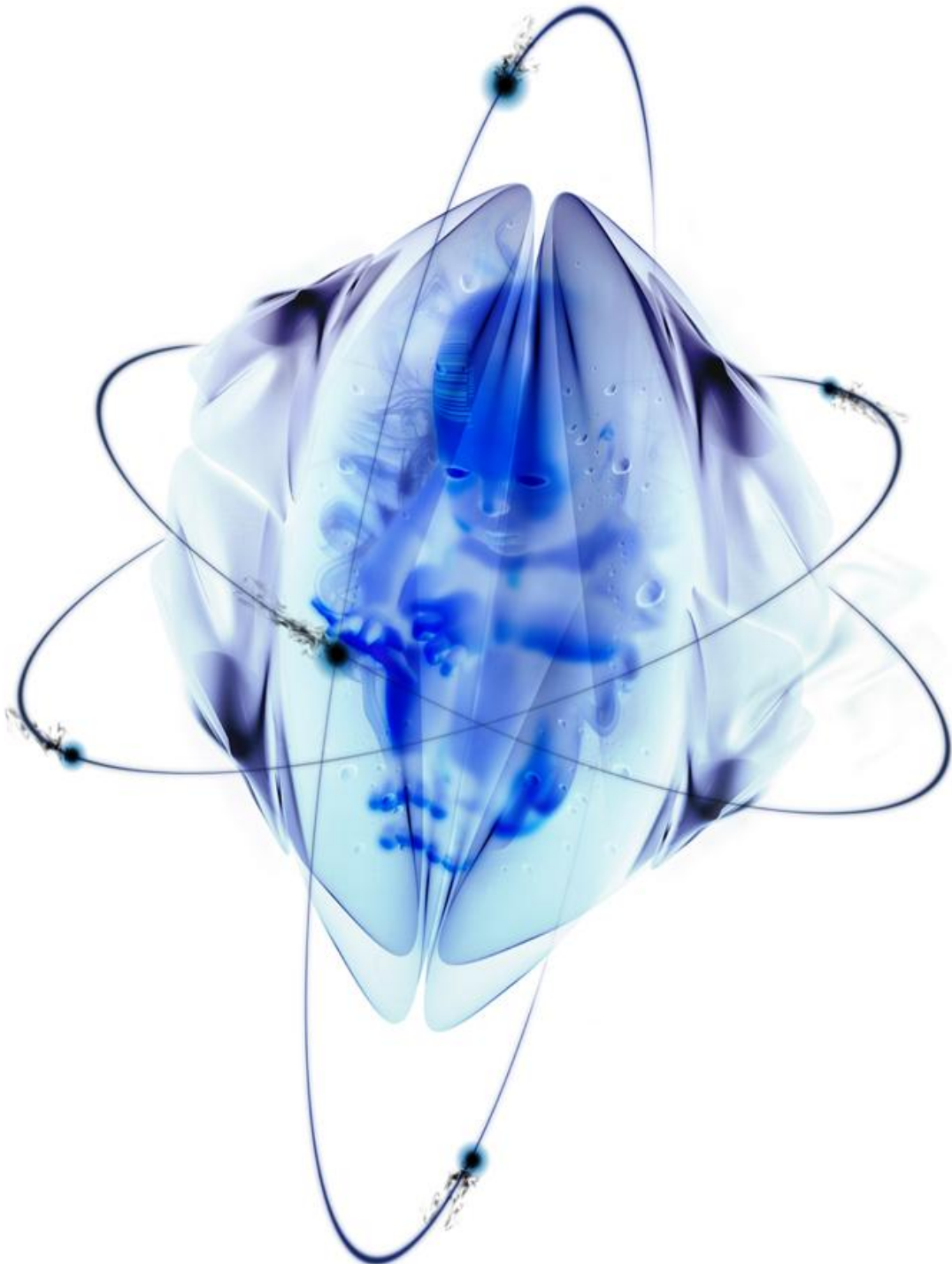


The Plastic Tree of Life

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‘Any fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius - and a lot of courage - to move in the opposite direction.’ Brian set down his copy of The Plastic Tree of Life and touched his desk where it was glowing and beeping. A blue holographic projection of a young woman rose out of the desk.

“The Jackets,” said the projection, “your 2pm sir.”

“Yes, of course, thank you Violet,” said Brian.

He marked his page and returned the book to the shelf. The door opened behind him.

“Do come in and have a seat,” said Brian “I will be right with you.”

“Thank you sir for seeing us,” said Mr. Jacket.

“That is quite alright John”, said Brian, settling down in this chair. “What can I do for you today?”

Brian looked over John Jacket, a small timid man. A banker from one of the suburban cities, on this day he was a little more transparent than normal. He knew John was a troubled man. Other than his transparent appearance, he was no worse for wear physically. The government programs looked after people physically and financially these days. If people are happy they will be productive and production is number one. Brian remembered the government’s ads all too well. He shook off his thoughts and turned to Mrs. Jacket.

