

Living Trust by L. Timmel Duchamp

On that gloomy February morning, Kate Abbotson's personal phone woke her a scant ten minutes before her alarm was programmed to. She had been dreaming that the misting system in her vivarium refused to shut off.

The caller said, "This is Lady Godiva." Kate, slow to wake, pictured a woman seated on a horse, naked under flowing, ankle-length hair. "Is this Kate? The thing is, it's about Mike." *Mike*. Kate snapped to. This was Godiva, the pop video artist whom her father had been seeing for about two months. "Well, I'm sorry to have to tell you this. I really, really am. Like, I was sleeping when some weird siren kind of alarm on Mike's phone went off. It was about five to seven, I guess. I rolled over to look at him, to see why he wasn't doing something about the racket, and, well, he was completely out of it. I mean, he was unconscious. His face looked terrible, and though his heart was beating, he wasn't breathing that I could tell. So I called 911 right away, and then did artificial respiration until the paramedics came. He's in an ambulance now, on his way to Cedars-Sinai. I knew I should call you, but I didn't have your number. Then I noticed that Mike's phone had a shortcut for you, which is how I reached you."

Kate sat up. Her hand was gripping the phone so hard her palm started to cramp. "Daddy?" she said, just managing to get the word out. "Daddy's . . . ?" She was shivering violently. Her mind had totally blanked of everything but the vivid images Godiva's words summoned up.

Godiva repeated everything, then said, "Kate, I'm sorry. I'm really, really sorry. I'm going to go to the hospital, of course, myself, but since I'm not a relative, I don't know if they'll even let me near him. But . . . is there somebody else I should call?"

"I'll have to get down there right away," Kate said hoarsely. "It shouldn't take me long." Her mind zoomed into focus on the practical. There were commercial flights to L.A. from SeaTac every hour of the day. Or would it be faster to charter a plane? She said, "I, I, I think my father would want his attorney to be notified ASAP. But I'll see to that myself." She was babbling, and there was nothing more Godiva could tell her. Somehow she managed to thank the woman, say she'd see her at Cedars-Sinai, and disconnect. She had to pee badly—her teeth were chattering partly from that need and partly from the tension—but she input Matt Hull's personal number immediately anyway, and *then*, when she had him on the line, went into the bathroom, collapsed onto the toilet seat and let loose with not only a stream of urine but a flood of diarrhea as well. She gave him the news, indifferent to his hearing the racket she was making in the toilet. She thought about how lucky it was that her father had gotten that implant set to trigger his phone alarm if he stopped breathing or if his heart stopped beating. Obviously, if Godiva hadn't woken up and given him artificial respiration . . .

"An *ambulance*?" Matt said. "Does he have his security with him? And why the *hell* haven't I heard all this from *them*? Tell me again, Kate, *exactly* what Godiva said."

She repeated what little there was to tell. "What does it matter if his security is with him?" she said. "Nobody's going to be abducting him on a totally random 911 call."

"Abduction is the least of our worries," Matt said. "And short of his hemorrhaging severely, or going into cardiac arrest, the orders to his security are that he's to be brought home, to University Hospital, pronto, without detours. Cedars-Sinai is one of the *last* places he should be going."

"For godsake, Matt, he *stopped breathing*! It's possible he's had a stroke! His father and his grandfather both died of strokes!" Her father had made stroke research one of the biggest areas of his philanthropy. She swallowed. "And everybody knows, with certain kinds of strokes, if they inject that drug, you know the one I mean, within the first three hours, the damage can be minimized. Of *course* he needs to be taken to the nearest decent hospital down there!"

"Kate, Kate, *please*. Get a *grip*. You don't know the whole situation. What I want you to do is give me five minutes—ten max—to see what's what and make the necessary arrangements. And in

the meantime, if you're not already dressed, will you please do that, and do what you have to do to prepare yourself for whatever Mike is going to need of you. Okay, Kate? Will you do that?"

What the *hell* was going on? What wasn't he telling her? "Ten minutes, max." She clung to the promise. "And then I want some kind of explanation for why you think I should let you take that kind of risk with my father's *life*."

Shakily she put the phone down on the magazine table beside the toilet. The only thing that made sense was her going to L.A. to be with him. Once he was admitted to the hospital they weren't going to say to the security guys *oh sure, go ahead, just ship him up to Seattle*. No. Hospitals had rules and procedures they followed as long as they thought the patient was good for the charges. And there was no bean-counting, rule-toting bureaucrat like a health-care bureaucrat, for sure.

What was the weather in L.A., anyway? she wondered as she dithered over what to wear. Somehow she managed to get herself into a T-shirt, jeans, thick cotton zippered sweatshirt, socks, and boots. She carried the phone with her every step she took, as though she dared not be out of arm's reach of it. While she washed her face and brushed her teeth she thought about how bizarre Matt and her father had gotten about security, and about all the arguments she'd had with her father over her refusal to have the same kind of security he had. According to him and Matt, she was a perfect mark for abduction. Didn't she know that? Any lunatic might imagine she'd be worth a cool billion—at least—to him. Not to mention the Spifers, who especially targeted people like her and her father. She just wouldn't be *sensible* about the matter. . . .

