic fish in the water and the pelicans in the lagoon they could see. Magnus tried his best to fake interest and listened patiently because he wanted to be remembered as a tourist, and not as a suspicious fellow asking questions.

By the time they got back, the sun had disappeared behind the buildings. Lilian and her friends sat down in the bar to drink a coffee. Haru followed them and took a seat at a nearby table to hear what they were talking about. Magnus watched them from the shore in his folding chair.

Haru was holding the pen but for the time being he did not see an opportunity to get close to her. If they wanted to make a move, they had to be sure not to miss. Everything would become unpredictable if they failed. He wouldn't be able to complete the mission if they made note of him.

Lilian ordered a cappuccino with honey and held the cup with both hands—turning the handle to the other side—as if she were trying to warm her hands in the 30°C heat. The girls were giggling, chattering, and the guard was visibly bored of their babbling but waited patiently at the table, playing on his mobile phone, and drinking two strong espressos to stay awake.

The subject of childhood came up and Lilian mentioned that in England, the weather was often quite bad, and although in those times

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she was accustomed to the cold, now she would not leave the house below 15°C for all the tea in China. She quickly got used to the constant Hollywood sun. She talked about things her girlfriends had never heard from her before, for example the beautiful neighbourhood they lived at, and the huge hill next to the house that local kids believed was a holy mountain, on which they spent whole summers playing. The best thing in the United Kingdom is that the grass is always green. She could clearly recall it. She said that she used to have a bracelet she adored because her name had been embroidered on it, and she used to have a flounced dress, like a princess's. The other girl, Christine, mentioned that her twin, Carol, had a new boyfriend, which was why she could not come with them, and she knew that she had already talked about this, but she could not get over the fact that her little sister had met such a loser.

The third girl—Haru never found out her name—badgered Lilian with questions about the date of her next movie party, which she wanted to attend because she was eager wanted to meet her favourite actor, even if he was about twenty years her senior.

Haru was thinking hard about his options. Should he address them? Should he invite them to a non-existent party? Pretend to be an idiot? Try to rob them? Any plan might work, just as well backfire. He was weighing his options and discarding his ideas until Lilian and her company stood up and headed back to the hotel. The moment slipped away.

In the evening, Lilian and her company had dinner in the hotel. Angelo, their waiter, persuaded them to go to the Club Delfín, as it had a great atmosphere every Friday. Information like this, even if it seemed insignificant, was very useful to first-time visitors who would otherwise be lost in the jungle of clubs. The waiter emphasised that the

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Delfín was a small place, recommended especially for those who would like to avoid large, festival-like clubs. As an added bonus, the terrace of the Delfín offered a fantastic view of the sea. Then he added that if they mentioned his name at the counter, they would get a free cocktail. He said this in an undertone, as if he was disclosing the secret of eternal life. The girls chuckled and thanked him for the advice and the service with a large tip. Magnus also tipped him well because the waiter told them where the company of that table was headed, even if it was just a guess. He threw in a little bonus for him to keep silent about his questions. The waiter knew that he could also count on a small commission from the manager of the Delfín for referring guests.

After Lilian and her girlfriends left the hotel, Magnus and Haru followed them, and Angelo's information came in handy when they lost sight of the girls as they were crossing a crowded street. The nightlife was vibrant, with the restaurants, bars, night clubs, and streets teeming with tourists, youngsters, couples, and groups of friends.

They found them standing in line in front of the Delfín. Magnus and Haru felt like someone finding his lost phone undamaged.

The Delfín had a strict face control at the VIP entrance, which meant that if a bouncer recognised you, you were allowed to enter, and if he thought you were good enough for the place, you could pay and go through the main entrance. Lilian and her friends entered at the VIP entrance, Magnus and Haru—in exchange for a tip—managed to go in through the main entrance.

Inside, the crowd was ecstatic. The place was filled mainly with North American and European youngsters, who were closely packed into a gyrating mass on the huge dance floor, while others crowded up to the three counters for drinks. The vibe of the place was great, and

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the girls were sure to get their free cocktails when they mentioned Angelo's name. Free cocktails are always sweeter, even if money does not matter.

Magnus and Haru were just north of the average age but they did not stand out from the crowd. Magnus thought that in a crowd like that it would be impossible for the bodyguard to remain constantly by Lilian's side. Since they entered, he had spotted three famous people, all of them without a bodyguard, so he concluded that the place must be frequented by people of Lilian's calibre, which meant that her bodyguard could relax.

Lilian was approached by a few young girls who wanted selfies but none of them were too pushy. Lilian smiled for the pictures, she was grateful for the compliments, but tried to get back to her girlfriends as soon as possible.

They got a little tipsy and went to dance. The bodyguard kept an eye on them from the counter. Magnus slowly made his way onto the dance floor and started dancing, alone, as most people did, as part of the multitude weaving and swaying to a common rhythmic beat. He sneaked closer and closer to Lilian's group, as they were frantically throwing their hair around and rocking their hips in their tight, shiny clothes and high heels. Lilian looked stunning and Magnus felt his heart racing, like a teenager in love.

Lilian, who was wearing a silver dress, drew her hands across her hips, slowly bent forward, her hands slipping down to her suntanned thighs; then she straightened her back and ran her fingers through her hair, which for a moment appeared to blaze in the greenish-golden light. Curls fell across her eyes as she raised her arms and started to twist her hips. Magnus found himself standing motionless in the crowd.

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He needed all his focus to keep dancing or he would be noticed. Good God Almighty, he thought, focus on the job or Olivier will kill you. He can be just as cruel as friendly.

Magnus slowly danced his way toward Lilian. He took out the pen, unscrewed the top and darted a glance at Haru, which was Haru's signal to walk along the counter, to the bodyguard and ask the time in Japanese. The bodyguard looked puzzled.

Magnus took two steps toward Lilian and tripping over his own feet, stumbled slightly and fell against Lilian. In the bump and embarrassed apology that followed, he had managed to prick the sampler into her left thigh, just below her silver dress. That second seemed to last an infinity. Meanwhile, the guard brushed Haru aside, indicating that he did not understand him, then glanced up at Lilian and jumped up from his seat. Magnus scrambled to his feet, looked at Lilian imploringly, and said with a face distorted by alcohol, "¡Lo siento! ¡Lo siento!" He held up his hands defensively and began backing off into the crowd. He heard Lilian cry out something like "For Pete's sake!" but it was lost in the noise. Haru looked with concern as the large black bodyguard struggled through the dancing crowd and towered above his partner.

He saw that Lilian adjusted her dress, rubbed the back of her mid-thigh as if it were itching, and exchanged a few words with the bodyguard. Everything will be fine, thought Haru. He definitely got the sample. He was hesitating between helping him and leaving.

The guard put one large finger on Magnus's chest and gave him a push, growling a warning for him to be more careful. Continuing to apologise, Magnus backed away from the crowd. Haru turned back to the bar to remain unnoticed and to avoid being associated with Magnus. The bodyguard explained the situation to the local security in a few

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sentences. Haru could not make out the words but order was quickly restored, and everybody calmed down. Haru glanced back at Lilian one last time—she was dancing with her girls as if nothing had happened—and left.

They met in front of the club. Magnus proudly showed the pen to Haru.

“You have it?” asked Haru.

“Yeah. Let’s go.”

In the hotel, they examined the sample and concluded that it was satisfactory. They put it in a small cooler and sent a message to Olivier.

The two agents checked out of the hotel the next morning before the end of their reservation. The receptionist thought that the lovebirds had had a quarrel. Three hours later, they boarded a plane bound for Los Angeles.

The DNA sample went through the security check in a container disguised as an Epi-pen, in a bag hanging over Magnus’s shoulder. Throughout the flight, both Magnus and Haru kept a close watch on it to be sure it was secure until they reached their destination.

A black Mercedes was waiting for them when they landed in Tokyo. A man in a suit climbed out of the car. He was Olivier’s courier. He took the bag and drove off.

The laboratory was on the southern side of Tokyo, below the immense building of a pharmaceutical company. Pharmaceutical manufacturing activities and drug development operations were an excellent cover for the biological waste and foul odours generated during cloning. The pharmaceutical factory manufactured mediocre products, produced mixtures for a few large brands, and fulfilled other specialized contract work. The factory's employees did not know anything about the secret laboratory under their feet. The restricted sections and separate garages of the building facilitated the comings and goings of people who worked with the clones. The facility's security, however, worked directly for Olivier's company and not only guarded the premises but also monitored the factory's employees to see if they had any suspicions. They discharged any employees who seemed the least bit suspicious.

Olivier was waiting for the Mercedes in the parking lot. The courier handed over the bag that contained the DNA of Lilian Bailey. The laboratory could be accessed only through hidden doors, with coded and monitored entry. By the time he reached the lift—which took him three floors down to the laboratory—he had walked past several rooms where they ostensibly carried out illegal activities. These rooms, however, were red herrings, misleading unauthorised entrants to believe that they found what they were looking for. Sure, they would be fined for these activities, someone might even go to jail, but they wouldn't close down the whole factory, and above all, they wouldn't search further and wouldn't find out that just a little below humans were being cloned.

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As Olivier stepped out of the lift, he found himself in the biotechnology laboratory where development and programming took place. The computers that stood on large desks represented state-of-the-art technology. Each workstation was equipped with its own array of displays, keyboards, and holographic monitors. Various data and number sequences blinked on the displays showing DNA sequences, maps of brains and bodies, biodata of the copies, and values indicating different developmental stages. Two further rooms opened from the laboratory, one resembled a hospital ward: this was where the copies were awakened and cared for until delivery. In the other room, there were microscopes, test tubes, molecular diagnostic and other kinds of storage devices lined up on long tables.

In case of certain celebrities, it was essential to copy body jewellery and tattoos too, unless the client specifically asked otherwise. For this reason, a room was set up to prepare tattoos, and to do their hair and make-up. They employed people specifically for these tasks. They were called in only when necessary, otherwise, they had their own jobs.

The clones were not conscious during the post-production process—as it was called—so this room resembled a physician's office more than it did a tattoo parlour or a hair salon. Lilian would be brought here to have her hair and make-up done. She did not have a tattoo or a piercing, and Turner specified in the application that he did not want her to wear any earrings.

The exposed concrete walls and the sixteen-foot interior height increased the elegance of the laboratory. The desks and chairs followed the latest design, were made of fine materials, and were functional and comfortable at the same time. Certain rooms had their own carpets and plants, even mood lighting. The spacious kitchen was equipped

with the latest devices, coffee and vending machines, as well as a dishwasher. There was a dim light in the break room that could change its colour.

Armchairs, couches, recliners, table football, and ping-pong tables, as well as console games helped the workers relax. The large-screen television that came with a console game hung on the concrete wall like a poster. In standby mode, it showed the marine life of an ocean. The slowly moving whale sharks and manta rays belonged to the most soothing sights in the world. The underground complex looked more like a nominee for office of the year than a secret laboratory.

The well-being of the employees was among the priorities of the management in order to eliminate any thoughts about leaving the company. Moreover, the employees' criminal records weighed in favour of staying at the company as much as their salary and the favourable working conditions.

Olivier handed the package to Kaoru Yamada, a Japanese professor in a white robe, who began to process the sample. Olivier had notified the lab in advance that a sample was on its way, so in addition to the professor three other employees worked assiduously, all of them in white coats.

Olivier swiped his ID card and punched in the code on the touchscreen's number pad, which, without the user's knowledge, analysed the fingerprint too. He was sick and tired of having to go through the safety procedure every time, but it was mandatory. Extreme caution is better than the smallest mistake—Olivier kept repeating. The security procedure was there to protect him, so at the end of the day, it was not difficult to put on a good face.

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He was always friendly with the employees, but he never smiled at them like he did at the clients. They respected him, but at the same time were too afraid of him to make mistakes. In this line of business, the tiniest mistake could cost them not only hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost revenue but also loss of time.

At the other end of the lab, an immense steel door set into the wall opened with a deep, rumbling noise, and Olivier entered a larger room. Ninety-five sphere-shaped tanks stood in neat rows. The humanoid form of a template could be seen in most of them. The templates were featureless, but developed, humans. As they were suspended in a bluish translucent liquid, they seemed to be asleep. Their faces resembled those of rubber dolls, their skin smooth and white as porcelain. They had no individual features, like toy soldiers. They frequently reminded Olivier of the Kuleshov effect because their faces did not show any emotion, not even peace. The way a viewer saw them depended on the viewer's mood. At times, they appeared sad, helpless, or at the mercy of fate; at other times they looked cheerful, just waiting for their time to become a person.

Olivier stood by the entrance as if bound by a spell and stared at the templates. He had already been here several times, but he could never get tired of the sight. There were small-sized templates, still undeveloped, looking neither like children, nor like embryos. They were reminiscent of small adults born with a developmental disorder. They were not deformed, and they looked exactly like the developed templates, except in a smaller size. Olivier knew that it was normal because the developmental stages of the templates in the tanks differed from those of clones developing in a womb. Whereas humans develop for nine months in the womb, a template needs three years

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to reach adulthood and be ready to be programmed based on a DNA sample.

The face and mouth of each template was covered by a translucent mask, from which one wide and two narrower tubes coiled up to the top of the tank. Their chests and temples were covered by small patches, and thin wires led from them, carrying information. Their crotch was hidden behind a box, which seemed like shorts, like a black diaper, and from that ridged tubes diverged toward the bottom of the sphere, and another wire led from navel.

The machines that kept them alive and controlled their temperature hummed, whirred, and vibrated faintly. Male and female templates could be distinguished from one another easily, otherwise there weren't any differences. The women's breasts floated in the liquid softly, but there was nothing attractive or feminine about them. The templates for each sex were identical, flawless, and featureless—as though they were the lowest common denominator of every people on earth. They looked so perfect that they seemed more like an alien or the specimen of a future race than contemporary humans. At the same time, there was a certain underdeveloped quality to them. Their uniform white colour and the lack of features, along with their identical proportions made them unreal and doll-like.

The professor entered and stopped beside Olivier. His hands were in his coat pockets, as usual.

“I am always fascinated by the progress we have made,” said Olivier.

“A few decades ago, cloning was nowhere near this,” said the professor. “Most lab animals were stillborn, usually with gruesome deformities. Those that survived contracted a series of diseases and died

at an early age. The clone embryos were twice as large as the normal ones, so the survival of the mother animal was a marvel in itself. Did you know that the first clone, a sheep named Dolly, was born with severe arthritis and died of lung disease in the end?”

“No, I did not know that, but I read about the initial challenges,” said Olivier. “And Dolly was not the first clone.”

“Yes, naturally, there had been many successful and unsuccessful experiments, but Dolly was the first that became publicly known.”

Olivier nodded and the professor continued:

“Human cloning was banned because they did not believe that copies should walk among us. How would they legally or morally fit into our society? It profoundly violates human rights and dignity, as UNESCO phrased it, but at the same time, they were also afraid that super humans or monstrosities would be manufactured.”

“Science is about overcoming challenges like this, don’t you agree, Yamada-san?”

“Exactly,” said the professor and gave him a conspiratorial smile. “Although reproductive cloning is banned everywhere where science is advanced enough, carrying out research is legal in several countries, including Japan.” Olivier nodded, indicating that he was aware of this. „In fact, therapeutic cloning is allowed in many countries, including stem-cell therapy and tissue generation.”

“But you went significantly further than anyone else,” said Olivier. He admired the professor and liked flattering him.

“What we do here is one of the greatest achievements of science, yet we cannot tell anyone about it.”

“Regrettably, you are right. When was the last time any kind of deformity occurred?” asked Olivier. The laboratory was not under Olivier’s

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supervision; rather, management directly oversaw these operations. He came here only when he made an order or when a clone was handed over to him. Since he did not have access to written reports, he was not up-to-date on the lab's results and knew only as much as his superiors shared with him. Yamada was well aware of who Olivier was and how important his position was at the company, so he answered readily.

“In the past year, we started over with a copy only once. The template was faulty, and its DNA did not want to assimilate. To be more precise, the DNA of the template and the DNA of the target person joined, and as a result certain organs began to grow uncontrollably, as if the organs of two bodies were fighting for the same territory.”

Olivier twisted his mouth.

“That's terrible. I hope it won't happen again.”

The professor shook his head.

“This mistake certainly won't happen again. We managed to locate the problem and eliminate it from the system. We had to destroy a number of templates, but the rest were fine.”

Olivier let out a sigh and pointed at the tanks.

“Which one is next?” he asked.

“Number fourteen,” said the professor.

They stepped to the tank. Yamada pushed a few buttons on its side-keyboard, then two other larger buttons. Something clicked on the top of the sphere and let out a hissing sound. Yamada disconnected the tank from the central system. Two assistants entered and the three of them carefully pushed the tank to the lab, where it was secured again and reconnected to the system.

Olivier stood back and watched. They did everything very slowly and deliberately. They lifted off the interface from the top of the

spherical tank and lowered a new one into place. In the meantime, a fourth worker, also wearing a lab coat, prepared the programming of the cells.

Then a thick, multi-element mantle was assembled around the tank. It rose up from slots in the floor, unfolded itself, and covered the whole sphere. The template could be seen through a small window, so Olivier took a step aside to have a better view.

The motionless template floated in the tank, in its womb—an artificial womb with artificial amniotic fluid. A multitude of circuits, wires, wireless, and ultrasound units worked together so that the cells would finally adopt the characteristics of the sample DNA. Nanobots carried out the instrumental part of the job. They were loaded with the DNA of Lilian and by infecting the template they reprogrammed its cells. Parts of the epigenetic markers were transferred from the sample, other parts were added by the template, and the rest were adjusted by the professor's team. Olivier rarely had the time to observe the whole process, so he waited patiently.

“Are they having dreams?” asked Olivier and wondered why he had not asked this before.

“Not in their template state,” said the professor. “First, they need memories, Mr. Olivier, but they will have dreams as soon as they start assimilating. Naturally, at the beginning the dreams are just a bewilderment of pictures and simple feelings, not the dreams you and I experience. And you should know best what a developed individual dreams about.”

Olivier ruminated over the almost incomprehensible depths of this thought: the templates, who are not humans, yet they resemble them, start having dreams out of nothing.

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Forty minutes and countless further adjustments later, Professor Yamada launched the program. The template twitched and jerked as if shocked by electricity, then went back to “sleep”.

Olivier watched it with hands crossed.

“Professor,” said Olivier, “there is something I have been meaning to ask you for some time now. How is it possible that it takes the same amount of time to create a Black, a White, or an Asian copy from a fundamentally white template?”

“It surprises me that no one has asked this before. Well, the reason and in fact the key to the templates’ identification process is that in terms of genetic structure humans are the most homogenous race. There is a difference between people on an individual level, but not on a group level. The difference between the genomes of people is 0.5%, which is negligible. Organisms with such tiny difference are classified into the same species.”

“So, this is not some human rights mumbo-jumbo, is it? That everyone is equal.”

“Our personalities are different, of course. You, Mr. Olivier, are you only so long as we observe your individual features. After that, you are like everyone else on the planet. Skin colour is an apparent difference, but genetically speaking it is a negligible trait. Believe it or not, the genetic difference between a European and an Asian is less than between two Africans, though at first sight Africans have more common characteristics than Europeans and Asians, for example their dark skin, the shape of their face, and their hair.”

“I did not know that” said Olivier, feigning to be a bit more interested than he actually was. He listened to the professor like a student.

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“Returning to your question,” said Yamada, adjusting his glasses, out of habit rather than for comfort, “we need to modify approximately 10-15% of a template’s genetic code, the rest are individual features. The genetic manipulations that determine skin colour and other racial characteristics are quite negligible and take no more time for one race than for another.”

“This technology never ceases to fascinate me.”

Yamada nodded, sat down in front of the computer and started punching in the data on the holographic keyboard. Olivier did not feel annoyed. He knew that the professor was good at multitasking.

“When will it be ready?” asked Olivier. “Lilian.”

“In principle, a week, but I will be more confident after a few days.”

“All right. Thank you, Yamada-san.”

Olivier shook the professor’s hand and said goodbye to the others. He asked to be notified of any developments, then left.

Olivier was cheerful on his way home. The project was progressing quite well. He believed that he had contributed to the stable operation of the organisation. No copies would ever escape, the clients wouldn’t be dissatisfied, and orders would keep coming. The beauty of it was that ordering clones was an addiction for the wealthy. Once they get a taste of it and think about the possibilities, they cannot stop giving new orders. He was born to do this job, and he would do anything to keep it.

12

Five days later, Olivier paid another visit to the lab. Yamada was not in, but he found one of his assistants, Tian. Olivier could not recall his surname but knew that he was from China, and he was wanted by the Chinese Armed Police Force for euthanasia-related charges. The company was looking out for people like Tian, good people in trouble with the law. They were talented but their opportunities were limited by international covenants or lack of money. They found Tian just in time, smuggled him to Japan, and offered him a job. Tian received training and had since been a loyal and outstanding employee. He had been working for the company longer than Olivier, and Olivier respected that. However, Tian could never think of Olivier as his superior. It was an unbearable thought. It was not about the way Olivier treated him or talked to him, but about his whole personality, his irritatingly kind manners and his cool, reptile-like gaze. He was upset by the hypocrisy in the world. It chilled him. Nevertheless, he had to tolerate Olivier because they were in the same boat, a huge boat in which they made money hand over fist.

Olivier stepped closer to the tank to see the progress of Lilian's development. The sight fascinated him. Lilian was floating in the middle of the tank, and for some strange reason she was curled into a foetal position, which was not typical of the templates, at least not until the foreign DNA is uploaded. The tubes had been taken out, only the light reflected on the wall of the tank spoiled the picture. Lilian floated peacefully, waiting to be born, and her hair, like a golden, fairy-tale creature covered her face as if to protect her from the inquisitive eye.

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“Amazing,” said Olivier. “As always.”

“Yes,” said Tian. “Life is marvellous.” He could not think of anything smarter to say.

“It really is,” said Olivier, with childlike wonder written all over his face. Tian could not decide if it was sincere or not. Olivier was a hell of an actor, so he’d better be cautious. At the same time, he was fair, and his sole purpose was to maintain the system. Tian acknowledged this, and in a way, he was grateful for him for holding the matters so firmly in his hands.

Tian couldn’t help it, but he could not stand the copies. He was disgusted by them. He had no choice but to work with them, and so he put up with his job, but he hated them. He couldn’t quite put his finger on why he had the feeling that their existence was so unnatural, so wrong. He suspected he was alone with this opinion, so he never mentioned it to anybody. That would have meant cutting the branch he was sitting on. And why would he do that?

“We are progressing well,” said Tian. “A few days and we can wake it up.” He tried to avoid Olivier’s gaze. Usually, he managed to pretend being busy. He was checking the monitors and reviewing “important” data.

“Is Yamada of the same opinion?” asked Olivier.

“Yes.”

“Excellent. Good job.”

“Memory conditioning is still in progress, though we are still in the early stages.”

“When can we deliver it?” asked Olivier.

“In two days,” said Tian. “In my opinion.”

Olivier let his eyes linger on the unfinished female body, then left without looking back at Tian.

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“Keep up the good work,” he said on his way back to the lift.
After he reached the surface, he took out his phone and called
Turner.

“Hallo.”

“This is Rolland Olivier. Three or four days and we will be ready,
Mr. Turner.”

13

That evening, Olivier had dinner with Aina Tanaka, his favourite employee from the company. He knew her as a cold-blooded, tough woman who could always be relied on. He was fond of her but thought of her only as a colleague.

Olivier knew that working with Tanaka guaranteed success. He liked spending time with her because she was his only female acquaintance he did not want to take to bed, so he could talk to her without any hidden motives.

The female workers of the company were considered taboo, and he made sure that every employee knew this rule, but meanwhile although he could talk with Kyo only about work, he could talk with Tanaka about anything. He also liked that away from work the otherwise cold and laconic Tanaka opened up and became friendly.

Tanaka was born and grew up in Japan. Thirty years old and single, she was both pretty and lethal. The toughest member of Olivier's team. Her black hair was shiny and straight, like a Japanese blade. There was an expression Olivier heard in a movie and found it applied to Tanaka perfectly: ghost in the sea breeze. This refers to a person who is not scared of her shadow. And Tanaka, who graduated from the police academy and was a master of three martial arts, was not afraid of many things in the world. So why did she not end up being a police officer? Because ninety-eight percent of all police officers were men who considered themselves modern day samurais and that the police force was no place for a woman. It did not matter that Tanaka was tougher than most of them, that she had a better understanding of the

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cases, or that she solved crimes and closed cases more often than her male counterparts did. In fact, these only made the situation worse. She could not fit in, so she left the force when she was approached by Olivier a year and a half ago. He enlisted her and they have been working together ever since. Tanaka now earns three times more than her former colleagues.

Olivier was of the opinion that Tanaka was more dangerous than most of the criminals he had the opportunity to meet. He had been certain of this since an event in Saint Petersburg, where Tanaka and Magnus were sent to obtain the DNA of a Russian tennis player. That was Tanaka's first mission, and everybody was eager to see if she would live up to expectations.

Tanaka and Magnus gained access to an event with at least five hundred invitees, the target person among them. Unfortunately, none of the diversions were successful and the athlete was infuriated when Jensen (the alias of Magnus) pinched her. The friends of the tennis player kept pushing Magnus away as he was drivelling on about being sorry and being a huge fan and that he just wanted to touch her. Then the bodyguards arrived and escorted him out. They began beating him up in a dark corner of the parking lot, and, though he was sober, he could not take on the three of them. Tanaka arrived at that point.

Tanaka, five feet five inches tall and a hundred and twenty-five pounds, attacked the three heavily built bodyguards. The unexpected attack and the startling size of Tanaka played into her hands. However, no one will ever know how much it really mattered because Tanaka was an unsportsmanlike and dirty fighter when she found herself in a real fight.

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She kicked the first guard in the temple with a six-foot high kick. He fell on the macadam as if he had been knocked out by an electric shock. Tanaka, her feet steady on the ground, kicked at the other guard's knee. The bones and cartilages broke with a cracking sound as his knee bent to the side. He hit the ground with a howl. The third man just stared and couldn't believe his eyes. He was 10 inches taller than Tanaka, and his shirt almost burst on his toned muscles. He made a step towards Tanaka, but it turned out to be a huge mistake. Tanaka stepped on his thigh to gain momentum and kicked the guard in the chin with her knee. His jawbone broke with a crack, his teeth knocked against each other, and three of them broke off. The man, before losing consciousness, felt as if a bomb had exploded in his head. He turned aside, fell to his knees, then stretched out on the ground, with an arm twisted under his body so it dislocated, and he later woke up with an unbearable pain.

The guard with the broken knee stopped wailing and cried out for help. Tanaka approached him so swiftly that the man thought she must have broken the rules of physics. She kicked him hard on the forehead, and as his head hit the ground, he received another punch to the back of his head. He passed out. No matter how muscular a person is, muscles don't grow on the temple, the knees, and the chin. After this, Magnus and Tanaka escaped before anyone responded to the cries for help. By the time the guards were found, they had been far away, with the sample in their possession.

The guards could not give a usable description of the attacker, so they decided not to disclose it to the police that a woman beat them up.

They knew who Magnus was, but he came forward with the explanation of being drunk as a skunk—confirmed by several invitees—and

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could not remember anything. He made no mention of Tanaka. He waited for them to mention Tanaka, but they did not bring her up. He suspected this might happen, as the guards must have been too embarrassed to admit being knocked out by a tiny Japanese woman.

After that mission, Tanaka had trouble sleeping for a few weeks. Her eyes were glued to the news and she kept pestering informants about the case. They would have been in a serious trouble if it had turned out that there was an ongoing investigation or anything suspicious was found on the security footage. Olivier would get furious if anyone set the police on the company. And, if Olivier got furious, you better vanish, and not show yourself.

Nowadays she recalls this story with a smile on her face because they got away and it was a good mission. Since then, Olivier has respected her, which was not a small privilege.

At the dinner, Olivier told Tanaka about the Turner-Bailey project, which at this time was transitioning to monitoring and clandestine observation.

After they finished discussing work, they immersed themselves in topics they could talk about only with each other. A little relaxation is necessary before a copy leaves the facility, because from that moment on everybody is on round-the-clock duty.

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While Olivier's team was hunting for Lilian's DNA in the holiday resort and then preparing her copy in the laboratory, Turner was making his own preparations by moving into his Hayama villa. He kept himself busy with making all the necessary arrangements for Lilian's arrival. He decided that he would spoil and pamper her, like in a romance novel. He would pretend that they had been together for years and this excursion would be like a honeymoon, just for the two of them, far from all their worries and problems. These two weeks would be a magical dream, a long vacation, a beautiful love story that—as Olivier had said—he would remember fondly in his later days.

Lilian, one of the prettiest women on earth, and he would spend two weeks on a Japanese beach. Maybe this was what everything had been leading up to, he thought. It was his destiny, and everything that had ever happened, happened that way because he needed to be here now. These two weeks would be the pivot of his life, after which he will turn fifty and begin growing old. Now this thought did not seem as tragic as it had before he met Olivier, and for this he was grateful to him. Olivier was a salesman, nonetheless; and he would be as friendly after their deal was over as any car dealer in a glittering showroom, but at least he was selling something precious: happiness. Perhaps others were in it for the fun and the sex, but for him these two weeks would mean happiness.

Turner kept reminding himself that this whole thing might still turn out to be an elaborate scam, a clever trick even he had not been able to foresee, despite of his good nose for swindlers. What if they knew that he was difficult to con and they were prepared?

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In the end, he decided that he would play their game and do everything to make the best of it. If Olivier's promise turns out to be true and they actually deliver a copy of Lilian to him that is. On the other hand, if Olivier had lied, then it would be a more costly lesson in his own gullibility than he had had in a long time.

The house he rented perfectly satisfied his expectations. Its style blended traditional Japanese architectural elements with modern Western design. Turner liked this because the Japanese style he was so fond of was apparent, but not to the extent that he would have to sit and sleep on the floor. There was an American style living room with a semi-detached kitchen and a large bar counter. A couch made from composite leather and a coffee table stood in it on a huge white Persian rug.

The furniture, the drawings and paintings on the walls, the sliding doors, the translucent paper over a frame of wood, and the wooden ceiling all reminded him that he was in Japan. The floor lamps—paper bodies in wooden frames—were rectangular.

A small corridor opened from the living room, which led to the bathroom, the toilet, and at the end a gigantic bedroom with an enormous king-sized bed. The bedroom was so romantic that Turner was certain that this room of the house could only function as a love nest, and the earlier tenants must have been couples. Looking at the floor mat, he knew that walking on it was foreplay in itself; it was so soft and delicate to the feet. He did not even notice the ambient light hidden in the room. However, he did notice the walk-in closet where there was space enough for four people, and he found a built-in safe for valuables.

The living room had two other doors, one leading to the garage, the other to the street. In addition, double sliding glass doors opened

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onto the terrace. The doors covered almost the entire wall and gave a view of the shore. When both sliding doors were wide open, the living room resembled a roofed terrace. The terrace was comfortably wide, with enough space for two sun loungers and a wooden table. Stairs led down to the garden, which was not particularly large but was artfully arranged with a neat rock garden, a small lawn as fresh and green as a golf course, and a Japanese maple tree with twisted branches providing a refreshing shade. Turner made plans to spend time with Lilian under that maple tree. Under its leaves, they would be hidden but still have a view of the sea, with a starry sky above and soft grass underneath them. It would be perfect.

Altogether, the house was simple, almost minimalistic, a typical feature of Japanese homes, just like the use of natural colours and materials. That was what made the villa so attractive and loveable. According to the Tao, the ambiance of a place should gain shape in the mind, not in physical reality, and this house was the embodiment of this principle. Everything implied something, yet it was subtle, and everything elicited good vibrations.

The house was equipped with modern electronic and kitchen appliances, serving the comfort of the tenants. A seventy-five-inch television screen hung on the wall of the living room. This model could be operated with gestures and displayed three-dimensional pictures without the viewer wearing any glasses.

The terrace offered a splendid view of the bay and Morito Beach to the right side of the house. The beach was farther away than the pictures had suggested but it was still visible. Turner had checked on whether the Japanese emperor really spent time there, and it turned out to be true, in winters, when there were few tourists.

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A fresh, steady breeze brought a salty tang from the sea, which Turner always associated with relaxation. As soon as he smelled its scent, as a Pavlovian response, he calmed down and his muscles loosened.

Turner owned only one residence. It was in New York, close to his office. He was the owner of several other properties, but he bought them only for investment purposes. He either obtained them at a good price or he intended to let them out.

He had never bought himself a summer house, a yacht, or even an automobile. He treated property like he treated women: he always wanted a new one or a different one. It was foolish to maintain a summer house, a beach, or an island, he thought, to vacation in the same place every year.

He preferred renting. Now a ship, the most modern and the latest model with her own crew. Now a hotel suite, or a house built on a ledge with a view of the turquoise sea or the deep blue ocean. He had also rented an island, and a variety of automobiles that most people never get to drive or even see. At the moment, he was renting a right-hand drive silver Toyota, a common vehicle, because he wanted to drive around without being noticed.

He hired his women too. He had no need for attachment. For an evening, for a weekend, for a several-week-long vacation. Obviously, not always prostitutes. He had several female acquaintances to whom he just mentioned he was about to travel to the Seychelles for ten days and they were welcome to join him. He would pay for everything and buy them anything they wanted. They rarely said no. And now he was renting a star. An actress, one of the most beautiful. For two weeks.

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Turner loaded the fridge and equipped the kitchen and the bathroom. He bought lingerie, shoes, manicure sets, shower gels, shampoos, clothes, everything to his own taste, but always keeping the style of the original Lilian in mind, as much as he could understand it as a man. When he wasn't certain, he bought several sizes.

He also bought a few kerchiefs, sunglasses, and hats in case Lilian needed to wear disguise on the streets. He even obtained a first aid kit to avoid calling an ambulance in the event of an emergency. He was careful not to buy too many things at the same place, for fear of someone remembering his face. It was unlikely that it would be a problem, but extreme caution is better than the smallest mistake—a phrase Turner kept repeating.

He bought himself a comfortable shirt, a pair of jeans and shoes, a second suit, and a laptop for correspondence and reading the latest news.

Turner put some cash in the safe of the house in case they needed to order something. After he was ready with everything, he began to enjoy the Hayama summer. He could not recall the last time he was idle for days. He was just sitting on the terrace, at times with a glass of cold beer in his hand, other times a cigarette, and watching the ocean, its never-ending waves, the people, lying, running around, and playing on the beach, and the sun as it slowly descended behind the horizon.

After moving in, he went for a run, as he had promised himself. He left early. The sun was up, but the beachgoers hadn't arrived yet. Running on the wet sand was a pleasant feeling. On the first day, he ran half a mile from one end of the beach to the other. By the time he reached the end, he was out of breath and felt a sharp pain in his side and in his chest. His heart was beating erratically, like wind chimes be-

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fore the storm. “Oh my God!” he thought. “I am in worse shape than I thought.”

He tried to gain control of his breathing as he was walking back. Cold sweat beaded his whole body and he felt like jumping into the ocean with his clothes on just to chill his burning face. He felt pins and needles in his limbs and was about to faint. He walked in a straight line, like a robot, and tried to inhale and exhale steadily. He felt better by the time he reached the house, but he had to accept that in the past years he had gotten out of shape. He decided to give up running because in the end he would push himself until he had a heart attack or a stroke before he could meet Lilian.

“Lilian, this man is Mr. Turner, he is the one who ordered you. He had a stroke, now he is a vegetable. Of course, you are just a copy, which basically makes neither of you is really alive. I’m going to leave you two alone now.”

One evening, Turner sat down with his laptop to learn more about Lilian. He had already skimmed through her biography, but now he went into the details and read that her mother was German with Hungarian origins, and her father had Polish and British ancestors. She was born in Dartford, southeast of London. In an interview, she mentioned that from her childhood she remembered the smell of the Thames, the shape of the trees, and the green parks where she used to play.

Early on, her father had recognised the possibilities hidden in the exceptional beauty of his daughter: hence, he quit his well-paying job and moved the family to London, close to the action. It was not that he wanted to put their daughter on the market, but that, if given the chance, she would be able to make it as a model, a musician, or an actress.

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Her father managed her relentlessly, took her to auditions, made her take singing lessons; however, for a long time it seemed that there was nothing special in her. The turning point came when she was picked for a part in a movie.

From that point on, there was no stopping, but the road to success was longer and bumpier than they had ever imagined. Since her movie last year, she was hailed as one of the best young actresses. She achieved success, although so far only in the United States and on the continent. However, her latest movie attracted tremendous international interest.

With regard to her acting skills, well, they do not really matter in the film industry because scenes are re-done repeatedly until they are perfect. Still, Lilian worked hard, attended night school and hired private tutors and acting coaches because she wanted to be not only the prettiest but also the best. Though she was still young, “She was on her way to being mentioned on the same page with the most remarkable actresses, like Meryl Streep and Jessica Lange,” according to a well-known film critic.

Turner closed the browser. He had the strange feeling that it was not fair to pry into her life, while she knew nothing about him. In fact, if he understood Olivier well, Lilian, the copy, wouldn't know much about herself either. He decided to stop researching. What will be, will be.

He spent most of his time on the terrace, under the clear blue sky, and the view was beautiful. From up there he could see everything, but nobody saw him. When he wasn't sleeping, he was wondering about things like the cooking skills of the original Lilian. What about her copy, how would she look at him? Her love would be stimulated, but

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how would they make her believe that she loves him? Is that even possible? Could the whole thing turn out to be a huge failure? Would she end up not consenting to sex, making him a rapist? Could the whole relationship go from bad to worse, after which he would see her taken away to be smashed like a faulty doll? Questions like these kept popping up in his mind, but he tried not to dwell on such worst-case scenarios.

Instead, there was reason to expect that this August would be among the best ones of his life, Turner thought. It had not rained, and he had hardly seen any clouds since moving in. Time passed more quickly and pleasantly than he had expected. He felt more rested, younger, stronger, and more balanced. His instincts, which seldom failed him, promised an exciting adventure.