“How’s the baby doing Kate? I was wondering if you were going to try and bypass seeing me altogether,” said Brian. “I trust you are aware of the new laws that are now in effect.”

Kate simply nodded and Brian continued his speech. It was the same one he gave to all new couples.

“Given the demand for production, the newborn blueprinting process has been reformatted to rebalance and reenergize the economy. As our population climbs to 10 billion, new control measures are

needed. And so bills were passed classing the social structure and limiting the choices of these classes to the types of blueprints available.”

“We can’t all be lawyers and doctors,” joked Brian.

“Why the hell not,” interjected John. Kate gave John a swift kick in the shin that Brian barely noticed. Brian now understood why John was so transparent. He had probably been dreading this appointment for weeks. Brian remembered when people were so happy to come and see him. So happy that their baby would be blueprinted and grow up to be healthier, stronger, faster, and smarter. Reengineer their DNA to fix any wishes of the parents and like so many parents before them they wanted their kids to be better than everyone else. In turn that’s just what we did, however little did that last. As the economy began to fall to pieces the government passes new bills taking over the blueprinting process and requiring new parents to register to a class. As such, blueprints in that class would be the only choices they had. People couldn’t even have a child the natural way anymore.

“Bah humbug,” sighed Brian. John jumped to his feet, rounded the chair and headed for the door pulling his wife behind him.

“See I told you he wouldn’t help us,” John whispered. Kate broke free of her husband’s grasp and turned to face Brian.

“We have not even asked him yet, dear,” whispered Kate to John as she returned to the seat in front of Brian’s desk. It took some time for Kate to coax her husband back into his seat.

“What are we all whispering about,” whispered Brian leaning forward on his desk.

“Nothing,” said Kate as she shot her husband a sour look. Brian leaned back in his chair, gave a low chuckle, as a smile returned to his face.

“I am no fool you know,” said Brian. Kate smiled. John sank farther into his chair.

“Of course not sir,” said Kate gently “you must know that I... we only want the best for our child.”

“Everyone does,” sighed Brian “that’s why the country is in the sorry state that it’s in. Do you think this is the first time someone has asked me to bend the rules. Why should I do that for you? What’s so special about you? Why should I risk my job, my livelihood to help you? It’s the same for everyone. You start at A and lose a letter for every genetic blemish we have to fix. In your case that’s 18. Do you really want me to skimp on fixing the genes that cause cancer, aids, or the common cold just so your child can score a few points higher and become a banker like it’s father? Why should I do this for you?”

John sank farther into his chair, becoming smaller by the moment. Kate simply smiled and said, “Because you care.” Brian let out a heavy sigh and leaned back into his chair. Kate smiled at her husband who began to regain his shape and colour at the indication of the smile.

“Do... do you ever make a mistake...” inquired John “do you ever turn an Einstein into an average Joe?”

“I am sure we do,” said Brian “but does it really matter? We just blueprint another. The system is now about balance, no matter how impractical it is.

“What ever happened to survival of the fittest, natural selection and all that jazz?” interjected John.

“We destroyed nature a long time ago John,” said Kate.

“That’s my point,” countered John.

“I know dear,” Kate returned.

“To be direct, the reason we came to see you sir was because we want you to fake the blueprinting,” said Kate “to bypass it all together.”

“Impossible, bellow Brian “even if it could be done. The government would string me out to dry for even talking about such a thing and the child surely would not survive outside a month. The world

has changed, we have to as well, and if blueprinting is the only way, so be it!" Before he finished Kate and John were already at the door. Kate turned and smiled.

"Thank you for your time Doctor Williams," she closed the door behind her.

John and Kate waited next to the window outside of Brian's office. With a ping the window slid open and they climbed into the car that materialized outside. With another ping the window slid closed and John pulled away.

"That Williams is definitely a free thinker," said John "should I have him placed on observation and test his patients?"

"Not needed," said Kate "he wanted to help but has been conditioned not to."

"What makes you so sure?" demanded John.

"He didn't help us and he surely didn't help others," stated Kate. "Oh yes there were others. Didn't you read the file you blockhead. He blueprinted his own son at the bottom end of the scale. A month later his wife left him, probably furious with the classification. No doubt went to someone else to try and get the blueprint increased."

"Ok, whatever," said John "mark the file closed and schedule him for a retest in 5 years. I still say he is a free thinker."

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After some time, Brian got to his feet and found his book just where he left it. He collapsed into his chair and put his feet up on his desk and continued to read. 'How foolish of man to create the plastic tree of life, you did so bask in its glory, but you are a coward.' Brian hurled the book across the room and sank into his chair, his head in his hands.