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But that's not what we ordered

by Craig Kenworthy

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But That's Not What We Ordered

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

TINA; *a woman in her late 20's to late 30's*

REX; *her husband, late 20's to late 30's*

DR. BANNON; *a reproduction specialist in his/her 40's-50's*

SETTING

In the year 2040 (Or thereabouts) in the ultra-modern office of a doctor who specializes in reproductive services. The setting is minimally represented by a desk chair and two visitors' chairs.

ETC

Required Props: *One Droid-type device and a Raggedy Andy doll*

“But That’s Not What We Ordered”

by Craig Kenworthy

(AT RISE: TINA and REX are seated in the visitor’s chairs at a desk Stage Left; DR. BANNON is sitting on the front edge of the desk holding a Droid-type device in her hand.)

Bannon

(Looks at device) I just reviewed the test results. It confirms what we thought. Your baby is completely normal.

Tina

Oh, my God.

Rex

How could this happen?

Bannon

Rex, Tina. I am so sorry.

Tina

This is all your fault. You insisted on getting the athletic package.

Rex

It had a 98% uptake rate. And that six weeks of junior high would be a lot easier for him, believe me.

Tina

Not everything is about your childhood, Rex.

Rex

We ordered several upgrades, Doctor Bannon. You mean none of them took?

Bannon

No. Our technicians are still checking the DNA processing stream. Frankly, I haven’t seen something like this since the 2020’s.

Tina

(Stands; crosses to Center Stage) This is going to kill my mother.

Rex

Well, nothing else seems to.

Tina

What did you say?

Rex

She's 85 and you just got a new half-sister. Or is it a ¼ sister? I can't keep track. Well, whatever fraction she is, at least she's not...

Tina

Mundane?

Rex

I was going to say normal, Tina.

Bannon

I think maybe you should both talk to someone. I can refer you to people who deal with these matters.

Rex

"Deal with?" We expected him to be in college in five years. Now what are we supposed to do? Spend eighteen years with him at home?

Bannon

There are options.

Tina

You mean...

Bannon

There are couples in other countries who actually seek out such children. The unenhanced.

Tina

Look, I may not have given birth, but I carried him for twenty weeks.

Bannon

If you want to keep him, there are places near here that you could consider.

Rex

A school for the normal?

Bannon

Yes, several of them are quite good.

Tina

But that seems so cold, to send him away like that.

Bannon

He'd be with other children just like himself. He'd feel like he was just like somebody else.

Rex

I don't know. (*Crosses back to TINA; takes her hand*) Honey, I'm sorry. I mean, if it was the athletic package that did this.

Bannon

(Looks at screen on hand-held device) Actually, we don't think that's what went wrong. Look, he may not be able to run a two minute mile, but he is one cute little red-haired boy, if you don't mind me saying. *(Holds out device)* Here, take a look.

Rex

Did you say red-haired?

(REX releases Tina's hand. TINA drops her head and crosses slowly toward Stage Left.)

Bannon

Yes.

Rex

(Turns to TINA) How could you? You cheating little...

Tina

I just wanted...

Bannon

(Crosses to REX) Please, Rex. He's your son. The DNA is yours.

Rex

Not all of it.

Tina

I did it for my grandmother. She had such beautiful red hair. I didn't think it would matter.

Bannon

You mean you had work done elsewhere? And you didn't tell me? Tell us? *(Sets device on desk)*

Tina

I didn't think it would matter. They said it wouldn't.

Rex

You went to one of those drop-in places, didn't you?

(REX storms out Stage Left.)

Tina

It was such a small part of the genome and it was so late in my part of the term. They said they could just slip it in, before he went into the artificial womb.

Bannon

These things are all connected. Your package had the resistance to sunburn features. When you mix that with a pigmentation alteration, the results can be...

(REX enters Stage Left. HE is holding a Raggedy Andy doll.)

Rex

I should have known when you put this in the car a couple of weeks ago. You couldn't have just used hair dye?

Bannon

Actually, those are not always safe. Besides the whole artificial aspect of it—

(TINA and REX glare at DR. BANNON.)

Bannon, Continued

(Beat) Look, I need to go talk with the lab. You may want a moment alone, anyway. I'll be back.

(DR. BANNON exits Stage Right.)

Rex

Do you know what you've done?

Tina

I told you how much the hair color meant to me. But you didn't listen.

Rex

We agreed to give him your skin, the way it flashes when the sun hits it in the early evening. And my hair. You used to say my hair in your hands was... I just wanted him to seem like one of us.

(REX hands the doll to TINA.)

Tina

But just not to be one of us, right?

Rex

That's not fair. I wanted a better life for him. *(Picks up device; looks at image)* And now this. All because you wanted him to look the part while he sang 'Danny Boy.'

Tina

Now you're just being mean. And I'm not the one who asked for the tenor package.

Rex

Think about how much we spent.

Tina

Is that all you can think about? You wanted a Peyton Manning III arm crossed with the Michael Phelps lungs and guess what? Now you've got Charlie Brown.

Rex

We might outlive him.

Tina

One of us might not.

(TINA closes on him and reaches for the device to see her child.)

Rex

No. *(Lifts it above his head)* I think maybe it'd be better if you didn't look. After all, you've created this...

Tina

Monster? He's not a monster. He's ours, remember?