A few years before, he had received business proposition accompanied by advance notice of a new product. On paper, the description of the product and the plans for launching it seemed fine. All they needed was capital injection. Turner sat down with the owners and heard them out. Brody was quickly convinced, and Turner was almost persuaded to invest in the project. Their background check did not result in any cause for concern about the company or its owners, who were spotless, young, and energetic. Even so, something gave him pause.

In the end, Turner said no but he could not explain why. Brody was practically yelling at him, but he was adamant. He sensed trouble but he did not know when it would come. Perhaps it was one of the owner's odd flicker of an eyelid that tipped him off, or perhaps a subconsciously perceived silent vibration. After all, what is instinct if not the harmonic combination of refined alertness and intuition? Turner had both. A week later, it turned out that the product had not been properly tested,

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the marketing authorisations were faked, the subscribed capital of the company had vanished; moreover, two of the three owners were found to owe money to loan sharks. Brody could not apologise enough and never again doubted any of Turner's decisions. Turner was happy to have such abilities because business is like a wilderness. If you are not alert, you fall prey.

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Turner's father—a retired colonel, also by the name of Robert Turner—died of a heart attack on a sunny autumn afternoon in Danbury, Connecticut, when his only son turned twenty-five. Later, it became clear that he had suffered from a congenital heart disease that nobody had known about as none of his medical exams had detected it. He lived fifty-one years.

Father and son had severed ties long before that, and Robert Turner, Jr. did not even attend the funeral. He was the complete opposite of his father, an apple that fell far from the tree.

As a child, Turner was full of spirit, and he had always had an interest in modern things and the pleasures of life; meanwhile, his father was old-fashioned and conservative, a strong, tall man who, in his later years, after leaving the military, lost weight and developed a stooped posture. The once muscular, authoritative, and proud colonel became a gaunt, retired vet, who had a hard time accepting this change.

He could not express his love for his son—if indeed he had any. Their relationship was akin to that of a superior and a subordinate. He had spent too much time in the army and too little with his family.

He never said it aloud, but he had never wanted a child, and the arrival of baby Robert deeply distressed him. He had no idea how to handle the situation. He did not know what to do with a babbling, kicking infant who was always drooling and crying. Army regulations did not provide any information on this subject. He believed that there was only one proper way to raise a child: to impose rules upon him, then to send him away to military school. There he could learn everything he

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needed to become a decent man. His philosophy was that if everything in the world was run like the military, then there would be order and peace, and leaders would have to climb the ladder step by step to reach their positions. Consequently, they would be qualified to do their jobs, unlike the way it was in these days. He had no first-hand knowledge of the world beyond the military, and the only time he read political news was when they had something to do with the military.

Turner, Jr. was repulsed by the army and did everything he could to escape it. During his high school years, he showed ingenuity in small business deals, thus, by the age of seventeen he could afford to move to a boarding school. That was the year he left his parents' house. By the time he went to college, he had put aside substantial savings, which he re-invested and was able to pay for his own studies. When he graduated, he already owned an apartment and had a successful investment firm. During this period, his parents were living on the colonel's pension.

His mother, Amelia Turner, worked at the Danbury post office, but her salary did not contribute much to the family budget. As a mother, she was quite oblivious to her own shortcomings. She wasn't a smart woman, but in her twenties, when Col. Turner asked for her hand, she was pretty. The colonel did not have the luxury to be picky: he had neither the time, nor the disposition for that. Besides, there was hardly a woman who would endure the blindly patriotic colonel and his compulsive habit of sticking to rules.

Amelia accepted the man destined to be her husband unconditionally. That was all she could do. Unfortunately for Robert, when the colonel did not talk to his young son for a week, then neither did she say a word to the child. When little Robert was scolded by his father,

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she also kept her distance. When father and son managed to exchange a few words, she joined the conversation during dinner.

In rare moments, they appeared to be an average little family, but in reality, their relationship had been slowly deteriorating from the beginning, until the night came when their son moved out of the house. His father forbade him to leave but that was only fuel to the fire. Robert said goodbye and left the city with tears in his eyes. He was crying because he hated his parents. He was crying because he was sorry that it was all he got from life and he felt it was unfair. He was crying because he was free at last, and the world was waiting for him.

At the beginning of his first successes, Turner lived a bohemian life, a life full of violence, as though he was looking for a way to shake off the bitterness accumulated in his childhood, a bitterness that he dragged behind him like a bag of rocks. His troubled, violent, and self-destructive years taught him that there were few people he could rely on. He also realised that he would be destroyed if he continued further down that road. On his thirtieth birthday, he made a promise to slow down, to be kind to people—who were in no way responsible for his miserable childhood—and swore that he would take his work more seriously. After that, his business began booming.

He felt awful that his parents never tried to contact him, as if they were happy to have gotten rid of him. It was not that he was an unruly child. In fact, he was smart and skilled in financial matters, but for the Turner parents the child himself was the source of the problem. Merely having an additional human being in the house was more than they could handle.

Turner learned by accident of the colonel's death. He found out about it when he was searching his own name on the Internet, trying

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to find out if anything was being written about him. He was thirty-one at that time and he was moving in the upper circles of society, in the world of investments and real estate deals. Reading the news—that his father had died six years earlier—he wondered what could have happened to his mother, but even as he started to reach for the phone, he knew he could not call her. At the bottom of his heart, he felt sorry for his mother, but he was also afraid that his mother would take his call with complete indifference or that she would deny ever knowing him.

This was exactly what he was grateful to his parents for—rejection. It drove him to success. Because they had never loved him, because they had planned a dreary military life for him—these conditions propelled him to leave his home and stand on his own two feet as soon as possible.

Turner believed that there comes a point in the history of every family when the gap between the two generations is so large that the family inevitably falls apart and a new dynasty is built. In their case, no new dynasty was built because he never had and never would have a child. Nevertheless, the first part had come true. The family had fallen apart.

Turner had been relaxing in Hayama for ten days when Olivier visited him. He arrived on a black motorcycle, which—despite being electric—emitted a malicious, deep rumble. It was far more powerful than the petrol bikes of old times. Under the motorcycle jacket, as always, he was wearing a suit. He smiled and greeted Turner like an old friend.

Turner knew that Olivier’s pleasantries were part of the business-people like him are always nice when they smell money—but he was glad to see him.

“Lovely house, Mr. Turner,” said Olivier, stepping into the living room. He walked out to the terrace to check the view. The ocean radiated iridescent shades of blue and green that can be seen only at the zenith of summer. Thanks to the clean sea-air, he could see to the distant horizon. “And the view, it is marvellous. The Sagami Bay.”

“Yes,” said Turner. “I like it too. I’m having a good time here.”

“I bet you are, but not like you will.”

“Anything to drink?”

“Orange juice, if you have some.”

“I do.”

“Great. You should have some on hand. Lilian likes it.”

“Really?” said Turner as he walked to the fridge and poured out a glass.

“I have brought you a list about Lilian. We’ve gathered a few things about her that might be useful to you if you want to please her.” Olivier put a sheet of paper on the glass coffee table of the living room. “You can also ask her about these things; however, she may not remember

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everything at first. Although her memories about her favourite things will surface soon. It is better to be familiar with them than to confuse her with questions early on.”

“I see. Thank you,” said Turner, handing him the glass. “Please sit down. I hope you are not in a hurry.”

Turner gestured toward the armchair. Olivier sat down. Turner ran his eyes over the list.

“Well, the point is,” said Olivier, “she will like having her favourite things, and it is advisable to avoid a few things she dislikes.” Turner nodded.

“I did some online research on cloning,” said Turner. “I still cannot imagine how it is possible to copy a person in a single week, but I don’t want to imply that this is a scam,” he said with an inquisitive smile because he did not want to offend Olivier.

Olivier put down the glass. He liked using both hands to gesticulate.

“All right. I am going to try to skip the parts that would ruin the illusion. Our method is based on cell fission and resembles classical cloning very little. We keep the templates in a laboratory. These are clones—blanks, if you will—that do not have any distinctive features yet. They are grown from egg cells in artificial wombs in approximately three years. The target person’s DNA is then uploaded into the template via a computer-guided process, and the template’s DNA adopts its features. After a week, it reaches a stage where there are no apparent differences between them. In fact, the process of assimilation does not stop until the template becomes a completely identical copy of the original. Identical in the truest sense of the word: in appearance, in memories, in preferred clothing style, and even in the way they speak.

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Turner sat silently and listened to Olivier.

“The problem with the previous technology, with clones developed in human wombs, was that the process took as long as a natural human being’s, so in our case, Lilian’s copy would be ready only after twenty-eight years. Moreover, the clones’ typical weaknesses would surface during this period. Most of the time, their immune system is weak and growth disorders are also frequent, not to mention that they would grow up in a different time, in a different environment, so yes, there would be a resemblance, but the clone would not be identical to the target person.

“How is it possible to transform a grown human being into another human being?” asked Turner. “Don’t the templates have their own DNA?”

“The templates are not human beings. Their cells represent an intermediary state between stem cells and fully developed somatic cells. They are past the stem cell state and develop into organs, but they do not reach the final state until they receive the command about the exact state to which they should assimilate. Gurdon and Yamanaka received a Nobel Prize in Medicine for retrogressing developed cells into stem cells, then reprogramming them into other kinds of cells. I wonder if they ever thought that what we do here is the next stage of their discovery.”

“I also read that memory is not stored in the cells of the body. But in the office, you said that the copies can recall the memories of their original.”

“According to the current state of the art, there is no proof of body memory, but at the same time we are certain that information is stored not only in the brain and not akin to a computer’s data storage unit. In-

deed, it is true that traditional embryonic cloning does not allow for the transfer of memory and there is also the long development period, but in our laboratories, we make copies like a photocopier does. The template's assimilation is so complete that even electrical patterns, memories, and biorhythms are transferred. I myself cannot explain the details of how this is all possible, yet it does happen. The field of research closest to my heart postulates that the DNA stores far more information than we are capable of decoding at this time. For instance, the evolutionary history of mankind can be traced back based on the genetics, including DNA and RNA, quite reliably. That is how we know when humans split from other species and how large the genetic difference between certain species is. For instance, research has been able to show how mice pass on fear to the next generation. If you think about it, the basic physiological reactions necessary for survival are also hereditary. These include defence mechanisms, perceptions regarding the edibility of food, or reactions to foreign bodies. We call these instincts, but they are essentially information like any other, and are inevitably innate in everybody. What I am getting at is that humans store information in all kinds of ways, and we just do not understand its nature yet."

"Hmm. I have to admit that I did not dig quite that far into the subject," said Turner. Olivier drank the orange juice and continued.

"I like contemplating these questions. Let us call it an occupational hazard. I would like to understand better the way the mind operates, but after a certain point it is beyond our comprehension just like the other side of a singularity."

Turner nodded in agreement.

"In my non-professional opinion," said Olivier, "since no human clone has ever been born, at least not officially, we cannot know how

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much memory would be transferred if the clone underwent the process of embryonic development. The key to our technology is that the brain does not start developing from scratch. It is just as developed as any human adult's except that it does not contain any information. As soon as the cells receive the command to develop in a specified way, they follow the instructions, and memory follows. It is like copying a painting dot by dot. We do not need to see the whole painting. It is enough if we know the exact location and colour of each dot, and in the end, a new painting emerges. The brain is the most complex organ, that is why it is the last to assimilate, and that is why memories surface only two weeks later.”

“Sounds logical,” said Turner. He felt a little dumb next to Olivier but knew that it was only a question of the topic. He would be the smarter one if the subject were the automobile industry or real estate investments. Or, who knows, perhaps women too. Olivier must have had his own experiences, but he was ten years his senior, and he would not call his past decade idle. At any rate, he was dying for a whiskey, and he was waiting for an occasion to stand up, but Olivier continued, but in the end, Turner did not mind.

“Based on what we now know, there are two types of memory, one you can consciously recall, composed of experience and information, and the other is implicit memory, which involves the performance of certain tasks without conscious awareness. To put it simply: knowing what and knowing how are two different things. Using state-of-the-art nanotechnology and a supercomputer, we stimulate the brain cells of the copies to strengthen their implicit memory. Lilian's explicit memory about her roles, awards, plans, and the names of her friends will be filtered. Our conditioning processes are so advanced that we can man-

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age these areas separately, and we can speed up the assimilation process. Lilian will be able to walk, run, ride a bike, and use a spoon, but she will not know that she is a famous actress who lives in the United States. Every new piece of information will stimulate self-identification. Anything can prompt this process and the copy will not realise that anything is out of place. A copy will not notice the gradual growth of their abilities. For example, initially they have difficulties using cutlery but after the second and third attempt, they can use it like their originals. The same applies for everything else. Things like childhood, daily job, career, and so on, each will surface slowly because she won't think about them much, especially now that she won't be in her usual environment."

"So, if we were to place her into her original environment, then she would behave like the original in a few days?"

"Perhaps in a week. Yes. We have not tested anything like that before because it is against our policy, but I think that a singer would even remember her songs in a few weeks. However, paramnesia frequently occurs when these memory fragments surface."

"Déjà vu."

"Yes, but neither you, nor Lilian will notice it. It comes and goes," said Olivier, thinking for a few seconds. "Life is beautiful, and the human body is wonderful, but at the same time they are full of mysteries."

"It really is difficult to even think about these things," said Turner, rubbing his temples, which somewhat eased his thirst for a whiskey.

"But you do not have to. As I said, all you need to do is enjoy the company of your favourite actress for two weeks." Olivier smiled.

"Sounds good," said Turner, smiling. "Let's drink to that. Would you like another glass of orange juice?"

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“No, thank you,” said Olivier.

Turner stood, poured himself a whiskey and settled back in the armchair. Olivier waited until Turner made himself comfortable, then continued: “If you want my advice, avoid any information that would bring her closer to her original personality. Talk to her about general things. When she asks questions, you can tell her anything and she will accept it.”

“But she won’t be empty-headed, right?” asked Turner. “I hope you are not bringing me a dumb blonde doll.”

“No, not at all. You will get a copy of the original Lilian; however, on account of the conditioning, she won’t be in the loop on the original’s current affairs. To be more precise, the copies receive a simplified version of the original’s identity. The important thing is that she will love you and take for granted anything you say. If you do not feel like talking, then you can give her an evasive answer and she will be happy with that too. You will have full control over her for two weeks.”

“And what about... I mean, will she be any good in bed?”

“Let me assure you that everything will be fine. The knowledge of the original Lilian will be transferred to her copy; in fact, it will be intensified, as you requested.”

“And what about her makeup? Will she be able to do it on her own?”

“Certainly not in the first week, but she won’t need to. In accordance with your specifications, she will have modest makeup on as long as she is with you.”

Turner nodded, involuntarily wondering what all this would eventually mean, then he returned his attention to Olivier.

“Wouldn’t it be possible to cure lethal diseases with this technology? You could save famous people. Important people.”

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“A copy is not the original, no matter how identical it is. From the perspective of the original, this solves nothing. They die anyway. Obviously, it makes no difference to the world, but yes, it is true that we can eliminate any disease from the copy, just like deleting a couple of lines from a code. However, there is another far greater hitch to it. If we do all this in secret, then people will be wondering how a sick person has been cured just over a month. We would refute the diagnoses of reputable physicians, physicians who had diagnosed a lethal disease and predicted the probable date of death. A miraculous healing would not go unnoticed, and it would pique the interest of several organisations, and this would not benefit us.”

“You could use the clones as organ donors,” said Turner, although he did not want to delve too deeply into the subject. It was probable that Olivier and his co-workers had looked at these opportunities a long time ago. He was angry with himself for speaking before thinking. But after all, he enjoyed Olivier’s company. He had not had a visitor ever since he moved into the villa.

“This has come up, and it is undeniably a profitable line of business, but the risk is high because it would be difficult to seek out those who are rich, sick, can be saved with our methods, and at the same time would keep the treatment confidential.”

“That is true,” said Turner, hoping the topic was closed. “At any rate, the technology itself is fascinating, if everything really happens the way you’ve described it.”

“I know it all sounds incredible,” said Olivier, “I also had a hard time believing it. I did not sleep for months after they first showed the copies to me. I could not comprehend it. Today, I accept it without thinking too much about the details.”

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“How long have you been in the business?” asked Turner.

“For three years.”

“That’s enough time to gain an insight into the operations, to understand what goes on in the background.”

“What can I say? My work is my hobby.” Olivier spread his arms and put them back on the armrest. Turner broke the silence.

“Have you ever ordered someone?”

“Oh, no, Mr. Turner,” said Olivier with a surprisingly elegant chuckle. “I am well-off but not that well-off.”

“I am sure you would get an employee discount,” said Turner. Olivier had a hearty laugh. Their professional discussion was obviously turning into a friendly chat.

“Yes, probably.”

“Well, if your intention in coming here was to make me more eager to meet Lilian, it certainly worked.”

“I am glad to hear it. I am sure you will not be disappointed,” said Olivier, standing up from the armchair and comfortably buttoning his suit jacket. “I will not take up any more of your time. I will leave you to relax.”

“When will she arrive?”

“How would tomorrow suit you?”

A wide smile crossed Turner’s face. He could hardly conceal his childlike enthusiasm.

“Perfectly fine.”

“All right. Look for us around ten in the morning.” Olivier held out his hand and Turner shook it. Olivier put on his jacket and helmet, looking like a bad boy from John Woo’s old action movies. Turner did not escort him out. He poured another drink and settled back into the

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armchair to think over what Olivier had just said. He heard the other-worldly growl of the motorcycle as he drove away.

He was too psyched to be let down. They could not have been pulling his leg; it could not be a trap or a scam. After all, he had seen the clones in their ensemble. They must have made a copy of Lilian.

He stayed out on the terrace until it was dark. By half past eight, the bay was transformed into a large black void. Only the sound of the waves crashing the shore indicated the proximity of the sea. The lights of the city were glowing in a semicircle, like embers on the edge of a black sheet of paper. Turner sipped a few glasses of whiskey and went to bed around nine.

He did not think it would be possible, but he fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow. God bless the one who invented whiskey.

The next morning after breakfast, Turner sat out on the terrace as usual, but first he opened the garage for Olivier so that he could pull into it when he arrived. He was beginning to like the porch with its comfortable folding chairs, huge sunshades, and pillows, overlooking the bay. In Hayama, he felt a long-forgotten peace, or perhaps it was the first time he felt it in his life. This stillness and idleness, he thought, was much closer to him than the feverish work of the previous thirty, maybe thirty-five years. He was reluctant to imagine doing this for the rest of his life, but he was not opposed to the idea as much as he would have been a year ago.

A car turned toward his house and pulled into the garage at eight minutes past ten in the morning. Turner went into the living room. He was over the moon with excitement, like a six-year-old kid about to open his birthday presents. He never imagined his body could produce so much adrenaline. His eyes were fixed on the wooden door to the garage, as if he were waiting for a miracle.

He heard the shutters of the garage door closing, and then the approaching footsteps. High heels, no doubt. The door leading to the garage opened and Lilian Bailey stepped in, the actress, the woman of his dreams. Turner stood, stiff as a marble statue, staring at her in astonishment. He wondered whether it was possible to have a heart attack induced by the sight of a woman, but he hoped not.

Lilian was gorgeous. She wore a stunning dress. She could have been on the cover of any leading fashion magazine. Her short white dress perfectly fit her slender form. Her turquoise, floppy hat made

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her look like an elegant socialite, adored by every man, like an Audrey Hepburn or a Brigitte Bardot. Her dress and makeup made her look older than twenty-eight, but not less lovely.

She took off her hat and gently threw back her hair. The golden locks and waves obediently fell into place, but first they swung to the side, like the popper of a whip that strikes those that dare come close enough. Without the hat, Turner could see her sweet, angelic face, and how young she really was. What an interplay of evolution, generations, and genes was needed so that finally such a beautiful woman could be formed?

Lilian took off her glasses and looked at Robert. As the blonde curls playfully fell into her light blue eyes, Turner knew he would fall in love with her. His heart was hammering like a teenager's before his first kiss.

“Robert,” she said, her face lighting up to see him, as if they had been together for a hundred years and she had just returned home from a short trip, and Turner really did feel that way. His life before that moment became a blur, and instead a life lived with Lilian became clear in front of his eyes so that Lilian was not the only one who had imaginary memories.

“Lilian,” said Turner below his breath, a bit confused.

Lilian stepped closer, putting her hat and sunglasses on the kitchen counter. Her heeled sandals lightly whispered across the floor. Her subtle cleavage suggested shapely breasts that gently bounced with every step. Lilian walked up to Turner, threw her arms around his neck, and kissed him.

If I don't die of heart attack right now, then I will live forever, thought Turner after their kiss had ended. During that first kiss, the

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world ceased to exist, only brilliant stars whirled in infinite space and infinite time. The universe was spinning around him, and everything was suffused with passionate, rainbow-scented happiness.

It was a wonderful feeling to embrace Lilian, and he felt the heat of her body. She pressed close against him and nestled up to him. This cannot be copied, only a live human organism is capable of this, he thought. Lilian must be a real human being, not a machine, not a trick. It really is her! Turner had held many women in his arms before, but Lilian not only embodied the noblest femininity, there was also an innocent charm in her that was lost in most women. Her purity, noble posture, and her bewilderingly perfect shape made her stand out in the ranks of beautiful women.

Olivier stepped in from the garage. Turner asked Lilian to make herself comfortable for a minute and he would be all hers, but before that he needed to talk to Mr. Olivier. Lilian smiled, caressed Turner's face, and sat down on the couch in the living room. She crossed her legs and adjusted the bottom of her skirt in a way Turner found exceptionally graceful.

Although it physically hurt him to take his eyes off Lilian, Turner stepped to Olivier, who was standing by the counter.

"Is everything all right, Mr. Turner?" asked Olivier with his usual charm.

"It seems so. Thank you for bringing Lilian home. Let me escort you to your car, Mr. Olivier," said Turner. Olivier nodded and they walked out to the garage. A dark—maybe maroon, it was difficult to tell in the dim light of the garage—convertible Corvette parked next to Turner's Toyota. It was freshly washed, and it matched Olivier's tie that on that day was of the same colour.

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“This is incredible,” said Turner, pointing back, toward Lilian, without trying to hide his joy. Olivier closed his eyes contentedly, then opened them and smiled.

“I am glad that you are satisfied, Mr. Turner. I leave you two alone now. You know the rules: we will come if you call us, otherwise, we will not disturb you. See you in two weeks, until then, have a good time.”

It was nice of Olivier that he did not say, “We are coming for Lilian.” Neither did he ask for the money. It was obvious that Turner was obliged to wire it, which he would do most readily, without hesitation. That wonderful woman! Even if she was just a copy, she was worth every cent.

“The financial matters will be taken care of this evening,” said Turner. Olivier nodded again, as he handed over an envelope. Turner slipped it into his back pocket.

“Goodbye, Mr. Turner. And have a good time,” he said.

Olivier climbed into the sports car. Turner opened the garage door and closed it after the convertible pulled out. On his way back, standing in front of the door, he was overcome by the terrible feeling that Lilian wouldn't be in the house. It was all an illusion, Olivier's brilliant trick, and he would receive a certificate for becoming a member of the Club of Conned Rich Men, on the entertainment program of Rolland Olivier, on television every Saturday night.

To his relief, though, Lilian was still sitting there. She recrossed her long legs and was flipping through the pages of a magazine she found on the glass coffee table. She brightened up as she saw Turner.

“Oh, Robert, I have missed you so much,” she said. Turner was stunned but it didn't seem to bother Lilian. Her voice was soft, free from pretence and feigned affection.

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Turner had to focus to play the role that Lilian expected. Everything happened as Olivier said it would. He and Lilian were a couple. They were together. In a relationship. Despite all his preparations and the many times he had imagined their first meeting, now he was surprised at the intimacy coming from a stranger. She was not direct in the way women are who try to pick him up, or twenty-thirty-odd-year-old girls who in a drunken stupor snuggle up to him at a party. Lilian's disposition toward him was sincere, and she didn't have ulterior motives. She loved him and he was her partner.

"I missed you too," said Turner. Sitting beside her, he took her in his arms, and they kissed again, this time longer. Turner was thinking about sitting out on the terrace, but the kiss didn't stop, and their arms tightened around each other. Right now? Turner was reminded that according to his request Lilian not only loved him but was sexually attracted to him. This gorgeous woman wanted him. For his part, he was more than willing to that she got what she wanted.

Turner practically tore off her clothes, but she was not idle either. She freed him of his trousers with surprising dexterity. Lilian's skin was gentler to the touch than the most expensive silks, and he could not see any birthmarks, scars, or warts on it. Turner could not stop caressing her, he could hardly believe it was all real. He felt a lifetime would not be enough to grow tired of her. Although a bit clumsy at first, she soon became more adept. To Turner it seemed she would be momentarily unsure of what to do next, but then quickly move past her tentativeness to a well-practiced familiarity.

They made love first on the couch and then on the Persian rug, all within fifteen minutes. Turner could not believe he had just done that or even that he was still capable of that. Afterwards, they lay on the

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couch in each other's arms, and Turner started wondering if there was any way to keep the copy, although he knew that he shouldn't entertain the idea even for a second.

I just had sex with Lilian Bailey, he told himself, but he had to repeat it several times before he could comprehend that it had really happened. This is mind-blowing!

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," said Turner. Lilian smiled, nestled up to him and pecked him on the neck for the compliment.

When Turner thought the time was right, he proposed having a shower together. He sent Lilian ahead and was treated to the vision of her walking through the living room naked, in high heels. Turner watched her hips swinging, her round bottom moving, and her muscles tightening as she walked. Just think, this was all his. Only his. For two weeks.

After the one-hour bathroom scene, Turner showed Lilian her wardrobe. She was happy but not fascinated. Turner concluded that she did not understand the value of this gift because she was not fully aware of things yet. He decided not to dwell on the matter, although there were so many clothes in the wardrobe, all of premium quality, that she could wear something different every day for a month.

Turner had a skill that always surprised everybody: he was a great cook, even though he rarely practised it. At college, he soon realised that with a special ability it was easy to sweep a girl off her feet. This ability could be dancing, playing the guitar, a sport, or cooking.

The first two options, including any other instrument, were out of the question because he did not have an ear for music. He liked listening to music behind the wheel, but he never bothered with collecting

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music. Doing sports was not his cup of tea either. He was active but only to stay in shape, not because he had any goals in that area.

He had always been jealous of those guys who produced their guitars at a campfire and he had tried playing different variations of the same chords but simply had no knack for the instrument. He had to think of something. He needed to come up with something that girls would be all over.

Then one day he noticed a cooking course in the university's newsletter and decided to try it. He had always had an interest in gourmet food and had a little flair for spices, but only as a consumer of them. Ten people participated in the course, himself and nine college girls. He knew right after the first class that it would end well. Suddenly he had a conversation topic with nine girls instead of the usual "Hi, so you go to this university too?" After the course ended, he checked out online cooking shows and cookbooks to improve his skills. In the end, he even invented recipes, always keeping in mind the taste of women. He preferred small-size portions prepared in some special way. It surprised even him how much he got a taste for it. Another advantage of cooking was that he could invite women over to his place to have dinner, and thus avoid the awkward your-place-or-mine conversation after restaurant meals.

He always enjoyed the moment when it was revealed that he was good in the kitchen, very good indeed, and most women's jaw dropped, or at least they were pleasantly surprised, regardless of first impressions and preconceptions. They let him get closer, as if he were playing the guitar.

Lilian would be different, but he was certain that she would value his cooking skills. Turner prepared a light, but tasty Italian dish of

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bruschetta and penne pasta with pesto sauce. He selected a Japanese merlot for the lunch he served them out on the patio.

At first, Lilian held the knife and fork awkwardly. Turner did not look at her fumbling, but held the cutlery above his plate, so that Lilian could notice them and imitate him. Then, as if by magic, her memory suddenly came into place, and she was using the cutlery like the original Lilian somewhere five thousand miles away. It was interesting that she did not notice her momentary lapse of ability. She did not wonder why she did not know by instinct how to use the cutlery.

After clearing the table, Turner put the rest of the penne in a bowl and passed the aluminium foil to Lilian to wrap it up. Lilian held the aluminium foil, looked at it, and then looked at the bowl. Seeing that she was puzzled, he reached for the box of foil.

“See,” he explained as he pulled out a square of foil and pressed it over the bowl, “Turner saw that she was confused and readily helped her, like a good parent would. He explained to her that it was a thin metal sheet, then showed her how to unroll it and put it on the bowl. This is important to keep the food fresh so we can eat it in the evening or tomorrow.” Lilian understood and liked the way Turner explained it.

After lunch, they sat out on the terrace and had coffee. The sun was blazing, and in the distance, there was the Morito Beach filled with vacationers.

Lilian picked up the cup by the handle. It almost slipped out of her hand, but then she managed to hold it firmly. They sat in silence. Turner was wondering what they should talk about. Why hadn't he thought of this sooner? He could not ask her to talk about herself, and he could not ask her about her plans for the future. She was in this world for two

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weeks, and she would spend them on the shore with Robert in peaceful ignorance. He would use her as long as he had the chance, and he wouldn't mull over it. That's what he needed to do. That's what he paid for; this was the service.

“Robert, I would like to have a swim in the sea.”

“Why not? We will go tomorrow. Okay?”

“Great.”

“But this is not the sea, but a bay on the Pacific coast of Japan. You know, the ocean is larger.”

Lilian nodded even though if Turner had asked her a moment ago, she would not have known the difference between the Pacific and the Atlantic Ocean. She would not have figured it out on her own. It was this conversation that brought the knowledge to the surface.

After finishing their coffee Turner dozed off in the large folding chair. The sound of the monotonous waves of the ocean lulled him to sleep. Lilian covered him with a blanket and went into the house. She looked around and walked through the whole villa. She was in a good humour because she knew that she was in the right place. She was on a vacation with Robert. She walked into the bedroom and thoroughly examined her clothes. They were made of fine materials and pleasing colours.

She drew her hands across the line of clothes hanging on the racks and got down on her knees to see the shoes. She took them in her hands and was inspecting them, when a strange word popped into her head. It seemed to come from afar, or perhaps from somewhere deep within, but she did not understand it: *sangel*. She knitted her brows, looking to her side, thinking, but she did not understand this word. She stood and continued looking around the house. The other wardrobe was full of Robert's clothes, and behind them, she found a steel box. A safe.

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She drew her hands across Robert's clothes as she did with her own. She walked into the bathroom and felt pins and needles all over. Her hands flew up to her mouth, as if trying to hide a tiny smile lured out by fresh memories. *Earlier, I had a good time with Robert. I love him,* she thought.

She found the laptop on the kitchen countertop. It looked unfamiliar; she had never seen anything like that before. She opened it up and it automatically switched on, which startled her, so she quickly closed it back. Turner had set the laptop to silent mode so it did not make a sound. Lilian would have felt gratitude if she had known how significant that was.

Lilian liked the huge living room. She felt good in it. She picked up a magazine from the coffee table and went out to the terrace. Turner was still asleep. She sat down beside him and started flipping through the pages. The letters were blurry, but the pictures were interesting. She saw pretty women, shoes, and clothes, similar to those in her wardrobe. Makeup kits, jewellery, and—*I know what this is*—a mmmobile phone, and similar devices.

Turner woke up an hour later. Lilian was standing by the railing, gazing at the bay and the sea gulls circling above. It was a clear, bright afternoon, and Mt. Fuji was visible on the horizon.

“Are you hungry?” he asked Lilian. She shook her head.

“There is ice cream. Want some?”

She shrugged her shoulders and nodded. “Sure,” she said smiling. Turner scooped the ice cream into two cups and brought it out to the terrace.

He was talking about general things and made her laugh several times. The rest of the world around their tiny place seemed to have

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been wrapped in mist. They were eating ice cream, at times from each other's spoon, at times smearing it on each other's face so they could lick it off.

Through the afternoon, Turner continued in a half-awake, half-asleep state. The hot summer mist and the salty air alone could numb the senses, just like the ocean's endless and hypnotic crash of waves. They spent the afternoon in the house and on the terrace. They ate, drank, pampered each other, and did whatever they felt like doing. "I cannot believe that this is happening" and "I must be dreaming, or it is reality?" Turner kept repeating the whole day. He hardly took his eyes off Lilian during the day.

By sunset, they were sitting on the terrace again. Turner in shorts, and Lilian wrapped only in a blanket. That is how she cuddled up to Turner to watch the first sunset of her life.

"Do you see the sun?" asked Turner, pointing toward Mt. Fuji. Lilian put on her sunglasses, and she shielded her eyes from the sun with her hand.

"Yes," she said. The sun disk had just touched the peak of Mt. Fuji. It slowly descended upon it, like a glowing ball of fluff. In complete harmony.

"The moment the sun aligns with the peak of Mt. Fuji is called Diamond Fuji."

"Beautiful," said Lilian, turning her eyes away because the sun was still too bright, and anywhere she looked, the white disk of the sun was dancing in front of her eyes.

"That is the highest peak in Japan," said Turner. This made her think. Not about the mountain, but the fact that they were in Japan. She couldn't recall anything about this country, or any other place she

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had been before, but this train of thought got inexplicably derailed in her mind before she could find an answer.

They lay outside until it was completely dark, then Turner went inside to prepare dinner. They made love before going to sleep, but this time Turner wasn't as avid as in the morning. He pleased Lilian and enjoyed every nook and cranny of her body.

Turner smoked several cigarettes during the day, but it did not bother Lilian at all. Everything Turner did seemed natural to her.

They fell asleep in each other's arms. On that day, Turner's last thought was that it was worth it.

Olivier was glad when Tanaka reported that Turner and Lilian had a good time, and everything was fine. He was walking up and down in his living room with the receiver to his ears. When he hung up, he was standing in front of the only painting in the house. This was the only picture hanging on the walls. It did not match the room, but Olivier liked it. It was “The Ninth Wave” by Ivan Aivazovsky. He was contemplating the details of the painting as he had done countless times before. The warm and dark tones of the waves, the six shipwrecked men being tossed and tumbled in the sea, clinging to the debris of their boat, and the sun as it sank behind the horizon, behind the raging waves, painting the sky orange, yellow, and crimson. It was a replica but a very high-quality copy.

Olivier liked this picture because to him it represented the insignificance of human life facing the forces of nature. The sea is not concerned about the people who want to cross her or about the storm that does not allow them. The waves do not subside just because family men work the ships. The sun does not mind that six men are about to drown. It sets the same for lovers having a picnic on a meadow and soldiers fighting in a war. Nature does not care if people exist or not. Humanity, however, should respect nature and value human life, just as he does, he thought. He does not defy nature, just enjoys life, and that is all. As long as he can.

There was a dossier lying on his living room table he needed to review. It contained the data of the next client. After a project is greenlit, the question always arises: who is next? The company’s workers—head-

hunters with no knowledge about the cloning—continuously look for and check the backgrounds of people like Robert Turner. They are the searchers, working in the belief that they are recruiting people for state functions or to positions of trust in international companies. That was why it was necessary to check their families and financial backgrounds, as well as their affiliations with certain organisations. When the dossiers of the selected individuals reached the desk of Olivier, he added his impressions, and when he found it necessary, they dug deeper. Among other avenues, they bought information on the black market, and if this did not yield any results, then Haru or a third-party hacker stole the desired data. Personal correspondence, numbers saved in a phone book, and financial transactions revealed a lot about a person and his or her connections. If they passed all the tests, then Olivier reached out to them.

Olivier was well aware that the black market provided a platform for buying and selling DNA, but his company would not resort to this solution. First, it was difficult to confirm the authenticity of someone's DNA without a sample or a database. Second, the quality of black-market samples was questionable. Most of the DNA samples sold on the black market were stolen from stem cell banks by their own employees. Almost everybody's DNA was stored at birth, even if the parents did not specifically request it. However, it was a lot of work and too much risk to investigate which bank stored which star's DNA and whether there was anyone inside who would be willing to smuggle it out.

Incidentally, it was actually legal to sell DNA online. Stealing famous people's personal articles—for example T-shirts, bubble gum, hair, or panties—with their DNA on them, or their actual saliva was a booming business. Two types of customers bought these articles. First,

the most committed fans who were certain that the relic belonged to the object of their obsession and were willing to pay the price of a DNA test. Second were the tabloids that tried to fabricate something newsworthy based on DNA. That is how it turned out that Toni Portelli, the Italian celebrity chef, was a distant relative of Al Capone, or to be more precise, they shared a few genes. Back in those days, it was a sensational piece of news in Europe and in the United States. The supply was inexhaustible, but the quality was dubious so it was not worth the time; moreover, purchasing something legally could attract unwanted attention.

The folder in front of him was different. The client was not found by them but recommended by the European branch whose leader called Olivier and asked for his help. In a few days, the client would travel to India where Olivier could easily track him down. The Europeans sent over his detailed schedule, according to which he would spend a few days in New Delhi, but after that his itinerary was uncertain.

He skimmed through the material in the afternoon, and if he had had to make a snap decision relying on his instincts and first impressions, he would have said that it was a piece of cake. However, that night he did not want to deal with this case. He took off his shoes, placed shoe trees in them, and put them on the shelf as if they were a work of art. He opened a bottle of wine and sat out on his terrace with his feet up on a wooden table. He enjoyed the summer evening, the smell and taste of the wine, and the good news. Way to go, Turner, he said to himself. Don't do anything stupid. Don't mess this up for me.

He raised his glass to his invisible company. To the greedy and wealthy, who can afford to buy anything, and who make sure I have a good salary, he thought, then glanced at his watch. Eiko, the nuru mas-

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sage therapist was to arrive by nine, half of this bottle will be gone by then, and I should have something for dinner.

His thoughts were skipping from his past to his future, but they kept returning to a case that went wrong, a hairy situation involving a German woman. Sara was her name. I will never forget it, he thought, slugging a big gulp of wine.

It had taken a toll on him and it haunted him even now. It had very nearly been his downfall, which would be worse than death itself, because death just happens and it's over, but otherwise you have to live with yourself.

The others—his colleagues and subordinates—were not affected so deeply. They did not see the big picture, so they had no idea how serious the problem was, and what would be the consequences of getting caught.

