

Of Love and Conception

By Michael L. Ricketson

(BLEET BLEET)

PLEASE INITIATE UTERINE SCAN

“Time frame.”

YOUR MENSTRUAL CYCLE IS TWELVE HOURS THIRTY-TWO SECONDS
BEHIND SCHEDULE.

Freya smiled, threw the covers off, and leaped out of bed. She sprinted across the large bedroom for the lavatory, stopped short, and headed for the communication window, stopped again, and spun in circles. Her long, straight, white hair flitted about as she giggled.

“Locate Sven and calculate his arrival.”

HE IS AT UNIVERSITY. HIS SCHEDULED ARRIVAL IS OH NINE HUNDRED
HOURS.

“Contact him and insist he return home immediately.”

VERY WELL.

“Thank you, Celia.”

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FREYA, MAY I REMIND YOU THAT FOUNDATION GUIDELINES ARE VERY CLEAR. ALL SCANS, ONCE MENSTRUATION TERMINATES, MUST BE CARRIED OUT ON SCHEDULE AND ON TIME. ANY DEVIATION WILL BE IN VIOLATION OF CONTRACT. The computer's voice was less formal, friendlier.

“Yes, ma'am.” She rolled her eyes. “You're as bad as my mother.”

DON'T ROLL YOUR EYES AT ME, MISSY.

Freya laughed and strode to the lavatory. She filled her hands with water and splashed her face. She toweled off as she eyed her reflection. Both hands stroked white hair. Index fingers traced scant, white eyebrows, followed the bluish veins just beneath translucent skin, and past her breast. She cradled her belly. Her brow furrowed as her blue eyes examined her reflection. She was unremarkable. She and Sven looked much like every other one of 3 billion human beings. There were only slight variations that identified each.

“I wonder what it felt like?”

I DON'T UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.

“The Change.”

YOU ARE REFERRING TO THE YEAR 2150, WHEN OVERPOPULATION AND FAMINE LED AGRICULTURAL GENETICISTS TO INADVERTANTLY CONTAMINATE THE FOOD SUPPLY, RESULTING IN REORGINIZATION OF THE HUMAN GENOME STRUCTURE AND...

“Yes, killing over 120 billion. Making us what we are today. Blah, Blah. I learned that at University. I mean did it hurt?”

I DON'T HAVE SPECIFIC INFORMATION. HOWEVER, BASED ON THE SCIENTIFIC ANALYSIS, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EXTREMELY PAINFUL FOR THOSE

THAT DID NOT SURVIVE THE METAMORPHASIS. THEY WOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED PROLONGED AGONY AS ALL CELLS, ONE BY ONE, CEASED TO REPLICATE.

“And the survivors?”

THEY WOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED MILD DISCOMFORT AS CELLS REORGANIZED AND BONE STURCTURE WAS ALTERED. AS YOU KNOW, THE PROCESS TOOK JUST UNDER A YEAR. MY I ASK, WHY THE INTEREST?

“I don’t know.” Freya stepped to the curved window that stretched floor to ceiling. The view from the one-hundredth floor spanned the eastern side of the city—one of only thirty-five scattered around the planet. “Since we started the process a year ago, I have wondered what it would have been like to live in a world without The Foundation.”

THE FOUNDATION IS CREDITED WITH SAVING THE HUMAN RACE. THEY HAVE MAINTAINED A LEVEL POPULATION FOR THREE HUNDRED YEARS. HUMANS EXIST IN A EUTOPIAN SOCIETY, ALLOWING FOR MENTAL EXPANSION ON ALL LEVELS. LIFE EXPECTANCY IS HIGHER THAN EVER BEFORE IN HUMAN HISTORY.

“What about the stories of their overreach? How couples that fail to conceive mysteriously disappear, never to be seen again.”

FREYA, YOU ARE AN INTELIGENT WOMAN. YOU KNOW THERE IS NO MERIT TO THAT INSINUATION.

“I know. I read a book the other day and....”

THERE IS YOUR ANSWER. IF THE FOUNDATION WERE SO INSIDIOUS, WHY WOULD THEY ALLOW FREE EXPRESSION OF IMAGINATION?

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“Of course, your right.”

BESIDES, FOUNDATION POLICY CLEARLY STATES THAT FAILED CONCEPTION REQUIRES A TWO-YEAR RESPITE BEFORE FURTHER ATTEMPTS. THEY ALSO ENCOURAGE LOVE IN COUPLES, NOT UNIONS FOR THE SAKE OF PROCREATION, THOUGH THEY ARE ALLOWED FOR THE GOOD OF THE RACE.

“Sven and I are madly in love.” She stretched out her hand and smiled at the platinum ring.

SVEN IS IN THE LIFT. HE WILL ARRIVE MOMENTARILY.

Freya squealed.

Sven rushed in and swept her into his arms. “Are you ready?” he asked.

She nodded and stepped into the contoured indentation in the smooth, white lavatory wall. “Initiate scan, Celia,” she said. Their eyes were wide as the computer analyzed the scan information.

SCAN DETECTS NO VIABLE LIFEFORM. I AM SORRY, FREYA.

Freya’s chin quivered and she ran to the bed and collapsed crying. Sven sat and embraced her. “It’s ok, we still have two more scans. They told us it’s rare for the first scan to detect the baby.”

“What if we don’t conceive?” she said.

“Then we try again in two years.”

“What if they come and take us away if we don’t conceive?”

“What are you...you read that book didn’t you? I told you not to read that thing. I knew it would scare you.”

“It could be true,” she said.

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They sat in silence for the next 6 hours. Freya cried, off and on, and then broke down completely after the second scan was negative. Sven tried to comfort her, but she was inconsolable. Celia counted down until it was time for the last scan. The door chimed.

MR. FITZGERALD IS AT THE DOOR.

“From the Foundation,” Freya said. Her mouth agape, and eyes wide, she trembled.

Sven rose and stepped to the door. He glanced over his shoulder. *She is so beautiful.* His brow wrinkled over sad eyes. His hand shook as he hit the unlock panel.

“Mr. Fitzgerald. What are you doing here?” he asked.

“I always like to be present during the last scan.” He motioned to the lavatory.

Freya stood motionless in front of the scanner. She stepped in. “Initiate scan, Celia.” Her voice cracked. She and Sven exchanged glances.

SCAN DETECTS NO VIABLE LIFEFORM.

“Well, that is unfortunate,” said Mr. Fitzgerald. He reached into his coat pocket. Freya and Sven grabbed each other. He pulled out a small silver pad and stylus. He handed each to them. He paused. “Are the two of you feeling alright?”

“Yes, yes,” they both said. Their quick nods belied their affirmation.

“Splendid. I like to get signatures on the new contract as soon as possible. There is a ninety-eight percent success rate on the second attempt. Besides, the way you two love each other... well, it’s a rare thing. I’m not worried at all.” He smiled.