The phone chirped as she was tossing underwear and toiletries into an overnight bag. Matt said he was just about ready to leave his house on Mercer Island. He had an L.A. colleague who owed him a favor already on his way to Cedars-Sinai. And he'd located the security team and they were on their way there, too. They said they hadn't been on the scene because Mike had sent them away with the car with orders to return at eight a.m. Which was so damned typical of old Mike, wasn't it. Anyway, Matt said, he had somebody locating her father's pilot, with orders that her father's jet be ready to go. And finally, he'd had a little chat with the CEO of Best American Health, Inc., which owned Cedars-Sinai. If everything went according to plan, her father would be en route by the time Matt arrived at her place.

Matt was telling her something, but in code outside her level of access. When she tried questioning him about why her father must be kept out of Cedars-Sinai and insisted that he shouldn't be taking that kind of risk with her father's health, he said would she please calm herself, that she didn't know what she was talking about and her assumption that she did was just making her hysterical, that if she'd just be patient he'd explain everything when he saw her.

Kate tucked her phone in her pocket and went out to the kitchen. She was more upset—if possible—than before. She considered calling him back so she could yell and scream at him. She even thought of calling up Cedars-Sinai to try to countermand Matt's orders, but backed off it, because her apparent out-of-loopness made her fearful of fucking up out of ignorance. She just wanted to *do* something, something that would make the disaster go away. One of the J's, she saw, had made coffee. Joel, probably, since he'd left her bed before Godiva's call woke her. Shakily she poured herself a cup, then wandered through the house in search of either or both of them. Cracking the door to Jeff's room, she found that he was still sleeping. But then Joel was always the first up. She tracked him to the vivarium, where he was doing pushups in the thin gray light the many plants in the room tinted green. She set her barely sipped cup of coffee down on a table and went and crouched near his head. He grinned at her. "Morning!" he gasped without losing his rhythm.

Her eyes filled with tears. "It's my Dad," she said tremulously. "He's had a stroke or something."

"Oh, hey." Joel gracefully slung himself up into a crouch and put his thick, ropy arms around her. His warm, caring solidity comforted her, though it didn't make the great acidic pit of fear in her

stomach go away but rather made her tears start to flow. She thought, irrelevantly, of her father's first reaction to her decision to live with Joel. *My God, I don't believe it. You're shacking up with a guy who's some kind of male version of a bimbo—right down to the blond hair and gold nose rings? Shit, what kind of reflection is that on me? A woman's supposed to go for men who're like her father!* At least he'd stopped calling Joel a "bimbo," even if he did still joke about Joel's "babeness." (Hell, she joked about it herself.) "You want me to come to the hospital with you?" Joel asked. "Just say the word and I'll trade shifts with somebody."

Kate loosened her clutch on him and stepped back so that she could look at him. "Everything's a mess," she said, brushing her eyes with her sleeve. "My Dad's in L.A. But his attorney has made arrangements over my head to have Dad brought back up here, instead of being treated down there."

"After a stroke? That sounds kind of . . . weird."

"Yeah," she said, and her fear fanned into a surge of anger. "Not that we know it's a stroke, for sure, just that Godiva found he'd stopped breathing and was in some kind of coma." Just saying the words so overwhelmed her with fear again that her spurt of anger at Matt was damped.

The blue cursor appeared in her upper peripheral visual field and began its slow, constant blink. Kate realized it must be eight. The blue cursor was set to start blinking at eight if she hadn't checked the day's calendar and memoranda by then. Kate winked three times with her right eye to bring up the calendar. Of course, she thought, this would have to happen on a really busy day. She pulled back from Joel and took her phone from her pocket. "I need to call the office," she said.

She expected to get Voice Mail, but highly responsible Eric answered, and so she was able to dump all of her schedule (except dinner with Marjorie) into his lap with the full expectation that there'd be no repercussions. When she disconnected, Joel said, "Is there anything I can do?" His big sweet baby blues regarded her with comforting concern.

Kate said, her voice barely steady, "You know, I keep thinking of how he was always telling me that in spite of all the social instability, how wonderful it was that we were living now, because science is so close to giving us unlimited lifetimes. I think he really thought he had all the bases covered. His health was good, his body fit. Not like his father or grandfather. Constantly taking Vitamin E, constantly grazing on fruits and vegetables for their beta carotene and potassium, I mean you wouldn't believe how much carrot-juice he drank, and as for potassium, hey, potassium could have been his middle name, he had a real obsession about it, he practically had grapes and bananas coming out of his ears. . . ." Thinking about her father making himself carrot-juice cocktails three times a day pushed her over the line into Big-Time tears. It had to be bad, if he was unconscious. She knew that. Damn Matt. Damn Matt for his obsessions with security. Her Dad was too young to be having that kind of stroke. He was in good shape, too good to have been at serious risk.. It just really wasn't fair, just wasn't fair at all. But then Daddy himself would be the first to say fairness was a concept meaningful only to the weak.

Minutes after Matt handed her the medical and legal powers of attorney her father had assigned to her for use in just such a situation, Kate met with her father's primary physician, the head of the neurosciences department at the UW medical school, and a specialist in neuromedicine chosen by the head to attend her father. The docs weren't happy that Matt had had her father moved before he could be properly diagnosed. One member of her father's security team was a paramedic, Matt said. He'd worked for the Seattle Fire Department for ten years before going into the security business (which he'd apparently done when the city had laid off half its firefighters).