Rex

No. He's not a monster. But what is his life going to be like?

Tina

Is it his life you're worried about? I could just take care of him. On my own, I mean.

Rex

You think you can handle raising a child who can't even drive when he is four? Who isn't potty trained at six months? Who needs his mommy to get him a drink at night instead of just blending his own protein-antioxidant shake?

Tina

I could manage.

Rex

You know that after this, I'd get custody of our other embryos if you left.

Tina

You'd do that? Take them? Leave me?

Rex

Do you realize what the impacts on the allele specific oligo are from the cloning vector?

Tina

You don't even know what that means, do you?

Rex

No. It was in the liability waiver. You know my cousin Larry? What it was like for him? I still remember the family reunions. When I wasn't around for him to play with? He didn't just get picked last for everything; the parents wouldn't even let him be umpire because it wouldn't be fair to the other kids to have someone like that judging them.

Tina

I don't think kickball is a reason to send our child away to a special school. But I know you were always closest to Larry.

Rex

What is that supposed to mean? Just because my parents couldn't afford self-healing wounds and perfect pitch.

Tina

Rex.

Rex

I'm just not sure we'd survive this.

Tina

You'd hold the hair thing against me forever?

Rex

No. I mean having to deal with this. All of this.

Tina

All of him? We'll figure it out, OK? Besides, Larry did alright once he left home.

Rex

He was an actuary. If he hadn't just had... what do they call it?

Tina

Natural ability? Maybe our little 'Mundane' will have some of that.

Rex

They wanted to study Larry in a lab. Didn't believe anyone with test scores that high could be unenhanced. When he'd go out, his 'friends' would make him do things for bar bets. The company he worked for treated him like their pet salvage project. And the way his parents acted.

(REX crosses to Stage Right, his back to TINA.)

Tina

Eighteen years is a long time, isn't it?

(TINA sets the doll on the desk.)

Rex

What does it mean to be someone who doesn't believe in his own child?

Tina

You wouldn't be that way.

Rex

Well, if there is a chance it really will kill your mother.

Tina

No, she won't give up until she gets a Nobel Prize winner of her own.

Rex

It's not just the long time. It's a lifetime of worrying about how this... how he'll turn out.

Tina

People used to do that. Do you remember my roommate at college? Junior year?

Rex

Jennifer Gaspard? The captain of the tennis team? The one who is chair of the anthropology of New Europe department at Cal?

Tina

I can see you barely remember her. You really liked her, didn't you?

Rex

(Turns to face her) She was OK. I doubt her parents ever had to worry about how she was going to turn out.

Tina

She was perfect, wasn't she?

Rex

I don't know if I'd go that far.

Tina

I heard that you told your roommate she was. And she was perfect. Perfectly normal. Didn't you ever wonder about her?

Rex

No.

Tina

Do you remember her older brother?

Rex

The one who lived at the monastery?

Tina

They ordered an auditory enhancement for him. He could tell what kind of hummingbird was in the yard by counting the beat of its wings. She said he used to stand outside the house, screaming at them to "Just stop, please stop." After that, they just had her.

Rex

Just had her? You mean they even... the old fashioned way?

Tina

Yes. And she said it took them several weeks of trying. And you would have married her, wouldn't you?

Rex

I never said that.

Tina

It's alright, dear. I know you asked her out before me.

Rex

You know my fast-twitch/slow-twitch muscle fiber ratio is just right down the middle. That's why I was never a sprinter. Or good at the marathon. Just right down the middle.

Tina

You've done OK. You got me, didn't you?

Rex

(Looks at screen) I just thought he'd be better. Different than us. Than me.

Tina

He is different, Rex. And maybe he will be better. Better than us. I bet he's got your eyes, even if they aren't 20/10.

Rex

And your nose. Even if it's not... well, it's your nose.

Tina

You know, we could just never tell anyone. Just get the best tutors and coaches. Then, when he gets good at something say, "Yes, that Doctor Bannon. He's a genius."

Rex

(Hands device to TINA) I guess you should get to see him, before we decide. About what to do.

Tina

I don't need to see him, Rex. Did you?

Rex

(Sets down device) He does have the red hair. Maybe people would figure we had that done. But you know I always wanted—

(DR. BANNON enters Stage Right.)

Bannon

Well, we're pretty sure that was it. Look, I didn't want to say this before, but there's a chance we could still do something. I think I could strain out the red hair DNA and we could reinfuse. Get some, but not all of the qualities you wanted.

(TINA picks up the doll.)

Rex

You could do something? But isn't postnatal work illegal?

Bannon

This could be very embarrassing for my practice. Your wife should have told us, but we normally do a check at 33 weeks. The digital file got degraded and we missed it. If we'd caught it, I might have been able to salvage some things.

Rex

Did you say salvage?

Bannon

Yes. The speed and vision parts. The good news is I think I could still get the hyper sense of smell and the physics affinity inserted. I couldn't guarantee the rest, but I think we could pull those off. We'd have to ditch the hair color, though. Did you want a moment to discuss it?

Tina
Yes.

Rex
No.

Bannon

Maybe I should step back out.

(DR. BANNON starts to exit Stage Right. REX takes the doll from TINA.)

Rex

No. I think we know what we are going to do.

Bannon

(Turns back to them) I'll get started right away. I'll need you to...

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