Sara Rammel was recommended to Olivier by the European branch, just as the current potential client was being recommended. At that time, they had two ongoing projects and Olivier was looking for new clients. Sara satisfied all criteria required to be the company's client, so Olivier contacted her and persuaded her the same way he persuaded Turner.

The middle-aged German woman made her millions as a swimmer. After her athletic career, she proceeded to conclude several profitable business deals in the sports industry. Sara lived alone, retired from social life, as she was more interested in money than in the stronger sex; but when the opportunity arose to meet and, in fact, spend a few weeks with anybody she wanted, including the love of her youth, her eyes lit up.

Sara had fallen in love only once in her life, at the beginning of her twenties, when the German band, Eisenrabe, was at the height of its

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celebrity. Sara was hopelessly in love with the drummer of the band, known as Edy by everybody, though his real name was Harold Gärtner. They knew each other by sight, and Edy was aware of Sara's feelings but they never became more than friends. Sara never got over it, and she first escaped into athletics, then into the business life.

The band split up a few years later when the guitarist was knifed after a gig. Sara soon became a member of the German upper class. The twenty-five years that had passed since then had left their mark on Sara, and on Edy too.

Sara accepted Olivier's proposal and ordered Edy's youngest possible version. The lab workers managed to make the copy of the drummer look fifteen years younger. Olivier informed the client that for this reason Edy's aging would be accelerated, which may become visible even during the two weeks they were going to spend together. However, the aging process is accelerated only until the copy completely assimilates with the original person, then the balance is restored, and the process slows down to a normal speed.

Sara had Edy delivered to her North German seaside villa. Only a few houses were built in that area, and most of them very empty, especially during that time of the year, before Christmas. After many lonely Christmas Eves, she was waiting with an unprecedented excitement for the day of Edy's arrival. Edy was strong, had piercing eyes, was always in a good humour, and his music was incredibly powerful.

After getting to know Sara, Olivier would have never imagined what happened next. One day, a dark microbus pulled up at her house. Later, it turned out that it was the mobile surgery of a physician who was wanted by the German state police. The surgeon opened up the skin on the back of Edy's head and deactivated the chip. He could not take it

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out because the diodes led too deeply into the cerebellum, but he managed to terminate the signalling. After this, Sara and Edy drove to the airport in a van. Edy flew away in a Cessna and Sara stayed behind to offer a deal to Olivier.

Sara told Olivier that from that moment on Edy belonged to her, and that she was ready to double the fee if they left them alone. She promised that they would never hear from them again, they would keep everything a secret, and added that if Olivier did not accept the deal then she would report them to the police.

Sara must have had an elaborate plan, but she was too naïve. Olivier carefully examined the option of letting them go. On the one hand, Sara could not tell Edy that he was a copy because that would drive him mad. On the other hand, they would not live happily ever after because Edy would soon ask questions about himself. Sara would not be able to answer these questions, and Edy would soon realise that Sara was not his true love as the conditioning had led him to believe. So, the only option was to catch and kill the copy.

It was a cinch to find out the destination of the plane, but difficult to figure out where the car took Edy from the airport. Sara had been tortured by two of Olivier's agents—under the supervision of Olivier and his colleague, Charlie Wong—throughout an entire night until she admitted that Edy was hiding in a forest hut and she told them how to get there.

Olivier got his hands dirty only as a last resort, but unfortunately, it came to that in this project. Sara, Olivier, and Wong went together to the house in a grey and unfriendly afternoon. The pouring rain turned the ground into a sea of mud. The wheels of the jeep flung wet mud and clumps of grass in all directions, but they managed to drive up to the hut.

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As they stopped, Sara tore herself out of the arms of Wong and ran into the house. In a way, it was fascinating how determined she was to fight for her life and the life of that man. Sara was covered with bruises, burn marks, and cuts, had not eaten for at least thirty-six hours, had not slept for forty-eight hours, but when she dashed toward the house she was as strong as she had been at the peak of her sports career.

She shut the door behind her and appeared in the window with a rifle in her hand. It must have been waiting for her loaded because she fired it immediately. Olivier jumped behind the car, but Wong was hit in the chest and he stretched out dead in the mud, next to the jeep.

Olivier waited until Sara disappeared from the window, then he jumped into the car and drove away. He revved up the engine because he wanted Sara to hear that he was leaving. As he was backing away with the car, he practically covered Wong's body in mud.

He drove away just far enough to be out of Sara's sight, and then he got out of the car and sneaked back up to the house. He was drenched to the skin, his wet dark hair stuck to his forehead, and his black leather boots sinking into the mud up to his ankles, but he did not care. He focused only on the mission. He made a large circle and trudged among the trees to approach the house from its windowless side. He was waiting patiently when Sara and Edy broke out to make a run for the car, and he shot them both. Execution style.

There were many loose ends to tie up after the events, and Olivier was sent on compulsory leave. They did not want him anywhere near as long as there was an ongoing investigation. He had not slept for weeks because he was uncertain of his future. How would the investigation conclude? What would the police figure out? Would the management

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throw him under the bus, or would they protect him? It was a terrible two weeks.

Sara Rammel was officially declared a missing person, although pieces of news spread that she was kidnapped or even murdered. The physician vanished, after deciding it would be best if he had stayed out of the matter. The investigation did not lead as far as either the pilot or the forest hut, which “accidentally” burned down a few days later. The hut’s owner was never found because Sara had bought it under a pseudonym with fake documents.

Olivier had never been as afraid as he was at that house. He was shot at by a client who would have done anything to escape. Like in a western, two armed adversaries were set on destroying each other.

When he shot her, it did not cross his mind that he was committing murder. He just did what he needed to do. Sara fell into the mud and dropped her rifle. She just lay there, face in the mud, awkwardly trying to push herself up, trying to steady herself, but then she stopped and did not move again. Olivier had never killed and had never even hit anyone before, so the sight of life leaving Sara deeply burned into his brain.

Edy, confused and helpless, like someone pulled under by a strong current, came to a halt and turned toward Olivier. He gazed uncomprehendingly at him, at his pursuer. There was no time to think or chat, although Olivier would have gladly had a talk with a copy. He was interested in his feelings, and what it was like to develop from the level of a new-born into a thirty-forty-fifty-year-old person in a week. What intrigued him the most was how they coped with the knowledge that they were copies, not humans. They were not born, but created in a laboratory, and their memories were the memories of someone else,

fragments of memories transferred by genes. Olivier pulled the trigger and Edy collapsed like a ragdoll.

Later, he found out why the signal was interrupted, and that Sara had told Edy who he really was, and they had planned the escape together.

In the end, Olivier got away with it, but the many “what ifs” of the story troubled him for a long time. What if Sara had not wanted to make a deal but they had disappeared into thin air? If they had been smarter, they could have escaped. What if Sara had shot at him first at the hut, and not at Wong who was closer to her? And what if Sara had not made a desperate attempt to run for the car and decided to lure him into a trap? The fact that he could have died did not bother him as much as the possibility of failure, even if the former made the other de facto insignificant.

Following these events, he began feeling that he was the best in this line of work, and he wanted to keep doing it as long as he could. Moreover, he was the best not only because he was an excellent negotiator but also because he was willing to go to extremes. To the very end.

He was relieved when management announced that they considered the German case closed and would like to rely on his services in the future. He was reprimanded for not putting enough emphasis on surveillance despite having all the necessary resources at his disposal. Olivier killed only one person during his time at the company and hoped he would not have to do anything like that ever again. He did not enjoy it at all and did not get a taste for it as murderers do in the movies. It was done purely out of necessity and he would do it again without hesitation if left no choice, but he would do everything to prevent it in the first place.

Copies, on the other hand, were a whole different story; he had always considered them more of a product than a person. Switching them off was routine work. Nonetheless, it was not a pleasant feeling to shoot Edy. It would have been better to switch him off by the push of a button, but things do not always work out the way we want them to, and he blamed Sara for that. She had her lover and a plan, but she did not take Olivier into account.

Except for this affair, Kosta's case, and a few tiny mishaps, things had gone smoothly. Olivier sold the service to a rich man or woman, who in turn ordered someone, was satisfied, and then wired the fee. After the time was up, they collected the copy and the client got back to his or her everyday life, and everybody was happy.

Olivier never worried that a client would start bragging about his or her adventures. First, it would sound untrue. It would sound like gloating with a made-up story rather than a real experience. Second, Olivier always made sure that the clients clearly understood who they were getting in bed with.

If anyone broke their agreement, they would get into trouble, no matter how much money they had. His technique was to slip pieces of information into the discussions, just as he had with Turner, so that a picture was formed in the client about the organisation and its capabilities. This way, he did not need to make a direct threat. The combination of these two factors worked without a hitch. Besides, Olivier made it clear that clients were not allowed to refer other clients, in other words, they were not allowed to recommend their friends so that they could discuss their adventures later. It was an exclusive right and corporate policy of the company to seek out new clients. After the deal had been closed, the clients were usually

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so pleased that they agreed to whatever was required of them and kept their word.

Olivier refilled his glass. The neighbourhood fell silent, the lights were on in the houses, the deep blue sky faded to black, and a few stars lit up. The air hung motionless above the city, stubbornly keeping in the warmth of the day. The silence was broken by the melodic ring of the bell. It was Eiko.

The next morning when Turner opened his eyes but was not yet completely awake, he was certain that everything was just a dream. He would not have been surprised at waking up in his New York apartment, and he would have bet a fortune on never having met Lilian. Then reality began to sink in. His blurry, muddled dreams were taken over by the palpable, audible, and visible reality. He turned to his side and there she was, the beautiful woman he spent the previous day with. Yesterday had really happened.

He caressed her gently, then she cuddled up to him and went back to sleep. Turner was lying on his back and tried to make sense of what was happening. Patience, he told himself, a few days and everything would feel completely natural. Lilian is yours. That's the case. Accept it, he told himself and smiled. He closed his eyes, but did not go back to sleep, just enjoyed the closeness of Lilian's body and doing nothing.

Half an hour later Lilian went to take a shower, in the meantime Turner wired the money to Olivier's account. It crossed his mind that as soon as they received the agreed amount, they would come bursting through the door to take Lilian away, but he set his mind at ease because that wouldn't make any sense. Based on what he had seen so far, he could trust Olivier because everything happened as he had said it would. And probably they would like to part ways peacefully. If he is satisfied, he won't talk, and he may even place a new order. He kept thinking about it. Yes, it is a possibility. He went out to the terrace with a coffee in his hand. He was looking at the bay, and inhaled the salty

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sea and the flowery, sweet, cool air as if it were a once in a lifetime experience and he wanted to remember every detail of it.

On that day, Turner was still very cautious. They went to the beach, but only to secluded areas, sheltered by rocks with only a few people around. He asked Lilian to wear her sunglasses even in the water, explaining to her that in Japan the sun is very strong and dangerous. Lilian believed him without a second thought.

Lilian Bailey, the actress, was not as popular in Japan as in the United States or in Europe, but her movies all had Japanese releases, so his caution was reasonable. One small mistake and Olivier and his men would come for her. Turner was certain that Olivier would readily switch Lilian off if she were at any risk of being identified. No matter how nice he was, he was a serious player and a survivor.

During the day, they went back to the house several times to make love. Turner became more patient, and Lilian became more skilful. Turner did not know if it was because her memories were coming to the surface or perhaps, she was learning new things with him, but every occasion was better, and Turner fell deeply in love with her. Lilian loved him unconditionally, as if they had been together for a thousand years, and he was the man she had been longing for all her life.

Turner kept Lilian away from television. He told her that during the day there was nothing good on, except for boring programs for dumb people, but they could watch movies. They had access to an on-line database where almost all productions in the history of film were available. Turner reserved this for the time when they had nothing else to do in the evening, but he was sure they could always come up with something else. It was forbidden to use the phone and the laptop, and Lilian accepted that. A little bad luck and she might see herself on a

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news site or giving an interview. The original Lilian—since a lot of time had passed since her latest movie and her Oscar nomination—had not been in the spotlight lately but there still was a chance that his Lilian could stumble upon something about her original. Turner did not know if she could operate these devices or not, or if she could conduct an online search on the laptop or on the phone, but it did not matter. He couldn't take the risk, and after all, Lilian was not there to surf the web but to be with him.

In the evening, as they were lying in bed, Turner slowly leaned over to her. Only the outline of her body was visible in the dim light that seeped in from the outside. The curves of her hip and thigh were so delicate that Turner was wondering if they really could have been created by evolution, and not by a higher power, a superior power who knows everything, including what the most beautiful thing in the world is. Lilian was pretty when she was sleeping. Her mouth was closed, her features softened, and this gave her an angelic look. The light refracted in her hair and shone through it, which made her hair glow like a bent, golden laser beam of sci-fi movies. A girl pretty in her sleep is always pretty.

Turner recalled the day he was walking the halls of the Uffizi Gallery and saw *The Birth of Venus*. He knew that Venus symbolized the ideal beauty of the era, but for some reason he did not care for it. He did like the painting, but the Venus was not his type. An old man with grey hair and a grey moustache, wearing an elegant three-piece suit, was standing nearby.

He stepped close to Turner and without taking his eyes off the painting said, “Only a female body can perfectly represent beauty”. Turner was confused because he did not know if the old man was addressing

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him, only talking to himself, or just congratulating Botticelli. He was a strange man, that was for sure, but Turner, watching Lilian in the dark, just realised how right he was.

He leaned close to her and gently touched the back of her head. He felt that a small area was firmer to the touch, like calloused skin, except that the surface was soft, like everywhere else. That was where the chip had been inserted. The switch of life and death, the shackles of Lilian. Could Lilian feel it by touch? If so, what would she think about it? Turner didn't want to think about it because that would destroy his illusions. He could not tell her about it, and perhaps she wouldn't ask about it during the remaining twelve days of their time together.

On the third day, Turner rented a small yacht. It was large enough for sunbathing, but small enough to leave the port without a crew. They shipped out into the bay, far from other vessels. This time Lilian did not wear her hat, and the wind gently lifted her shimmering golden hair. She was laughing, enjoying the speed, the astonishingly deep blue waves of the ocean, the seagulls circling above the bay, the sight of the shore, the gentleness of Turner, and—at least a little—her own beauty.

Most of the time Turner managed not to think about his Lilian being a copy, and that her life would end in two weeks. He cleared his mind and enjoyed the time they spent together. They swam in the ocean, had lunch on the ship, made love in the cabin, on the deck, and in the water.

The stern of the yacht was at sea level, and when they both stood on its very end and rocked the boat, the water flowed in. It was easy to climb aboard and felt good to jump into the water. Turner tried to do a cannonball jump a few times and was surprised at his success: he landed in the water half turning to his side and made a big splash. First, the water splashed out in all directions, and after he sank below the surface, a six-foot column of water shot up. Lilian laughed and cheered.

“Excellent, Robert!” she said, as Turner swam to the surface and she jumped into the water. She swam to him, leaned on and embraced him. He held her but pretended that he needed great efforts to do so.

“You are heavier in the water than on the shore.”

“Not true!” said Lilian. She laughed again and planted a huge kiss on his cheek.

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After lunch, they lay down on the deck. The wooden planks were warm and pleasantly smooth. The smell reminded him of the wood in a sauna. It was nice just to lie there. Lilian held Turner's hand and they swayed with the ship. From far away they could hear the murmur of the city and the beaches, above them the squawk and screech of the gulls, and below them the water splashing against the hull of the yacht. These were all the sounds in the world, and the two of them, holding each other's hands, were the centre of their perfect little universe.

Turner had to admit to himself that he had never been happier. Lilian loved him as no one ever had, and if he did not think about the future, perhaps these two weeks would never end.

In the evening back in the house, Turner was thinking in the bed, in that half-awake, half-asleep state when he still had a small amount of control over his thoughts; however, the events, dialogues, and ideas that were reeling in his head were just imaginary. He caught himself planning the escape of Lilian. That way, lying in bed—when thoughts could roam free and nothing needed an explanation—the idea did not seem so far-fetched.

So, he played with the idea. What if they drove to Tokyo airport and got on his private jet? Brody would be waiting for them, he would tell Brody everything, and he would help. Somehow, he would block the signals of the chip, and they would leave in a cab because they knew about his rented car. If they were quick enough, they could take off before Olivier or anyone else came within the radius of the chip. What could be its range?

After landing in the United States, he would take her to his apartment in a car with tinted windows... or perhaps he shouldn't because they must know about the apartment. Then to a hotel or an inn. They

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would hold each other's hands so they would not lose each other even for a moment. Then they would get on a different plane and fly off to an island. A small plane. First, he would rent an apartment, then he would buy a house. They would never be found...

But, in Turner's fantasy, Olivier would find them. He was on the island. But how did he get there? Turner and Lilian kept running and running, from island to island, from country to country, from hiding place to hiding place, but Olivier reappeared everywhere, no matter how much effort he made to erase him from the dream. Nevertheless, in the real world, everything would be different, he thought. They could succeed...

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While Turner and Lilian were still sleeping, the original Lilian Bailey was sitting on the terrace of a Hollywood coffee shop with her friend, Christine. It was a sunny afternoon with small fleecy clouds in the sky. Lilian liked the Hollywood weather. She preferred it to London's.

She wore a short, blue skirt, a white T-shirt, and blue canvas shoes. None of her clothes were particularly expensive, but they fit well and were always in impeccable harmony with each other.

Christine was Lilian's only girlfriend from before the time she had become famous—that's why she was her best and most trusted friend.

"I need to tell you something," said Lilian, "but please don't say that I am crazy."

"All right, out with it," said Christine. Her face matched the serious expression she saw on Lilian's face.

"I've been having this strange feeling for a few days," said Lilian, stirring her honey cappuccino, without looking up. "I cannot describe it, but I feel like there is somebody out there waiting for me."

Christine smiled.

"Of course, there is someone waiting for you. Everyone has a true love out there, and I am sure that he will find you."

"Maybe, but isn't it strange that I have this feeling?"

"So, do I, I know I'll find the one," said Christine. Lilian glanced up.

"Yes, I know that it will happen, but this time it's different. It's as if he is talking to me." Lilian let go of the cup and the spoon, letting her hand fall faintly on the table as if stirring the cappuccino was a difficult task. "I can't put it into words," she said, lowering her head.

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“I think I know what you mean. I feel the same way with my twin sister. Even when she is not with me, I can feel that she is out there, and she is okay.” Christine was not intending to change the subject and talk about herself, so she didn’t say any more, waiting for her friend to speak. However, Lilian just kept staring at the milky foam in her cup without saying a word, so Christine went on. “One time, Carol and Dad went skiing, and I couldn’t go with them because I had to study for an exam. One morning she fell, she sprained her ankle, and I felt her pain. In that moment, I knew that something bad had happened. Later, it turned out that it wasn’t serious, so we had a good laugh about it. It’s interesting to have a twin.”

“Well, I am feeling something similar, although I am not sure,” Lilian looked desperate and lost. Christine held her wrist to console her.

“Perhaps, you have a secret twin,” said Christine, trying to be serious, but when Lilian looked up, they both burst into laughter.

“You are being so silly,” said Lilian, chuckling.

“Don’t even think about it,” said Christine, “but as my grandma used to say, always watch out for the signs. It cannot hurt.” Lilian kept nodding and smiled.

“Good idea. It’s probably nothing anyway.”

“I didn’t say that, but you shouldn’t make a mountain out of molehill. Give yourself time. You will find the answer,” said Christine, shrugging her shoulders. “It will probably pass.”

Christine and Lilian talked for another fifteen minutes about their various problems, then paid the bill and left. Out on the sidewalk, they said goodbye, hugged each other, and Christine patted Lilian’s shoulder encouragingly.

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That day Lilian's schedule included only a photo shoot for a chic online movie magazine. The portal placed an emphasis on high-resolution photos and Lilian couldn't wait to be on the cover.

Lilian readily followed the instructions of the photographer and the art director and made several suggestions of her own. Between shots, she asked an assistant to take a photo with her phone. In one of the short breaks, Lilian posted it on a social media site with the following tagline: "Photo shoot today, check out the pics tomorrow," and below the pictures she placed a link to the magazine's website. By the evening at least forty thousand people will have seen the post, a tenth of them will share it, and within a week at least hundred thousand people will like it.

After the photo shoot, she drove home. Usually, she let the electric car drive her home but that day she felt like driving. She rented a thousand square foot apartment in an elegant apartment tower, where she lived alone and enjoyed her independence. Her mother had told her that first she needed to learn to enjoy life alone, and then she should find herself someone. If you're afraid to be alone, your relationships won't work, was the way her mother explained it.

Christine slept over occasionally. She was still living with her parents, though their house was so large that she basically had her own wing. Lilian also slept over at her place a few times, mostly after parties.

Lilian kicked off her shoes and sat down on the couch to read her e-mails. She checked them two or three times a day, in contrast with most of her friends who couldn't put down their phones and tablets.

She received a forwarded message from her manager, Edwin Floweree, about a role advertising a bank account and investment package

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for young people. They promised a high fee. Lilian replied that she wouldn't appear in an ad for banks and declined the job.

She also got an offer for a role in a movie and received—also from Edwin—a schedule for a fashion shoot. She decided to read those messages in the evening.

Naturally, she had many suitors. She could hardly get rid of them. Sometimes, when the position of the stars was favourable—as Lilian liked to put it—she met normal guys too. These relationships had lasted for one or two years, until Lilian felt that it was not the real thing, or it turned out that she was being cheated on. One of them specifically stated that he wanted to hang out with other girls too, so she broke up with him. She could imagine the rest of her life with a few of them. Perhaps she was too young for that, and in the end, it was for the best that things turned out the way they did.

Although Lilian was pretty, rich, and famous, she struggled with the same problems and questions as the rest of the twenty-something-year-old girls. Am I doing something wrong? Was I too clingy? Did I keep too much distance? Am I good in bed? Do I look okay without clothes? Do guys prefer blonde/brown/black-haired girls? And so on...

Lilian knew that she was pretty but wasn't sure how much. She watched herself in the mirror with the same uncertainty as other girls of her age. She did not attribute much importance to her looks and did not use it to her advantage. She did not give herself away easily and did not dress provocatively. She knew that in that city she could get anything if she paid the right man with her body, but she was unwilling to do that. Even so, she had a nice career. She had received countless accolades and compliments but how many of them were sincere? She

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remembered also that someone had left her because she was not that pretty.

Once, at a party organised by a film studio, a producer offered her the price of a mid-range luxury vehicle just to spend a night with her. One of Lilian's girlfriends told her that she was a dummy to refuse the offer, and most people would have accepted it. There was nothing shameful about it. Besides, it would have never been found out because the producer had a family, so he would not have shouted the news from the rooftops, and the money was good. Nevertheless, Lilian would not do it. To her, intimacy was based on emotions, even if it was only a one-night stand, though she had never had one.

She had a simple take on life. It was based on the principle that the best things in life are free. Money does not make you happy. Although you do need it, money by itself won't make anyone happy.

She didn't share every minute of her life in the social media as many of her contemporaries did, but she shared a few stories and photos with her fans. Occasionally, she even wrote about what she had for lunch, although she did not like this, but her manager asked her to do so, and in the end, she did not make a fuss about it. She could not understand why a million of her followers would be interested in her lunch, but she needed them, so she did what a famous person should do.

Naturally, she was asked several times to pose naked for a photoshoot and to accept erotic roles. Even though astronomical sums and luxury trips were promised, she rejected every such offer. Beauty is one thing, and she considered herself lucky for that, but she wanted to reach success with her talent and her hard work, not with her body. That was how she was brought up. Just because there is an easier way, you do not necessarily need to take it. Moreover—she

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thought—the more difficult the journey, the sweeter the success. Success that comes easily is like mochi, the Japanese rice cake eaten on New Year's Day. There are those who can swallow it, and those who will choke on it.

After finishing with her mail, Lilian went for a run in a park near her apartment. Lilian loved running because she was alone, she could relax, think about her life, and listen to her favourite music. Sometimes when she wanted to work out even harder, she listened to extreme tracks no one would have believed she listened to, but they were excellent for running. Those tracks gave her a boost.

Before falling asleep that night, as she was lying in bed, the strange feeling she had talked about with Christine overwhelmed her again. It frustrated her that she could not even describe what she felt. She liked the comparison her girlfriend made: it was like having a twin. She knew that she did not have one, but she could imagine what it would be like. However, no memories and no shared experiences were associated with her current feeling, at least not in the way Christine had talked about it. It was just a feeling that she could not put her finger on.

Turner and Lilian's following two days were similarly carefree. They enjoyed the most beautiful days of the Japanese summer as lovebirds. They discovered Hayama, visited the maritime museum, went to the beaches of Morito and Isshiki, ate, drank, slept, made love, and did what their hearts told them to.

They took several short and longer walks in the city. The streets and sidewalks were narrower than Tokyo's or New York's, which made Turner feel like they were walking in a miniature town. The broken centre lines were missing from many roads, giving the town a romantic, rural atmosphere. Turner had been a city man all his life, but he missed this atmosphere. At times, it felt good to live in a less developed, less modern place, even if only for a few weeks.

They did not go to restaurants because Lilian couldn't sit inside and eat in a hat and sunglasses, not even on the terrace. It would be as eye-catching as being naked. For lunch and dinner, they went home or ordered donburi, which is fish, sweet beef, and vegetables served over rice, or yakizakana, which is grilled fish, from a fast-food joint to go.

Lilian was good with chopsticks after Turner showed her a few times how to use them. He did not know if she was good at it because the original Lilian had used them or because she just had a gift for it.

On a stroll in Hayama, they stumbled upon a gallery that advertised itself as having all the paintings in the world. Turner was not a fan of the arts, but he was fond of painting, especially impressionism. It matched his quick and spontaneous lifestyle.

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The gallery had three departments. One featured a temporary exhibition, another was reserved for contemporary works of art, and in the third, instead of paintings, high-definition screens hung on the walls. Each screen showed a painting of the visitor's choice, thus fulfilling the advertised claim of having all the paintings in the world. There were eight smaller screens, and one occupying an entire wall, which allowed visitors to view chosen paintings in their actual size. Each screen had a control panel where visitors could choose between the pictures, zoom in on them, and read the history of the painting and the biography of the painter.

That day, as on most weekdays, there were few visitors. Turner and Lilian waited until the couple in front of them finished, then stepped up to the largest screen. Turner typed in a few letters on the holographic keyboard. The number of search results decreased with every letter. He was looking for his favourite painting: *The Grand Canal, Venice* by J. M. W. Turner. He tapped on the name of the painting and it appeared on the screen in its original forty-eight-inch-wide size. It was a stunning piece of art, although it was possible that he was fond of the painter because they were namesakes.

The technology fascinated them. The picture was more engrossing than the original. Its sharpness and tones were bewilderingly perfect. Every little stroke of the painter left on the canvas was visible.

“This is my favourite painting,” said Turner.

“It's beautiful,” said Lilian, and Turner believed that she really thought so. You don't need an entire life or an education to realise that it is a marvellous picture. Its magnificence is as fundamentally natural as a misty valley at sunrise or the coral reefs of the Galápagos Islands.

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“This is in Europe, in Venice, a city built on water.” Turner pointed at the gondolas. “Instead of cars people come and go on boats, called gondolas, they row it while standing.”

“Don’t they fall into the water?” asked Lilian.

“Not too often,” said Turner, showing her the rest of the picture. “What I like about this painting is that with a few dabs of the brush and light strokes the painter has created a perfect scene. Look at the windows, how tiny they are, yet you can see all the cracks and ornaments. At least, that is how the viewer feels.” Lilian smiled with understanding and appreciation for what Turner was saying. “Or look at this, the people on the right. How tiny they are, their faces painted with only a few dots, but you can almost read their expressions. You see their clothes, their gestures, and you can tell their story,” said Turner. Lilian nodded, small nods, with comprehension and intelligence sparkling in her eyes, which surprised Turner because she had been alive only for a few days, yet she understood painting, or at least a fraction of it then and there.

Turner then searched for the Mona Lisa and The Birth of Venus, which he had just thought about a few days before. The Marquis de Sade called Mona Lisa “the very essence of femininity”, and Venus was the goddess of beauty, so it was clear why, in the company of one of the most beautiful women in the world, Turner chose these paintings.

Lilian was captivated by the Mona Lisa. She said that she had already seen that painting, though she could not remember exactly when and where. Turner did not doubt it. When he asked her opinion about the Mona Lisa’s mysterious smile, Lilian answered that the painter must have told her something funny. Turner argued that she was smil-

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ing because she was thinking of something naughty. They had a good laugh about it.

They looked at a few other paintings, and as they were leaving the gallery, Turner stopped and looked back one last time and saw that the Asian couple behind them had downloaded a new painting. He came to a sudden halt.

“Wait a second,” he said, and walked back to the wall. Lilian followed him. According to the information panel, it was Lord Frederic Leighton’s work, titled Flaming June. Turner had seen it before but did not recognise it.

Now, it immediately caught his attention. The picture portrayed a young girl curled up on a bench in a Mediterranean setting, behind her the sun and its golden reflection on the water. She was beautiful and looked as innocent as Lilian. The orange colours of her translucent clothes, like fire, dominated the picture. Lilian is exactly this lovely when she is asleep, thought Turner.

According to the description, the oleander on the right is poisonous, and it symbolises the thin borderline between sleep and death, but Turner believed that she was just sleeping, and the picture was about beauty. About their two weeks together. Lilian sleeping on the shore, on the terrace. Dreamlike and sensual. Lilian was also in a state somewhere between life and death.

Turner decided that if he couldn’t take a photograph of Lilian, at least he would obtain a replica of this painting and hang it in his office. That would be his personal memento of her.

On the way to the beach, they managed to get lost in Hayama. Turner, asking for help from a local elder, tried to inquire with all kinds of hand signals to ask directions to the beach. Tears swelled in Lilian’s eyes

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from laughter. Turner, also laughing at the situation, imitated swimming, and kept asking “Isshiki? Isshiki?”, but the old man just smiled and waved his hand, letting them know that it was all right.

As soon as they found the beach, they jumped in to cool down from the blazing summer heat. Isshiki Beach was widely considered the most beautiful coastline of Japan, but it had a prominent ranking worldwide too. It was covered by fine and clean sand, and it had a grassy area that even Turner found rare, although he had been to many beaches. They laid down their towels because they didn’t want their belongings to be covered in sand by the end of the day. For a while, they just sat there and watched the vacationers. Lilian laid her head on Turner’s cool, wet shoulders, and he embraced her.

There was a crowd in the water, some people were surfing further out in the ocean, and a long, seven-person kayak was paddling toward the horizon. They tried stand up paddle boards. Lilian commented on the resemblance to the Venetian gondola. At first, they were very bad at it, and had a few good laughs as they watched each other fall off, but soon they got the knack of it and found it easier than it first seemed.

There was a bar at the beach that served delicious grilled chicken with chips, and beer, cocktails, and other refreshments. It was quite acceptable to wear hat and sunglasses there, so Turner felt comfortable dining there. They had lunch and later dinner there and watched as the sun set. In the evenings, the beach turned into a community area, with live music, as Japanese and foreign tourists walked up and down the beach or sat under a lamp if there were no more seats in the bar. At times, the rest of the world seemed to be so far away that Turner completely forgot who he and Lilian were. They were just one

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couple among many. Everybody was equal, like in an isolated community separate from the larger society.

They stayed there for a long time, and the afternoon turned into a beautiful night. They were sitting under the brilliant starry sky. A trio of old men played peculiar music at the bar. It was a fusion of Japanese folk, tropical, and Caribbean music, but it was still very harmonious. It matched the place perfectly. They played simple songs with little vocals. It was more like background music, melodious and cheerful songs.

“Kanpai!” said Turner. “This is a Japanese drinking toast. It literally means dry cup.”

“Kam-payy!” repeated Lilian, and they clinked their glasses. The cocktails made them tipsy, and Turner began audio-dubbing the people on the beach. Lilian had never laughed so much and so freely before that day. A short, stout man stood up from a company of five. He was probably heading for another drink or was searching for the bathroom, but Turner mimicked, “That’s it goddammit, I’ve had enough of you. I’m leaving!” It was funny on its own the way he was smiling as Turner uttered his sentences. A little farther away two frat boys were talking. They had apparently already emptied several glasses and were immersed in a world-changing topic. According to Turner, one of them told the other: “One last drink, then I escort you home and massage oil all over your body like no one before.” At the exact same moment Turner uttered this sentence, one of them poked at the other, so Turner laughed out and Lilian leaned to her side, her eyes tearing from laughter.

By the time they reached the house, Lilian could barely stand on her feet. Turner opened the door and picked her up. She did not resist. She giggled quietly and fell asleep by the time they reached the bed-

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room. Turner carefully laid her down on the bed, combed her hair out of her eyes, and covered her with a blanket. For a while, he just stood there and watched her sleeping, then undressed to his shorts and lay down beside her. He fell asleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

Turner seized every opportunity to enjoy the bodily pleasures with Lilian, who developed spectacularly, and was willing to do anything Turner asked of her. She could think of nobody else.

He often drank a beer or a whiskey, depending on his mood, when he did not have to drive. He usually did not get drunk, but enjoyed the pleasant, numbing effect of the booze, which made the summer even more dreamlike. Lilian loved cocktails and always accepted them when Turner mixed one, but never asked for a cocktail on her own.

Turner would have liked to get some marijuana and coke for these two weeks, but he did not have any contacts in Japan. He did not regret it particularly because in the past years he had gradually given up the habit. Besides, he found Lilian so stimulating that he did not need anything else to aid his adrenaline production.

When leaving the house, Turner was always careful to hide Lilian's face under a hat and behind sunglasses. The paparazzi don't usually just run into stars and take photos when they recognise them; rather, they know where they are, and they follow them. Just to be on the safe side, he had Lilian wear her sunglasses even when she went in the water. She was a remarkable sight on the shore, but Turner did not believe they would get into trouble.

Lilian was exhibiting more confidence, with an erect bearing and poise that made her more radiantly attractive day by day. Sometimes Turner forgot for hours at a time that Lilian was just a copy. He had the strange feeling that after an extraordinary turn of events he was with the original Lilian; at other times, he imagined that he was on vacation

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with a beautiful woman who had always been his partner; but he also knew that he was in Hayama with Lilian Bailey's copy ordered from a company. He was living the dream.

He remembered seeing the clones in Olivier's room for the first time, those identical, pretty, young women in miniskirts. Thinking back, it seemed absurd that he thought that Lilian would not be human, but a robot or an android, with plastic hair, silicone muscles, and rubber skin. He had not been able to think of any other option because people can't be copied. Yet, here she was, a human being beyond doubt. She was moving, breathing, yawning, shivering, sighing, embracing, kissing, laughing, winking, playing with her hair, caressing her legs, breathing lightly in her sleep, eating, and drinking. A robot would never be able to do these things with such subtlety and elegance, or perhaps it might in a thousand years.

Lilian did not mention it, but she frequently thought about the word *sangel*. It bothered her that she couldn't place the word. Sometimes she forgot it, but from time to time it re-appeared, like a tiny insect and tickled her mind.

In the afternoon of their fifth day, as they were preparing to go to Morito Beach, Lilian did not want to put on her hat. Turner told her that they could not leave without it, but if she preferred then she could put on a hijab. She liked the idea. It somehow seemed elegant, trendy, yet distant enough. The advantage of a scarf was that they could sit in a restaurant without receiving disapproving looks for not taking it off. Her face was visible, but she was undoubtedly difficult to recognise. Turner told her that Arabian women wore articles of clothing like that, but in the past decades, it had spread across the world. It wasn't so much that the scarf itself was fashionable, but rather the morality it represented.

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Morito Beach was lovely. They noticed that other people were moulding sand balls and lining them up on the shore. A few were as large as basketballs. Turner and Lilian gave it a try. He managed to mould a smaller one, but Lilian's kept falling apart before forming a sphere.

Lying on the shore, Turner tried to capture in a single word what he felt toward Lilian. He was thinking of her and let his mind freely wander to come up with a word that encompassed everything. The word that popped up was apricot. Turner had no clue why, but there was some truth to it. She was as sweet as an apricot.

Turner saw no sign of anyone paying particular attention to them. Nobody directed inquiring looks in Lilian's direction, or showed any recognition that a Hollywood actress was vacationing there. It was possible though that people noticed the fifteen or twenty years difference between them and thought that such a young girl had to be with a middle-aged man like him for his money. Prejudice is often based on first impressions, and people do not even consider that there may be thousands of reasons for a couple to be together.

That evening, Turner drank more than he should have, and he could not perform in bed. Lilian was tipsy too and she did not understand what was going on. He was annoyed and kept prodding her to do something, but she just stretched out on the bed and giggled. Turner got angry and pushed her. She fell from the bed onto the carpet, and immediately stopped laughing. He put on his trousers and walked out to the terrace to have a smoke. On his way out, he knocked over a chair and kicked into the lamp. The wooden pieces scattered and flew away in all directions.

"Why would she resist?" he drunkenly muttered to himself. "She should do what I tell her to do. She is my property."

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As Turner went back, he found Lilian lying on the bed, facing the wall. He lay down beside her and fell asleep. In the morning, they woke up as though nothing had happened. Turner did not think about the previous day, just as an emperor does not think about the men he had beheaded the previous day. Lilian hardly remembered what had happened, and she was not sure whether she had fallen off the bed or it was all just a dream.

In the meantime, Edwin, the manager of the real Lilian, was at a party in a luxurious bar in LA with Steve Sparks, the owner of a fashion house. By 4:00 in the morning, he had managed to persuade him that Lilian would be the perfect female model to feature his fall collection.

The fashion mogul had just passed forty, but his hair was completely white, making it obvious that he dyed it. He wore the latest fashions, from his watch to the frames of his eyeglasses. In Edwin's eyes, he was more of a clown than a cool guy, but he was forced to shower praises on him because getting into his circle meant a huge step up the ladder, even for successful girls. Edwin knew that in those days Lilian was interested exclusively in acting—modelling, after all had given the initial push to her career, even though it no longer excited her—but she would not refuse this opportunity.

Steve revealed the big secret that his autumn collection was inspired by the classical motifs and uniforms of sailors and mariners, and the photoshoot would take place at the LA cargo port two weeks later. He believed that the rusty containers, cranes, and cargo ships would function as a striking background, making a contrast with the beautiful models and complementing their clothes. Of course, Lilian's manager knew about this from other sources, and also was aware that Steve was not satisfied with the current female model. That was why he organised the evening. He wanted to seize the opportunity.

