

SARAH GIBBONS

*AN ACTIVE CREATION*

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“Unless you have any questions regarding bone structure,” Tiffany said, “we’ll turn our attention to eye colour. You’ll notice we’ve updated our eye colour selection from the previous catalogue. We now offer synthetic blends as well as every natural eye colour. We’re very excited about this new development. Now you can pick virtually any shade you want. However, we still offer our more traditional options – ”

“Either my husband’s eyes or mine will be fine, thanks,” I interjected. “I’ll need to discuss it with him.” I could no longer bite my tongue; I forced the smiling, creative-engineering technician to retract her sales pitch.

I felt a slight pang of guilt; I’m not normally so rude. But when I noted the Active Creation engraving on Tiffany’s pen, I was filled with nothing but disgust for the entire procedure my husband and I had selected to undergo.

“Of course,” she replied. She leaned back in her chair, seemingly relaxed. She tossed her shoulder length blond hair behind her back and adjusted a pair of thinly framed glasses. I took note of her white and grey pin-striped suit and surmised that she was the perfect, untouchable executive. I wondered if it was intentional that, even with a warm smile, she still appeared detached. It was as if her appearance marked a deeper, more desperate attempt on behalf of the corporation to act as if it still respected even some small vestige of the sanctity of human birth. I wondered if this was necessary.

“Please remember that there is no need for you to make your preferences known today. This is merely a preliminary session, and as you most likely already know, you’ll need to bring your husband here for the first module of the creative process.”

“All right,” I said. “Right now, he’s in the United States, starting his new job. When he gets a few days off next month, we’ll come for the first module.”

“Great,” Tiffany said, smiling. “So, we’ll take a brief look at the other facial features before we move onto the body, and from there, the inner workings of the mind.”

I knew I was slowing down the session, but I felt it was necessary to explain the whereabouts of my husband. He had traveled to the United States for an opportunity in aerospace engineering, and our plan was that I would follow him as soon as our house was sold and our first child was born. His career was the reason why I was sitting at this desk, listening to a woman dictate the many wondrous options available to me in designing my own child. Scientists had engineered my genetic material before I was born; my parents had been one of the first couples to arrange this procedure in my city. Even though I was a genetically altered person who had an educational background in science, I still believed that it was unfortunate that science had replaced the need for more natural processes. Despite the wonders of science, nothing could amount to the delivery of an unadulterated, human child.

In the modern United States, genetic engineering was the fuel that fed a new form of discrimination, more ruthless than any seen before. The birth of a malleable genetic code had signaled the death of standardized tests, university degrees, and job interviews as traditional tools in determining one’s competency; one’s entire future was

mapped out, from birth to death, and set in motion with the simplicity of a thumb scan. I learned all of this from my own life experience, being blessed enough to have wealthy parents who could afford to provide me with the genes I would need to live out a 'full life', should I be fortunate enough to venture outside the borders of my country.

During this consultation, I felt that my status as a living product of genetic engineering should've put my mind at ease. Instead, I felt like every bit of defining tissue, spread across the desk in front of me, could in no way amount to a person. Instead, it looked like a simple chart of strengths and weaknesses, where every listed strength formed itself into the ominous shape of a dollar sign.

I began ignoring Tiffany, who was trying to sell me a more expensive option, presenting data tables that correlated male height with success in the business world. I was a woman who was engineered to have great powers of insight, yet I was also created to be perceptive enough to doubt the very ethics of the process that gave her those powers of perception. I thoroughly hated the unnatural prophecy my parents had invoked within me, the knowledge of my ability to succeed. This included my ability to successfully create my own child, using the same procedure, bringing him into an elitist world where everything was a revolting competition. My only comforting thought was that in a mechanized world, the beauties of the natural realm radiate with poignant strength. For instance, love is reinvented in such a culture, and cherished for its pure simplicity. Although the majority of my family adhered to the tradition of arranged marriages, I had been fortunate and blessed enough to be able to find love before marriage, albeit created; I didn't have to endure a relationship in which love was to be harvested over time, like a fickle crop. It was because of love that I was restarting my life, traveling miles away from my country, creating a child that could survive in a very different society. Love was the reason I was fearless.