"If you'd allowed even one CT scan, we'd have a fighting chance," Jordan Bentoit, the stroke

specialist, said. "But given that all we have to go on is the sole fact that he's unconscious . . ."

The way he shook his head sent Kate into a panic. "What are you saying? That he's not going to make it?" Bentoit shrugged. Kate glared at Matt. "If he dies because he didn't get prompt treatment, Matt, I swear to god I'll—" She bit her lips to keep from delivering the threat. There was no way she could accept the cockeyed story he'd given her—his explanation for why he'd had the security team and the colleague who owed him a favor prevent any personnel at Cedars-Sinai from getting near her father. Doctors, he said, were now numbered among the ranks of other fallen middle-class folks who'd chosen to become Spitters. And her father, he claimed, had been receiving death threats from doctors who held Michael Abbotson personally responsible for putting them out of work, from other doctors who were afraid of being put out of work once Abbotson Interactive Designs, Inc. had gotten around to modeling *their* specialties and whose level of compensation had already dropped drastically, and from a variety of medical personnel similarly impacted. Kate, hearing this, simply took her phone out of her pocket and called L.A. information for the number of Cedars-Sinai. But then Matt had pulled a document out of his attaché case, which the barest of glances that he allowed her revealed to be a living trust with her father's signature, explicitly stating that if he wasn't in imminent danger of dying on the spot, he was to be taken to University Hospital and treated there. He said he'd faxed a copy of the document to the colleague he'd sent to Cedars-Sinai, "just to be sure they don't try to make an end-run around me. Now don't yell at me, Kate. You *don't* know the situation. And that's strictly because Mike didn't want to worry you. Your ideas about the Hippocratic Oath are a couple of thousand years old. At least one of these paragons of human morality took out a contract on Mike and would be serving jail time right now but for the fact that Mike didn't want the publicity an arrest and trial would have generated." Though she didn't buy into the paranoia her father apparently shared with Matt, she had seen that although she held her father's medical power of attorney, her hands were tied by the living trust that rendered her helpless to oppose it.

Lee Park, the head, shot Bentoit a Look. "Let's not be leaping to conclusions prematurely," he said sharply. "Until we run some diagnostics, we won't really know. And of course, we don't *know* that it's a stroke. What we want to do now is have everything set to go on his arrival. I've ordered Life Flight to copter him from Boeing Field; they're already on site, standing by. And I've pre-empted the one private bed we have in the Stroke Unit for him, and scheduled a run of diagnostics. I want you to feel fully assured, Ms. Abbotson, that your father will be getting the very best care possible."

One of her father's companies owned his department. Of *course* he would have to say that, she thought resentfully. She looked down the table at Penny Eliot, who had been largely silent. "You know my father's medical history better than anyone," Kate said. "What do *you* think?"

Penny looked grave. "This event, whatever it is, is completely unexpected. Mike, as you know, has had free-radical-cleansing and deoxidizing nanocytes in circulation in his blood for five years now. His blood pressure has been good. I would have said his cardiovascular outlook was excellent. Of course, that doesn't mean that he couldn't have had a stroke. But given the paucity of information to go on, I haven't ruled out some sort of mass." She glanced at Park. "I would suggest we review his past MRI and CT-scan records in the time we have before his arrival."

"A mass is extremely unlikely," Lee Park said coldly. "In the first place, when I spoke to the paramedic with Mr. Abbotson on his plane, he reported that the patient is hypertensive. And in the second place, Mr. Abbotson would no doubt have reported a variety of symptoms well before the event if a mass were the cause of his unconsciousness."

Penny nodded. "I'm inclined to think so, too. But I want Kate to understand that we're operating in the dark until we've actually seen him."

Matt shoved his chair back from the table and stood up. "Kate, why don't you and I go have some coffee, maybe get some breakfast. There are a few things we need to discuss, and I'm sure these folks will be better able to plan your father's treatment if we're out of the way."

Kate followed Matt out of the room. She'd never much liked him, but she'd never actively disliked him, either—until now. He was her father's oldest buddy. Her father's business was his entire law practice. It was time for her to demand a copy of the living trust he'd been waving in her face earlier. Maybe there was nothing she could do now to help her father, but at least she could get herself prepared for the possibility of doing something in the near, very near future.

Somehow the news sharks got hold of the story and began their siege at University Hospital even before her father's jet landed at Boeing Field. She and Matt decided between them that he would deal with them. He was probably delighted to do so, Kate thought, probably thrilled at the opportunity of playing the dude-in-the-know, the intimate, close adviser of the Great Man (who might very well—story of stories—be *dying*). Kate wished him joy of it. Her job was to deal with Penny Eliot and the specialists, make whatever medical decisions would have to be made—and view the laserdisk her father had apparently made for her in case of such a situation as this, which Matt had so thoughtfully brought with him.

Lee Park arranged for her to view the disk in the same conference room in which she and Matt had met with the docs. Kate loaded the disk into the drive with deep trepidation. Her father owned a vast empire and many, many secrets. She had made her discomfort with his empire and secrets in every way plain to him when, on her graduation from college, he'd tried to draw her into his business. Eventually, accepting her position, he'd settled a hefty trust on her with no strings attached. But it would be like him, she thought now, to assume she could be emotionally blackmailed into trying to attend to his interests at a time when he could not do so for himself.