After several drinks, the two men agreed that two and a half weeks later Lilian would be the model, and Edwin sent a message to Lilian:

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“The photoshoot is a done deal. We need you in two and a half weeks.”
Lilian was still asleep when her phone chirped.

The next day, as Turner stepped out onto the terrace, he noticed a man standing in the garden. His blood froze. It was a Japanese man with pruning shears in his hands. The man turned around, smiled, and waved amicably. Must be the gardener, thought Turner, but why didn't I know about him?

“Good morning,” Turner greeted him, but the man was standing still on the lawn, smiling. “Do you speak English?” He did not receive a reply. Turner made a call to the landlord and mentioned that there was a man in the garden. The landlord reassured him that it was just the gardener, Mr. Tong, a simpleton, but an excellent worker. He usually worked two hours, twice a month. Moreover, not only did he not speak English, he did not even speak Japanese because he was Chinese. He would soon be finished. Turner could just ignore him, and Mr. Tong wouldn't go into the house, added the landlord. Turner thanked him, hung up the phone, then walked back into the house and closed the terrace door behind him. It would have been problematic if Lilian had walked out and Mr. Tong had been a huge fan of Hollywood blockbusters. You can't be careful enough, thought Turner, as he was picking up the pieces of the lamp.

During the day, they went for a walk to the Japanese garden of Shio-sai Koen Park, and they visited the Katsura Imperial Villa, the summer residence of the emperor back when Hayama was not yet a popular tourist spot; however, that was long ago. In the afternoon, they went to Morito; but once there, Turner did not go into the water, only Lilian did. She was swimming in sunglasses and having the time of her life.

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That evening, Turner made a genuine American dinner: a chicken burger for Lilian and a beef burger for himself, and spicy chicken wings with French fries. He had read on Olivier's list that Lilian liked this type of food. Turner was certain that his burger could compete with that of any fast-food restaurant.

He also bought Cokes and popcorn. They ate the royal meal in front of the television. That was what he felt like doing, and after all, these two weeks were about him.

From the list—carefully skipping the films in which Miss Bailey had a part—he picked *Casablanca*. He had not seen it in ages and found it somewhat suitable for the occasion and thought Lilian would enjoy it. It worked. She laughed through the whole movie, and her tears were flowing when Rick and Ilsa said their goodbyes. Turner watched Lilian as the TV threw its light on her face. He found her beautiful at that moment. Always beautiful, in every way. She didn't have a better or a worse side.

Turner wondered if only the sounds, the music, and the facial expressions had triggered Lilian's emotional reactions, or if she really understood the juxtapositions that generated tension and humour. During the previous five days, he had noticed that at first Lilian did everything like a five-year-old, and by the second attempt, like an adult (or to be more precise, like the original Lilian). Consequently, her memories and her habits surfaced sooner when something prompted her. The movie must have had a similar effect. The music and the scenes evoked the comical features of love, separation, and the relationship between man and woman.

“Where I'm going, you can't follow,” said Rick in the movie. The same awaited them, thought Turner, but Rick's other saying, “Someday

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you'll understand that" would not come true, unfortunately. Wryly, he reflected that he alone "would always have Hayama."

Lilian would never understand what had happened to her, no matter how fantastic she was—young, full of life, and stunningly beautiful. He admitted to himself that he had fallen in love with her. He was in love with her immaculate beauty. Turner could not boast of long-term relationships. He had fallen in love only once in his life, with a woman named Diane, who had been his girlfriend for several months. Turner, however, would claim that he was in love with every woman he picked up, but Diane was the only one he sincerely felt something for, even if he would not admit it. Despite this, he quickly adopted his role of being in a happy and long-term relationship with Lilian. Turner enjoyed the illusion of settling down.

After going to bed, Turner noticed a few birthmarks on Lilian's arm. He could have sworn that nothing had been there when she had arrived. Is this how she began to assimilate to the original Lilian? What could be the end of the process? He dismissed these questions, just as he brushed off the thought that Lilian would slowly fall out of love with him if they stayed together, that the effects of conditioning would fade away and she would be like the original Lilian. After all, how could he expect the real person to be drawn to a fifty-year old womaniser like himself, no matter how much money he had, but in the end, he convinced himself that mulling over this was pointless.

While Turner and Lilian were enjoying the Hayama summer, Olivier travelled to New Delhi to get in touch with the potential client recommended by the European branch. He hoped that even if something went wrong with the Turner-Bailey project, it would not happen in the two days he was away.

As to the potential client, Olivier's intuitions proved right, but his preconceptions misguided him. He expected to meet the conceited, irritating son of a billionaire. According to his folder, the kid was less than thirty and already the heir of an international corporate group. Olivier knew that these two factors make a dangerous mix.

Instead, he met a relaxed, light-hearted, smart, and well-educated young man. He was pleasantly surprised and had a good time talking to him. Naturally, the kid took the bait, or at least Olivier managed to raise his interest. Olivier did not disclose all the details, but he did mention that they copy people, and he could order anybody he wanted. The young billionaire said that he would think about the offer and would pay him a visit in his office either way, as he had been thinking about visiting Tokyo for years.

Olivier thanked him for his time, gave him Kyo's number, and asked him to call in case he needed anything. He specifically asked him to call in advance if he decided to travel to Tokyo because his company would arrange for his accommodation during his stay. The young man thanked him and accepted the offer, then they shook hands. Olivier returned to Tokyo on the first flight.

Turner woke up feeling unwell. He had felt queasy during the night, and by the morning his condition became worse. The beef he had prepared the night before was probably spoiled, or he had bought something that was not what it was claimed to be. He couldn't think of another explanation because Lilian ate from the rest of the food too and she seemed fine.

Turner asked her to stay home. He spent the morning in his room and in the toilet, then slept two hours.

For a while, Lilian watched the bay from the terrace, and then, after Turner had fallen asleep, she turned on the television. Although in the beginning she was not sure how to operate it, she quickly got a feel for using hand gestures. She could leaf through the channels like turning the pages of a huge, invisible codex.

On the first channel, a Japanese woman was reading the news in Japanese, with a B-roll of a mass casualty incident on the Keiji bypass road. Lilian switched to another channel. A Japanese man was giving a report, surrounded by youngsters at a seaside festival. He was talking quickly and loudly because it was difficult to hear his voice over the thumping music. Lilian switched to the next channel. An American man was standing on a stage and speaking English. It was subtitled in kanji. Lilian read his nametag on the screen: Hugo Weston. His friendly face radiated peace, and he talked about the future opportunities of our lives in a low, pleasant voice.

“... the question is, are you ready to seize it when you see it?” asked Weston, “because if you continuously improve yourself, you read, you

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learn,” counting with his fingers, like it was an itemized list, “about everything you are interested in, then you will be ready. If you love something, put 200% of yourself into it, and suddenly you will see one door opening after the other.” The camera zoomed out, showing hundreds of people in the audience. Weston pointed at them. Not at one of them, but at the audience as a whole. “And you will be ready, and you will seize it.” The crowd burst into applause, but Weston held up his hand, indicating that he was not finished. Lilian switched to another channel.

There was a movie playing on the next channel. The characters spoke Japanese but did not talk much. It was raining and a blond man was encircled by a crowd, all of them with swords in their hands.

Lilian turned off the television. “Opportunities,” she recalled Hugo Weston’s speech. Once again, the word lit up in her mind, like a neon sign above the entrance of a bar in the evening: *osangel*. It was slightly different than it had been the last time, but she still felt that something was not right.

She was tired of the magazines, so she sat down in front of the laptop. She knew that it was forbidden, but she opened it up anyway. It started, and the desktop appeared. She stared at the buttons, the icons, and the different areas of the screen, then in the corner clicked on the desktop’s search bar. An application popped up and filled the whole screen. Now that it was in front of her, she found it familiar, like *déjà vu*.

Slowly, pressing every button with her right forefinger, she typed in *osangel*, and pressed Enter. By then she could read, although slowly. Based on the search results, she concluded that it was someone’s name. “But who might it be,” Lilian thought hard but nothing came to her mind, however she did not think of it as a failure. For her, memo-

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ries were not part of life, but when she managed to recall something, it felt natural, as if she had always known it.

Then it suddenly came back. It was not *osangel*, but *losangeles*. Los Angeles. That's it! She typed it in and pushed Enter. A city, of course. Everything seemed so obvious that she had to laugh for not knowing it at once. She looked at the pictures and found one she liked, in fact, she felt that she belonged to that place. The pictures showed the streets of the city, behind it a huge hill with large letters on it that spelled Hollywood. A strange feeling overcame her, but this time it was not *déjà vu*. It was homesickness.

What if I asked Robert to visit Hollywood, she asked herself, as she closed the laptop. Then she felt a touch on her shoulder, and she jumped up from the chair with a short scream. She had to grab the counter to keep her balance. She put her hands up to her mouth, as if she could undo the scream.

“What are you doing?” asked Turner and looked at the laptop.

“You scared me,” said Lilian, giggling confusedly. “Are you feeling better?”

“I think so, but please don't touch my laptop,” he said in a friendly tone, but Lilian felt he was serious about it. “I work on it, and I wouldn't like you to reset anything, even by accident. Do you understand?”

“Of course,” said Lilian, nodding. “Please don't be angry.”

Robert gave her a hug.

Turner did not talk much during the rest of the day because his stomach was still aching and all he wanted was rest. This was the first day in years that he did not smoke.

The sky became overcast by the afternoon. The water of the bay lost its colour and its friendly sparkle. The sea carried its water to

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the shore with wrathful grey waves and by the evening, it began to rain.

Lilian's thoughts were spinning, but in the end, she decided not to let Robert know what she was thinking about because she did not want to burden him with such trivialities.

In the evening, Turner talked with Brody. Both assured the other that everything was okay, though there was a slight uncertainty in Brody's voice. He did not like that his boss had disappeared and would not tell him why, but Brody did not bring this up. Turner sensed it but did not want to deal with it. His companies would be fine without him for a few weeks. He deserved a vacation, and he felt that once in a lifetime it was fine to keep to himself where he was and why he was away.

The rain didn't stop until the next noon. The weather depressed Turner. He didn't feel like doing anything, he had been just sitting on the couch since waking up. At times, he looked out the window and watched the raindrops pattering on the handrail of the terrace; at other times, he read the news on his laptop. Lilian was sitting in the armchair, flipping through some magazines. They hardly talked to each other. Then Lilian walked up to Turner and nestled up to him. They lay on the comfortable sofa and listened to the raindrops' monotonous tapping on the window. Over the handrail, the bay was lost in the void. They could not see the water or Mt. Fuji. Turner put the laptop aside and put his arms around Lilian. For some strange reason Turner could not understand, the proximity of Lilian cheered him up despite the depressing weather. Lilian was happiness itself, no matter the weather, and no matter where they were.

At noon, Turner ordered pizza. He said to Lilian that being a good cook or having a lot of money didn't matter, there were days when you

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simply had to order a pizza. This is one of the great truths of life, as certain as the sun.

Turner was in the shower when the pizza arrived. Lilian was on her way to the door when Turner bolted out of the bathroom:

“Lilian, don’t!” Lilian, startled, let go of the door handle. Turner pulled her away from the door. “Let me,” he said. “Please bring me some cash from the bedroom. You know, it’s in the safe, the dark green box.” Lilian nodded. “The code is 9211.”

Turner opened the door, barefoot, in a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. His hair was dripping wet.

“Hi,” he said. The delivery boy greeted him in Japanese. Turner took the pizza box and the receipt. Lilian arrived with the money.

Turner closed the door halfway so that the delivery boy could not peep into the house.

“Thank you,” he said to Lilian. “Go to the bedroom, please.”

He waited until she disappeared from the hallway, then he handed over the money, and said arigato. The delivery boy also said thank you and put on his helmet. He was young, so Turner was certain that he would have recognised Lilian. Guys like him make up most of the audience of Hollywood movies. Of course, it was also possible that he was just overreacting. He was thinking too much about getting busted.

In the evening, Turner picked out an outfit in Lilian’s wardrobe. She smiled and took the clothes into the bathroom to dress. He sank into the armchair and waited for her. He turned the light off, leaving only the paper mood lamps on. Then she entered the room, in a white mini skirt, a half-unbuttoned top, wearing high heels and a Red Cross headdress, like a nurse from an adult movie. Turner gasped at the sight of her. Again. For the thousandth time.

Jay and Gorou were twenty-something youngsters from Yokohama. On the weekends, they often took the bus to Morito Beach for a day or two. They had been good friends since childhood and spent every summer together. The ride was tiresome, but it was worth every minute, since Morito had a beautiful beach with tons of beautiful single girls, not to mention water sports.

During the ride, they talked about the heavenly weed they had scored the week before. Jay said he always got his weed from a guy named Ho, who had several sources, but the best pot was supplied by someone else, a guy named Cho, though he acquired it from the United States, it was not always available. Another dealer grew the ganja right here, in Japan, and a third dealer—a girl—brought it in from Tokyo. Their time between Yokohama and Hayama was spent with discussions of the same importance.

They had spent the previous day on the beach as well, and Jay noticed a beautiful blonde in the water. She was wearing sunglasses and she was alone, at least he did not see anyone she might have been with because the beach was teeming with tourists. His eyes had been caught by her beauty, then, squinting his eyes, he was trying to recall where he had seen her before because she looked very familiar. He tapped Gorou on the shoulder.

“Hey, is that Lilian Bailey?” asked Jay. He did not point at her, just stared in her direction. Gorou followed the gaze of his friend and narrowed his eyes to see the girl in the water more clearly. Gorou shook his head.

“Of course not. What would she be doing here?”

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In the spring, they had gone together to see Lilian Bailey's latest hit movie. On the bus ride to Morito, they had just been talking about how beautiful she was, and that they wouldn't mind spending a night with her, and what her future would be like. They were certain that she would undergo many plastic surgeries, like all the other actresses, as soon as the signs of aging start to show.

"But she looks exactly like her," said Jay.

"Well, yes, a little, but I'm certain that it's not her," said Gorou. "Why would she be here?"

"They must be shooting a movie," said Jay. "Let's ask her for a photo," although he knew it was a bad idea as soon as he said it out loud. She would probably send them away, and she would get angry, rightly so. Perhaps she has bodyguards who would catch them if they got too close. She might even press charges for harassment. But a photo would be great with that bombshell.

"Just leave it, I told you that's not her," said Gorou as he started off in the other direction.

"Wait," said Jay, and took out his phone.

"What's that?"

"I am checking out her profile," said Jay, swiping quickly on the phone. Gorou looked at the screen, then back at the girl, and took a deep sigh, indicating that it was totally pointless.

"Well?" asked Gorou.

"I don't understand. Her last post was at 6:30. She is at a photo shoot in Hollywood. Now it is half past four..."

"You have lost your mind, buddy. We are in a different time zone, which means that she made the post sometime around midnight. There is an eight- or nine-hour time difference."

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“Nine hours? She couldn’t get here in nine hours, could she?”

“Of course! She was done with the photo shoot, hopped on a plane, got off in Tokyo, then came to Morito, and jumped into the sea just to mess around with you. By the way, the flight is about six hours long. Maybe ten, depending on the plane.”

Jay was sad and lowered his hand.

“You are right, she can’t be here. Though this girl sure looks like her,” said Jay, and sighed deeply.

“She really does. Now come on. Let’s eat, I’m starving.”

“Okay, okay.”

As they were walking away, Jay turned back once more, and imagined that he saw the real Lilian Bailey, only a hundred meters away. It was a jittery feeling.

Eight days had passed since Lilian's arrival, and everything was fine. The evening was once again phenomenal, and Turner felt like a man reborn. He had become a different person, and he was planning on spending two weeks with the copy of a star somewhere in the world every year. That would be his rejuvenating therapy. I wonder how many people do this, he was thinking. Olivier said that they had another office. There can be hundreds of copies all over the world. I will probably never know the truth.

On the ninth day, the sky was still draped with clouds, but it had stopped raining, and the sun came out several times. Turner wanted to leave the house, so they decided to go on a hike on the Island of Enoshima. Lilian was excited and kept urging Turner to hurry up so they could go, like a little girl whose parents promised her a trip to Disneyland.

They went on to the island by car on highway no. 134. At the entrance, Turner parked the car and they walked in. There was a beach on both sides of the bridge, with myriads of colourful parasols, small boathouses, restaurants, and lots of people. Many of them were windsurfing, kitesurfing, kayaking, jet skiing, or just floating in the water on air mattresses. This was the most popular beach in the area. On the weekends, a huge number of people arrived from the north and the neighbouring cities. The area bustled with activity in the summer months from the beginning of June to the end of August, so it was just about to end. Farther from the shore, sails rose above the horizon like shark fins.

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Turner and Lilian easily blended into the crowd of tourists because the island had visitors from all over the world. A long promenade stretched through the centre of the island, with small stores and vendors on both sides.

At the beginning of the promenade, between two stores, a middle aged, haggard-faced Japanese man was writing on old, lacquered wooden boards. Lilian stopped there and asked the man to write her name on a board. The man showed her the boards that lay on the small folding table, indicating for her to choose one. Lilian chose a seemingly old, but well-treated piece of peach wood and passed it to the man. Turner watched the scene patiently and liked how Lilian was managing on her own. He decided not to help her unless she asked him to. This was the first time she had done something completely on her own. The vender pointed at Lilian, asking for her name, and grumbled a few Japanese words. Lilian would not have understood them even if he had been more articulate.

“Lilian,” she said. The man leaned closer and pointed at his own ear, asking her to repeat it once again. “Li-li-an,” she said slowly and clearly. The calligrapher dipped his brush into the inkwell and painted the kanji letters on the board. He took his time, and the black signs looked beautiful and proportionally placed in the middle of the board. He gave it to Lilian, who stared at it with a smile, then showed it to Turner.

“Look at this,” said Lilian. Turner complemented the souvenir, then passed some money to the Japanese man. “Arigato,” Lilian thanked the calligrapher. She had learned the word from Turner.

The man bowed several times, although he probably would have bowed even if she had thanked him in Afrikaans, Hungarian, or Proto-

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Mayan. Lilian held the board in her hand until it was dry and then put it into her bag.

The promenade stretched from an ornamented memorial building up to the rocky shore, then forked into another promenade winding among the rocks, and offered views of Sagami Bay. Far away, they caught sight of Hayama and Morito Beach, and they figured out the approximate location of their love nest.

Throughout the day, they wandered through Enoshima. Turner translated a few inscriptions with his phone, but he did not want to stare at a screen all day, so they just visited the sights and let their imagination do the rest.

On the west side, they found a barred wall. It was covered with padlocks left behind by couples in memory of their trip. Lilian attentively read the names and noticed a bronze-coloured, corroding padlock with the engraving “L+R”. She said that it meant Lilian and Robert. Turner did not oppose the idea, so they ceremoniously appropriated it as if it was their own.

A French tourist recognised Lilian as they were watching the wall. He was not entirely certain whether it was her, but he managed to snap a photo from the distance and posted it on his social media page. The picture was a bit blurry, but the blond woman in the photo—with a little effort—might well have been Lilian Bailey, or anyone else, for that matter. Those who saw the picture thought it was funny because there was a resemblance, but they knew it could not have been her.

They walked down to the beach where the rocks formed a large, level surface at the foot of the mountain, as if they were purpose-built waterside structures. They visited the observatory, the Iwaya Caves—according to legend the hiding place of a dragon that used to

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terrorize the area—, the statue of Benzaiten, and at Lilian's request they went into the aquarium. Turner didn't really want to, but he let himself be persuaded. Lilian liked watching the colourful fish, as they were busy in the water, taking care of important fish matters, but after all the hurry, they did not do anything. Turner was somewhat fascinated by the hall of the jellyfish, as they were floating in the dark, in a pale blue light. There was an otherworldly, yet relaxing quality to it.

They had dinner in a restaurant with a terrace. Lilian ordered sukiyaki made with chicken, and Turner finally tried the Hayama beef steak he had read so much about.

After dinner, Lilian went to the restroom, and as Turner was sipping his coffee and gazing at the ocean, he was thinking what would happen after Lilian is gone. He had fallen for her, and he had never had such amazing sex with anyone else before, although he had met several very gifted women. However, Lilian's purity and innocence enhanced the experience.

He felt he was ready to live the rest of his twenty-thirty years with Lilian. He could order her again but then their shared memories would be lost, and he would have to start all over; the little he taught her would be lost like unsaved data after switching off the computer. Their shared memories made Lilian particularly attractive. He felt attached to her because they shared experiences. Losing her would be like a break-up, although he had not really been through a break-up yet, at least he could not think of a serious one. No. He needed this Lilian, and if he could not have her, then probably he would not want anybody else, at least for a time. He definitely would not want a new Lilian who didn't remember anything.

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He recalled his dream about their escape, and in the daylight, it seemed completely nonsensical and unrealistic. They would not be likely to get as far as the next corner, not to mention the airport.

In the meantime, the waiter brought the bill and Turner paid.

After this Japanese adventure, he planned to go back to New York and immerse himself in work again. There would be no reason to be sad because he would return home with the memories of the two best weeks of his life. Olivier was right. This is an experience unlike any other. Turner decided to buy Olivier a bottle of whiskey as a farewell gift. He deserved it because they did an excellent job. The service was impeccable.

In the restroom, Lilian took off the hijab, washed her hands, and for a while just stood there with wet hands and was staring at her reflection. She thought that she was pretty but felt that something was missing, as if there was something about her that she did not know, but the fleeting thought quickly evaporated from her mind.

A ten-year-old girl stepped into the restroom and stopped by the door. She was not Asian, rather she must have been the child of a tourist visiting from a far away country. She noticed Lilian and stood thunderstruck. Her large brown eyes grew wide and she was about to say something, but the words stuck in her throat, and she suddenly turned around and ran out. Lilian put on the hijab, adjusted it in the mirror, and then left the restroom. The little girl ran to her girlfriend and whispered to her that Lilian Bailey was in the restroom. She did not believe her, but the little girl was insistent. Her arms and legs were shaking because she had just run into a star in the restroom. Finally, she persuaded her girlfriend to go back with her so they could check it out together.

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Lilian returned to their table and smiled under her headscarf, her eyes gleaming in the mixed light of the setting sun and the lamps.

Turner stood up from the table and noticed a man in the distance, standing alone and watching him. He was not Japanese, which did not mean anything by itself, but he suspiciously turned away his gaze when Turner noticed him. They rarely caught the attention of people because in that part of Japan, there were many American and European tourists, and the Asians did not really distinguish between the two.

“Damned tracking device,” he growled. They must be following them, what was he thinking? They had to keep an eye on the “product”. But how close surveillance were they under? He was not afraid of any recordings being made because that would hurt the company more than him, but he did not have any doubt that if the entire band were arrested, he would also spend a few years in a cold Japanese cell. Turner calmed himself since he had no reason to mistrust Olivier—so far.

“What are you talking about?” asked Lilian. Turner took her hand and they headed outside.

“Nothing. Doesn’t matter,” said Turner, and Lilian left it at that, but wondered what a tracking device might be.

As they were leaving the restaurant, the two little girls stepped out of the restroom, one of them laughing and scolding the other for duping her with the story of seeing Lilian, but the brown-eyed girl just turned her head from side to side, looking for Lilian. She did not see her anywhere, and she could not leave to check outside because her father called her, dessert was coming. She trudged back to the table disappointed, convinced that the lady in the restroom simply resembled Lilian Bailey.

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The man Turner noticed was just a German tourist who had arrived in Japan with his wife a few days earlier. He did not work for Olivier. Turner, however, did not notice that in the opposite direction stood a short, black-haired Japanese woman with a camera around her neck and an Enoshima guidebook in her hand; it was her who had actually been following them all day.

Night had fallen by the time they got home. Lilian dozed off in the car, but she woke when Turner pulled into the garage and she was not sleepy anymore.

They spent the remaining few hours of the day in the bedroom and the bathroom, indulging in bodily pleasures. It was good, but not as good as before. The “not as good” was still mind-blowingly good, but it was as if Lilian was not completely present in the moment, at least that was what Turner felt. It crossed his mind that perhaps Lilian was falling out of love with him but set his mind at ease because according to Olivier it would happen only after a month, not in two weeks, so he blamed this feeling on his or Lilian’s exhaustion.

Turner fell asleep right away, but Lilian couldn’t. She was thinking about the past few days and herself. The feeling that there was something about her kept resurfacing more and more often and lingered longer, but she could not clearly articulate her thoughts. All she knew was that there was something about her.

She found herself wondering how she had gotten there and how long she had been with Robert, but she could not find the answer no matter how hard she tried. At times, fleeting images of faces and places like Hollywood and Los Angeles flashed through her mind, but it happened too quickly, and the images were meaningless to her. She was certain and she felt that she loved Robert but could not tell for how long and why.

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Lilian was lying in the bed, watching the sliding door of the room. She was listening to Turner's breathing, and waiting for the answers, but none came. Her mind was not on her side. She also found it strange that she could not remember any trips from before. The thing that made her think of this was that she had travelled a lot with Robert in the past few days, but she could not recall any earlier journeys. Another thing she wondered about was, who is Olivier? He brought her here, but she could not remember who he was. He seemed to be a nice guy. Perhaps a physician? Is it possible that she has amnesia, but the others would not tell her?

The more she ruminated over these thoughts, the more divergent they became, like a dream-like Rubik's cube that she was trying to solve without any success, and the cube kept growing and growing and she could not rotate its layers anymore. The number of the colours and cubes kept growing, just like the number of words in her head, but she could not figure out which were the new ones because all of them sounded equally natural, as if she had always known them.

She glanced at Turner and saw that he was fast asleep. She quietly crept out of bed and had a terribly guilty conscience for doing something behind Robert's back but she had a few questions she needed to have answered.

She walked out to the hall and moved the laptop onto the kitchen counter so that she could also keep an eye on the door of the bedroom. She did not turn the light on, just opened up the laptop. She typed "tracking device" into the search bar. She read that is it used to track vehicles and people all over the world. It is small-sized, so that it can be easily hidden. It consists of a transmitter and a receiver, and these

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devices use radio waves to communicate. Lilian had difficulties understanding that part.

She kept searching, all the while having the weird feeling that Robert might put his hands on her shoulders at any moment. On another website, she found an article on shielding tracking devices. She clicked on it and continued reading. Shielding depends on the tracking device. As a rule, without signal strength the tracking device stops working. Most of the current trackers use GPS (Global Positioning System), she read. Metal is good for shielding, but anything can work starting from tinfoil to metal sheets. There are also signal jamming and shielding devices...

Something moved in the corner of her eyes. She quickly looked up, but it was just her mind playing tricks on her. Silence and darkness filled the room. She could hear the sound of the ocean waves crashing onto the shore only when she focused on it. The door and windows were good at insulating outside noise.

It does not make any sense, thought Lilian. Why did Robert mention a tracking device? It makes no sense.

She clicked with the cursor back into the search bar and typed “Hollywood”. She looked at the pictures again and now they seemed more familiar than the last time. She had the feeling that there was something in Hollywood that belonged to her. Something was waiting for her and she should go there... even without Robert. How could she tell this to him? She couldn’t leave without him because they belonged together. But then why did she have the feeling that she needed to go to Hollywood?

She closed the laptop, put it back to its place, and went back to the bedroom as quietly as she came out, and climbed into bed.

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It was difficult to fall asleep, but when she did at last, she was dreaming, for the first time in her life. About Hollywood. She saw images she had not seen online but she did not know that. Then a little girl appeared in her dream. She was young, maybe six years old, the wind tugged her flaxen hair as she was running on an unrealistically green hill. It was summer and the girl was happy. She was laughing, running around, enjoying the warm air and the way her flounced dress floated in the air. She wore a pink braided band on her arm, and there was a name woven into it: Lilian.

Turner was not in bed when she woke up the following morning. From the bedroom, she could hear him in the living room, typing on the laptop. He knows, she thought. He noticed that I was searching online, and he will be mad at me. You better think of a way of telling him that you need to travel to Los Angeles, she told herself.

Her guilty conscience quickened her heartbeat, her skin became sensitive, and she felt that her flimsy nightgown was scratching her as if it was made of coarse linen.

She went to the bathroom and then walked into the hall. She was certain that Robert would yell at her. Just knowing that she had broken a rule, a rule he had made, threatened to break her heart any moment.

However, when she stepped into the room, Robert greeted her affectionately.

“Good morning, darling,” he said. It took all her effort to manage a smile, but Lilian did not feel relieved.

“Hi,” she said, rather curtly, because she was afraid that her voice would tremble from nervousness and Robert would suspect something. Perhaps, he doesn’t know after all, she thought.

“I decided to work a little while you were asleep. Oh, and I made breakfast.” He pointed at the plate on the counter, with a halved baguette, ham, and salad on it.

“Thank you,” said Lilian. Turner was stunned at how beautiful she was every time he looked at her, even in the morning, with the wrinkles of the pillow still visible on her face and her blond hair dishevelled. But sleep did not mar the lines of her face and her nose, and the blue of her

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eyes did not fade. They gleamed in the morning light just as beautifully as ever.

While Lilian was having breakfast and drinking her coffee (she had begun to prefer it with honey), Turner remembered that he had only four days left with her, or five, but the last day certainly wouldn't be a whole day. So far, he had told himself that two weeks would be enough with her, but today he felt different. He realised that they had not even sat under the maple tree. He had planned it, though. In life, things often turn out differently than planned. Perhaps tonight, or tomorrow. There are so many things they have not done.

He did not want to let her go, and he was angry at himself for not thinking enough about a plan to keep her forever, but what could he do? His Lilian would become progressively more like the original Lilian, and it was inevitable. She would fall out of love with him and the illusion would be destroyed. And even if that were not so, he was bound by a contract that he had every reason to believe would be strictly, even harshly, enforced.

A contract with the devil, look no further for proof: he had not signed anything. These types of contracts are the most serious ones for the same way nothing proves that he had entered the contract, nothing proves what he had entered into; and in situations like this, the stronger predator dictates the rules of the game. He knew Olivier's organisation was higher up in the food chain than even his own.

There was nothing for him to do. He would only embarrass himself and in the process bring Olivier's wrath down on himself if he tried in any way to deviate from the terms he had agreed to. Even so, the feeling that he would lose Lilian seemed unbearably painful, and the void seemed infinite.

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Be happy as long as you have her, he told himself. Use your time with her.

Lilian got in the shower after breakfast. The hot water felt nice, and the tension she had been feeling since waking up abated. She suddenly touched a strange thing in the back of her head. The cranial bone was thicker under her skin at an inch-sized square-shaped area. She had to focus to feel it with her fingers, and as many times as she found it, she knew that it was not natural. She pressed it gently and her whole body was inundated with a wave of pain akin to an electric shock. Lilian hissed in pain. It lasted for a fraction of a second, but it would be a lasting lesson. Her limbs were tingling like when someone hits their funny bone at a sensitive point. For Pete's sake! she cried out, but this exclamation surprised her more than the object in the back of her head. She chuckled, then touched the spot again. This can't be normal. Others don't have it, she thought. This is something only I have. There must be something wrong with me.

They spent the day at Isshiki Beach. Lilian decided for a hat again, a small white one matching her swimsuit and beach jacket. Turner was stunned at how good it looked on her—she simply could not dress badly.

The summer sun was shining brightly, the sand and the water warmed up quickly, people rushed to the beach, the surfers were hunting for waves, and the children were screaming. Away from the crowd of beach goers, Lilian and Turner made love secretly underwater, then they lay down in the shade and drank cocktails from the bar. Sated by sex and warmed by the sun, Lilian forgot about her questions, and Turner forgot about the deadline.

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While they were in the bar, Lilian took the hat off. Turner told her to put it back on, but she wouldn't. He asked her nicely and told her that they might get into trouble if she did not.

"Just tell me, why is the hat so important?" asked Lilian. She had never spoken in that tone before. She was determined and angry. Her face hardened, and the angelic gleam disappeared. Lilian was about to ask why she had to act like she was hiding, but in the end she did not because the question would have sounded ridiculous.

"Calm down," said Turner. He tried to stay composed, but it annoyed him that Lilian was disobedient. "Let's go home, and you can take it off there. But for now, put it on, please, because there are certain people who are not supposed to see you." Lilian put the hat back on, but she was offended, apparently. Turner thanked her.

They spent the afternoon in the house. Turner sensed that it was already too risky to go out with Lilian, so he decided that from then on, they would spend their time at the house.

He was sitting on the couch, sipping his second glass of whiskey. Lilian's anger had passed by the time they got back, but she was avoiding his company. She was sitting at the kitchen counter and manicuring her nails.

Turner watched her and thought that all this would soon be over, and now they were just sitting in front of each other wasting their precious time. Obviously, Lilian has no idea what to expect. She thinks that she is young, with her whole life ahead of her with her love, Robert. She believes she will be manicuring her nails in various parts of the world for the rest of her life.

The truth is, Honey, thought Turner, that in four days you will be turned off like a nice desk lamp, and I will go back to New York to earn money for the next order.

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Even though Turner never liked deadlines, this time it bothered him especially. He had invested a lot of money in the service and Lilian owed him every minute of her life. Like when someone rents a convertible but leaves it parked in front of the house, what's the point of it then?

He wondered what he could do during the rest of the time. Lilian had been good company so far, she was exceptionally smart, beautiful, and she accepted him as he was.

That's all fine and dandy, said a strange voice deep inside Turner, but there's one more thing. Here is a woman, and you can do anything you want to with her without consequences. She won't press charges, she won't complain to a boyfriend, she won't tell everything about you in the office like an intern did in New Orleans, when during a joint construction project, you worked in Raleigh Luxury Properties' office for weeks.

On the second day of that project, he had seduced a twenty-year-old intern in charge of administration, and on the third day everyone was talking about the affair. It did not cause any problems, but nobody needs complications like that. This can't happen with Lilian. In the past ten days, she didn't even think about her girlfriends, and it was fine this way.

You can even rape her, he heard a voice speaking from a secret, Freudian recess of his mind. It was the voice of an animal, locked away, tied down with chains forged by civilisation and society. Of course, answered Turner, emptying his glass, I can do anything, because she is my property. I bought her and paid for her. I can even kill her. It probably wouldn't be a problem. It wouldn't surprise me if other clients had killed their copy. The monster was watching Lilian through Turn-

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er's eyes, like a hungry predator watches a fawn among the trees. But I won't do that. I admit that there is something exciting in violence; once I even saw a dominatrix, but I love Lilian. She is so pretty and innocent. She doesn't deserve to be treated badly. Perhaps I will order another girl to treat differently, but I can't hurt Lilian.

His rational mind knew that just because he could do something, he did not necessarily have to do it.

Come on, Roberto, whispered the monster, hissing from the dark. What's the point if you don't use her? Why have you paid so much money, the voice asked—taking advantage because it knew that money was Turner's Achilles' heel. She's not a person, she's just a clone. A hologram. Dead woman walking. She has no rights, no life, no future. What's the difference between you ending her life or Olivier doing so with the flick of a switch? It will end, no matter what. Just use her!

Turner was sitting on the couch and watching Lilian primping herself. His glass was empty again, but he did not remember when or how many times he had refilled it. His mouth was parched, and he craved another whiskey. And he desired Lilian. He wanted her, but this time he wanted her in another way. This time he would take her as hard and selfishly as he could. He poured himself another drink and headed toward her. The glass was empty by the time he reached her. Lilian noticed that he tried to appear sober but in reality, he was drunk, more drunk than she had seen him before. His slurred his words as he talked, and it was obvious that he was trying to be articulate to hide from Lilian that he had been drinking. She felt contempt and pity for him.

Turner put the glass on the counter, it clinked loudly, and she shuddered. She stopped what she was doing, and looked at Turner questioningly, with a slight dread in her eyes.

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“Is everything all right, Robert?” she asked, “You seem...”

“Take your dress off!” said Turner.

“I don’t feel like it right now,” said Lilian. It wasn’t that she wanted to defy him, just that she wanted to do something else. Turner did not realise that this was the first time Lilian had rejected him. The sexual desire programmed into her in the laboratory was starting to diminish because the original Lilian never had a high libido. “Would you like to watch a movie instead?” she asked. Lilian had no idea that Turner was not in the mood for a movie, and definitely not in one to argue with her.

“Come with me,” said Turner, heading to the bedroom. Lilian followed him, wondering what he might want after she had just explicitly told him that she did not feel like it. Turner stood next to the bed. She will get what she deserves, hissed the animal in his head. Take what’s yours, Roberto.

As Lilian stepped into the room, Turner grabbed her by the arm and threw her onto the bed. Lilian was startled and looked uncomprehendingly at Robert, then at her arm, where the red marks left by Turner’s fingers were still visible. Robert jumped onto her and started tearing her clothes off. Lilian’s breast slipped out and then disappeared under her dress as Turner tore the arm off the dress.

“Stop it,” said Lilian. “Robert!”

“Shut your mouth,” yelled Turner, “you are mine. You do as I say!” And he continued tearing her dress off. A strap ripped but another one twisted and cut into Lilian’s arm.

Lilian cried out but Turner did not stop. When Lilian’s summer clothes were no more than rags, he began to take off his clothes. Lilian tried to push him away.

“I’ve told you I don’t want it. Stop it.”

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“Shut up,” Turner shouted at her again. He wanted to alleviate the dryness of his parched lips with the kiss of Lilian, but she withdrew from him, and he could only lick her face. He had never forced himself on a woman, but now the feeling that he could do anything to her, with no restraint, overpowered him. This is what slaveholders must have felt when they raped their black slaves, or Nazi physicians when they violated the prettiest Jewish girls before dissecting them in the name of science. The monster in man can never be let out from the cell of the subconscious because then all hell breaks loose.

Turner felt a force, a power slowly overcoming him. He could exercise control over her like over a personal belonging. He imagined turning her on her stomach, and then he would twist her arms back so that she wouldn't wriggle.

“I don't want to, Robert. It hurts!” she said in tears, and then by instinct, she hit him unintentionally. She struck him on the temples with her fist.