With a drastic change to the colour scheme of the slide presentation set up behind the sales representative, I refocused my attention upon the task before me.

"Now, in terms of intellectual abilities," Tiffany continued, "there are many package deals we can discuss, but if you'd prefer to select individual abilities, we can go over that as well. Now, the cost does increase significantly if you pick and choose through individual attributes, simply because our package deals reflect the combinations of abilities we find most effective to incorporate simultaneously into the human brain. In fact, while selecting intellectual abilities on an individual basis does appear to reflect the most personalized route, it makes it much more difficult to effect exact characteristics and there exists more of a risk that - "

"Sorry to interrupt," I interjected. It seemed as though Tiffany was reciting a speech, rapidly pronouncing the chain of words with a dazed expression. "A package deal would be ideal, and I have the brochure, so I'll be able to go through that on my own at home."

"Are you sure you don't want me to continue?" Tiffany placed her hands down onto the desk slowly, the tips of her slender fingers softly touching the wood. She stared at me with wide blue eyes. "We have the first mandatory session for your benefit, so that we can explain everything to you clearly so you feel more comfortable with the process. Having your first child is enough of a hassle; we don't want to make creating your baby any more difficult for you. We just prefer to let you hear a human voice, so you don't have to deal with all the brochures and electronic updates and automated

calls and everything else that only serves to make you feel like a number or a client, when you are so much more.”

“I’d rather just read the brochures,” I smiled sadly and folded my hands into my lap resignedly. “I would rather the brochures, and the computerized voices, and everything else that’s going to remind me of how unnatural this is, compared to my sister’s pregnancy, or my best friend’s. I want to know how different and unreal this is going to be, compared to all the people who don’t have to leave and travel where this kind of thing matters. I just ... please, I’m having a hard enough time. Just tell me what you really need to tell me and let’s please call it a day.”

“Of course, I understand completely. In that case,” Tiffany turned to a digital calendar and pressed buttons to conjure up the right page, “I’ll just register you for your first decisive consultation on the eighth of December.”

“Thank-you,” I tried to convey my appreciation by reaching my hand forward, offering to shake. She extended her arm towards me in return. Suddenly she retracted her hand, turning back to her calendar.

“I’m sorry, I almost forgot. Will you be having a joint consult?”

“Yes, my husband will be attending.” I lifted an eyebrow in confusion. I thought I had clarified this point earlier.

“Sorry, that’s not what I meant. Will there be another couple joining you that day?”

“No ... I mean, not unless you want us to be paired up with another couple. Is there a reason why we would have to do that?”

“I apologize. What I meant is, are you bringing another couple along with you to create a correlative baby? I assume from your history you understand this concept.”

“I’m afraid I don’t.”

“But,” she protested adamantly, searching through her files frantically, “you and your husband were designed together at this location.”

“I was designed here,” I affirmed, “I didn’t know about my husband.”

“Well, of course he was, he’s your correlative.”

“What?”

“Your correlative – the person you were made to be compatible with. The person whose genes were created in such a way that they complement your own, so as to encourage the possibility of attraction, and some day, marriage.”

I felt as though the floor beneath my chair was giving way. I felt as though my very existence in that room was threatened. I felt blood leave my face; if it didn’t stop, I would soon be as pale as the porcelain-faced blonde before me. I could barely speak.

“I promise you ... I knew nothing of this.” I tried to stand, but faltered, and the woman reached out for me as I tumbled back into my seat. I expended a surprising amount of energy to continue speaking. “So, to clarify what you’re saying, my husband and I were genetically arranged to be with one another. Not just arranged by our families, but by our blood ... our mind ... our cells. We’re ... we’re nothing but a prearranged, predetermined connection?”

She swallowed slowly, shrugging pathetically as her eyes turned back to her computer.

“Unless my files are inaccurate.”