His image came straight on, without introduction, two-dimensional but larger than life-sized on the flat wall screen. "Hi, Kate," he said, smiling in one of his engagingly goofy looks. "If you're watching this, it must be because I'm either paralyzed and unable to speak, unconscious, or of diminished capacity, due to a trauma or some other problem with my cerebral cortex. I have to admit I can't really imagine what you must be feeling now, so forgive me if I seem a little too breezy. I don't suppose you'll be very surprised to find that I've got a variety of contingency plans in place if any of a number of misfortunes strike. I know you're seriously opposed to getting involved in any of my business affairs, so I've mostly arranged to have other people deal with the details, under Matt's direction. But the fact is, you're the only one I trust to carry out and make all the big important decisions that might crop up, especially the personal ones. Which is why I've got to burden you with my medical power of attorney." The image of her father leaned forward and loaded a super-serious, sincere look, the kind he adopted for what he called "our deep-shit, heart-to-heart mode." "Honey, my basic wish is that you use every resource available to keep me going. Seriously. I don't want the plug pulled. I have faith in those guys at University Hospital. Hell, I've been paying their salaries for years, and they've got the best of reasons to think my perpetuation is in their vital interest. I know, I know, I've talked with them about what's likely, and what's possible, so I know that if I'm unconscious then the prognosis is really, really bleak." Kate's bowels clenched. *That* was new information. Shouldn't the docs have warned her, right from the start, if that was the case? "And cell damage in the brain," her father's image said, "is no joke. If my cerebral cortex is too damaged to ever recover, I want you to give Joshua Bledsoe the okay to attempt cell regeneration using fetal tissue created from my DNA. Bledsoe has been working on this for years, Kate, regenerating small, damaged sectors with great success. He's been doing incremental sorts of trials for the last couple of years. If there's no hope for the viability of my cerebral cortex, I want to be his first large-scale regeneration case."

Kate's stomach, already tender, heaved so violently that she paused the file, staggered up from the table, and sought a waste receptacle. They'd never discussed such things between them. They'd never even discussed the ethics of conceiving children to be organ donors for parents or siblings in dire need. To spring this on her, without first sounding her out . . . but of course, she thought bitterly. He'd obviously been *afraid* to talk to her about it—afraid it might put him in the position of knowingly asking her to do something she considered morally despicable.

Kate resumed the file. "Knowing you, you probably think this sounds selfish, Kate, but it's not as though I haven't made one of the biggest contributions to Progress in the history of the world." He grimaced. "Yeah, I know, you don't believe in Progress the way I do. Still. I've done a lot, and have a great deal more I want to do. The infirmity and vulnerability of the body is a hurdle—a terrible hurdle, but, being a hurdle, not insurmountable." He drew a deep breath, as though preparing her for more. "Kate, there's something else. You'll have to go to the House for it, though. House will let you into the vault if you say, in your own voice, the password phrase, 'House, this is Kate. Tell me where the vault is and let me into it.' In the vault you'll find not only the codes needed to access the entirety of my various business projects—which I've told Matt he'll have to go through you to get, and for which I'm hoping you'll demand proof of necessity before you hand anything over. But you'll also find reports on a research project I've been very, very privately supporting. Kate, no one knows about this project but the two teams I have working independently on it. You know my faith in competition; well, I've set them up so that each of the teams knows they're working in competition against the other. The project they're working on ties in with Bledsoe's regeneration project. I won't explain more now, because it's so complicated. You need to see the reports in the order I've arranged them." Her father cleared his throat and took a sip of water. "God, Kate, I'm so nervous you'll disapprove of this and let me down." And for a moment, he *did* look nervous. "Honey, please. Even if you have moral reservations, please, please, honor my request. A miracle is at stake. A miracle for me—if it works—and a miracle for the fate of the human species. Please, Kate. Please. Don't let me down. Not now, when I need your help so badly." Kate stared at the screen. Her father was actually crying. Tears were streaming down his face. Kate stopped the file, popped the disk and pocketed it. *Crying*. To manipulate her, goddamn it. Crying at the thought of his own mortality. Crying at the thought of all his contributions past, present and future—to Progress.

Her own eyes were teary, her throat tight. "Way to go, Dad," she said angrily. But then the man, as everyone had been claiming for years, was just a fucking genius.

On the same large flat wall screen, Penny Eliot and Jordan Bontoit showed her CT visuals of the damage the stroke had done, mainly to the cortex. She could see for herself the big blot that they called a hematoma, the main source of the bleed, in the thalamus. "The worst of it," Bontoit said, "is the intracranial pressure caused by the hemorrhage and cerebral edema." He laid down the light pen that he'd been using as a pointer and looked directly at her. "I must be frank. The prognosis, without surgery, is certain death."

Kate flinched. He wasn't pulling his punches, she had to give him that.

"The treatment options for this kind of stroke are limited. The main problem, as I said, is the edema. He's of course getting mannitol, which is an osmotic diuretic, intravenously, but edema is a difficulty that the body itself still copes with the best."

"What about programming nanocytes to relieve the edema?" Kate asked.