It was not a particularly strong punch, but Turner stopped taking off his clothes and just stared at her. The monster scurried back into his putrid cave of dark thoughts, and Turner felt sick. He looked at her for a while uncomprehendingly and rubbed his temples.

“I'm sorry,” said Turner, mumbling the words quietly and getting out of the bed slowly. Lilian pulled her torn clothes together to cover herself and cast her eyes down. Tears were running down her cheeks.

Turner went to the bathroom. He was dizzy and felt sick, but in the end, he didn't throw up. He took a shower, as if trying to wash off his wrongdoing, trying to flush the animal out of its cave, like a rodent from its hole in a wall.

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He drank as much water from the tap as he could, then got dressed. He was feeling better, but still heard the monster teasing him. Robert, you are a pussy. You are a worthless coward, but by then he was himself again and knew that he had done something terrible. Even though Lilian was only a copy and would be turned off in four days, he could not treat a woman like that.

He went back to the bedroom. Lilian was sitting on the bed with the blanket pulled up to her chest. She was not crying anymore but infinite sadness was writ on her face. Turner noticed that her upper arm turned blue where he had squeezed it. As she sat there on the bed she did not look like a bombshell or the woman of his dreams, and he was angry with himself for this. If he does not want to handcuff her to the bed for the remaining few days, then he has to win her over somehow.

“I am so sorry, Lilian,” he said with as much sincerity as he could muster. “I should not have done that.”

Lilian looked up and tears were swelling in her light blue eyes. Turner’s head was still spinning from the alcohol.

“I didn’t want to hurt you,” he said, “I just... I don’t know what came over me... I went too far.”

Lilian did not reply. Turner decided to give her a little time, so he went to the terrace with a beer. Enough whiskey for the day. Liquid sunshine, huh? Liquid frenzy!

Lilian lay down on the bed, curled up beneath a blanket. She turned toward the wall and was absorbed in her thoughts. Her heart said that everything was fine, Robert loved her, and his violent outburst was a one-time thing. Her rational mind however told her that she needed to go where she belonged, to Los Angeles. There was something wrong with this trip and with Robert, and the thing in the back of her head

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that was not supposed to be there. She reassured herself: You must stay strong and figure out a way to Los Angeles, and you will find your answers. Her heart insisted that Robert is her companion, they are happy together, and she cannot leave him. She lay in the bed for another hour and decided to stay because she loved Robert the way he was. She would think about the Los Angeles trip for another day, and if tomorrow she feels that she needs to go, then she will talk about it with Robert. It is possible that he will like the idea and they can go together.

Turner was smoking on the terrace. The sun hung low in the sky and bathed the terrace in a pinkish light. The water in the bay turned dark blue, and the seagulls circled up above like black silhouettes. They flew toward the sun and plunge-dived into the water for small fish. The people on the beach began packing up, closing up the sunshades and folding their towels.

All of a sudden, Turner burst out in a coughing fit. It came out of the blue and was so intense that the world turned black in front of his eyes for a moment, but then it passed. As he glanced up, he saw Lilian standing by the door looking worried.

“I’m fine,” said Turner, but judging from his choking voice, it was far from the truth. “And what about you, are you okay?” he asked. Lilian nodded, walked up to him, embraced and caressed him. Her touch was so gentle that it soothed Turner immediately.

They stood by the handrail in silence, listening to the ocean and the sizzle of Turner’s cigarette as the tobacco blazed with each drag.

“Shouldn’t you quit smoking?” asked Lilian, but nobody could have said how she knew about the correlation between smoking and coughing, and Lilian certainly would not have asked this question a few days before. Earlier, she had not thought about the harmful effects of smok-

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ing. The odour of cigarettes bothered her. She could smell it on him but had not brought up the subject before. She thought it was normal and she had to accept Robert immediately.

“I love smoking,” said Turner. Lilian smiled and gazed into Turner’s eyes.

“And me? Do you love me?”

“Yes,” said Turner with his eyes closed, but not because he lied, but because he couldn’t bear to see Lilian’s reaction, the sincere happiness and gleam in her eyes. Lilian is happy, but not for long, and that’s not fair, thought Turner. “You know what?” he asked as he was staring at the smouldering cigarette.

“What?”

“I’m gonna quit,” said Turner, stubbing out the cigarette. “For you.”

Lilian kissed him and her arms tightened around him. Turner decided that he wouldn’t smoke until he is back in New York. If he feels like smoking when he is back in New York, then he will yield to the temptation; if he does not, then he will quit permanently.

They lay in each other’s arms. For a moment, the sun touched the peak of Mt. Fuji. It seemed as if the volcanic cone was the stand for a shining relic at an exhibition, and on it there was the treasure, the brilliant sun disc. The invaluable sun. Its diameter is about 109 times that of Earth. Turner heard this trivia in a game show. It is amazing how much we know and the strange situations in which we learn, but it’s all worth nothing if there is nobody to share it with.

“Diamond Fuji,” whispered Lilian.

“Yes.”

Mt. Fuji slowly swallowed the sun and dusk engulfed the city. They fell asleep on the terrace and woke up during the night when they got

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cold. Lilian forgot about Turner's violent behaviour, but Los Angeles and Hollywood popped into her mind again, and now she remembered that the two names refer to the same city.

They went into the house, and Turner headed straight to the bedroom. Lilian made up her mind. She went into the bathroom and waited a few minutes, then flushed the toilet. She quietly walked into the bedroom and saw that Robert was already sleeping. She slipped out to the kitchen and opened the laptop. She could not get the trip to Los Angeles out of her head. She should already be there—this feeling got stronger and stronger, as excitement and adrenaline rises when the rollercoaster reaches to the top. She felt that if she did not fly out there as soon as possible, she would miss out on something.

She decided to talk to Robert the following day, but first, she wanted to think the whole thing through. She searched for information on how to get from Hayama to Los Angeles. The first hit recommended departure from the Tokyo airport. Reading about it was like knocking over a line of dominoes. One domino toppled over the next. The airport made her think of abroad, then of a trip, then of the country's border, then of her passport, and she realised that she had no idea where her passport was—or, for that matter, her identity card, and her driver's license. How is that possible? She would think about it later, but now she needs to gather further information.

While browsing through the website of the airport, she realised that she needed a lot of money and airport security is very strict. She felt dizzy reading through the innumerable conditions of travelling by plane.

She remembered the thing under her skin in the back of her head. She gently touched it. Is this what makes me so confused? wondered

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Lilian. Is this what makes me forget everything? Robert said that we can't be seen. Then there is that damned tracking device. Perhaps there is a tracking device in me. Maybe that's the thing in the back of my head. But how? And why? It sounded unreal, but it would explain her confusion and other strange questions she tried to answer in the past few days.

If she is being followed or under surveillance, then she can't get on a plane. Perhaps someone does not want her to leave this place. For some reason, this sounded perfectly logical to her, so she decided against travelling by plane. She also discarded the idea of a tracking device inside her. On second thought, it was not a reasonable presumption.

As she was searching for an alternative solution, she stumbled upon a website that recommended travelling on a cargo ship from the port of Yokosuka. Many cargo ships allow passengers on board, and their service had improved a lot over the past decades. Moreover, the fees are lower and security checks are significantly laxer than at airports. However, she would have to ask Robert for money because she does not have any, which, now that she thinks of it, is also very strange. Perhaps she does have money, but where? Entering the United States will be problematic, but she will be there at least, and she will tell someone that... perhaps she was kidnapped. The theory did not seem plausible, but she did not consider herself smart enough to think it through. It was just a shot in the dark. She would have never thought that Robert had malicious intentions so there must be something else. Is it possible that everything is all right and only her feelings are playing a trick on her? Why the hell should I go to Hollywood? I have Robert and everything else I want here. Then, another question popped up. What did I

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do before I came here with Robert? Somehow, she could not find the answer to that question, and for that matter, she hardly understood the question itself. Being there was natural. It does not matter what happened before. She simply did not think about it, just like other people don't think about what they have done in the previous summer or on any other average weekday.

The quickest way to get from Hayama to Yokosuka was by taxi. She found a phone number, and she tried to commit it to memory. She couldn't write it down because if Robert found it, he might be opposed to the journey.

The image of the yellow taxi reminded her what it is like to ride one. She was certain that she had been in a taxi before, but she could not recall the memory exactly. She also remembered that it is possible to flag down a taxi and that they accept tips.

She deleted the browsing history, closed the laptop, put it back in its place, and climbed into the bed quietly. She was thinking about a way to tell all this to Robert.

Questions began popping up again, as if they were waiting for the arrival of the night, like nocturnal predators. When did she come to Hayama and how did she meet Robert? She might as well ask Robert, but she felt she should have known it in the first place, and by asking about it she would reveal herself. Why must she wear a hat or a hijab even when they sat down outside a restaurant? Robert said that the sun is strong in that area, but others don't wear a hat at all times. Neither does Robert. And why did Robert say that I am his, and why was he so violent? Isn't he afraid that I will leave him? Nevertheless, every time she thought about being without Robert she was overwhelmed with remorse. She couldn't leave him because

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she loves him, she knew it with every fibre of her being; still, she did not know why.

Her mind was a large cauldron, roiling with so many unanswered questions. It seemed like each question led to still more. Soon there wouldn't be place for more and she would go mad.

Perhaps she would find answers in Los Angeles, but what if she gets there and nothing happens? There it is. Another question.

That is how the agonisingly long minutes passed before she fell asleep.

Dawn in Hayama was magical. The sun rises across the Miura Peninsula and for a while leaves the beaches on the western side in a bluish light. The light of the sun first emblazons Mt. Fuji, then the island of Enoshima, and slowly crawls through the dark blue bay, then it washes over the torii, the Shinto gate built on the rocks close to the coast, enflaming and engulfing it in a crimson colour. The beaches are next, and the dawn turns into morning as the first light reaches Turner's house.

Lilian woke up when Turner climbed out of the bed. She sat up and watched him leaving the room. What the hell happened? Where did things go wrong? Or have they ever been all right? She sensed that her feelings toward Robert were not as strong as they had been a week ago, but she attributed it to his cruelty the day before. Even so, he had apologised—argued an inner voice—but something has changed irreversibly.

Turner, for his part, also felt confused. He went out to the balcony and lit a cigarette. For some mysterious reason, smoking had always cleared his mind. A part of his mind was occupied by the love he felt for her, but in another corner the beast cowered in darkness, and there was a new idea intruding in his mind: what if he put a stop to it before everything turns into a nightmare? In the end, he decided to start all over from scratch.

As he stubbed out his cigarette, he noticed the butt from yesterday and he remembered his vow. Well, that's it. As Mark Twain said: "Giving up smoking is the easiest thing in the world. I know because I've done it thousands of times."

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Turner decided to give it another try. The one he had just smoked should not count because he forgot to pay attention to his recently made vow. Lilian deserved it.

After all, the past ten days were wonderful, and how beautiful she was upon her arrival! She was still beautiful, but now he looked at her in a different light. She had seemed more exciting when he had thought of her as a Hollywood actress beyond his reach. Now she was one girl among many on the endless list of his conquests. Perhaps he would put a star next to her name on the list, to indicate that she was a clone, a rare type, like Asians and African Americans. In a certain respect, everybody is similar, and everybody wants the same in life—stars, common people, the wealthy and the poor alike. Being unreachable creates the illusion of uniqueness.

As he stood on the balcony and watched the greyish-blue water of the bay, he concluded that he had abandoned the principles that had paved his way so far. He had always considered himself a winner, a dominating person, and someone who was decisive. He didn't brood over things. He always acted based on his intuitions, trusted himself, and stuck to his decisions; and as a result, he never came to regret anything. These were the fundamental principles that had led him to where he was and made him rich and free. They had led to a life of parties, the pursuit of pleasures, and new experiences. What about Lilian? She was just one pleasure among many. A smile crossed his face with a tinge of wickedness in his eyes. That's right. Lilian would be a pleasant memory, something he had that was uniquely his. Lilian was fantastic and he would use the rest of their time to enjoy themselves. He slicked back his hair, took a deep sigh, and went into the house.

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Lilian was preparing breakfast, and Turner was amazed at how she was bustling in the kitchen. He stepped to her, hugged her from behind, and breathed a kiss on her neck. Lilian showed no sign of pleasure or aversion at this.

“Breakfast for me?” asked Turner.

“If you behave,” said Lilian.

“Okay. What about a trip to Miura Peninsula? Some nice places out there, and a famous fish market.”

Lilian liked the idea, but she didn’t want to give in too easily. She glanced down, her hair hiding a smile.

“It will be fun, you’ll see,” said Turner. “I’ve taken you only to nice places so far, haven’t I?”

Lilian nodded, almost imperceptibly.

“Yes,” she said quietly, and began eating her breakfast.

“They say the best tuna is sold in Misaki,” said Turner. He was enthusiastic and Lilian’s mood gradually lightened up. “You can eat it fresh out of the ocean. You might even see it wriggling on your plate.”

By the time they finished breakfast, they were both smiling. Perhaps they would have a good time, like they had on their first days, thought Turner—although it seemed ages ago.

Sunlight was pouring into the living room, and pleasant warm air circled around them like a good fairy who peers into every room and caresses everybody. Lilian’s nightgown was almost transparent, and the curves of her breasts became visible again and again, once from the side, then from above. Turner stole furtive glances at them. He found them exciting, even after having seen them from every angle.

Turner noticed that she began holding the cup another way, its handle to the other side. She slipped her finger through the hole and

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held the cup in her palms. That's not a habit someone picks up overnight. It must have been a habit of the original Lilian that somehow transferred into the copy via the mystical network of neurons. As the process of assimilation gradually reaches completion, more and more habits of the original will surface. Lilian did not notice any of them. She just drifted in the stream of her mind's enlightenment. It was like Alzheimer's in reverse.

Turner knew that they did not have much time left. Olivier's estimation of two weeks was precise. He had to be prepared for a separation that wouldn't be like Bogart's in Casablanca, whatever he does or does not do until then. Perhaps, in the remaining time Lilian would figure out that they were not a couple and that her place was not with him. That her love for Robert was not real. That she couldn't tell why she loved him and why she did not. Only God knew what went through or would go through her mind. Nevertheless, they had four days left and he wanted to make the best of it.

They got ready, climbed into the Toyota and began their journey to discover the peninsula of Miura located between Tokyo Bay and Sagami Bay. It was not a self-driving car, but Turner liked driving and he rarely had the opportunity to do so. They drove south on the coastal road under the blazing sun. Lilian wore a floral summer dress that revealed her shapely legs below the middle of her thighs. She put the hat on the back seat and watched through her sunglasses the landscape flying by. At regular intervals, Turner reached over to caress Lilian's soft thigh, as if it were life-sustaining therapy for him, and in a certain respect, the touch of pretty girls means exactly that for a man. At the same time, Lilian was toying with him. She felt so good that she forgot about Hollywood. It was too early in her mental

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growth for her to think about and keep in mind several things at the same time.

They stopped at Bishamon Bay and walked along the grey rocks that had been carved by the waves of the ocean. They splashed cold water on each other, kissed, and laughed. Lilian—probably inspired by the cameras seen in the hands of tourists—proposed taking a few photos. Turner had a phone in his pocket, but he kept its camera function a secret. Lilian accepted that they did not have a camera, but she had a vague memory of taking a photo in some past time, although she could not remember exactly when and where. She also wondered whether she had a phone and where it could be.

Although the sun was still high, lunch time had passed by the time they reached Misaki, a fishing village in the southern tip of the peninsula. They walked among the densely built houses and booths. All the buildings were old and distinct from each other. There were hand-painted Japanese kanjis and neon signs on the walls of the buildings advertising the products and prices. They could order a whole tuna and Turner, seeing them up close, was surprised at how big they were; however, at most places they were sold without their tails. Turner told Lilian everything he knew about tuna, which was that certain species could swim at speeds up to 38 miles per hour.

Most of the seafood sold at the market was recognisable, but several of them were difficult even to describe. Seaweeds and exotic fruits were on sale as well. Many vendors spread out their cuttlefish and octopi in front of their booths like carpets; others displayed them hung outstretched on a grate.

There was a cluster of restaurants at the harbour, selling an unimaginable variety of seafood dishes. Further away were booths that

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sold raw fish, whole or cut into pieces. The whole village smelled of fish, but there was a charm to it, and after a while they got used to the odour.

Fishing boats with distinctive arched hulls and sailing boats plied the waters, the fishermen and vendors shouting to each other in Japanese, and the tourists were bargaining, chatting, and giving orders in every language of the planet.

Lilian enjoyed the excitement in the air. Some of the marine animals that were stretched out disgusted her, others fascinated her. Turner told her everything he knew about them and tried to make her laugh as often as he could. He translated a few sentences with the help of his mobile phone, which was how they figured out that maguro means tuna.

Lilian wanted to buy a fish-shaped refrigerator magnet, so Turner asked her to repeat *Kore wa ikura desu ka?* ‘How much does it cost?’ in Japanese. Lilian, laughing, muttered the question a few times, then turned to the vendor and messed it up once again. But the vendor figured out what she wanted to say and pointed at the price list. Turner paid and Lilian put the ceramic magnet, which showed a fish jumping merrily out of the water, into her bag.

Turner felt adventurous and wanted to have a local specialty for lunch. Cooked tuna roe with salad and rice and tuna sushi rolls were on the menu, but in the end, he decided to eat *maguro don*, marinated raw tuna over rice with sesame seeds and a bit of yam. Lilian ordered roasted tuna steak over rice with Japanese salad.

A patron at a nearby table ordered grilled tuna head. It seemed very bizarre. Shortly, the waiter arrived with a platter with a fish head on it like a pyramid. At first glance, there didn’t seem to be much meat on it,

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but the waiter, as skilled as a chef, used a knife and a small cleaver to slice enough fish for three people in a matter of seconds. He whittled around the fish-head as if he were carving a sculpture, with a speed that was hard to follow. The people sitting nearby stopped eating and watched the waiter deftly wielded the blades like a samurai. When he finished, he was met with enthusiastic applause, to which he bowed deeply.

The guests were taking photos and Turner wondered if it would be a problem because Lilian would be on the photos, but he knew he could not do anything.

Turner and Lilian acknowledged that the local cuisine was rightly famous. The waiter, a young Japanese boy, knew a few English words. He mentioned that Misaki was Japan's second largest tuna supplier and on a better day, they served up to one thousand five hundred pieces of fish. He added that the fish were put into a freezer on the ship, that's why they were so tasty and fresh. After lunch, he brought local melons in a small bowl because it was a must-not-miss for tourists.

After the tumult and the crowd of Misaki, it felt great to finally get into the car. Turner drove back to the house. That was when Tanaka stopped tailing them, but she kept observing the house for another hour. She had been following them on a scooter throughout the whole day, but they had not noticed anything.

Turner pulled into the garage and began taking off Lilian's clothes right there in the car. She let him. She wanted him. They forgot about everything and spent the whole night together. They made love in every corner of the house—it was their ritual now—then sat out on the balcony.

Turner didn't light a cigarette and didn't even crave it. He suspected that later it would be more difficult, but for the time being he was fine

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without them. Lilian was not fond of alcoholic beverages, except for cocktails, especially with oranges. She liked the way Turner prepared them: orange juice, strawberry syrup, white rum, and lime juice—Mai Tai à la Turner.

“I’m having a good time,” said Lilian without looking at him. She was staring at the water, the glittering moonlight on the black waves.

“I’m glad to hear it. I’m having a good time too.”

“How long are we staying?” she asked. Turner managed to hide his consternation. Lilian kept gazing in the other direction. He could not decide if she was putting on an act, or knew something, or just asked an innocent question as an ignorant clone would do.

“As long as we want to,” he blurted out.

“It is strange, but I don’t remember where we were before coming here.” She looked at Turner, who read in her eyes that there were no ulterior motives behind her statement and calling him to account was not her intention. Nevertheless, it worried him that she was thinking about things like this on the eleventh day.

“Neither do I, but it does not matter,” said Turner, raising his glass. She clinked her glass against his. “What’s important is that we are here, together, and I love you.”

Lilian was getting more insight and awareness every day, thought Turner. Shortly she would begin to realise that she did not love him, although he was certain that Lilian was having a good time with him, which might slow down the process.

“I love you too,” said Lilian. After that, her questions drifted away and left her alone for a day; neither was Turner troubled by the evil thoughts that had plagued him the day before. They were talking about the past few days, where they had been, what they had done. They

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shared memories, like a real couple. The fish market in Misaki, the island of Enoshima, the cocktails on the beach of Isshiki, the sand balls in Morito, the boat they rented, the salty water, the waves, and watching the sunrise from the fabulous terrace.

That was their last happy evening together. They made love and fell asleep like on the first day. In peace and love.

Lilian was dreaming again that night, for the second time in her life. There were no monsters in her dream, and she did not fall from a height, but it was tormenting, nevertheless. She dreamed that she was a famous actress. Everybody adored her, everybody wanted to see her; they wanted to give her awards and applaud her, but she could not find the way to the stage. She was hurrying through a narrow yellowish-white backstage corridor behind the stage, but she could not find the ramp. She reached the end of the corridor, which forked into two endless corridors. There was scarcely any light and air. Her chest was heaving but she hurried forward because she was already late. As she was pushing forward, she leaned against the wall on her right, then the wall on her left to keep her balance. She heard the roar of the crowd and her name being shouted. The corridor kept getting narrower and narrower until she could not breathe anymore... then she woke up.

She was soaked in sweat and her heart was racing as every cell of her body gasped for air. She glanced at Turner, but he was asleep. It was still dark outside, but the bluish light of the sky glimmered on the horizon. She caught her breath and lay back. Her throat was dry, and her lips were parched. She decided to get a glass of water a bit later, but first she needed to think over her dream. She had the feeling that dreaming was natural, but she could not recollect any of her earlier dreams, except the one in which she saw the young girl.

What was this dream? she asked herself. The thought that she was an actress seemed natural, but confused her too, because she could not be an actress... but who was she after all? Or what was she, if not an

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actress? She could not remember having a profession. She reached the boundaries of her mind, a frontier she could not cross, and her thoughts bounced back like a ball bounces back from the wall that prevents it from getting out into the world. Everything seemed far too complex for Lilian and she had to hold her head in her hands, fearful it might burst.

She stroked the back of her head and touched the small area of hardened skin. A tracking device, the thought flashed across her mind clearly and unambiguously, like the beacon light of a lighthouse. She could not be sure but that was what her feelings told her. What else could it be? Robert does not have one; she felt the junction of his neck and skull one evening as they were making love. People do not wear tracking devices; she is the only one. Someone put it there to monitor her whereabouts. And Robert knows this. He has to. That's why he said, "damned tracking device." He knows that someone has implanted it into her. But why? And who is she that her whereabouts must be known?

The journey to Hollywood occupied her mind again. Yesterday, she did not bring it up to Robert because she forgot about it, but now she once again felt that she needed to go. When Robert wakes up, she will talk to him. It's for the best. She will tell him everything about her strange feelings and that she wants to go. Robert is smart and has money. Surely, he would take her.

Her feelings toward him had changed since the time she arrived. The excitement and the passionate love faded, but she still respected him and felt that she had to stay with him. The sex was good too, though not always, and occasionally Robert was too rough. Despite these changes, she could not leave him without a word; however, the secret feeling that she needed to depart grew stronger every day. With or without him.

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Although she could not plan every single detail of the trip, she felt that she would know what to do when she got to her destination.

Once again, she touched the square-shaped object under her skin and felt its rounded corners. She only felt it when she touched it, but when she laid her fingers on it, it sent out a burning sensation, or maybe she was just imagining it. What is so special about me? she asked herself again.

She dozed off but woke with a startle an hour later. She got up and went to the kitchen for a drink of water. The sunbeams projected the blurry lines of the windows onto the floor. Sounds of the city began to filter in as its inhabitants woke up. Her throat was so dry that it hurt when she tried to swallow, but as she continued to sip, the dryness of her throat eased.

Lilian noticed the laptop on the kitchen counter and opened it almost unconsciously while darting glances at the bedroom. The hallway was empty, and everything was silent. For a while, she just stared at the search bar because she did not know what to type in. She knew that she needed to go to Hollywood, a district of Los Angeles, but she didn't know exactly where to go. She hoped she would remember more once she got there. She drank another glass of water, sat down in front of the laptop, and typed in her name: Lilian. She hesitated for a moment. There was something terrifying in what she was about to do. Her long, slender fingers hovered over the Enter key, like a military chopper waiting for an order to fire. She watched her name, the black pixels in the search bar, and she was overcome by a feeling that there was more to her than the name Lilian.

The moment she pushed the button two strong hands grabbed her shoulders and turned her around on the bar stool with one sud-

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den jerk. Search results, photos, and links filled the screen behind her back.

Turner was standing right in front of her, with his face twisted into an expression of fury. Lilian was startled and held up her hands in front of herself. With one hand, he clasped Lilian's hands like handcuffs, and with his other hand he reached behind her back and shut the display of the laptop without looking at the screen. Lilian shuddered again at the thud.

"What the hell are you doing?" he asked. His voice was deep and coarse from anger.

"I'm sorry..."

"I told you not to touch the fucking laptop!" Turner was yelling.

"Please don't be angry, Robert," she said and began crying. It was not remorse, but her own powerlessness and helplessness that disheartened her. She knew what she needed to do but she was not capable. She had neither the knowledge nor the strength. In her gut, she felt that she had friends somewhere out there, but this did not help her in her current situation. Perhaps, she had talked to them long ago, but she had no memories of it.

In that moment, Turner decided he had to forget about Lilian. She knew too much, and she had become too smart. He could no longer deceive her with their love, but she was still his property so she either obeyed him or else she might fare badly. He needed to make this clear for her.

He slicked back his hair and let her hand go. Lilian rubbed her hands as if she really had been handcuffed.

"Go and take a shower," said Turner. "I will make breakfast, and we will have a little talk."

“Robert, I...”

“Go.” Turner pointed toward the bathroom, signalling that the discussion was over.

“I also have to tell you something,” said Lilian as she stood up, but Turner did not reply. He began preparing breakfast and made two cups of coffee. He finally coughed, which eased the burning sensation he had felt in his throat since coming out of the bedroom. He opened the laptop and mumbled a curse. Most of the search results showed the name of Lilian Bailey, with “Lilian” highlighted in bold letters.

There were a few other people named Lilian as well, a page that explained the origin of the name, and another one that listed female names; but most of the results were about the actress. There were pictures on the side of the page: Lilian at an award ceremony, on the red carpet, in a ravishing, champagne-coloured evening dress. Lilian in bikini on the cover of a magazine, screenshots from her movies, paparazzi photos of her drinking coffee in a Hollywood bar, and short videos: interviews, movie premiers, shootings, and several paparazzi videos of her sunbathing on her friend’s boat, posing at a photoshoot, or leaving a movie theatre.

Turner struck the table. If this is how that stupid bitch pays me back for everything I have given her, then she will get what she deserves, he was thinking. The fun and games are over. It’s time to be tough with her. I’m the one in charge here. She is my property, I’ve paid for her, goddammit!

He poured himself a whiskey and gulped it down. His hands were shaking from anger, though he had no reason for it. The warmth of the whiskey spread in his veins and energised him like electricity.

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Calm down, he said to himself. What did she do after all? Clearly, she has become curious about who she is, maybe even has some clue to her identity. It is natural that she would try to investigate. What does it matter? But he couldn't calm himself down and anger continued to simmer. Lilian cannot talk about it with anyone because she does not know anybody.

You should have protected your laptop with a password before you let a clone near it, said a reasonable and conciliatory inner voice. Turner chugged down a second glass of whiskey. Maybe he should not have told her the code to the safe, but surely this dim-witted woman could not remember it. To be on the safe side, I will change the code, but first I am going to show her who wears the pants in this house. Who is the boss. The owner. The beast in him was wound up. It was cowering in the dark, ready to pounce.

Lilian came out of the bathroom and headed to the bedroom. She had wrapped a white towel around her body. It reached down to the top of her thighs, competing to be the world's shortest miniskirt. Her dark blond curls hung wet against her back, drawing wavy lines.

She put on a dress she had not worn before, a light blue one, not too short, but it looked pretty on her. She went to the kitchen while drying her hair. Turner was sitting by the counter with two plates of breakfast. Sandwiches with tuna fish, salad, and olives from Misaki. Turner held another glass in his hands and was swirling the whiskey so that each drop of it would touch the ice.

“Sit down,” said Turner. His voice was calm but commanding. Lilian stepped to the counter, put down the towel and fixed her hair. She did not sit down.

“What were you doing with the laptop?” asked Turner.

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“I was just searching...,” started Lilian with a quavering voice.

“What? What were you searching for?”

“I typed in my name.”

“And what did you find?”

“Nothing. Honestly, Robert.” Lilian’s eyes swelled with tears. “I didn’t see the search results because you startled me. Please don’t be angry.” She brushed her tears from her cheeks, then wiped her hands in her skirt. Turner believed her and calmed down a bit. “Why? Why can’t I run a search on my name?”

“Never mind. Forget it. What did you want to tell me?” asked Turner.

“What do you mean?” asked Lilian, awkwardly clutching the towel.

“You told me you had something to tell me,” Turner casually pointed toward the bathroom, “before you went to the bathroom.”

Lilian decided to be straight with him and tell him everything. If Robert loved her, he would understand and help her.

Drawing a deep breath, she said, “I . . . would like to go to Los Angeles.” Turner’s jaw dropped in astonishment. Lilian was no longer a copy, but a real human being. There were no longer a Lilian and a copy in the world; there were two Lilians. “Would you take me there?”

The monster in Turner was grinning. This was the end. It was his time. It was strolling back and forth like a lion hungry for revenge, waiting for the right moment to attack.

“Why would you want to go there?” asked Turner. Lilian was not sure if he was angry, sympathetic, or putting on a show.

“I don’t know. I had a dream that I should go there. What is there?”

“Nothing. There’s nothing there,” said Turner and stood up. Lilian took a small step backward.

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“We will never go there. You are not allowed to go there. Forget it.”

Turner emptied his glass and slicked back his hair. Show it to her, whispered the animal with gritted teeth.

“But why?” Lilian’s voice was quavering, and she was struggling to hold back her tears. She was confused. She did not want to be there, and she no longer wanted to be with Turner, but she could not explain her feelings. He told me that he loved me so why does he act like that? Why won’t he help me? She was desperately looking for a solution, a way out of this situation, but to no avail.

With one sudden motion, the animal, like a lethal predator, swooped down upon Lilian. It tore off the straps of her clothes and pulled the dress off and cast it aside. Lilian shuddered and instinctively held up her arms. Turner grabbed her arms, twisted them behind her back, and pushed her against the counter, and unfastened the clip that held her hair back, letting it fall freely about her shoulders.

“Because you belong to me, and you are mine. Mine!” he shouted as he started caressing her with his free hand. He had caressed her a hundred times before, but now it was more exciting. As if he was trespassing.

“Robert. You are hurting me!”

Turner’s hand came out of nowhere and whacked her on the side of her head. As she was falling to her side Turner caught her and held her tight. Her wet locks of hair flew in all directions, then fell on her face. Turner unzipped his pants and tore off her panties.

The taste of the whiskey, the fragrance of Lilian’s shampoo, the salty sea air, the summer heat, and the touch of her beautiful body mixed into an extraordinary drug that stirred the sleeping monster awake, and there was no way back.

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“Lilian! You are my property,” he said, leaning close to her, and she felt the foul smell of whiskey on his breath. Her hair blocked her view, and her hands were twisted back. Her breasts pressed against the cold marble of the counter and her face was burning hot from the slap. “You need to learn to do what I tell you to do! And you are going nowhere!”

Lilian was prepared for the worst. She accepted that what was coming would be painful and unforgettably bad, but she could not fight back. She was too weak. Not just physically, but emotionally too. Then suddenly, she felt the grip on her hands weaken, and Turner let her go. She heard a faint sigh and then a sharp inhalation of breath from behind her back. At first, she did not dare turn around because she was afraid that Turner would hit her again.

Then she glanced back slowly, and found Turner bent forward, with unzipped pants, and his clenched fists over his chest. He was staring blankly at the floor. Lilian was frightened and confused. She didn't know what was happening or what she should do.

Turner dropped to his knees, then fell over and stretched out on the floor. His breathing was shallow and uneven. He was staring at her with glassy eyes, waiting for help, but she was just standing by the counter with a worried look on her face. Lilian saw that Turner was sweating, shaking, and trying to talk but he could not.

He realised that he was having a heart attack. That was all he could think of, and the question of what he should do now flashed through his mind. What could he do? His chest hurt, as if someone was squeezing his heart from the inside. The world was getting darker with every breath, and with every wave of excruciating pain, he saw stars.

Olivier had told him to call him in case of trouble. He was to call only Olivier, and not an ambulance, not the police, only him, and he

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would take care of everything. The telephone was in the bedroom, but walking that far was out of the question, in fact, he felt he might have only minutes to live without medical help. This is the end, Robert, said a soft-spoken voice in his mind that spoke up rarely, always contradicting him. That voice had always been right. The animal had vanished, abandoning him.

Lilian came around from the shock with a sudden thought. On the horizon of her mind something appeared, like the upper arc of a sun disc after a long night: an opportunity. The pieces of the puzzle fell into their places, and she knew that her place was in Los Angeles, in Hollywood. She did not see clearly what Turner's role was in this game, but she knew that she was not his property, although she inexplicably loved him.

Olivier had brought her here, so she could not trust him either. Perhaps he could take her back to Los Angeles but going alone seemed like a better idea. Alone and in secret. She needed to take care of the tracking device in her head, which was put there to track her whereabouts. She had probably been kidnapped and her memories might have been manipulated. She could not think clearly, and she suspected the reason was that they had done something to her. What's important is to leave, now. Right now.

She left Turner on the floor, took the aluminium foil from the drawer and hurried to the bedroom. She grabbed her bag, tossed in a few clothes, and changed. She found only summer dresses, and she put on a less striking one. She took a hat off the shelf, lined it with aluminium foil, hoping it would shield the signals, then carefully adjusted it on her head so the foil wouldn't show.

Nine-two-one-one: she opened the safe and as she didn't know the difference between the two currencies, she threw several wads of dol-

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lars and yen into the bag with shaking hands. There was a brown envelope in the safe. She opened it and found her passport. Lilian Turner. Turner can't be my family name, she thought. But what is it then? So far, she had not thought about it, but now she knew that it couldn't be Turner. Something like Bai... doesn't matter. She would use the passport. She put it away, then looked at the door and a sense of dread overcame her. She was certain that Turner would be standing by the door, staring at her, with a look in his eyes filled with evil instead of the love he felt in the beginning, and it would turn out that he was just acting, and now he was coming to finish what he had started. However, the hallway was empty, and the house was silent.

Lilian was trembling, but she took a deep breath and zipped up her bag. She put on a pair of flat heel shoes and headed toward the door. She walked cautiously at first but hastened her steps when she saw that Turner was still lying on his back on the floor. He was trembling and he looked at her with the eyes of a dying man, something Lilian would never forget. Turner somehow was able to take his lighter out of his pocket and was holding it in his hand. Lilian paid no attention to it, and hurried to the front door, but the deadbolt was locked.

She went into the garage and opened the garage door with a button on the wall. The shutters of the white door seemed to take forever to crawl up to the ceiling. Lilian expected Turner to burst through the door any moment, or else she would hear him dragging his body, crawling toward her with a pallid face. But nothing happened. The only thing she heard was a faint crackling, sizzling sound from the living room.

When the door opened high enough, she ducked out of the garage. Her eyes, used to the dimness of the bedroom and the garage, were for a moment blinded by the sun, and so she stopped abruptly. The feel-

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ing that she should go back overcame her, as though an unknown inner force was controlling her muscles. She should help. She closed her eyes tight and opened them. She just could not make herself go back. She put on her sunglasses and started walking. This was her opportunity.

Turner had given up the fight. Where is she going? he asked himself, looking around for Lilian. He could not move his legs and his right arm at all, and his left arm was shaking as if he had Parkinson's disease. She can't leave me. She can't escape. He made one last effort to light the lighter and tossed it onto the Persian carpet.

Lilian was in the garage when the carpet caught fire. The hungry flames spread and devoured the textiles and the wood. Dark smoke swirled toward the ceiling and the stench of the burnt synthetic fibres filled the room. The gilded eagle of the lighter turned into a black griffin and was engulfed in the flames.

Turner was watching the fire that supposedly would cleanse everything. Perhaps it is true, he thought, but then remembered two words: *Flaming June...* just as his sight dimmed into darkness.

Lilian reached Road 134 on foot. She knew it was a major highway because wherever they drove, they started out this way.

She hoped she would see a taxi on that road. As she walked, she felt a terrible remorse for leaving the house and Robert behind. Getting farther and farther away, with every step her love for him grew, and she wanted to return to help. She had to gather all her strength to go on, no matter how wrong she felt it was. She tried to rely on her instincts. She had made a decision and she was going to stick with it.

She walked almost a mile at a rapid pace, to which her muscles were not at all accustomed. She did not slow down, although her ankles and calves were sore and started aching. Her mind was restless, and she could not stop thinking. Robert had said that she was her property. She can't be anybody's property because she is a woman, a person like everyone else.

She considered calling the police but wasn't sure if contacting them would be a wise decision. They would call Robert, find out where she came from, and they might suspect she did something to him. This option was a last resort in case everything else went wrong.

She once again thought about Olivier. Perhaps he would be able to answer a few questions, for example how she got here from Los Angeles. She also wanted to know who Olivier was because all she knew about him was that they had met not so long ago. Of course, she wasn't certain at all that he would help her, but at the end of day, it didn't matter because she didn't know how to reach him, so she stuck with her original plan. She would go to the harbour by taxi, and she would

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board a freighter to Los Angeles. Once there, she would figure something out.

Her suspicion that she would be followed grew stronger. She might have managed to shield the tracking device, but she still had the feeling that they would come after her. Someone doesn't want her to leave Japan. Robert could hardly be on her track right now, but she was determined not to waste any time.

She waited ten minutes by the side of the road when, at last, she saw a yellow taxi and she waved it down. A small, elderly Japanese man with a thinning, greyish-black beard sat behind the wheel. As he came to a stop beside her, he greeted her in English. Lilian climbed in and said: Port of Yokosuka. The taxi driver repeated the address with the correct pronunciation, properly stressing the syllables. Lilian barely understood him, although he uttered the same words she did. The driver said nothing else, just merged into the traffic and drove on. Above the gear stick, a taximeter counted the fare with digital numbers. She sat in the back seat of the taxi, looking out the window, and the excitement of her escape mixed with the sweet taste of hope that she might get to Los Angeles where—she believed—everything would be all right.

Olivier was sitting in his office reviewing the plans his colleagues had drafted to improve the cloning projects. A few of them were rather depraved; one included selling celebrities' DNA on the black market to rich parents who wanted to have a child identical to a famous person. All they would have to do is to extract the nucleus from the mother's fertilised ovum and implant the DNA of the celebrity. Of course, certain modifications would need to be made to avoid getting caught.

The subject of copying animals came up again. That would include copying the favourite pets of wealthy people, thus bringing them back to life. Olivier did not believe many people would be willing to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars for a copy of an animal. Moreover, many family friends would probably know about the death of the pet so it would be difficult to explain that the animal was alive again after being run over by a truck a few weeks before.

However, there were usable ideas too, for example selling the organs of the retired copies on the black market. That would be an additional source of income, but entering a new market always brought risks.

Those who proposed these plans did not have an overview of the whole company and could not have known that certain branches were already carrying out similar activities.

The door of the office opened and John Lin, an employee on monitoring duty burst in. He seemed nervous. He went directly to Olivier's desk, leaned on it, trying to catch his breath, and said, panting, "Boss... the Turner-Bailey project..."

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“What happened?” asked Olivier, raising his eyebrows. He was afraid he already knew the answer. The most important question was how serious the problem was and whether it was still manageable.

“A call came in to the police.”

“From Turner?”

“No. The fire department. An alert came in. They are on their way to Turner’s address.”

“Any of our guys there?”

“No.”

“Why not? Goddammit. That’s their job.” Olivier jumped up from his seat and walked to the window, but he was not looking at the city. He was thinking. Tanaka was charged with watching them, and this somewhat relaxed him. It’s not 24/7 surveillance, though, because they watch the client according to the client’s schedule. Tanaka has to sleep sometime, and their goal was not to watch the client continuously, but to foresee any potential problems. And so far, everything has been fine. This did not mean that Tanaka was doing a half-assed job, but it is possible that she was not nearby. He turned back to Lin.

“The fire department?”

“There was a fire. I don’t have any more details,” said Lin.

“The copy?”

“We don’t know. There’s no signal.”

“She may be dead, but we must presume that she is alive, and the signal is shielded.”

Lin was surprised to hear this because the first option sounded more plausible, while the second completely unreasonable.

“A copy wouldn’t know how to,” he said, more to himself than to Olivier, and added in an undertone: “Anohitotachi, atama warui.”

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Olivier nodded; he knew it means the copies are stupid as hell.

“Call Magnus and Haru,” said Olivier. “Tell them to go to the house and slow down the police. Do not let them interrogate anyone until I get there. I’m calling Tanaka. You stay here and keep a close eye on the matter. Call me if you know more. You are on 24/7 duty with Mori and Avi until the situation is resolved.” Olivier picked up a tablet and stormed out.

“Consider it done,” said Lin, and was on his way back to his office, which served as an information hub, monitoring communications from a variety of sources. An application was monitoring calls made to the police. Everything was automatically transcribed and analysed based on keywords, including Turner, Lilian, the address of the house he rented, and the make and model of his car. Lin received a signal when these came up during a call, and more than once they were on scene quicker than the police. Naturally, they had law enforcement contacts, but they couldn’t pay off each and every officer at every station in the world. At any rate, corruption in Japan is a delicate matter. Few policemen accept bribes. Most of them are decent patriots.

Olivier called Tanaka. The phone rang but she didn’t pick up. He hoped it meant that she was dealing with the problem, and not sitting in a hot bath with her cell in the bedroom.

Lin made a few calls, and then called Olivier, who was already on his way to Turner’s house. He didn’t use his own car. He was driving a black SUV, a company car kept especially for cases like this, with the necessary tools—weapons, clothes, badges, even a magnetic police siren for an emergency—in the back to solve delicate situations.

“I called Haru. He was with Magnus, so they’re both on their way, should be there in thirty minutes,” said Lin.

“Great. What about the signal?”

“Nothing yet.”

Olivier hung up and drove as fast as he could. It took him forty minutes to get to Turner’s house in Hayama, but it had already been closed down with police tape. The fire was extinguished, and the firefighters were cleaning up the debris and examining the integrity of the structure. A faint plume of grey smoke rose toward the vivid blue sky. Two police vehicles flanked the fire truck. Four police officers were chatting next to it and watching the firefighters do their job.

Olivier parked the car in a nearby street to avoid unwanted attention. Tanaka and Magnus noticed him and walked up to his car.

“Boss,” said Magnus. “From what Haru overheard from the firemen, they think Turner had a heart attack, then someone lit the house on fire while he was still inside. The ambulance took him away to Aoki Hospital. That’s all we know. Haru left to follow the ambulance so he can keep find out what happens. He might be dead, if not from the heart attack, then from the fire. Lilian is nowhere to be found. Tanaka collected all of her things, they are in my car, along with Turner’s laptop and phone.” Olivier sighed with relief. “Her passport was not in the house. The cops don’t know about anything. They think Turner was alone. The neighbours have not been interrogated yet.”

“They won’t be. It’s simple: heart attack, accidental fire. Case closed,” said Olivier, trying hard to believe his own words. He took a look around. Only half of the house had burnt down, leaving the roof intact. The firefighters were packing up their gear and the crowd started to disperse. The police officers didn’t seem worried. “Our job here is done, Magnus. Go to the hospital and help Haru keep an eye on Turner

and let me know whether he's dead or alive. I'll see you there once I have the copy."

"All right," said Magnus, and was turning to go when Olivier grabbed him by the shoulders.

"One more thing, search Turner's laptop and phone, I want all the data. Look for his browsing history, route plans, call lists, everything from the past week."

"Yes, sir. I'll see to it as soon as I can," said Magnus. Olivier nodded.

"Tanaka, you drive. We're going after the copy."

They climbed into the SUV. Olivier held the tablet in his lap and was examining the latest data on Lilian.

"Turner, Turner, don't mess up my day," said Olivier to himself.

"Where to?" asked Tanaka. Olivier was looking at the screen displaying the last known location of Lilian on the map. From the side of the tablet, he snapped off a little gadget and slipped it into his pocket. It looked like a remote control, but it had only one button on it.

"Let's check out the main road. She might have wandered off. Lilian stands out in any crowd here like a member of the yakuza in a police pool party. She probably left an hour ago, so she must be within a three-mile radius. She must be wearing a hat, or hiding underground, that's why we can't get any signal."

"How is it possible that she is on the run, yet we don't get a signal?" asked Tanaka. "Her implant might have been deactivated, like that drummer's in Germany."

"Unlikely. I think she is shielding the signal. She must have figured out that there is a tracking device implanted in her." Tanaka was just as surprised as Lin had been, but she would never question Olivier's decisions and instincts. "Or else Turner told her about it."

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Tanaka had complete confidence in Olivier. She knew about the company's activities, and she was glad to work for them. Although this was not her childhood dream, it was still better than being an asset for a crime syndicate. All Tanaka had been sure about as a child was that she would be a fighter when she grew up. It didn't matter to her on whose side. The only thing she inherited from her father was the repulsion she felt toward men, and the final advice her mother gave her was that the world is a dirty place, and it is not a place for women. Thus, she hardened her heart, and assiduously trained her body and mind. These days, she feels safe in the world; she has found her place, and a few years before she even tried dating. Although she has had little success so far, she won't give up, and she continues to believe that she, too, can be loved.

Until then, she remains an agent of the company, a fixer, and Olivier's companion. She was dependable as long as she was duly paid. She didn't second guess orders and didn't care about the moral aspects of the job. She did what she was best at and moved on quickly. It was good to work for Olivier because he was one of the few men who did not make a move on her every time they talked. She knew that he liked her, but he kept a respectful distance, and this felt good. Moreover, he was a professional planner, he always understood the situation clearly, and he was a strict but fair leader. He always strived to solve problems as soon and efficiently as possible. Tanaka liked her job and was willing to go to any length to keep doing it in the future.

Olivier outlined the plan in the car. Tanaka would play the role of a state investigator and he would be an FBI agent. They had all the necessary badges and equipment with them. They would be able to deceive the prefectural police, and with a tiny bit of luck even those em-

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ployees of the state police who are not working for the Crime Department. Though Olivier spoke fluent Japanese, he couldn't be a Japanese detective because he was of mixed blood. In turn, most people would find the cross-border cooperation of a Japanese and an American detective more plausible. Lilian would be the girlfriend of the leader of an American terrorist organisation, and they raided their place, but she escaped, and now they had to take her in custody without attracting attention and without victims. If possible.

“What happened at the house?” asked Olivier.

“I had been watching them, but I wasn't there when it all went down. I heard the the fire truck sirens, so I rushed to the scene as fast as I could. The house was in flames. The ambulance was already driving away when I arrived, and the fire was mostly out. I climbed through a back window, grabbed everything, and left. Three firefighters were on the premises, but only one of them entered the house. He went into the living room to finish extinguishing the fire. He didn't check the bedroom because it wasn't on fire. Nobody saw me, although I had to sneak behind his back because the laptop was in the kitchen.

Olivier shook his head with a smile. He could hardly believe what he had just heard. Tanaka never ceased to fascinate him.

“Good job,” he said. Tanaka nodded. Olivier knew that she would have bowed if she had not been driving. She slowed down as they reached the point on Road 134, they believed Lilian could not have passed in that short time, but they still did not see her anywhere.

“Turn around. Let's check the other direction, and if we do not find her, we head to Yokosuka. To the port.”

Tanaka glanced at Olivier, indicating that she understood the order. She turned the huge car around and slowly drove south.

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She suddenly noticed a pedestrian walking alone in a hat. She seemed like a young foreigner female.

“There!” said Tanaka. “In front of the grocery store.”

Olivier looked over there and his adrenaline level spiked. Then the woman, as if she felt that she was being watched, turned toward them. She could not see through the tinted windows of the car, but Olivier saw clearly that she was around fifty, undoubtedly in good shape, but it was not Lilian. In addition, her hair was dark, which had not been visible under the hat until she turned.

They drove further south. Olivier was deep in thought as he reviewed every little detail he knew about the copy of Lilian. According to previous reports, everything was fine between her and the client. The client died of a heart attack, and the copy disappeared. In case she left because she was scared, or ran for help, then help would have arrived already or someone would have called the police. And why did she take the passport with her? Based on his experience, he concluded that her memories were beginning to surface and she was on her way home. Copies tended to be obsessed with going where the original lived, as if that were the strongest and most dominant memory governing them. She was probably on her way to Los Angeles, and not to her birthplace in England. That was the pattern copies always followed after two weeks, but Lilian was not that old yet. She could not go to an airport because getting on a plane is too complicated, she wouldn't be able to board, and the company monitored the system so they would be warned.

Another way to reach Los Angeles was by a freighter transporting tourists. It might be slow, and the accommodation is far from luxurious, but it is easier to board a ship than a plane.

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Yokosuka is too far to reach on foot, public transportation is too slow and there is no direct route. If she is looking for the shortest way, then she has to call or wave down a taxi. She might try hitchhiking but that's not likely. Olivier didn't want to exclude public transportation from the options. If she chose that, then they might have a head start, and they know the route too. He called Lin in the centre and asked him to check the security camera footage of the bus and rail lines; they might have recorded Lilian. They had a facial recognitions application for those recordings. To facilitate the identification process, they made recordings of the copies while still in the lab. A hacker provided them with the public transport camera footage for a per-minute fee, so all Olivier needed to do was to specify the day, the time, and the name of the station.

Tanaka drove on in in silence. Olivier knew that she was determined, and if necessary, she would pursue the copy for days without eating or sleeping. He was watching the houses passing by and was wondering if this could be the day. The day when everything came to an end. That day would start like any other day, and that was the scariest thing about it.

He turned his thoughts again to the job. He had to find Lilian and turn her off. The feeling that she was on her way to the port grew stronger with every minute. Two things might happen in Yokosuka and he did not dare think about the first: Lilian might walk into the American naval base. She would be recognised in an instant and he would not be able to bring her out.

Of course, they would go in after her and turn her off as soon as they had the signal. Lilian's death would give them enough time to clean this mess up, but that was as far as he could plan. He was certain that if it came to that, his career would be over, so he might as well embrace the

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copy with a bomb attached to his chest to protect the company with a heroic death.

However, it was more likely that she was heading to the container terminal, where the cargo ships docked. At ports, most workers are male. They would help her. The prettier a woman, the more likely men are to believe her. In this regard Lilian must be the master of persuasion. Cargo ship workers have little time to go to the movies so it is less likely that they would recognise her, but there must be American tourists at the port, looking for an adventurous voyage on the ocean. It's pure chance whether any of them might recognize her.

Olivier began to feel a little nervous when they did not find her as they drove south. If Lilian managed to escape, he would be held accountable. It would be a greater problem if she got to the United States. They could get there by plane before she could, and wait for her at the destination port, but it wouldn't be easy because it is one of the busiest American ports. But even if they caught her and turned her off, they wouldn't be able to get rid of the body without the support of the lab. Bringing her back to Japan might be possible but entering the largest airport on the Western shore with a copy of a celebrity would no doubt involve a considerable risk. A hat might disguise her at the airport, but in Los Angeles she would be recognised in an instant, and fans would storm her for a signature or a photo. The images would end up on the web, the original Lilian would see them, and the rest of Olivier's days would be like a rollercoaster—with him tied to a seat, waiting for the end of the loop, but the tracks would run out, and all he could expect is a dark, sinister pit at the end of the ride.

And then there was Turner. He could not relax until he saw the corpse of that bloody fool. If he survived by some miracle of luck, he

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might do something stupid to avenge the tragedy that befell his little love.

His phone rang. It was Magnus.

“Hello boss. There’s nothing on Turner’s phone, no photos, and he did not talk to anyone, except for a few calls to the States, and he ordered food from a few local restaurants.”

“What about the laptop?”

“Well, that’s a whole different story,” said Magnus. “The browsing history shows searches on Los Angeles, tracking devices and shielding, the port of Yokosuka, and Lilian.”

Olivier pursed his lip to hold back the swear words. No need for those right now. He wanted to appear cold-blooded and unrelenting in front of his subordinates.

“Thanks, Magnus, and Turner?”

“I’ve just arrived at the hospital. I’ll call you when I know more,” said Magnus.

“OK,” said Olivier and hung up. He wondered whether Lilian had figured out who she was. She might think that she is an actress and know that she is all over the internet.

There is no harm in that, thought Olivier, because it would just confuse her more, and it might quicken the return of her memories. But it was also possible that Turner made the online queries. However, it was probably Lilian who had read about the shielding because he presumed that Turner had at least some knowledge about shielding and tracking. Nevertheless, it was possible that Turner wanted to escape with Lilian, so he informed her about a few things, and then something went wrong. Or was it a trick to divert his attention? He could not discard any possibility because Turner was wealthy and beyond doubt a smart man.

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Lin called to let them know that Lilian had not been spotted on the footage of the public transport cameras. This, however, didn't mean that she was not travelling by public transportation. After all, their software could identify someone only if the face was clearly visible.

“All right,” he said to Tanaka, “let's go to Yokosuka. Take the shortest route and let's pay attention to taxis. We'll check out the American Naval Base too but first we go to the cargo port.”

Tanaka nodded, turned the car around at the next intersection, and drove as fast as she could, in silence.

The taxi driver stopped next to the gates of the port because he didn't want to hold up the traffic or other incoming drivers. The taxi meter showed 3800 with a strange sign in front of the digits that resembled a "y" with a double-line strikethrough. The driver asked for four thousand with a horrible English accent, claiming five percent extra was added due to the traffic. Lilian understood the words, but she didn't really know what he meant by them. Finally, she counted out four thousand dollars and passed it to the driver.

The driver was so stunned that he just stared at the money for a long time, but then started protesting vehemently. Lilian didn't understand him, but she tried to appear calm. She looked at him questioningly, like a little girl who had just played a mischievous trick and didn't want to say a word because she might betray herself. She was also afraid that her followers might track her down more easily if she made a mistake, so she wanted to resolve the issue as soon as possible. But what was wrong? She handed him the amount he asked for. The driver, shaking his head, recounted the cash several times and gave her three thousand five hundred dollars back, and asked her to get out. He made a shooing motion with his hands, trying to make her leave the car.

Lilian got out, while keeping her eyes on the driver in case he changed his mind, or something else came up. But the driver's hands were already on the wheel, waiting to leave. Lilian looked at him anxiously as he drove away. She was sure that she had made a mistake and she would get into trouble.

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She didn't know anything about exchange rates and never realised that the driver—despite all appearances—was fair and honest with her, refusing to take advantage of her when she overpaid the fare, by paying in dollars instead of yen. The summer heat settled on the Peninsula of Miura and drops of sweat ran down on her back. Her lined hat was warm, and her hair stuck to her face. She was thirsty but tried to not think about it because she wanted to stay focused on her goal: to buy a ticket.

She wondered what might have happened to Turner, but everything seemed so distant—the house, Turner, even her feelings. She decided that as soon as she arrived in Los Angeles and was safe, she would inquire after him. What he did was unforgivable, but she wished him no harm. Now, she had to take care of herself.

A man was standing by the gate. She told him that she was a tourist wishing to travel on a freighter. He didn't seem to understand, but he let her in and pointed at a building. Lilian said thank you and started walking toward it. The port occupied a breathtakingly large area with countless vehicles, all lined up neatly at an equal distance from each other, as if it were a vast parking lot. A little farther away, there semi-trailers with various company logos were parked. At the far end, cargo ships and loading cranes towered above the harbour and formed a barrier between Tokyo Bay and the port. Cranes and cargo trucks whirred and roared, workers were coming and going, a few of them with papers, others with tools in their hands. Warm air rose up from the concrete pavement, the sun was shining brightly, and a salty smell came from the sea, without any breeze.

Lilian stepped into the building the guard had pointed out to her. One ticket booth was open with one clerk, and in front of its window,

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with their backs to Lilian, a young couple were speaking in Japanese. They wore pastel-coloured clothes and carried heavy packs on their backs. While she waited, Lilian took off her glasses, but didn't dare take off her hat. The couple paid for their tickets, and when they turned around and saw her, they stopped suddenly.

“Oh my god!” said the girl in Japanese, bent her knees a little and clapped her hands in delight. “Lilian Bailey!” She took a step toward her, then stopped, realising that as a stranger she couldn't just fling her arms around a star.

“Hello!” said Lilian. She wasn't too happy, it was apparent. She felt uneasy because she didn't know who they were and why they were so happy to see her. But at least she now knew that her name was Bailey.

“You are my favourite actress,” said the girl, which was a lie, but at that moment she really believed it. The boy was just standing there, smiling. The girl offered her hand and Lilian shook it. “I love your movies.”

“Thank you,” said Lilian, but nothing made sense to her. What movies?

“I am Hailey, and this is my boyfriend, Josh.”

“Nice to meet you.”

“What are you doing here? Are you on vacation?” asked Hailey, and put a hand over her mouth, as if she was feeling ashamed. “I'm sorry. I don't mean to pry.” She darted a glance at Josh to see if he was following the events.

“Are you coming on the freighter?”

“Yes, I am” said Lilian. She didn't smile. She was too focused on buying a ticket as soon as possible. Hailey clapped her hands again in delight.

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“That’s crazy. Josh, we are on the same ship as Lilian Bailey.”

Josh just stood there smiling and rubbed his scanty beard. He was glad but he would have preferred running into an action star. Of course, it was good to see Lilian because she was gorgeous, but she was out of his league.

“I have to go now,” said Lilian and tried to bypass them.

“Would you mind taking a picture with us?” asked Hailey with a smile from ear to ear. Josh stepped behind Hailey and started digging for the camera in her bag. Lilian looked around in confusion, then back at Josh and Hailey.

“Maybe later,” she said. “On the ship, okay?”

Hailey’s smile faded, but she pretended that it was fine. Josh stopped searching for the camera and zipped up the bag.

“Of course,” said Hailey. “Sorry for holding you up. I’m glad we’ve met. Tomorrow then.”

“See you.”

“Bye,” said Hailey and Josh simultaneously, and waved goodbye.

“Bye guys,” said Lilian and turned toward the ticket booth.

The clerk greeted her in Japanese, then switched to English.

Lilian told her that she wanted a ticket to Los Angeles on a cargo ship. She gave a suspicious look at her above her glasses, then asked for her passport and hundred and fifty thousand yen. She uploaded the details onto a magnet card, printed the name of Mrs. Lilian Turner and the basic data of the voyage on it, then passed the card to her.

She briefly informed her about everything she needed to know about the journey, the daily schedule of the ship, customs, and the crossing of borders. She advised Lilian to take out insurance, get medi-

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cation against seasickness, and stock up on reading material. Then she wished her bon voyage with a smile.

Lilian walked up to the vending machine at the other side of the room and bought a bottle of mineral water. First, she tried to feed the machine a dollar, and when it didn't accept it, she tried it with a yen note, and it worked. She concluded that banknotes with a "y" were more useful than those with an "S".

She stepped out of the building and drank the water in one go. She was trying to figure out what to do until the next day. She couldn't stay at the port and couldn't go back to the house, but she needed a place to spend the night. She could not find the two Americans. Perhaps, they could have helped, they seemed friendly. She looked at the magnet card, which said the ship would leave the harbour from dock 14, and passengers could board at six a.m.

She decided to take a look at the ship. Perhaps someone would be able to help her there. She put on her sunglasses and slipped the card into her bag.

As she walked, she glanced back at the gates because she was afraid that someone was following her, but she did not see anyone, and the guard was busy with an incoming truck. As she turned around, she almost bumped into a Japanese teenager. She had to laugh at her clumsiness.

"Hello. Can I help you?" asked the boy in excellent English and smiled. He noticed that Lilian was confused.

"My name is Juro," he said, trying to gain her confidence.

"Hello Juro. I'm looking for dock 14." She lowered her eyes when she saw that he was studying her face. "My ship leaves from there."

"What a coincidence! I'm working on that ship," said Juro. "I'm the cook. I'm just about to go out for a chocolate bar to lighten up my day." He leaned

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a little closer to peek under her hat, but it cast a shadow on her face and her hair hung over her eyes. “I’m sorry but you seem very familiar.”

Lilian didn’t look up, though she felt that avoiding his gaze was not a good idea either. Juro glanced around and found it strange that such a beautiful girl wanted to travel alone. He did not see any other tourists, only dockhands and trucks were passing by.

“Are you sure you want to travel on a freighter?” asked Juro. “Is it really your thing? It’s week and a half on the ocean with lots of sailors and odd tourists. Are you in the right place?”

“I need to go to Los Angeles,” said Lilian with a tinge of desperation in her voice. “I’ve already bought the ticket.”

Juro found her pretty, and there was something innocently clumsy about her, so he felt that he had to help her. He suspected she might be in some kind of trouble. She was not necessarily running from the law, but she definitely wanted to escape from something.

“All right, come with me,” said Juro, and started toward the ship.

They walked through the port and a spark of hope ignited in Lilian’s heart again. The ship was visible from afar, but when they got closer, Lilian gasped at its enormous size. Is this really my ship? she asked herself, and felt excitement, a sense of adventure.

The ship carried containers and a crane was loading more of them. Lilian watched with her mouth open. It was a beehive of activity, dock workers were coming and going, shouting to each other and making preparations.

“Zarigani,” shouted Juro toward the bow of the ship. A big, burly fellow turned to them. He appeared to be very strong and had a paunch. Sweat was beading on his brown skin and his bald head was gleaming in the sunlight.

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“He is the loading supervisor,” said Juro to Lilian. “An odd fellow, but he won’t bite. Earlier he was a crab fisherman, then worked on cargo ships, now he is the foreman of an international freighting company. Nobody likes him particularly, but he is a skilled sailor, and he’s very good at solving problems. We need guys like him; he is strong as an ox. A few weeks at the sea is a piece of cake for him. Not many people can do this job, but Zarigani is resilient like the crabs he used to fish. When we’re loading, he’s in charge, while the captain and the first mate are off the clock. If there is anybody who can help, it’s him.”

Zarigani gave a few orders to the men bustling around him and started toward Juro and Lilian. As he was walking, he looked her up and down, and was stunned to see such a beauty. The wind rarely blew women like her to the port.

Lilian was afraid of him, but she trusted Juro. He had friendly eyes, as opposed to the foreman whose were rather sly.

Juro told him in Japanese that she was travelling to Los Angeles on the ship. The beefy man guffawed. His paunch was shaking with laughter, and he darted several glances at her cleavage and legs. He produced a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead.

“It’s not for you,” said Zarigani with an odd accent. Lilian needed a little time to figure out what he had meant. Zarigani pointed at the ship with his chubby fingers, then wiped his forehead that was again covered with beads of sweat.

“She has already bought a ticket,” said Juro, and the smile vanished from Zarigani’s face.

“All right then,” he said, “we leave tomorrow.”

“Can you help me find a place for the night?”

“Maybe on the ship?” asked Juro.

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“With you, huh?” asked Zarigani, and guffawed. He looked at her again and licked the side of his lips which made Lilian feel embarrassed and she lowered her eyes. Zarigani imagined pulling up the summer dress on her smooth thighs.

He thought that the girl must have gotten lost or she was confused for some other reason. She had an air of charming naivety about her, as if she had just stepped out into the real world from under the wings of a rich daddy, although she was a bit too old for that. Most probably, he thought, she was running away from someone. She might have run away from her boyfriend, from her parents, and might have fallen into bad company. Otherwise, why would a pretty, well-dressed girl like her travel on a cargo ship? She could obviously afford a flight, but for some reason she had decided not to. Money could not be the reason. She was alone, there was nobody to protect her, so he needed to help her before she found herself in trouble.

“All right then,” he repeated himself. “Juro, tell Oshiro to cover for me. I will take her to Starfish.” Then he turned to Lilian. “It’s a little motel in the neighbourhood.” Lilian didn’t like his smile at all.

Sensing her discomfort Juro said, “I can take her, if you want,” but Zarigani just waved his hand, shooing Juro’s offer away.

“Do as I say, kid. You know you are on the first mate’s radar already. Don’t cross the line by leaving while on duty. An hour and I’m back,” he said. Lilian looked at Juro, who nodded, so she decided to follow the big man. Juro knew little about Zarigani, and he was too naïve to see through him. Zarigani and Lilian left, and Juro went aboard the ship.

“It’s not a five-star hotel but it will do just fine for a night,” said Zarigani. His accent was so bad that Lilian hardly understood what he said. “You understand?”

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“Yes, thank you,” said Lilian.

“What’s your name?” asked Zarigani. Lilian considered telling him her real name, but instead decided to say the first name that came to her mind.

“Hanna.”

“Anna,” repeated Zarigani, pronouncing it without one “h”. As they passed the gates, the guard cast a sideways glance at them. Zarigani let her go ahead to check her out from behind. He was fascinated by the way she was walking, her dress flying in the wind, and the shape of her calves. He had never been with an American woman. He was not their type, he thought. As a general rule, they don’t fall for Japanese men, he thought. “Where are you from?”

“Los Angeles,” said Lilian. “I guess,” she added under her breath.

“And what are you doing here? Are you on vacation?”

If Zarigani had not mentioned vacation, she probably would have said that she had no idea what she was doing there, but this way it was easier to give an evasive answer.

“I was on vacation with my husband,” she said.

“Your husband? And where is he now? Has he left?”

“Yes,” said Lilian. Zarigani was surprised to have guessed it.

“Seriously? Incredible.” And he added something else in Japanese. “He left you here? Just like that?”

“Yes,” said Lilian, and started worrying about the spiral of lies she had started, but she felt she shouldn’t tell him what had really happened. All that mattered was that she needed to go to Los Angeles, and for that she needed a place for the night first.

She planned to stay in the motel until the morning when she could board the ship. Except for the two sailors, nobody would know that she

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was there, so nobody could find her, although at that point she wasn't sure anymore whether someone was after her.

The Starfish Motel must have been built a long time ago because despite the renovations the plaster was crumbling, and the wooden inlays and exposed beams were rotting. A neon sign advertised the name of the motel in English letters, and under that in kanji.

A middle-aged, thin man was standing at the reception desk with a half-smoked cigarette between his lips. Zarigani stepped to the desk and addressed him in Japanese. Lilian did not understand a word, so she had no idea that Zarigani told the receptionist that she was a hooker who had just arrived in town. She would stay for a night, and he would come back to her, but he still needed to run some errands. The receptionist didn't ask any questions, and he didn't care if the story was true or not. He said something to Zarigani in Japanese, who turned to Lilian.

"Three thousand yen for the room," he said. She opened her bag and took out the money. He paid for the room and took the key cards. Lilian didn't understand why Zarigani had asked for two key cards and she didn't notice that he slid one of them in his pocket. The receptionist mumbled something and pointed to his right. Lilian watched him the whole time and noticed that he had deeply wrinkled skin, as if the lines had been drawn by a felt-tip marker. She also noticed that he had not taken out the cigarette from his mouth even for a moment, and she did not understand how it stayed in place.

If the Starfish had been erected in the 1800s people would probably remember it as a notorious pirate base, but it opened its doors in the 1990s. In those years, it was a prestigious hotel, but today it is nothing more than a one-night stop for backpackers and workers. Hookers were as common as cockroaches on the walls.

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Zarigani escorted Lilian up to her room. She took off her sunglasses but decided to keep the hat on. It was dark enough and the brim of her hat covered her eyes. The concrete steps were covered by ancient, mouldy carpet. Its patterns were worn out by the footsteps of backpackers, drunken dock workers, cheap adulterers, and, occasionally, private soldiers from the American naval base. The extraordinary role the motel played in the life of the town made it unnecessary to equip it with CCTV, to everybody's great delight.

She got room 8 at the end of the corridor on the second floor. Zarigani opened the door and handed the key card to Lilian.

"This is your room. Stay here. Stay put, you might get lost and miss the ship." Lilian needed some time to decipher what he had just said.

"Okay."

"I will come back in the evening and bring you some food, all right?"

"Yes, thank you," said Lilian, although he did not want him to come back in the evening or at all, but he did help her, so she didn't want to offend him. After all, he might not be as bad as he seemed at first, she thought.

Zarigani left. Lilian closed the door, opened the window and the heat streamed in, but at least there was a little draught. The window looked out on a narrow street and the white side-wall of a building across the street.

Lilian lay down on the bed and watched the paltry curtains quietly fluttering in the wind. This is a horrible place, she thought, but she accepted her situation and got her hopes up since she had the ticket, and tomorrow she would leave for LA. She was going home. Yes. Her home, now she was certain. Her name is Lilian Bailey and she is an actress. She tried to remember her movies, and she could

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recall a few pictures, but then she dozed off and slept through almost the whole day.

It took Olivier and Tanaka 35 minutes to reach Yokosuka because the traffic was heavy, and on top of that they had to make a stop so Tanaka could change. They had a pantsuit, a badge on a neck chain, a gun, and a holster in the car for her.

The Port of Yokosuka was a highly important traffic hub in Japan. It consisted of several docks, including two ports for cargo ships, a dock for sailboats and fishing boats, and the American naval base, located in a separate bay, closed off to freight traffic.

In the past twenty years, it had been rebuilt, increased in size, and renovated several times. This was the first port in Japan that could harbour the latest hydrogen-powered cargo ships.

On an average day, there were three hundred ships arriving in and departing from Yokosuka. About a third of them were cargo ships, many of which also transport passengers, providing them with an easy—and slow—way to reach any point of the world.

Olivier called Lin to ask how long it would take to obtain the security footage of every camera in the port for the last 2-3 hours. Lin estimated several days, so they scrapped that idea.

First, they checked the northern commercial port. Tanaka parked the car near the entrance, just like the taxi driver had done a few hours before. They got out and walked up to the guard, Tanaka in the front and Olivier behind her. Tanaka showed her badge, Olivier didn't.

She introduced herself in Japanese: she was Agent Taginawa from the NPA, Special Protection Unit, and he was Agent Grant from the FBI. The guard was obviously scared. He rarely had anything to do

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with the police in his life and now he found himself in the thick of it. He didn't have time to check the badge carefully, but the name and the picture matched. Tanaka's conduct and appearance were so convincing that he believed every word she said. She was pretty and mystical at the same time. Her posture and gait reminded him of ninjas, so he was eager to help and be through with it.

Olivier was standing back with his hands clasped throughout the whole time. He did not interrupt the conversation. He knew that Tanaka was just as good at this as he was.

Tanaka informed him that they were searching for a blond female. American, five foot nine, wearing a hat and sunglasses, possibly confused. She asked the guard if he had seen her. He timidly replied yes. He added that the woman made an impression, it was hard not to notice her. Tanaka told him that she was a priority target, and that it was of utmost importance to take her in custody in secret, without a hitch.

The guard told her that the woman in question went inside to buy a ticket, and he did not see her afterwards, but then tapped his forehead, and added that he did see her. She left about fifteen minutes later. He didn't tell them that there was a man with her, because he wasn't sure whether they were together or not. Olivier looked sideways and pressed his lips. Tanaka glanced around the harbour.

The guard started to explain himself, but Tanaka motioned him to be silent. She asked him to keep their visit confidential. She thanked him for the information and headed for the building. Olivier followed her.

"She was here, but she left," she told Olivier in English.

"I heard, thanks."

There was nobody in the office except for a Japanese woman behind the counter. Tanaka greeted her warmly, showed her the fake badge,

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and told her the same story she had told the guard. Olivier liked the ease with which she could switch between registers, at one point being professional, then friendly again.

Olivier stepped out of the office and carefully scanned as much of the port as he could see. Lilian is here, he was thinking, probably no more than a mile away.

He could tell that Tanaka was exited too when came out of the office. “What did she say?” asked Olivier.

“She said she saw her, she was wearing a hat, bought a ticket, paid in cash. Her ship leaves tomorrow morning, dock 14.” They knew that they had caught a break. Unless something unexpected happened, they had enough time to catch the copy. It was reassuring that she had not walked into the American base, and now she had no reason to. She must be holed up in a nearby motel, Olivier thought.

“She is shielding the signal,” said Olivier.

Tanaka nodded and said, “You were right.”

They started toward the ship. The dock workers were busy and paid no heed to the two detectives, except for one, who was visibly alarmed. He ran down the stairs, jumped onto the dock and ran off, while glancing back at them from time to time. Tanaka ran after him. Olivier stayed behind and watched the others in the hope of noticing something suspicious.

The man who ran away couldn't have known who they were, Olivier thought, so he couldn't know that they were there for Lilian. Then a burly sailor stepped up to him and interrupted his train of thought.

Zarigani knew that he could not escape talking to the investigators, but he assumed they were after poor Cho, who had just run away—the fool. He knew that Cho was a drug dealer, but kept it a secret, intend-

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ing to use the information when the need might arise, as leverage to his own benefit or for a favour in exchange.

Olivier did not want to reveal that he spoke Japanese, so he greeted the beefy sailor in English and showed his FBI badge. Zarigani wiped the sweat off his forehead. He briefly looked at the badge and did not question its authenticity. Too many unexpected guests for a day, he thought.

Olivier stood with his legs slightly apart, and his hands on his hips, making his badge and gun visible. He wanted to show who he was without appearing to be threatening. He felt his phone vibrating but didn't reach for it.

Zarigani didn't want any agents going around and interrogating the sailors. He didn't know what they might have seen and would tell them, and he must not let them talk to Juro. Zarigani considered Juro an idealist, a naïve little kid, while he saw himself as a cunning predator. But he wasn't cunning enough because Olivier saw right through him.

Olivier noticed that the man's smile slowly faded away when he asked if he had seen a young, blond American woman.

“Officer, my name is Zarigani, I'm the loading supervisor for this ship. I did see a young woman here earlier. She seemed to be looking around. I asked if she needed help. She said she was looking for the gate out of the port. I walked with her over there,” he waved toward some containers stacked for loading, “so I could point the way to the gate. That's the last I saw of her.”

Zarigani was trying to figure out what the investigators might know. The girl had a ticket, they probably knew about that, that's why they were searching for her at the ship. He could not deny seeing her, but

unless they start questioning the sailors, he wouldn't need to tell them where she was.

Olivier said, "I hope you know that the penalty for obstruction of justice could range from a half a million yen fine to jail time of up to three years."

"Of course, Officer, I'll do anything I can to help. I'm always on the side of the law," Zarigani said, hoping he was convincing this stern man of his sincerity.

Olivier did not feel like questioning the other workers. He had the feeling that they wouldn't be talkative. At any rate, all he had to do was to come here before the ship departs in the morning and catch her, but he had a feeling that things would turn out differently. There was something suspicious about that beefy man, something that others might not have noticed, but it bothered Olivier. He believed him that Lilian had left but doubted that was all he knew.

"What did she do?" asked Zarigani.

Olivier was surprised at the question but showed no sign of it. "I can't tell you, but we need to take her into custody before she leaves the country."

"Secret police operation?" asked Zarigani with a conspiratorial grin, but Olivier was visibly annoyed at this and lowered his eyes.

"Just a regular investigation," he said, "but yes, it is confidential."

In the meantime, Tanaka followed the fleeing sailor among the containers. There were a huge number of them in the port and running among them felt like being in the middle of a gigantic labyrinth of metal. Tanaka did not lose sight of the man. He saw that he could not outrun her, so he decided to overpower her. He stopped, turned around and started toward Tanaka. Tanaka stopped too and was stunned be-

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cause the sailor must have known that she had a weapon on her, yet he decided to attack her, although she could not use her gun without reasonable cause, and he must have known this.

He tried to kick her, but she blocked it with the edge of her hand, then stepped behind him, grabbed his forearm, clasped the other one, and twisted his wrist ninety degrees. By the time he realised what had just happened, he found himself face down on the ground. Tanaka locked his arms behind his back and knelt on his spine. She held his wrist so that the tiniest movement would cause him tremendous pain. How is that possible? the sailor was thinking. How did she do that?