Bontoit rolled his eyes. "Ms. Abbotson, I realize there's a popular conception that nanocytes can do anything you want them to, but I assure you that's not the case with edema. No better than drugs can."

A hot flush spread over Kate's face. She would ask Jeff to explain. "And the surgery? Would that also help relieve the edema?"

"Surgery would allow us to evacuate the hematoma itself, as well as assist with some drainage, which, yes, can help somewhat to control the edema."

Kate caught Penny Eliot's frown. "And the downside of surgery?" she said.

Bontoit shrugged. "Given our visualization techniques and what we can do with surgical lasers,

the odds are getting better all the time. Especially for someone as fit as your father. The downside is that it's difficult surgery because of the hematoma's location. I'd give your father's odds of surviving it at 70-30."

"And you, Penny?" Kate said, aware that her father's personal physician was still frowning. "What do you think?" Penny's quiet gray eyes glanced at Bentoit, then focused firmly on Kate's face. "Jordan is the expert here. I don't know anything about odds, except that this kind of surgery is highly risky, and it's often the case that when surgery saves the patient's life, it is at the cost of setting neurological deficits." She paused, drew a deep breath, and added, "Unfortunately, I concur with Jordan's assumption that your father will not recover otherwise."

Neurological deficits. It was an abstract economic term, maybe, but it described the problem as a form of debt no amount of money could ever pay off. Kate's throat had gotten almost too dry for speech. "You mean there's little room for hope."

"I wouldn't say that," Bentoit said sharply. "Seventy-thirty are not hopeless odds."

Kate registered the spatter of rain on the window behind her. She said, "When do you want to do this?"

"Immediately." Bentoit shoved the consent form across the table at her.

There was a question Kate hadn't asked. Now, she knew, was the time to ask it. But she also knew what her father wanted: he had made that as plain as the rain on the other side of the window. A certain kind of answer to the question might make her hesitate.

Without another word, Kate signed the form.

Ignoring the attendant seated on the other side of the bed (its head elevated a precise 30 degrees), Kate sat staring at her father's slack, empty face, at the tubes and monitors, at the restraints designed to keep him from injuring himself during a seizure. Seizures, apparently, were common after strokes. Her father's brain, Kate thought, must be in a state of confusion, perhaps firing off neurons at random, certainly flooding itself with unwanted amino acids like glutamate, an organism under attack striking out at random.

In the time remaining before he was taken away to be prepped, she talked to him. She stroked his hand and spoke softly, steadily, about the minutiae of managing the current installation at the S.A.A. (which she funded and managed), about their hikes the previous summer in the Cascades, about her plans for a new garden. He looked strangely old lying there, as she had never seen him. His long gray hair had tangled into a straggly, ratted mess that made her want to run out and buy a brush so that she could straighten and smooth it out. Talking her already hoarse voice into a whisper, she silently tried to convince herself that she was doing the right thing.

Besides her anxiety about her father's prognosis and her own possible obligations, she felt a growing uneasiness about the hospital in general, and the specialist doctors in particular. (Penny Eliot, whom she had known for years, she trusted.) She kept thinking about all that Matt had told her about the many doctors with a violent resentment toward her father. Consciousness that the entire Neurosciences Clinical and Research Division of the University of Washington Medical School was a subsidiary of one of her father's companies particularly bothered her. Matt claimed her father had that *going* for him here—as opposed to any other clinical site. Kate wasn't so sure, though she could see that they might be worried that without her father the department would be liquidated without a second thought.

Who was it who had told her that US-trained doctors were flocking to the southern hemisphere, where technology hadn't yet supplanted human expertise? Even as she whispered trivia at her

father, she wished they had talked about these issues, but even as she wished, knew that their relationship might not have stood such a discussion. Her mind, now, was numb. She had given the consent on automatic pilot. She knew she didn't know what she was doing.

"Oh!" she gasped at the sudden flurry of spasms rippling over the right side of his face.

"Just a little electrical activity, Ms. Abbotson," the attendant said—officiously, Kate thought. As though that "just" must obliterate any wild ideas she might foolishly begin to entertain out of the appalling depths of her lay ignorance.

The door opened and three attendants charged in with a gurney. "We'll have to ask you to leave, Ms. Abbotson, so that we can get the patient down to surgery now," said one of them, a woman in blue cap, pants, and gown who wore a black and silver stethoscope as if it were a necklace. "I understand that Dr. Park has made an office available to you, if you decide you want to wait out the surgery here in the hospital. In any case, he has your personal phone number and will call you as soon as the surgery's been done."

"Very well," Kate said, knowing they didn't want to be shifting her father around and maneuvering all his tech-attachments with her watching. She bent down and kissed his forehead. "The Force be with you, Dad," she whispered into his ear. It had always been his favorite sendoff. If anything could get through to him, that would.

When Marjorie Kinney lured her out of the hospital for a meal, Kate was surprised to find it was already evening. To avoid the hordes of news sharks milling about in the lobby, they left through a side door in the Health Sciences complex. "Both the J's will probably be here by the time we get back," Marjorie said as they crossed the street to the bus kiosk. "I've been in touch with them all day, and both of them kept wondering if they should cut work, but I told them that I'd hardly seen you at all, you've been so occupied."