“What’s your name?” asked Tanaka in Japanese.

“Why do you care?” Tanaka jerked at his arm and kept twisting his wrist. The sailor cried out, tried to wriggle himself free, but the pain became worse, so he decided to stay put.

“Cho,” said the man, whimpering in pain.

“What do you know about the girl?”

“What girl?”

“The American who was here today. Blonde, five foot nine, wearing a hat. We are looking for her. Where is she?” asked Tanaka without any trace of kindness or mercy in her voice.

Cho let out a sigh because he realised that they weren’t looking for him for a drug-related matter.

“Her? Yes, I saw her. She was talking with Zari.”

“Who?”

“Zarigani, the supervisor, the big man back at the ship, you can’t miss him.”

“Where is the girl now? On the ship?”

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“No, no. She’s gone. Zarigani went away with her, then he came back. I don’t know anything about her... I swear.”

“Then why did you run?”

“The library is closing,” said Cho. Tanaka rewarded the jest by slightly lifting his head and letting it to drop to the ground. The skin broke on his forehead but he endured it without a word. Tanaka suspected that he was in trouble with the law, he might have been smuggling something or had misappropriated a few things, but she didn’t consider him capable of more.

“What do you know about us?” asked Tanaka.

“About cops? That you stink and you sleep with you mother,” said Cho and was about to laugh at his own joke when Tanaka knocked him out before a smile could spread across his face. The world turned dark before his eyes. He regained consciousness a few minutes later and hardly remembered anything.

Tanaka walked back to Olivier who was watching the cargo ship with his hands in his pockets. He was fiddling with Lilian’s remote control in his pocket. Nobody seemed to mind that he was standing there. Zarigani had gone back to work and by the looks of it, nobody was concerned about Cho. Olivier looked at Tanaka, waiting for her report.

“A certain Zarigani escorted her out of the perimeter,” said Tanaka, “that’s all I know.”

Olivier nodded. “Yes, I talked to Zarigani, and that squares with what he told me. We can go now.” He didn’t ask about the whereabouts of the sailor who ran away. He presumed that he was alive, and like many people who had crossed ways with Tanaka, he was probably temporarily incapacitated.

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Olivier casually made his way out of the port and Tanaka followed him. He looked at his phone. Magnus had called him. He tried to call him back but did not reach him. He assumed that there was no signal in the hospital, but it didn't matter because he had to go there anyway.

“And now?” asked Tanaka as they got into the SUV.

“Now we wait.”

Zarigani's shift was over at eight p.m. He was furious at the workers because if they had followed his orders to the tee, they would have finished by six. He had to be back in the port by half past six in the morning; until then he was free. Most of the sailors and dock workers went into town to grab a few drinks, pick up some girls, or perhaps to do karaoke, but the rest stayed on board to get some rest. Several workers went to the Starfish. Zarigani carefully avoided them. He didn't want to be seen.

He, too, liked blowing off some steam in the evenings but this time he didn't join the others. He had other plans. All he could think about was what he had seen in the afternoon. Her body, her flaxen hair, her fabulous beauty. He hoped he would find her in the motel, or else he would have to beat someone up.

The sun was down and creeping to the motel was easy in the dim light of the evening lamps. The heat began to ease, but it was still close to unbearable.

He entered the motel and walked past the reception desk. It seemed there was nothing under the sun that the receptionist—still on duty, and smoking—cared about. His gaze was fixed on a small-screen television. Its light painted his face in a pale whitish tone.

Zarigani walked up to Lilian's door and mumbled a short prayer, hoping that she was still in the room. On his way, he had bought two bottles of water and two boxes of teriyaki chicken on rice because he was hungry, and the girl needed to eat something too. He took out his card and opened the door. He stepped in, hung the "Don't disturb" sign

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on the doorknob before closing it, and activated the magnetic lock. Lilian was there. She looked lost and frightened.

“Hello Anna. Don’t be afraid,” said Zarigani, but Lilian was obviously scared as the large man waltzed into the room.

“How did you get in?” asked Lilian.

“Don’t worry. I won’t hurt you. Look. I’ve brought some food. You are not vegetarian, are you?”

Lilian didn’t understand the question, but she was hungry as a wolf. She had woken up a few hours before and was wondering where to eat.

“Thank you,” she said and took the take-out container. She sat down on the bed and began eating the chicken. Zarigani put the two bottles of water on the couch, sat down on a chair and finished his meal. He realised just then that he could have drugged her food. He should have thought about it sooner. Cho always had something at hand, although he had never bought anything of the sort from him.

“You like it, huh?” asked Zarigani.

“It’s delicious.”

“Any visitors today?”

Even though Lilian was uncomfortable in the big man’s presence, it did not occur to her that she could have said something to deter Zarigani from doing what he was about to do.

“No,” she said.

A wide smile spread across Zarigani’s face. Excellent, he thought. After they both finished the meal, he tossed the boxes into the bin. As Lilian stood up and was thinking about telling him that she wanted to be alone, Zarigani suddenly threw himself at her. He grabbed her and covered her mouth before she could scream. The drapes were drawn

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and in the dim light only his eyes and forehead glimmered. His body radiated the stench of the day's work, mixed with the sweetish smell of the spicy chicken. Lilian was terrified as the massive body charged at her and knocked her off balance with ease. The hat fell from her head. She had been wearing it all day, even in her sleep. It was uncomfortably warm, but she hadn't dared take it off.

Zarigani's strong arms locked upon her tightly so that she couldn't move. His huge palm covered not only her mouth, but almost her whole face. Tears sprang into her eyes from fear and her inability to move, but she tried to calmly think over her options. Everything happened very fast, and in a matter of seconds she found herself on the bed, gagged, her hands tied behind her back. Zarigani squeezed a tissue into her mouth. It was bitter and dry. She tried to spit it out, but he tied another kerchief—the one she had worn on her head—around her face. On top of it all, it absorbed her saliva like a sponge, and her mouth dried out. She felt nauseous but didn't throw up. She knew that she would drown in her own vomit.

Zarigani began unbuttoning his dirty shirt without any haste. He didn't take his eyes off Lilian who was struggling on the bed. He talked to her in Japanese, so Lilian didn't understand when he told her “Good girl” and “Don't fight it,” and then he chuckled. He didn't know who she was, and he didn't care. All that mattered was that there was nobody there to protect her. A pretty girl like that wouldn't hang around the port if she wasn't in some kind of trouble. And he was in the right place at the right time. He looked around the room and saw that she only had a handbag. That is how she plans to travel to the United States? he thought. Can't be. He will interrogate her in detail after he is done with her. Out of curiosity. But first... Then his eyes fell on the nightstand

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and the two wads of cash on it. One of dollars, the other of yen bills. It was more money than he had seen in the bag earlier.

“Goddamn, girl,” he said, and whistled, “you are the jackpot.” Zarigani sat down on the bed and drew his thick fingers along her legs. It was a heavenly feeling. He had never been near a woman of that calibre. He was so immersed in the pleasure of touching her and the softness of her skin, that he didn’t hear when the magnetic lock was opened use the receptionist’s master key.

He turned his head and found a short, black-haired woman standing near him. She was hardly taller than he was, even though he was sitting on the bed. Suddenly, out of nowhere, something hit him on the temples with an immense force. Tanaka had knocked him out with one single kick. He didn’t lose his consciousness, but stretched out on the floor and couldn’t move.

Two men in police uniforms stepped into the room. Instead of being real policemen, they worked for Olivier. He had alerted them in the afternoon to be prepared for a job in the evening. Olivier walked in after them and closed the door.

“Good job, Tanaka,” he said, and walked to the bed to free Lilian. “Everything will be all right, Lilian. I am here now. Do you remember me? I am Rolland Olivier.”

Lilian wiped off her tears and nodded. A familiar voice. For some inexplicable reason, Olivier’s voice calmed her a bit. She was not sure if she should feel relieved, but at least they freed her from that monster. Olivier did not expect Lilian to jump into his arms. He had a vague feeling that she was suspicious, that she might even blame him for her adversities.

“Come on. We have to go,” said Olivier, and held out his hand as if asking her to dance. She grabbed his hand and climbed out of the bed.

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“We’ll take care of everything, all right?” Lilian cautiously nodded her head.

“What’s going on?” she asked so quietly that only Olivier heard it.

“We are leaving now. Later I will explain everything. We’ll figure out how to get you home,” said Olivier and gently put his hand on her back. He couldn’t decide if she was more relaxed or was just accepting her powerlessness. Olivier intended to find out how much she knew about herself and how she managed to find it out. It was his job to know these things. He wanted to understand how the copies’ brains work in order to use his findings to enhance the service in the future. Although, if he wanted to be honest with himself, he would admit that he wanted to know them better to have more power over them and to be able catch them, when necessary—as it had been in this case. Now that he had successfully caught Lilian, he decided that it was not too difficult to put himself in her shoes.

The two policemen handcuffed Zarigani and—with no little effort—lifted him up off the ground. Tanaka opened the door wide to escort their captive out. They went first, then Olivier, with his arm around Lilian. Tanaka packed up Lilian’s few belongings and went last. They left without a trace.

As they stepped out to the corridor, Zarigani somewhat regained consciousness, assessed his situation and went berserk. He head butted one of his guards in the nose, shoved the other to the wall as hard as he could, and ran off with hands still cuffed behind his back.

All breath was knocked out of one of the policemen, and he fell to the floor wheezing for air. His partner, also on the ground, was wiping his broken and bleeding nose. Olivier glanced up and let out a deep sigh. He didn’t like what he saw and was thinking about letting

him run when Tanaka stepped out from behind him and dashed off in pursuit.

“Tanaka,” shouted Olivier, and threw her a stun gun. Tanaka turned back, caught it, turned it on, and swiftly overtook Zarigani. She jumped high in the air and pressed the gun onto his neck. Zarigani threw her off with a violent jerk, then fell forward, and stretched out on the floor, shaking.

Olivier knew that Tanaka chose this option only because she was capable of it. He managed a small smile, after all, it was a spectacular jump. Unnecessary, but spectacular. Tanaka did not do it for him, for the spectators, or to prove anything. She did it merely for fun. That was how she worked, and she enjoyed every minute of it.

Olivier looked at the team. Lilian watched the events unfold with horror. She didn't know who these people were, or what her fate would be in that chaos. The two policemen slowly scrambled to their feet. One of them was wiping his bloody face and nose with a handkerchief and the other was struggling to control his breathing. A little further, Tanaka stood over the writhing Zarigani, checking whether she needed to shock him again. Then there was Olivier, who was completely fed up with the day. He felt like a hundred years had passed since he got the news that the project was derailed.

“Pick him up and put him in the car,” said Olivier. The policemen helped up Zarigani without a word, slowly and with more difficulty than before, and escorted him to the parking area.

Tanaka settled the matter with the receptionist. She told him that they had caught the wife of a gangster and her bodyguard. Everything was fine. She thanked him for his cooperation, passed him the magnet card, and left.

“Let’s go to the lab,” said Olivier as they got into the car. He kept rubbing his forehead, which was a sign that he has had enough of something. Tanaka understood it.

“Buta ni shinju,” said Tanaka, summing up her opinion about the whole project and hit the throttle. Olivier nodded. The Japanese proverb means “Pearls to a pig.” This applied to Zarigani too, but both of them were thinking about Turner, who did not appreciate the girl. The fake policemen followed them in an old red Honda sedan.

Zarigani regained consciousness again but he didn’t say a word and didn’t try to escape. His head was swirling as he tried to make sense of everything and figure out who they were and why they were taking him away. Why do the police drive a civilian car? He wasn’t particularly worried. The worst that could happen was that he would be charged with attempted rape, but even that would be difficult to prove. He found it strange that they did not examine the scene of the crime, and that the girl was being taken away, just like him. He was right that Anna—called Lilian by the man in the suit—was dirty of something, and he might use it to his advantage. He reasoned that he was just an insignificant speck of dust. They would let him go, and hopefully he would catch the ship before it sailed.

Olivier was deep in thought. The little screen in his lap again displayed a flashing dot, indicating the position of Lilian, who at that moment was sitting in the back seat. They had been in the motel, just in front of Lilian’s door when the dot had started flashing again. Olivier was suspicious of Zarigani, so they had followed him after he left the ship. He suspected Zarigani might lead them to Lilian, but if he had not done so, they would have returned to the port to wait for Lilian to appear at the time of departure.

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Olivier turned in his seat, but Lilian didn't look at him. She was looking out the window, her hands resting in her lap. She had aged at least three years since leaving the lab. Her hair was dishevelled and tangled with sweat. Her lips were parched, and it looked as if the glimmer in her eyes had begun to fade. What is she thinking about? Olivier wondered. He would have time to figure that out later, but first he needed to take care of Zarigani.

According to police records—as Lin had informed him on the phone—he was an antisocial man with a tendency for violence; he had been detained several times for assault, but he had kept to himself in the past five years. He had been working as a supervisor for a shipping company and before that had been a crab fisherman.

What should he do with him? He probably wouldn't talk if he let him go because he already had a criminal record, but if he recognised her, then he might still cause trouble. If he disappeared, nobody would look for him. He would be reported missing. All anyone would know was that he left the port and did not return, and that he was a violent man who set out into the night alone.

The dock workers might remember a certain Agent Taginawa and an FBI agent who were looking for a blonde woman, but it would not be suspicious at all, and it would be difficult to connect it to Zarigani. The cameras at the port stored the footage of the previous forty-eight hours. By the time they start an investigation on Zarigani, the recordings made of them would be deleted. It was an out-of-date system, but it was good enough for the purposes of the port.

How would Zarigani react if they told him that he simply picked the wrong woman, found himself in the middle of a police operation, and they let him go? He would probably be glad that he got away and would

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keep his mouth shut. However, it was certain that he would try to do the same thing with another woman, girl, someone. Olivier didn't like thought of it. He was not one to deliver a sermon on morality, since he offered a sex service with human copies who were later destroyed, but he felt that there was a difference between the two. One is business, cruel, but still a business, and the other is mere cruelty against women who have a past, a present, and a future, real friends, lovers, perhaps children. Nevertheless, Zarigani's actions had no impact on his project. It was neither his business nor his task to track down and arrest sex offenders.

Lilian knew that her plans had gone horribly wrong, but she couldn't say where she had a mistake or what else she could have done. She thought of Turner again. Their shared memories seemed very distant, and her feelings might have never even existed. She wasn't sure anymore that she had ever loved Turner.

The past week and a half seemed a foggy, unreal dream; and the time before that dissolved into a void. Someone had tried to rape her twice in the past twelve hours, probably there was a tracking device in her head, and now she was sitting in a car taking her further and further away from the ship that would take her home. There was something wrong about her, and she had no idea what to do to make things right.

She hoped that Olivier would help her, yet she was scared of him, but not the way she was scared of Zarigani. Olivier was frightening in another way. Why didn't he ask what happened to Robert when he found her? After all, it was Olivier who took her to him. And why did he say they would figure out a way to take me home? How did he know that I wanted to go home?

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Olivier's phone was ringing. It was Kyo.

"Mr. Morelli has arrived. What should I tell him?" she asked. Olivier swallowed a curse. He had forgotten about the meeting. That was not typical of him, but he was busy looking for Lilian.

"Tell him to have a seat, and that I have unexpected business to take care of," said Olivier. "I will be there in half an hour."

"Okay," said Kyo and hung up.

Once they reached the laboratory and were in the lift, Lilian asked where they were going, but Olivier gave an evasive answer. He was not as friendly as before, but he wasn't hostile either. He just looked tired. He said that everything would be fine.

Inside, Tanaka escorted Lilian into a room with a metal table and two metal chairs. She asked her to sit down, and with a quick and deliberate move, cuffed her to the table. Lilian looked at her horrified.

"What's going on? Why did you cuff me?"

"Olivier will be here soon," said Tanaka. "He will explain everything. You are staying here until then. I'll bring you some water."

And with that she left and closed the door. The lock clicked and Lilian stayed in the windowless room alone, with her fears and her countless unanswered questions. She was sitting, with hands cuffed, in the light of the LED lights, then she laid her forehead on the desk, and burst out in tears.

Olivier ordered everybody to stay out of Lilian's room until he got back, then he looked at Tanaka who was standing next to the others with a glass of water in her hand.

"Tanaka can go in, and nobody else," he said, and stormed off.

Morelli greeted him with a smile in the waiting room of the office, despite being busy and having to wait forty minutes. Olivier apologised for being late. "It doesn't matter," Morelli replied quickly. He appeared to be excited, and Olivier was glad to see that because it meant that he would place an order.

"Let's go into my office," said Olivier. Morelli stepped in and was immediately fascinated by the modern air of the office and the magnificent view of the Tokyo night scape. The glass screen of the desk displayed exotic fish, giving the illusion that the desk itself was an aquarium.

He sat down in the armchair and was surprised at how comfortable it was. He drew his fingers across the armrest, then crossed his legs and clasped his hands on his knees.

"It's a marvellous office, Mr. Olivier," said Morelli in perfect English, although he laid a bit more stress on the next to the last syllable. He picked up this habit from his father who spoke English with a distinctive Italian accent.

"Thank you. I like it too," said Olivier and looked around contentedly. He noticed that Morelli was wearing a Zegna suit and Testoni shoes. In contrast to Turner, he was the kind of billionaire who liked showing off his wealth. "Well, Mr. Morelli, have you made a decision?"

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he asked as he sat down on his chair. The glass screen of the desk turned on and was filled with information that Morelli could not see because he sat too low.

“I’m going to be honest. I have doubts about your enterprise, but the idea itself is so outrageous that I’ve decided to give you a chance.”

Olivier flashed his friendliest smile.

“I understand. I would have the same reservations if I were you, but you can believe me that you won’t regret it.”

“I know that what I’m going to tell you will sound crazy, but I didn’t start this,” Morelli said, and spread his arms, indicating that it was beyond his control, he was just going with the flow. Olivier watched him with a straight face and sincere curiosity. “My thirtieth birthday is in six months, and I have decided to order twenty famous women, plus five of myself. I am going to have a big party in my Phuket villa, after it you can come and collect the clones because I will be going back to Florida. My birthday is on January 19, on Saturday, so you would need to make the delivery on Friday, January 18. We are at the end of the summer. What do you think, Mr. Olivier, is it doable?”

“It is not impossible, but we need to know the names.”

Morelli sprang up from the chair and took out a small piece of paper from the inside pocket of his jacket. He stepped to the desk and passed it to Olivier, as if it was just a shopping list. Morelli raised his eyebrows because Olivier did not appear to be surprised at all.

“So here we are,” he said. “That’s the list. Let me know in case you need more info on someone.” He sank back to the armchair and adjusted his suit jacket so as not to wrinkle it.

Olivier skimmed over the list. A few names were familiar. A couple of them had been ordered by previous customers. He had never heard

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of the rest before, but at least they should pose no problems as far as accessibility was concerned. He suspected that the unusual names referred to adult performers; first names standing by themselves probably belonged to singers; the rest must have been actresses and athletes.

“Give us a few days to evaluate your request,” said Olivier. “We will get back to you with a quote.”

“All right, Mr. Olivier,” said Morelli with a friendly smile. He apparently didn’t care about the money, and in contrast to Turner, about technical details either. “I will be impressed if you can really do this, and I am sure that we will work together again.”

Olivier nodded and smiled.

“Great, Mr. Morelli.”

They both stood up, and Olivier wondered why the Italian had not even asked for any proof. He simply believed that they could copy people.

“I won’t hold you up any longer. I am very busy myself,” said Morelli.

“Thank you once again for waiting,” said Olivier, but Morelli just waved a hand. “Are you satisfied with the accommodations?”

“It’s perfect, thank you.”

“It’s my pleasure. I am glad you are having a good time here in Japan,” said Olivier.

“I will be waiting for your call, Mr. Olivier.” Morelli offered his hand and Olivier shook it.

“Goodbye, Mr. Morelli.”

“Goodbye.”

After he left, Olivier handed the list to Kyo. Kyo glanced at it and her eyes widened.

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“Is this one order or several?” she asked.

“One. Evaluate how much time we will need and how feasible it is. And the fee should include five copies of the client. We need them for only a weekend, so the conditioning will be short. Let me know when you are ready.”

“Five?” asked Kyo without waiting for a confirmation. Olivier said five so it was five. “All right. I’m on it.”

Olivier headed back to the lab to talk to Lilian.

Olivier entered the room where Lilian was waiting. He brought two fresh cups of coffee. Lilian had been waiting for him. He always remembered that this was where they kept Kosta, the hot-headed scion of a Russian billionaire.

Lilian sat at the other end of the dreary table. It was like sitting at the head of the table at a grotesque tea party with only one guest: Olivier. The room was silent, with only the ventilator whirring faintly overhead.

Tanaka had handcuffed Lilian's hands to a steel ring bolted to the middle of the table. The room might as well have been an interrogation room, only the mirror was missing from the wall, with investigators and a psychologist watching the discussion from the other side. Tanaka closed the door from the outside. The lighting was pleasant, but the white floor and the tiled walls didn't inspire trust. Olivier shook his head and gave an exasperated sigh.

"There's no need for that," he said, looking at the handcuffs. He put down the two cups of coffee and removed the handcuffs. "I'm really sorry for this." His voice was friendly and calm. Lilian wiped off the salty lines that her tears left behind, rubbed her wrists, and tucked her hair behind her ears.

"I brought you some coffee. It will be good for you," said Olivier, slowly pushing a cup toward her. He took off his suit jacket, put it on the back of his chair, and sat down in front of her.

"What's going on?" asked Lilian, on the verge of crying, but she tried to look strong. "What's this all about?"

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“Drink a little coffee, Lilian. You’ll feel better,” said Olivier. “As I promised, I will tell you everything. After all you have gone through, this is the least you deserve.”

Lilian looked at the coffee with a puzzled expression, and then took a sip. It smelled good, its pleasant warmth spread in her body, and she did feel better. When Olivier saw that she calmed down he asked the first question:

“What happened at the house?”

Lilian looked at him blankly. Olivier could see it on her face, she was recalling the events.

“Robert got violent, and then he collapsed. I don’t know what happened to him. I just knew that I had to leave.”

“Why did you want to leave the house?”

“I had a feeling... I dreamt that my home is in Los Angeles. I had to go there...”

“How did you figure out that there is a tracking device in you?” asked Olivier and saw Lilian was confused.

“I don’t know. I read about it on the internet.”

“And how did you get to the port?”

“By taxi. I took the money from Robert’s safe.”

Olivier nodded. Smart girl, he thought. He didn’t know whether her sudden improvement was the result of a strange coincidence or a genetic error, but he had to admit that she was far more resourceful than any copy they had made before.

“When can I go home?” asked Lilian.

“It this really the most important thing you want to know?” asked Olivier. He talked to her like a teacher talks to an outstanding student who is not as knowledgeable as he is, a mentor who listens with pa-

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tience, provides guidance, and in the end, gives the answer. He was cordial, not patronising.

Lilian looked at her coffee, holding back her sobbing, then looked up at Olivier.

“Why can’t I go home?” she asked.

“Because Los Angeles is not your home.”

“Why? What’s wrong with me? Why has everything become so confusing since I was first with Robert?”

“Nothing is wrong with you, Lilian, but the fact is that you were born only a few weeks ago, and you gained consciousness only twelve days ago.”

Lilian stared at Olivier with a bewilderment unfit for her beauty. She didn’t understand what he was saying, and she couldn’t put her thoughts into words. Olivier went on:

“Lilian, you are a copy, a kind of clone. You are not a real human being, but a copy of a real human being.”

She still didn’t understand what all this meant. She was utterly confused, her eyes filled with tears, and when her eyelids were no longer able to hold them, they rolled down her cheeks.

“We created you in this laboratory.”

“That’s enough,” Lilian cried out, and knocked the cup off the table. It broke with a muffled thud, and coffee splashed onto the floor and wall. “Stop it. It can’t be. I know who I am. I know where I want to go. I...”

“Lilian, calm down,” said Olivier. “Everything you remember, and all your memories belong to a girl named Lilian. She is the one who lives in Los Angeles. She looks exactly like you and she is exactly as beautiful as you. But she was born, and she grew up. She is a real human being. You were not born. You are her copy, a clone, not real.”

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Lilian was shaking her head, while she held it in her hands, as if trying to prevent all the thoughts and pain bursting out of it.

“I don’t believe you,” she said. “I know I’m alive. I’m not a copy. My name is Lilian Bailey. I’m an actress from Hollywood.”

Olivier was surprised that Lilian had become so confident in such a short time, but he didn’t express it.

“I know that it is difficult to understand, but just think about it. Do you remember anything from the time before meeting Robert? For example, coming to Japan or what you did last month.”

“Yes! I remember being a little girl. I remember wearing nice clothes and running in a field. The wind was warm, and the sun was shining. That’s me.”

“Those fragments of memories belong to the original Lilian.” He held his thumb and index finger close to each other to indicate how tiny the fragments were. “You don’t remember everything like she does, you remember only an insignificant part of it, but even I don’t know the reason. But tell me, do you remember your career?”

Lilian recalled her dream in which she was about to walk onto the stage, and a few images flashed in front of her eyes, but no sounds or stories were connected to them. They were just images: places, costumes, movie theatres, and award ceremonies, but she was not able to stitch them into a coherent memory.

“The real Lilian Bailey would know the title of her movies, the number of the awards she won, the names of her co-actors.” Olivier talked slowly and kept his eyes on Lilian. She was listening with her head down. Olivier concluded that his previous observations were correct. The first memories to surface are connected to eating, drinking, childhood, sexual behaviour, studies, dance, and sports. These are followed

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by more current ones of the original: place of residence, occupation, familiar faces. And in the end, the details: the latest memories, tastes, dreams, and individual memories, for example about movie parts, achievements, awards, and lyrics.

“What did you do to me? Why can’t I remember?”

“The copies’ memories come to the surface slowly. When I took you to Robert, you didn’t remember anything. You were interested only in him, weren’t you?”

Lilian frowned and nodded resignedly. Somewhere deep down, she had known what she just learned but she couldn’t have been sure. It was true that she didn’t have any specific memories from the time before Robert, except for obscure fantasies about being with Robert, about meeting him for the first time, and a few dates, but she doubted these were real memories. They might as well have been dreams. After a while, it was difficult to distinguish between the two.

“There must have been a lot on your mind in the past few days,” said Olivier. “That is the outcome of this process. Lilian’s memories are coming to the surface. Usually it happens more slowly, but you started going through it sooner than the others, which surprised us, and confused you.”

Olivier finished his coffee and put the cup down. Lilian watched him in an almost delirious state. The vast amount of inconceivable information was overwhelming, but she began coping. She began to understand that if Olivier was telling the truth, then everything made sense. Every piece of the puzzle fell into its place.

“How did you figure these things out?” asked Olivier. “How do you know where the original Lilian lives?”

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“I’m not sure,” said Lilian. Her voice was quiet and weak. “I just know.” She reached back and felt the chip under her skin and looked at Olivier.

“What is this thing in my head?” asked Lilian. Olivier was wondering at the absurdity of the situation. There he was sitting with a copy and talking about the chip in her head. They had made a lot of copies, but most of them were switched off before they could ask a question of their own. And then there was Lilian, prettier and smarter than any other copy before her, and he had to switch her off as well because rules are rules. That’s part of the job, that’s what they require him to do.

He took the remote control out of his pocket. It was a small rectangular gadget with a button on the side that served as a safety switch, and a button on the top that would send a signal to the chip. He casually turned it over and over in his hand. Lilian ignored it.

“You have a chip in your head. It sends your biometric data for us to know that everything is okay with you. It is also a tracking device. It informs us about your location. You figured it out on your own, which is no small feat. It also has a function to turn you off when I push this button.”

Olivier raised the control for Lilian to see it. Her heartbeat accelerated.

“We turn off every copy after their service is over. Unfortunately, you began to remember too soon, and your escape disrupted the schedule.”

“You’re going to kill me,” Lilian said, surprised as this realization came over her. She had never thought of death before, but now the will to live welled up in her, a will to look for an escape even though it seemed there was no way out. But she didn’t stand up, and she didn’t

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run toward the door to try to break out. She knew that she wouldn't succeed. Olivier felt a profound respect for her for staying put while facing her own death sentence. He had no idea what was going on in Lilian's head and what intricate interplay of neurons, chemicals reactions, electrical signals, and external influences made her so smart—but he admired her.

“I have no choice,” said Olivier. He lowered his head and shook it.

“Please don't do this. Let me go home. I know that I belong there. I feel it.”

“Those are not your memories.”

“But they are in my head. I can see them, and I can feel them.”

“If you were a real human being, you would remember everything from your childhood up until this day. You could tell me something about each year of your life; you could tell apart the birthdays and Christmases, you would remember the bad things and the good. But you remember only fragments,” said Olivier and saw that Lilian was beginning to believe him.

“Let me see the original Lilian,” she said. “Then, I will believe you.”

“I can show a picture of her, but then more memories would pop into your head. I'm not sure if you would believe me more after that.”

Lilian was thinking.

“What if I hide somewhere? I won't bother anyone.”

“You have to understand that I can't let you leave,” said Olivier. “There can't be two Lilians. It wouldn't be right. If it came to light, I would be done, and my superiors would have to escape and hide for the rest of their lives, or they would be arrested and go to prison for human cloning. And you still would not be free because the authorities would not allow two Lilians to live in the world. It would unsettle people. It

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would threaten their sense of security, and it would undermine their belief that we are all unique, we each have our own fingerprint, and everyone is born by their own mother. Everybody would know that you are different, and nobody would leave it at that. People would never accept you. You would be persecuted, and people would wish for your death, even if you have never hurt anyone.”

Lilian’s eyes were dimmed with tears, but she didn’t cry. She held Olivier’s gaze and she was thinking about the things she had just heard.

“And Lilian?” went on Olivier. “Just think about how she would feel if she knew that there is another one of her. She could have a nervous breakdown. Perhaps she could never process this. You can’t wish that for her.”

Lilian stayed silent for a long time. She would have liked something to hold onto that would save her, but she couldn’t think of anything. She felt infinitely lonely and vulnerable.

“There is someone like me?” she asked, as if she had just understood it. “Exactly like me?”

“Yes. Exactly like you,” said Olivier and gave her a little time to think it over.

How graceful! thought Olivier. She fights like a human. She is alive, and she is an individual, even if no laws apply to her. She has her own world, and she isn’t different from other people. There are many people who come nowhere near her, and many people who waste their lives, or throw their lives away, and here is a clone who would do anything to keep it.

Olivier bowed his head again. He had not expected this conversation to be so difficult. Lilian was very smart and pretty. She didn’t deserve this.

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“Believe me, I am very sorry that it turned out like this, but I am just a cog in the machine. You shouldn’t have figured these things out.” They were silent again. Lilian’s thoughts were spinning, but she discarded all her ideas. She made a sudden decision and knew she would stick to it: she would not beg for her life.

“Why did you make me if you planned to destroy me two weeks later?”

Her voice was no longer shaking.

“Robert Turner ordered you,” said Olivier under his breath, as if it was a confession. The last piece of the puzzle fell into its place. She remembered Turner’s eyes, as he was lying on the ground and looked up at her. He was dying, now she understood. Thinking back, it was unimaginable that she could love that man. “We copy people, on demand. Turner wanted to be with you. That was his dream.”

You mean with the original Lilian, she thought, and she was just used. That was the purpose of her life if everything that Olivier had just said was true.

“Why did you tell me all of this?” asked Lilian. Her brows wrinkled and her voice was stern, as if she were calling him to account for the unnecessary pain he was causing.

“Because I like you. And I respect you. You are special, and I felt I owe you this much. Just talking to you might get me fired, but I wanted you to know what is happening to you.”

Lilian dropped her head.

“What’s the point if I’m dead anyway,” she said almost inaudibly.

“Isn’t it better to know the truth about who you are than to go away thinking you are someone else? Wasn’t it great to be alive, even if it was just for a short time? Feel the ocean, the sunshine, the love?”

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Lilian did not answer. She sat quietly with her head lowered. Her locks fell to her face. She remembered her days. She had a good time with Turner, despite who he was. The Diamond Fuji, the trips, the love-makings. Was that really all her life? Twelve days?

Olivier didn't know what to say. He felt sorry for the girl, and he wasn't certain whether he was doing the right thing. Did he mean good for her, or did he just want to ease his conscience? What kind of absolution was he hoping to have from a copy after already killing more than twenty? Lilian raised her head.

"Well, let's get over it then," she said and looked at Olivier. Her blue eyes reminded him of the most stunning southern seas, and her gaze was not that of a copy, but that of a self-confident, feeling and thinking human being. Olivier stared deep into her eyes and pushed the button. Lilian fell forward, her head on the desk. Olivier watched her for a few minutes, perhaps he was waiting for something to happen, but Lilian never moved again. Her hair covered her head like a shroud, and her arms lay on top of the table as if reaching toward him, beseechingly.

Olivier stood up wearily and slowly put on his suit jacket. He shuffled to the door, opened it, and walked outside. He told Magnus and Haru to take her away.

"And what should we do with him?" asked Tanaka, pointing toward the corner. Zarigani sat there, broken and tired, with his head bowed, like a heavyweight boxer who was knocked out in the twelfth round.

Olivier looked at him, but he didn't appear to see him. He was just looking in his direction but was still thinking about Lilian. He had done this so many times already, he thought, so why did it keep upsetting him. Suddenly he raised his eyebrow, as if he had just woken up from daydreaming. Zarigani. He watched him, the large Japa-

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nese man. The dirty, violent, giant brute. Olivier knew that he could not let him go.

“Burn him,” he said at last. Zarigani jerked up his head. He looked questioningly at Tanaka, then at Olivier and the professor. He expected this to turn out to be huge misunderstanding. Tanaka pulled out the Taser and pressed it on Zarigani’s neck. The colossal body fell off the chair and wriggled on the ground with his hands cuffed behind his back. In the meantime, Magnus and Haru had come back, and they lifted and carried the semi-conscious man to the furnace.

“Please...” said Zarigani, but it was difficult to understand him, he wasn’t articulating the words anymore, but drooling. Tanaka walked in front, and by the time they caught up to her she had already opened the metal door of the furnace. A blast of heat struck them like the gust of wind before a storm. Zarigani’s eyes grew wide in horror.

“Don’t...” he said. He tried to fight but the Taser had numbed his muscles. Tanaka pulled a steel shelf on rollers from the side of the furnace. The two men laid him on it and strapped down. Zarigani whimpered and groaned as the metal surface began burning his back. He struggled to get off the drawer, but he couldn’t, and in the next moment, they slid the shelf with its writhing cargo into the furnace and slammed the door. After a searing flash of pain beyond comprehension, the heat and flames took him, even as the sound of the clanging door died away.

Tanaka searched through Lilian’s bag. As she lifted it, it tilted, and a small ceramic fish fell out and broke when it hit the ground. Tanaka picked up the pieces and put them back into the bag. She also found some money, two changes of clothes, a board with Lilian’s name on it, her passport, and a magnet card for the ship. She saw that the events

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had affected Olivier, so she decided not to give him the contents of the bag. Perhaps later.

As Olivier was leaving, he asked for a K9 lethal injection from the professor; then he went to a local park to clear his head. He was thinking about his life and the short career of Lilian here, on Earth. Copies are just products, and their death is unavoidable, but after all, what is the difference between a copy and a human? They become more than copies as soon as they start having feelings and are aware of their existence. The path they take is separate from the original's, and they are different. Is there anyone in the universe who is not entitled to live? Can the law and the rules of man apply to life, life which is more than fibres, cells, tissue, and blood? Olivier sighed and acknowledged that he wouldn't be able to answer these questions for the sake of humanity. And even if he had an opinion, it wouldn't matter. He was just a pawn on the board, and he too would be sacrificed if necessary to assist the operation.

He looked at the needleless injection instrument, slipped in into his pocket and headed toward his car. There was one more loose end in this messed up project.

In the meantime, Lilian Bailey, the actress, was rehearsing for her new movie. They were recording a couple of scenes without costumes to put the actors and some dialogue to the test. The director, Jack Walford, had been poring over the script with the writer, Albert Gross, for over half an hour. The crew were milling about, chatting, and drinking coffee. Lilian, a bit further from the others, was talking to a colleague, Jennifer Gray.

The sun had already risen and shone fiercely into the studio.

“What was Mexico like?” asked Jennifer.

“Cancún? Awesome,” said Lilian. “You can imagine. The sun was shining, the beach was beautiful, we had a great time.” She took out her phone, searched for the photos and showed them to Jennifer who was watching them with sincere interest. One of them showed Lilian with two girlfriends, in their background the beach with its golden sand and wildly blue sea. The next one showed colourful cocktails decorated with little umbrellas, and on the following Lilian posed in a bikini on the beach, happy and laughing. There were plenty of pictures, but they had a lot of time to look through them. Jennifer was not jealous, for this year she spent two weeks on a European roundtrip through Paris, Berlin, Milano, Prague, and Budapest. Fabulous places. Magnus was visible in one of the pictures in the background but nobody ever noticed it.

“Beth and Margaret!” shouted the director. Lilian put her phone away and approached the director. She was playing Beth, and Walford was famous for never calling actors by their real names from the mo-

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ment they signed the contract. An older, red-headed woman walked over from the other side of the room. She was Barbara Dale, who played Margaret. Lilian didn't know her. This was their first movie together and they hadn't had much time to talk. On the contrary, Barbara had met Jennifer several times.

Lilian liked her part, but she wasn't fond of the name, Beth. Her previous character was called Hanna Morgan, which had a nice ring to it. She tried to convince the director and spoke with a script writer as well to look for a more charming name, but they couldn't be persuaded.

"All right," said Walford. "I would like to see this part." He held the screenplay higher for the actresses to see it. "Here. Margaret turns on Beth. A quarrel. Past grievances are aired. Then a change of tone, and Margaret leaves. That is the moment Beth decides to kill Margaret, although at that point the audience does not yet think she would be capable of doing that. Beth then goes to Freddy and emotionally exploits him to help her with the murder. Okay?"

They nodded. Walford went on:

"This is a key scene. I would like to see how it works. Al wrote a great dialogue. Make the best out of it."

"Yes," said Margaret, and stepped back with head bowed. She was focusing on her lines. Lilian also stood up for the scene. The others stayed silent.

Walford adjusted his frameless glasses and watched them intently.

"Beth," cried out Margaret.

"Louder please," said Walford. "You are angry at her and put on a more hideous expression."

"Beth," she yelled out again. Lilian stepped forward and opened her mouth, but no words came out. Her knees buckled underneath

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her, her arms went limp like a ragdoll and she fainted. This happened half a minute after Olivier had pushed a button on the other side of the planet.

Walford jumped up to catch her. He was a bit slow but at least he was able to break her fall.

He carefully laid her on the ground, knelt beside her, and gently fanned her face. The rest of the crew gathered around them with worrying looks on their faces.

“Lilian,” he said, “are you okay?” She slowly opened her eyes. Her gaze was clear, and she sat up.

“W-What happened?”

“You fainted,” said Walford. “Is everything okay? Have you slept enough?”

“Yes.”

“Do you need a little break?”

“Could you give me a few minutes?”

“As many as you want,” said Walford, and with Jennifer they helped her to stand up.

Lilian went to the bathroom. Jennifer followed her but she asked her to stay outside. In the bathroom, she washed her face and looked in the mirror.

“For Pete’s sake!” She was stirred up and felt she was not herself. She saw herself from the outside, as if she were under the influence of a drug, but as quickly as the feeling came, it passed. Only its memory remained with her. As if a small piece of her soul had been torn out, and with this, the strange feeling that had been weighing on her for the past week also disappeared.

Turner woke up alone in a two-bed hospital room. The modern lamps emitted a pleasant, uniform light that painted the walls a broken-white colour. The window was dark, so he figured it was night, but what day? And what happened?

He tried to move but pain rippled across his chest, moved into his shoulder, and left his body through his right arm, leaving behind an unpleasant tingling.

An ECG machine stood next to his bed, but he wasn't connected to it. As he turned his head, he felt that there was something in his nose. He slowly lifted his left hand to touch it: it was a nasal cannula. He also noticed an IV line running to his left arm. He was being given drips of some kind. He had hated these kinds of things all his life, they were just not his style. When he occasionally wondered about them or saw them in a movie, he felt he couldn't stand lying in a hospital bed with tubes and foreign objects attached to his body. And now here he was, and he couldn't do anything about it. He couldn't jump out of the bed and tear them out of his body like a movie hero.

His whole body was numb, so all he wanted was to fall back to sleep, to sleep through this nightmare. He remembered having a heart attack, and he had a vague memory of quarrelling with Lilian. The truth is that you wanted to rape her, said the always honest inner voice. His thoughts appeared as a dream that usually slips away after waking up, but with a little concentration can be recalled.

Where can she be? he asked himself. He also remembered lighting a fire, but despite his efforts he couldn't recall anything else.

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He gingerly turned his head to the other side and saw that his right arm was in bandages from the shoulder down. He was thinking of the diagnosis. Were his days numbered? Did he have cancer from smoking? Or was his heart so weak that he needed a transplant and now they were waiting for a donor? From the corner of his eye, he saw the nurse call button, but the dumb Japs put it onto the right bedside table, and his right hand was useless. If he tried to reach for it, he would probably just push it onto the floor.

And what could have caused the heart attack? Smoking, or blood vessels clotted from the fatty meals I have eaten? Perhaps I have a hereditary heart weakness. Maybe my blood pressure was temporarily high. Maybe the doctor will be able to tell me when he comes in. A least I'm alive, and the rest didn't matter.

Turner remembered that twenty-five years ago as a young man he laughed in the face of death and disease. He had never had health problems. But nothing lasts forever, and people ignore this in their twenties.

A few days ago, he was wondering whether his whole life was meant to lead up to that point. He believed the point was Lilian, but in fact it was this—his unavoidable, tragic, and pathetic downfall. He had never paid much attention to his future and his health, so it was no surprise that he ended up in a hospital. Somewhere in his life, there must have been a turning point where he could have taken another path. If he had made different choices, he would not be here now. Of course, life is full of decisions and crossroads, but most changes are reversible. There are only a handful of turning points that alter the course of an entire life.

Was it a good decision to accept Olivier's offer and order Lilian? Yes, he was certain that he had made the right choice. He had spent the

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best days of his life with that clone. He had never held such a beautiful woman in his arms, so he wouldn't change anything even if that were the last thing he did in his life. But I hope it won't be the last thing, he thought.

As he thought about the events of his life, he remembered Diane. Diane was beautiful, far from fiery, but clever and tender. She was the type of woman who was a good friend to everybody. She would be loyal to her husband, cook dinner for her family, and take proper care of the children. Could have been his family, his children, he ruefully admitted. She valued the little things, like flowers, or her partner remembering the lyrics of her favourite song. Few men nowadays were a match for an exceptional woman like Diane, although Robert felt he could have been one.

He met her in New York, and they dated for a few months. Those were beautiful nights, but Turner felt that was not his path, and staying with her any longer would have given her a false hope, and this would not have been fair. He didn't want to cause her any pain. She was a kind-hearted and sophisticated woman, not a naïve intern or a doll who would do anything for a brand-name dress. Besides, Diane had difficulties tolerating Turner's lifestyle and attitude toward drinking, partying, and travelling. Although she had never given voice to her concerns, Turner knew about them and saw them in her eyes. And he was right.

Diane was his partner, lover, and friend in one person. He could talk to her through whole nights about anything. She was incredibly cute when she was smiling. Where would he be now if he had stayed with her? Would he have asked for her hand? Would they have children? Or would they spend their time travelling around the world? He

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couldn't imagine. And could he have proved that he deserved her? After all, a few dates and a dozen nights are very different from years of commitment and attention. Money did not satisfy Diane. She needed to be respected and cared for, and she had every right to be treated that way, because she would have done everything for the relationship and her family. Turner did not have the opportunity to experience this, but he knew what Diane would have been like. Perhaps now he could be that man, but not before, because back then he was an adventurous type, reckless, unstoppable, a playboy always looking for the next adventure.

That was ten years ago. Diane had been approaching thirty then. It was pointless to think about where she might be now. Fallen blossoms do not return to branches, says the Japanese proverb.

But perhaps it's not too late. It's not too late to find a woman who wants him, and not for his money and the parties. To find a woman with whom it feels good to sit out on the terrace and watch the ocean in silence and listen to each other's breath. Always wishing and seeking for more has left him with nothing lasting. Maybe it's time to not wish for more.

Turner sighed, which sent a stab of pain to his side. He inhaled sharply and tried to stay motionless. He took the breaths slowly and the pain subsided. What could Lilian be doing now? he asked himself. Olivier must have caught her. He is something, that man. He entertained the idea that Lilian managed to escape, he would get better, they would meet, make things right, and run away together. They would be hiding and travelling around the world like two dauntless adventurers. Suddenly, his eyes filled with tears. I am sorry, Lilian, he said, as if there was a hidden channel via an alternate dimension that could relay the message to her. I messed up.

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Or did I mess it up? Could I have avoided messing this up? Could things have been different? If I had paid more attention to my health, would things have turned out differently? If I had not drunk so much, where would I be now? Why do I drink, after all? Just because I can? Because my life has not been about responsibility, but liberty. This sounded good when I wanted to appear terribly cool in front of a young woman, but I can't keep on lying to myself. I drink because of loneliness. The whole world is mine but there is nobody to share it with. And my health? There was nobody to be healthy for. I haven't had a reason to live a long life. My loneliness got worse when I was with Lilian because she showed me what I need in life. But it was only the illusion of a life I have always been afraid of, something I always wished for but was not capable of. Yes, he thought, being with Lilian was nice, perfect even. But as their time together drew to an end he had to accept that it would be over, and an unbearable pain tore through his heart.

Perhaps he never made mistakes, and this was just a station on the path fate marked out for him. He couldn't read the minor signs, so now he got a slap in the face. Now you will learn your lesson, Roberto. He tried not to think about Lilian, and how beautiful she was when she arrived at his villa, but he didn't care about anything else. He didn't want to get better or go back to the States. He didn't care about money or his future... He slowly drifted away into the world of dreams. He remembered the gentle touch of Lilian, her smile, and her laugh. His pain subsided somewhat, and he fell asleep.

He wasn't sleeping deeply, but his eyes were closed when he heard the distant sound of a door opening. Foggy dream images appeared on the projection screen of his eyelids: he was standing in his Hayama house, saw the door leading to the garage, and Lilian stepped in, the

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most beautiful woman he had ever seen, she was wearing a snow-white dress, and the glimmer of her blond hair might as well have been stolen from the rays of the sun...

Then something pressed down on the bed, and he lifted his head slightly. His eyes flickered open and he saw Olivier sitting on the side of his bed in a dark, immaculate suit, looking at him without a smile. He pinched himself to wake up.

Turner wanted to cry out, but he could manage only a quiet whimper. His heart was beating erratically and he almost fainted. Olivier raised his index finger to his mouth, indicating that he wanted silence.

He had entered the room as quietly as a spectre glides in the depths of a forest. He put a tulip bouquet on the bedside table, like a friendly visitor coming to wish the patient a quick recovery. But that was not why he came.

“Mr. Oliv...”

“Calm down, Mr. Turner,” said Olivier. “Everything is all right.” His voice was soft, but it had a threatening overtone. He was holding Turner’s uninjured hand, just like a relative would do. He was sitting on the side of the bed, like someone about to tell a bedtime story.

“Lilian? What happened to Lilian?” asked Turner.

“We turned her off.”

Tears welled in Turner’s eyes, but not because of Lilian. He knew why Olivier had visited him. He sensed death itself standing behind him. If he had leaned a little closer, he would have even seen its white skull under the black hood, waiting silently for the sign. Cold and pain radiated from its infinitely deep and dark eye sockets. He gathered his strength to speak.

“Please don’t kill me.”

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Olivier raised the needleless injection for Turner to see.

“This is a K9 toxin we developed,” said Olivier. Turner was desperately shaking his head. “After being injected, a person falls asleep in a few minutes, and their heart stops in approximately six hours. Humane, isn’t it? Only a very thorough toxicological analysis can detect it, but they will not perform one because heart failure is not suspicious after a heart attack.”

The most terrible thing was that Olivier was still speaking with the amicable tone he had used when they first met in his office, which now seemed like a thousand years ago.

“Please,” said Turner, groaning the word. Olivier slipped the injector into his pocket and put his hand back on Turner’s.

“Mr. Turner, you’ve made a serious mistake. Of course, we caught Lilian, and this case probably won’t cause us a headache anymore, but you need to understand that I cannot let you live. It would be too risky. A small mistake can start an avalanche. You already made one mistake and I cannot risk it being repeated.”

A teardrop rolled down Turner’s cheek, and he could hardly hold in the next one. It was apparent that he was trying hard, but he was too weak to fight Olivier.

“Do you know why I cannot let you make a mistake?” he asked, and let Turner figure out the answer.

“Why?” asked Turner. Olivier grabbed Turner’s hand and pulled it up to the back of his head. Turner’s eyes grew wide when he felt the chip. Olivier is a copy.

“Because it is a question of survival for me,” said Olivier, slowly letting his hand go. “If I get into trouble, I will be turned off, and I will not let that happen.”

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A storm of thoughts swirled through Turner's brain and he was wondered if he could have figured it out sooner, but he couldn't even tell if it mattered at all. He would die today, and he had brought this on himself. Moreover, a clone would kill him, not a human.

"So, whose copy are you?" asked Turner, avoiding showing any respect with his tone.

"A French-Japanese special forces soldier, with slight modifications. Less muscle, more charm. I was told who I am, and I was trained to manage the company, and I manage it because I have no other choice. I was given a life and I have every intention of living it, and I am willing to do anything to protect myself. I am going to enjoy it as long as I can because every day could be my last."

The long conversation somewhat relaxed Turner because it led him to believe that he might let him live. Why else would he explain himself at such length? But then he realised that he told him these things exactly because he would take the secrets into his grave.

"I have to admit, Mr. Turner, setting the house on fire was a daring decision. The fire brigade arrived shortly, and they saved your life. Your heart stopped. You were dead for a couple of minutes. Ironically, dying may even have saved your life. Had you been breathing during those minutes, you likely would have died from smoke inhalation. Hard enough to revive a heart attack victim . . . add smoke inhalation and we would not be here now. But no matter," Olivier shook his head, and looked out of the window, thinking how bizarre the situation was. "Only the living room burned, and we managed to clear the house of all traces of Lilian. Of course, the police were called to determine the circumstances of the arson because of the insurance. It will not be cheap, but I assume you have liability insurance, but that is beside the point.

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What matters to me is that the police want to interrogate you as well, but following your doctor's recommendation, they will not come until tomorrow. They will ask questions and I do not want to risk what you might say."

"I won't tell...", said Turner, but Olivier closed his eyes, indicating that he didn't want to hear more.

"Maybe you would, maybe not. We can't be certain. They will interrogate you about the fire, and the locals will talk about a woman and you will have to answer these questions. Questions will follow questions, and it is very difficult to lie well, Mr. Turner. It is extremely difficult to keep up with the lies for a long time. What if you slip up? If a policeman notices a discrepancy in your story, they will become suspicious. Did she disappear? Who was she? Why did you stay here after your business trip? They will call your partner, Brody Calvert, who will tell them that he has no idea, which is more suspicious than saying he knows but wouldn't tell. Questions will keep coming. Why should I trust my own life that with you will standing your ground, and convince the Japanese police—renowned for their excellent training—that everything is perfectly fine?"

Brody... Turner repeated the name in his mind. He then realised that nobody knew where he was and what happened to him. Since Brody flew back to New York, he had left no traces of the past three and a half weeks. Brody. We had a good time together. He will be looking for me, I am sure. Or perhaps not, after all, he cannot leave his family behind to investigate when and how big a party led to his boss's heart attack in the end.

Turner felt desperate. He didn't know what else he could try and where to look for a glimmer of hope. He didn't say a word. He was

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watching the clone and knew that there was no way out. And not only because of Olivier, or because of his weakened condition. He felt as if the will to live was sweeping away from him. For some strange reason, he thought that if death was unavoidable, then at least he should have tried to run away with Lilian. It would have been a wonderful adventure, and in the end, they would have died as heroic lovers—if they were caught—and not like this, put to sleep like a dog.

“No, Mr. Turner, I cannot allow it,” said Olivier, shaking his head with regret, like a manager who doesn’t want to fire a family man, but his hands are tied because the CEO ordered downsizing.

I wonder how many clones work for the company, Turner was thinking. The owners can’t be clones because then they would be in the business of selling their own kind, which is rather a human trait, but who knows? Olivier is not human. Feelings are just tools for him; in reality, he is a cold-blooded executor.

In his final desperation, Turner was thinking about keeping him talking to persuade him to give up his plan. He couldn’t claim that he had children because Olivier knew very well that he didn’t. And would a three-year-old clone even understand what emotional trauma the death of a father would cause to a child? Hardly.

“Help me escape,” said Turner, with an enthusiasm that was fuelled by hope, “and they won’t be able to interrogate me. I will vanish and they will never find me. I have money, so I can disappear.”

Olivier looked at him as if he were considering the option, but in truth he was just admiring the attempt.

“I suspected that you would try something like this, but this option would be too risky as well. Your capture would pose an even bigger threat because then you would need to explain your escape as well. The

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police are very good at interrogation. They are resourceful, and sooner or later, they catch everybody. That is why I exist. When it comes to an interrogation, I will be turned off and there will not be anybody to investigate. Everything is in my name. It is a brilliant organizational structure.”

“How many people... how many clients have you killed?” asked Turner. He didn’t expect Olivier to give an answer, but he did.

“You are the second,” he said. “I had a client who decided to run away with the copy. She told the copy that unless they escaped, we would hurt him. It is interesting to note that we embedded the emotion into the copy to love the client, just like with Lilian, but his emotions didn’t fade after two weeks. It seemed like he had really fallen in love with the client.” Olivier was shaking his head and smiling. “Feelings are tricky, are they not, Mr. Turner? No matter how much I think about it, I still do not understand how they work, and what goes on in the human mind. In the end, the woman attacked us with a rifle. She killed my colleague and I shot her. Her and the copy too. We called it self-defence.”

Turner listened attentively and he was thinking and searching for an opportunity or excuse to extend his life, but he couldn’t come up with anything. And even if he miraculously escaped, where could he go? He had no phone, credit card, not even a dime in his pocket, and his Japanese wasn’t that good. He didn’t even know where his clothes were. There was no one to call for help. He suddenly realised that he was all alone.

“Just imagine,” Olivier continued his, “once a client of ours ordered the clones of his own parents because he wanted to kill them. He said that he loved them, but they were driving him crazy and he had con-

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templated killing them more than once. Finally, we created the copies for him, then he took them out to a forest and hunted them down with a knife. He brutally cut and stabbed them to death, while they were crying and wailing. The parents did not understand what was happening to them. Although we induced as many memories as we could, they still had only vague memories about their son and their past. After the client was done, we removed the bodies and cleaned up. He was infinitely grateful, and said that we saved his parents' life, and we saved him from a life sentence for murder. Later, he called to tell us that everything was working out in his life and that he loved his parents. I told him that I did not care about any of that, but he wanted me to understand him. But I do not, Mr. Turner. I do not understand what was driving that man and what his purpose was."

Olivier raised an eyebrow and made a wry face, as if even he didn't believe the story.

"Then I did some research on the psychological aspects of the case and found that the kid was relieved of an enormous burden by living out his sick fantasies that gnawed at him. The voices, you see. He was not a healthy person and without us he probably would have killed his parents, and even if he realised that it was a mistake, it would have been too late, and he would have gone mad. And if he had not seen the error of his ways, he might have become a serial killer. Overall, I can say that we are making a better world because we save people from murder, rape, and harassment. This could be our slogan. You know, I think there is a chance that one day our activities will be legal, like many other good things that were once illegal or opposed."

The story surprised Turner and he wondered why Olivier told him all this instead of just giving him the injection and leaving before any-

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one would come to check in on him. But Turner knew that Olivier was a professional, that he must have known the exact time of the medical check and how much time he had left, or whether there would be one at all. Olivier sat comfortably and was chatting with Turner as if he had just popped in to wish him well and everything was perfectly fine. It occurred to Turner that Olivier might be a psychopath.

“Take test-tube babies, for example,” Olivier went on. “In the 1970s, everybody was afraid that the world would be full of artificial humans. They wanted to ban the method. Yet here we are.” He spread his arms, as if showing the myriad of test-tube babies to Turner. “The world is full of them, and does anyone mind? No. The same will happen to clones. First, there will be genetically manipulated humans. People like me. Humans born in a natural way will disapprove of us, and they will be afraid of us, but in the end, they will accept us, and this will be just one of the many methods to give birth to healthier humans. To give children to sterile or homosexual couples without third parties or their reproductive cells.”

Olivier paused in reverie. It seemed to Turner that he really considered himself to be the next step of human evolution, which might as well be true because, if his genes had been modified, then he might be stronger, faster, smarter, and more resistant to everything than anyone else on Earth. Olivier began another story.

“One of our clients was an Arabian sheikh,” said Olivier, and now Turner was certain that Olivier just wanted to unburden his mind. There weren’t many people with whom he could share the inhumane acts of the darker side of his life. After all, there is no better audience than a condemned man because he cannot pass on anything he hears. “He said that he had asked the most popular American singer to perform

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at his birthday party, but she said no, even though the fee the sheikh would have paid was unreasonably high. He offered a fee equal to her annual income, approximately two hundred thousand dollars, just for one night, but the singer refused. So, he ordered a copy of her, we delivered it, and the copy sang for him.”

“At the end of the party he raped her and threw her to his men, and when they were done with her, he beat and killed her. He cut her neck with a gilded bread knife. I was not particularly happy about it, but we were compensated with a large tip.” For a few moments, it seemed that Olivier was ruminating over the amount. Then he went on:

“In my opinion, he would not have done this with the original, but we can never be sure. Perhaps he just took revenge for the rejection. He let off some steam, if you know what I mean. After a certain point, the very wealthy tend to think that they are untouchable. And unfortunately, when someone has enough money, it is often true.”

Olivier pointed at Turner with a friendly gesture.

“Do you know who has never been ordered?”

Turner didn't answer. He felt exhausted. He was tired of the conversation, the thinking, Japan, and his life. He was angry at his instincts for betraying him, and he didn't want to weigh his options anymore.

Olivier was not waiting for a reaction. He put his hand back on Turner's and continued his story.

“Nobody has ever ordered a copy of himself to kill.” He was grinning broadly. “It would be an exceptional case of suicide, would it not? Although at some point in their life everyone thinks of suicide, nobody has ever done this. Even if the suicidal thoughts are not serious, unconsciously we all have them. Yet killing one's copy is not the same as thinking about hurting oneself. I think this is a very interesting con-

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cept. It seems to me that the idea of ending their lives from an external point of view is far from humans.”

Turner, indicating that he wasn't interested in Olivier's speech, looked away. He wanted to go home but knew that it was impossible, at least as long as the angel of death was sitting on his bed. Olivier would soon finish with his stories, and then he would decide his fate. And, not for the first time, as if he had really been reading his mind, Olivier sighed, stood up, and stepped away from the bed.

“Unfortunately, I must leave,” he said, with one of his palms facing upward.

Turner looked at him uncomprehendingly. Is he sparing me? Did he just want to scare me?

“Are you letting me live?” asked Turner, hope against hope lighting his face, but his voice sounded shaky. Olivier was buttoning his suit deliberately.

“Oh, no, dear boy. I gave you the injection as soon as I came into your room.”

Turner was horrified. How could he be fooled!

“But, you can't kill me. You are just a clone! I am a human!” he said. He wanted to shout, to attack Olivier, but he did not have the strength. He felt pain all over his body, and his words were nothing more than quiet and hoarse croaks. Before opening the door, Olivier turned back.

“Here and now, what's the difference?” he asked. “I am the copy of a man, and you are a natural-born human, but we are both unique on this planet. Does it matter that you have been alive for forty-nine years, and I just three? Only the present matters. From this perspective, I am who I say I am. I have just told you how animalistic men can be. Compared to them, I hardly hurt anyone. I just protect myself be-

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cause I value my life, the few years that I have been given; meanwhile, others waste their lives. I am more human than many humans, Mr. Turner. Goodbye," he said, left the room, and quietly closed the door behind him.

Turner felt flushed and was overcome by a desperation caused by anger and powerlessness. He sat up to look around, but a piercing pain shot across his arm and he fell back to the bed.

He strained every muscle and gritted his teeth to fight against the recurrent waves of pain. His heart was pounding erratically, which could not mean anything good right after a heart attack. He could hardly breathe, and his head throbbed, as if someone was rhythmically pressing and pressing a pillow onto his head. Sweat broke out on his forehead and chest, and the pain dulled into a tingling sensation.

He looked around to figure out his next step, but he wasn't thinking clearly anymore. Olivier was right. Soon he would feel the toxin's effects. The nurse call button! He tried to turn to his side to reach it, but without success. For that, he would need to lean on his bandaged arm, and the accompanying pain prevented him from carrying out his plan. What else could he do? He might have less than a minute. His eyes lost their focus, then became clear again, as if a ghost whooshed through his mind.

He tore out the IV tube from his arm with his teeth. It wasn't easy because it was held by an adhesive bandage, but the bandage released at the third yank, and the needle came out of his vein. A little drop of blood appeared, and the adhesive bandage dangled in the crook of his arm like a dead flap of skin.

Turner gathered all his strength and propped himself up on his burnt arm. From his elbow, as if it were the tip of a warhead, the pain

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spread all over his body. He had to close his eyes to be able to endure the pain, but then he managed to open them.

He gathered his resolve to reach over with his left arm, grabbed the call button and pushed it. Something whirred at the window.

For a moment, Turner felt he was going to fall onto the floor. Perhaps he wouldn't break a bone, but he would fall on his bandaged arm. Finally, he managed to roll back. They will soon be here, he thought, and focused on staying awake. He must tell them that he was poisoned.

In fact, the button he pushed controlled the blinds. The nurse call button was on his left side, at arm's length, though it was out of his sight.

Turner knew that time was not on his side, so he decided to try to get up and walk out to the corridor. After all, it was possible that one of Olivier's man arranged that he shouldn't be disturbed even if he signalled, but they must do something if he collapses in the hallway.

He tried to sit up but found that he couldn't. He felt a pleasant numbness spreading through his limbs, like runners feel after using up all their energy when they complete a long distance race and they lie down on the running track.

Is this it? Turner wondered. Or is just the pain playing games with my senses? Am I having another heart attack? Whichever it is, it can't mean any good.

The throbbing in his arm eased and his heart rate gradually became normal. A misty fog covered his eyes. He saw Flaming June in front of him, the beautiful sea, and Lilian in the orange dress. Her blond hair melted into her dress. She was pretty in her sleep, or was she already dead? He couldn't decide. The image began fading, and unconsciousness, like a filmy veil, implacably descended upon him.

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This is the end, Turner thought. I am dying. His body relaxed, and against all his efforts he had to close his eyes. His muscles no longer obeyed him. They followed the orders of Olivier's toxin. The numbness dissolved into a shoreless drifting and his mind floated into a dreamless slumber. It's okay... perhaps it's better this way, Turner was thinking, but at that moment he was already light years away from his body. Lilian... I'm sorry...

Juro realized with some dismay that the girl—whose name he had not found out—wasn't there in the morning. Zarigani also missed the departure of the ship, but Juro didn't connect the dots. Zarigani was reported missing a few days later, but the investigation didn't turn up anything. A year later, he was declared dead. Nobody missed him, and only a few rumours went around about him among the sailors.

Juro believed that the girl was caught by her pursuers—could have been gangsters—or perhaps she found another way to get to Los Angeles.

On the third day of the voyage, Juro realised who the girl in the port resembled: Lilian Bailey, the actress, but he knew that it could not have been her. He concluded that the woman in the port just resembled her very closely.

He knew that celebrities are different in reality than in the photos, but he had the feeling that Lilian Bailey was similar to the mysterious girl he had seen in the port. From then on, Lilian was his favourite actress, and he went to see all of her movies. He thought that Lilian was one of the most beautiful women on the planet, if not the most beautiful.

When the cargo ship arrived at the port of Los Angeles on time, Juro had to stay on board at first to wash the dishes, but Hailey and Josh got off. They had looked for Lilian on board the ship several times but couldn't find her. Hailey was disappointed because she wanted a picture with her.

First, she thought that she must have stayed in her cabin, which was understandable because as a well-known person she didn't want to mingle with the sailors and workers. After all, she, too, walked around the ship only in the company of Josh.

But when they didn't see Lilian in the canteen or anywhere else during the whole voyage, Hailey concluded that she must have changed her mind and decided not to board the ship. They collected their luggage, and were about to leave the dock when Hailey noticed Lilian in the distance.

"Over there, Josh," she pointed excitedly toward a fenced off area. "There she is."

"So, she did come with us after all," said Josh. Hailey nodded and scrunched her eyebrows together.

"They are taking photos," she said, pointing at Lilian. "Isn't it strange that we just arrived, and she already has a photo shoot?"

"Celebrities are busy," said Josh with a shrug.

"Let's go over there," said Hailey and headed toward her. As they drew closer, though, they were stopped by a barricade and a sturdy guard who stepped in front of them.

"You can't pass, there is a photo shoot going on," he said.

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“But we know Lilian,” said Hailey.

“You can’t pass,” said the guard. “You can wait. They will be done in an hour.”

Hailey desperately tried to catch Lilian’s eye, but she didn’t notice her. She was engrossed in work. A photographer, a make-up artist, and who knows who else were busying themselves around her.

“Honey, I’m tired,” said Josh. “Let’s go.”

Hailey shrugged and she and Josh walked away. They left the port and never again met Lilian Bailey. They never told anyone that they had crossed the ocean on the same cargo ship with her, because no one would have believed them. As time passed, Hailey began wondering if it really had been Lilian they had met in the Japanese port.

Turner woke up from the coma a week later. He was lying on a hospital bed, alone in a four-bed room. The pale-yellow walls and the huge windows made the space feel cosy and welcoming. His first memory was of the face of Lilian. A beautiful memory.

Turner tried to figure out what he was doing there and what had happened to him, but he couldn't piece together the fragments of his memories. He remembered Lilian, and he had a vague recollection of the fire and his heart attack, but after that it was a complete blur. Everything washed away like paint on wet canvas.

At first attempt, he couldn't sit up, so he glanced around the room from the bed. Everything seemed unreal, as if he were on a set. His right arm was bandaged, and he had the feeling that his left palm belonged to someone else. He was afraid that if he touched himself, he wouldn't feel anything.

Then the contours of the world around him slowly solidified, and he managed to sit up. His strength ebbed back into his body like blood into a numb limb. He started to believe that he really was alive. He carefully got up and stood on his feet. He managed to stand without the slightest waver. He took the ECG electrodes off his chest, then took out the nasal cannula. The ECG machine gave an alert and in half a minute a Japanese doctor stepped in, followed by a nurse. The doctor spoke a perfect English.

"Go back to bed, please, Mr. Turner," he said. In the meantime, the nurse checked the values on the screen and fixed the bed.

"I'm fine," said Turner. "I want to go home."

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“Please sit. I would like to examine you,” said the doctor, and Turner followed his orders. The doctor listened to his heart and checked his pulse.

“How long have I been out?” asked Turner.

“You were in a coma for a week, Mr. Turner. It was induced by the lack of oxygen following the heart attack. It’s not an infrequent complication.”

“Where am I?”

“A hospital in Tokyo,” said the doctor. He didn’t bother to tell him the Japanese name of the hospital. Turner didn’t say another word. He was absorbed in his thoughts. He tried to sort through his memories to figure out what had really happened, what had been just a dream, and what was imagined.

The doctor performed a few tests and after asking several questions concluded that Turner was fine, and he could be discharged from the hospital under his own responsibility.

They brought Turner his clothes and wallet. He didn’t have a shirt, so the hospital provided him with a white one. He was told that he didn’t have anything else on him when he was admitted to the hospital, but he did find his credit card in his wallet, and that was enough to get home.

At the discharge desk, they called him a taxi that took him to the airport. On his way there, he tried to put the events into chronological order: Olivier and his office, the arrival of Lilian, the time with Lilian, then his heart attack, and finally the hospital where he woke up. He had a vague memory of another hospital room, but it might have been just a dream.

At the airport, he bought a mobile phone, retrieved his contact list from the cloud, and called the owner of the Hayama house. The owner

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told him that he didn't find a mobile phone or a laptop in the house, but he kept his clothes in case he needed them. He also informed Turner that he had arranged the financial aspects of the damage with his lawyer.

Turner decided against going back to the house or contacting Olivier. The two weeks were up, Lilian was turned off, and their deal was closed.

He purchased a ticket to the next fight to New York, and bought a new pair of jeans, a shirt, and a jacket. He had lunch, drank a whiskey, and boarded the plane.

Farewell, Lilian. Thank you for these wonderful days!

Olivier continued to manage the company, and after a prosperous year, he received a large bonus and a month of vacation after the Morelli project. He got a raise and additional subordinates. In turn, the European branch was shut down after a failed project and its clone manager was turned off.

Expansion was quite challenging in this line of business, but the company planned to charge Olivier with opening an American office.

Olivier was smart, learned, and intelligent. He was aware of the most important thing in his life: his survival depended on his knowledge, so he continuously developed himself to know more about people, art, and love—something he would never be able to experience, but he never quite understood why. He suspected that his creators eliminated such feelings from him, but this train of thought was beyond his comprehension. The clients regularly talked about this, and in order to understand them and to satisfy their secret desires he needed to talk to them as a human.

He never forgot Turner and always remembered him as one of his favourite clients, despite the mess he had made with Lilian. He came to like him probably because their lifestyles were similar.

He didn't want to kill him because he was too well-known, and his disappearance would have been too suspicious to Brody Calvert, but he had no choice, so he made a copy of Turner and let his clone go free. The morning after Turner had fallen asleep in the Aoki Hospital, an ambulance took him to the laboratory at Olivier's company. Only his copy left that place and was put into a Tokyo hospital where it regained

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its consciousness. No chip was implanted into it, and its memories had been altered, so in the event of an interrogation it wouldn't be able to paint a coherent picture of the people and events of the past weeks. The matter of the house and the arson was taken care of by a lawyer who was hired by Olivier to represent Turner, keeping in mind the best interests of the company. The police contacted Turner by phone, but all the information they got out of him was that he was on vacation, and he admitted causing the fire. He added that the blonde was his girlfriend, her name was Lilian, and she had left him before the fire. The police, without any particularly suspicious detail of the story, closed the case. Olivier listened to the phone call between the police and Turner with satisfaction. He had tied all the loose ends.

Olivier firmly believed that everything he had ever done was right. Deep in the drawer of his desk, he kept a memento of Lilian, the smartest and most beautiful copy he had ever met: an antique wooden board with Japanese symbols.

He knew that if someone ever ordered Lilian again, he would always remember the first one they made for Turner. She surpassed all the other copies he had ever seen, but he could never figure out the reason. If he believed in fate, he would say that one day he would have to pay a high price for killing the first copy of Lilian. Perhaps not for the other copies he killed during his career, but Lilian was special. But he did not believe in fate or anything else beyond himself.

Olivier, without a doubt, found it rewarding that a copy had become so smart in such a short time, not to mention that Lilian was beautiful as well. Perhaps she deserved a chance to work for them, although it would have involved a serious risk because a beautiful girl like her would have found a way to escape in case she did not agree with the

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activities of the company. It was not by accident that the management didn't want to employ clones in addition to the branch leaders, moreover, it would not be good if a clone had ambitions of employing more clones at the company. Besides, Lilian was the copy of a celebrated actress, and he was born from the modified DNA of a mercenary. That soldier had died since then, but even if he were alive, and they were to stand next to each other, they would look more like brothers, but not identical twins.

Olivier's conditioning was different from the others'. Almost all his memories had been wiped, and a willingness to learn was implanted in him together with the disposition of finding people interesting. Based on state-of-the-art research, his personality and tone of voice was adjusted to be a most effective leader and salesman. Making him as stoic as possible was also an important factor in preventing any disobedience due to remorse or pity felt for others.

Although he never followed any religion, he once wondered, if there was a God and a heaven, then where did Lilian's copy go? This, of course, raised the question of whether clones are God's or man's creations, and whether they can enter heaven, in the latter case? He wondered also what kind of afterlife, if any, might await him. Over the few years of his life, he lived according to the rules of a dog-eat-dog world, and knew that his time would come, and so he tried to be ready for anything.

He didn't know who held the remote control to his chip, but it must have been in one of the owners' office safe, perhaps in their apartment, but it was not impossible that Yamada Kaoru or even Tanaka guarded the remote control. He had to accept that he would never know the answer. He didn't live in fear, but he had to work for that.

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He didn't know who the owners were. He always met a man who represented them, but he was never sure whether that man was an agent or an owner. He did know, however, that the company worked on other secret projects he wasn't involved in, but that did not bother him particularly.

Olivier accepted the life the universe had given to him and didn't burden himself with lofty sentiments. His work was his life, and in his free time he enjoyed the opportunities he could afford. He travelled around the world, swept women off their feet, tried extreme sports, drugs with moderation, and one time he even ordered himself a copy.

EPILOGUE

Johnny Morelli celebrated his thirtieth birthday in his luxury villa in Thailand. His wealth allowed him to celebrate it wherever he wanted to in the world, but it was an extraordinary occasion, so he intended to throw the party far away from the world. The house on Phuket's prestigious coastal hill was the perfect spot for such an event. The party started on Friday and lasted until Sunday.

There weren't many guests, only twenty-five people, twenty of whom were women, all of them celebrities: top models, beauty queens, actresses, singers, porn stars, and the distressingly beautiful new meteorologist of CNN.

Johnny was by the swimming pool, sunbathing in the company of an actress, the previous year's Oscar nominee, Hollywood's latest starlet, and a blond porn star, the embodiment of many men's secret desire. The meteorologist was relaxing in the pool with a cocktail in her hand. She had lost her bikini top about an hour ago.

Loud music was blasting in the house, and the girls were dancing in flimsy summer clothes, in bikinis, or half-naked.

The villa had four bedrooms and Johnny entered one with two bombshells. The party was frenetically wild. Everything was allowed, there were no taboos, and anything that happened would remain Johnny's secret. The stars didn't know this. They were just having a good time.

Johnny was standing on the balcony and kissing a singer, who took off her top, grabbed him by the hand and pulled him inside the house. Johnny looked back down at the lower balcony and saw a Johnny in the pool making love to the meteorologist, another Johnny feeling up a

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Thai model under a room-sized sunshade, while being caressed by an Oscar nominee and a porn star.

The singer led Johnny into the house. They walked past a room; its door wide open. Inside, on a queen-size bed another Johnny was lying with the most beautiful Japanese actress. The past few hours had obviously exhausted them.

The singer stepped into a spacious bathroom with Johnny and pushed the door closed, but through a crack she could still be seen as she undid the side-knot of her bikini bottom.

There were twenty-five guests in the villa, but no one had been invited.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ronil Caine loves science fiction, thriller and horror book and movies. Born and raised in Hungary, watching the classic movies of the 80s and 90s, reading Stephen King, Michel Crichton, Philip K. Dick, Greg Egan, Orson Scott Card, Robert A. Heinlein and H.P. Lovecraft.

Ever since he was a kid, he wrote stories but this hobby became serious later. In 2016 Caine finished his first novel '*Copying Lilian*' along with two short stories, the mysterious adventure '*Coin*' and the science fiction '*Mr. Franklin's secret*'. He likes and writes fast paced stories, with no useless fillers, happenings push the characters to their very limit. Scenes constructed precisely like you are watching a movie. Cutting edge technologies appear and affect the lives of people just like in real life.

Ronil Caine lives in Budapest, Hungary, looking for new technologies and scientific ideas for new novels and short stories. Beside writing he likes photography and graphic design.

Two of Ronil Caine's short stories are **available for free** at his official home page.

[Film treatment available](#)

On request a short film treatment is available.

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