Kate blinked, as though to clear a haze from her eyes. The soft mist felt startling and fresh on her face. It was almost, she thought, like coming out of trance. "I'd just have felt guilty about them missing work—and maybe even for ignoring them. They're both really sweet, but they're still, of course, *guys*."

Marjorie gurgled her characteristically quiet, wry laughter. Suddenly self-conscious, Kate glanced around, but saw no one who looked like a news shark anywhere in sight. Certainly they wouldn't be expecting to find her taking mass transit. A #43 bus pulled up. "This one goes to the U-District," Marjorie said. They boarded, and did not speak for the short ride to the Ave. "Jan's Noodle House okay?" Marjorie said as they deboarded.

It was half a block away. "Sure," Kate said, certain she wouldn't be eating much anyway.

They ordered pad Thai, salads, and beer over the table's intercom. "I have to say I'm pretty confused," Marjorie said. "All the news nets say that your Dad was in L.A. at the time of his stroke—with Lady Godiva, in fact. And the J's say he was, too. So why isn't he in a hospital down there?"

Kate leaned her elbows on the smooth Formica surface of the table and scrubbed tiredly at her face, as if dermal friction would make her mind work better. "I'm as confused as you are," she said. "Basically, my Dad's lawyer insisted that my Dad be treated only at University Hospital, and since he had a legal document signed by Dad, none of us had any choice but to fly him up here." Kate bit her lip. She wasn't as confused as she had been; she had an idea that whatever secret research projects he was funding had everything to do with it. "Matt says it's all to do with security issues. Some doctors, he claims, have become Spitters. And that there have been death threats made against my father by some doctors in L.A."

Marjorie's face went into overdrive. "That's incredible," she said. "Of course he *is* rich, important and famous, and there have always been crazies wanting to assassinate high-profile types for the infamy. But *doctors as Spitters . . .*" She snorted. "That's something else. I thought most of them had investments keeping them in the middle-class, giving them too much to lose to think of Spite killing."

"Yeah, me too."

"Speaking of famous people. It's interesting, very interesting, that he was with Godiva. You've never mentioned meeting her."

Kate took a long swallow of ice water. She'd been forgetting to drink water all day. "That's because I haven't," she said. "He'd only been seeing her for about two months."

Marjorie chuckled. "Anyone else would have broken their necks at the chance to meet her. What, did you want to wait to see first if it was going to last?"

Kate smiled faintly. "If I understand correctly, she saved his life with CPR."

Marjorie's gaze held Kate's. "The news sharks haven't reported that. I guess that's a lesson that one shouldn't judge the character of a music-video star by her work."

The mechanical server set the beer and food on the table and asked them if everything was all right. The first bite of noodles sent a burst of saliva gushing into her mouth. Suddenly Kate was ravenous. The hospital seemed another world, and her father's request like a bad dream. Marjorie was such a sensible, low-key person. Though she constantly worked indefatigably on high-intensity creative projects, Kate had never seen her stressed in the ten years she had known her. Putting anything into words for Marjorie almost required a calm, balanced perspective, since that was the only sort of perspective Kate had ever known Marjorie to respond to. So as they ate, Kate considered telling Marjorie everything that she knew. She tried to imagine what the words to articulate it might be, tried to imagine feeling lucid and calm. But what she felt was numb, exhausted, and close to tears. What she felt was betrayed and abandoned. What she felt was nothing she could imagine expressing to Marjorie—yet. And so they just ate, and drank water, and used the rest-room before returning to the hospital and the wired-up, still unconscious body of her father.

Draining the hematoma, the docs told Kate, had saved her father's life. But their chief concern was cerebral edema. Soon, too, there would be the threat of arterial spasms and later, at the end of the second week, the danger of a rebleed. But the worst of it was that her father remained unconscious. He was alive, yes. His EEGs showed some electrical activity. But until he woke up, they couldn't gauge the extent of cell damage, which they could see on the scans, but could not accurately assess.

Kate spent the first two days after the surgery in constant attendance at her father's bedside, talking and reading to him. But the medical team loudly seconded Matt's urging that she "conserve [her] energies" so that she would be "of use to [her] father over the long haul." They warned her that she might have "significant, difficult" decisions ahead of her—while Matt continually harried her to assume her "responsibilities"—meaning, assign him a complete power of attorney to carry on business and provide him with codes her father kept in the vault in his house that only she, now, had access to. Kate irritably put him off. But she did, after the first two days, scale back her visits to just an hour or two three times a day.

Joel, Jeff, and Marjorie often sat with her when she visited her father, or sometimes visited him themselves. At Marjorie's suggestion, Kate made an audio tape of her own voice reading to him that she had the staff play when she was absent. ("Who knows," Marjorie said. "The doctors sure as hell don't. Maybe just the sound of your voice—its idiosyncratic pitch and timbre and

rhythms—reaches him. If there's only one chance in a thousand that it does, isn't it worth doing?") But much of the time when she visited she found herself getting to her feet and pacing. The sight of him lying so thin and gray, so entangled in tubes and catheters and IVs, surrounded by some of the very electronic equipment he himself had promoted, the thick white bandage on his head stark and sterile, was in intolerable contradiction to the man she knew as her father. His very body had become a stranger to her. It dawned on her that there was only a portion of him that she even knew, or had ever clearly perceived, as himself, the part of him that meaningfully and consistently projected a personality to her. It troubled her that she could match this unknown side of him with the image on the laserdisk more than with anything in her memories. Gradually her consciousness of the fact that he was sick and helpless and unable to appeal to her directly to answer this lack of connection accreted into a lump of guilt lying uneasily at the bottom of her stomach, a literal pain and aggravation that made it almost impossible for her to eat.

This sense of alienation from the man lying in the bed grew worse every time Matt questioned her about the laserdisk. Repeatedly she retrieved it from her fanny-pack and resolved to watch it all the way through, but each time the realization that she would have to deal with his blather about his great contributions to Progress, about miracles and the fate of the human species, and his goddam, manipulative tears at contemplating his own vulnerability, would freeze her intention. And then Kate would inevitably get sidetracked, remembering his lectures to her throughout childhood about autonomy and independence in rational, "full" human beings, his insistence that people who couldn't survive alone were not "full" adult human beings, that only the "psychologically maimed and physically crippled" could not be expected to bear total responsibility for everything that happened to them, and that those who could not should understand that they weren't "full" human beings and should be grateful for what they got, rather than always demanding more. "It's dog-eat-dog, Kate, and don't ever forget it."

Later, of course, she'd argued with him, particularly when he began pointing to his own brother as a prime example. "Every so-called 'full' human being has uncounted others bolstering them up. That's what *privilege* is, Daddy. And interdependence is the reason we have such a thing as social organization, without which we wouldn't have made it as a species at all. The modern world never would have gotten *built* if it weren't for the sweat and blood of all those who were bolstering up your Great Men. You know who I mean. Slaves. Immigrant labor. The folks who built the infrastructure 'full' human beings take for granted. And, above all, women, who've always taken care of the most helpless section of the population."

Reviewing this old area of contention made the guilt—and the unspoken anger, which she could share with no one—grow. The awful beeps of the monitor, the faint, high-pitched whine of electronics, the nearly constant presence of a specialist RN wove a nightmare texture of routine. She was a fraud—the tragic, concerned daughter to the media; the steadfast daughter to Marjorie; and the loving, patient daughter to the J's. The only "honest" speech she felt she could own was in her head, to her father:

You took me by the hand, Daddy, leading me here, leading me there, showing me this wonder, bestowing on me that. You opened my eyes to beauty and taught me to believe in hope and love. I took all such gifts from your hand without once questioning your generosity, as instinctively accepting them as a fledgling in a nest accepts into its open beak the constant stream of food its parents provide. A gift is a contractual bond, you always said, teaching me about deals-too-good-to-be-true as well as friendship. You lie there now, though so still and somehow empty, claiming compensation at last, for all the years of love rendered with an open hand and seldom-failing grace. And were you thinking, all along, that you were setting me up, to parlay your relatively small stake into a monstrous gusher? You and your games, Daddy. Not once even hinting we were playing this one. If you could speak now, you'd say it's cut and dried, a question of loyalty. Only you would be lying to us both. But then we never shared the same ethics, did we, Daddy? And isn't that a mystery.

But then she didn't share the same morals or ethics with her mother, either. It had been hard after the divorce. She'd chosen to live with her father for the school year and her mother during

vacations. It had been bad enough that her mother had resented her choice, but when she'd been born again and remarried—to a very righteous fundamentalist—Kate began to experience school vacations as descents into hell. Her mother had disowned her when the first of the J's had moved in. "You're your father's daughter, and no child of mine," she had said. "God is my witness, I've tried. But now you've gone too far. My other children must know, even if you don't, that this kind of sin is not to be ignored." It had been three years since she'd felt as though she had more than one parent.

On Day 4, staring at her father's face, she thought she saw his eyelids flicker. "Did you see that, Jean?" she asked the RN. "Is he waking up?" Her heart was pounding, her throat painfully tight.

"See what?"

Kate put her hands to her cheeks. The monitors showed no sign of change. Her father's face remained still. "I must have imagined it," she said. And wished as hard as she had ever wished anything that he really *had* been waking up. It was her only way out from the mess he'd foisted on her, his waking up. Either that, or his indisputable death. Which was something, she thought, that didn't bear even thinking about.

What news sharks considered newsworthy was always changing and seldom fathomable. These days anything to do with Lady Godiva was newsworthy, as was anything to do with Mike Abbotson. The two of them, paired, and involved in a "life-and-death" situation, including the one giving the other CPR, constituted a dump of blood in the territorial waters in which the news sharks swam. (Godiva apologized for her publicist's breach of confidence every time she called Kate.) Kate understood this. But she, unlike either her father or Godiva, had always considered news sharks an irrelevance and nothing to do with her. While the precariousness of her father's health had increased her sense of them as irrelevant, it had at the same time stimulated them into such a feeding frenzy that she was scarcely able to draw breath without having to worry about its being noted and interpreted. Her duck out of a side door of the Health Sciences complex on that first afternoon was her only successful evasion of them.

Kate had no choice but to agree to Matt's putting all her transportation arrangements in the hands of her father's security team. Though they used three cars to play a shell game, because of the number of news sharks involved, their success was limited. The S.A.A. was so swamped with phone calls and news sharks hanging around its doors trying to interview anyone who knew Kate that they were unable to get anything done. And both Jeff and Joel were hounded—in the role of her "love interests," as the news sharks called them (just as they called her home her "love nest," where she scandalously lived with two lovers at once).

In the meantime Matt continually pressed her for a complete power of attorney to oversee the empire. The Executive Group of AID, Inc., had a major decision looming, of whether their Public Defender AI should feature a holographic image, be housed in an anthropomorphized mechanical robot, or reside, simply, in a desktop unit. It was a matter not only of expense (since the cheaper the cost per unit, the more pressure state legislatures would bring to bear on the legal community to agree to the innovation), but of determining which image would make the fairest impression on judges and juries. Her father rubber-stamped the Executive Group's decisions about 82.7 percent of the time; the choice was ultimately his, though, and his signature—and now Kate's, in legal lieu of his—was required for every major decision. Since Kate had no intention of attending the competing project managers' presentations or the Executive Group's decision-making session, Matt was insisting that she sign over at least that authority to him.

To take the heat off S.A.A. and the J's, and to get Matt off her back, she finally agreed to cross to the eastside and drive up to her father's house. She would finish watching the laserdisk and

access the vault. And unless her father showed sudden signs of regaining consciousness, she would stay there overnight. Though luxurious, the house had all the security advantages of a military base. At the very least, it would—for a change—give her privacy and quiet.

So at 3:30 a.m., in the dead of night, Kate settled with pillows and sleeping bag into the back of her father's spacious van and managed to slip away without one news shark in pursuit. While the driver and security escort sat in the front seat, chatting about the Sonics, Kate lay comfortably cocooned, brooding. Earlier that night she had made the mistake of watching a CNN "Special Report" on her father; it had so wound her up she hadn't been able to sleep. She was disturbed that they had somehow gotten hold of an old photograph of her father, mother, and herself at age four. (Who could have provided it? Surely her *mother* wouldn't have.) She was disturbed that they had shown exterior shots of University Hospital, with the sound of a cardiac monitor beeping in the background, and the narrator's voice saying that the "fate" of Mike Abbotson was "uncertain at best" and that the fate of his "empire" might well rest in the hands of his daughter, Kate. But most disturbing were the verdicts of the opposing "experts" cited intermittently throughout the piece—of the economist saying that "Mike Abbotson has done more than any human being to accomplish, single-handedly, the elimination of the Labor Problem, and to make the world more efficient than any utopian has ever dreamed possible," and of the sociologist saying that "While the total globalization of the world economy had substantially diminished the rewards of work, increased unemployment, and relegated most of the few middle-class workers remaining into the poverty sector, Mike Abbotson has gone much farther, and has actually destroyed any possibility of humans living off of their labor for very much longer. Machines manufacture, machines design, machines teach, machines entertain, machines heal, machines do the accounting and auditing, machines communicate, operate transport and provide security. The only professional sectors of significant viability remaining are the legal and political sectors, and it is only a matter of time before the courts will rule that lawyers cannot require human administration of legal services. We have very nearly reached the stage of having only investors and the unemployed. The politicians may serve the investors, but it doesn't take a financial wizard to see that when the unemployed become 85 percent of the population, which—incredible as it may sound—has been predicted to happen within the next decade, there will be such hell to pay that the current epidemic of Spite killing, street demonstrations, and spontaneous mass looting plaguing us now will look like a poison ivy rash in comparison to the metastasized skin cancer we'll soon be facing."

Kate had known all her adult life that there was a serious problem with unemployment and eternally sinking wages and an investment-driven economy. But she had never realized the extent to which people credited her father with having, if not generated, certainly exacerbated this problem. Her father had always claimed that freeing people from dependence on other human beings and from the need to toil must be the first goal of a liberal. "Once we've achieved that freedom," he said, "it will be obvious that the resulting wealth in time and resources can and should be used for exploring the greatness and beauty of the human spirit." "But Daddy," Kate once argued with him. "The people who own everything aren't just going to let the people who *don't* live for free! If they can't work, how will they live?" At which her father teased her for being a "pessimist" with no "faith in human fairness and decency."

But she thought of all those doctors who, like university academics and primary and secondary teachers, had had to go to the Third World for work because the machines that had taken over in the First World were cheaper. Now, though, professors and primary and secondary teachers were too expensive to be supported (at any price) anywhere, since canned, AI-directed distance learning had taken over even in the Third World. Surely that meant that soon doctors would be unwanted anywhere, as well (except, of course, by the very rich, like her father, who could afford human-supplemented care).

The drumming of the rain on the van's roof lulled Kate to sleep. She woke when the security escort slid the side door open. She had been dreaming an ugly confrontation with her mother over her father's mechanically tended body. Something about God's plan and how wicked Kate's loathing for shopping was because it wasn't that she didn't enjoy spending money and

acquiring things, but simply that she hated doing anything her mother liked doing.

"No one followed us into the mountain, Ms. Abbotson," the escort reported.

The air was shockingly frigid compared to Seattle's. As Kate climbed out, she saw that snow coated the van's tires, and ice most of its exterior surfaces. She struggled into her parka, then pulled on her gloves and led the way around the various parked vehicles to the garage's inner door. "A house without a front door," she thought of her father saying the first time he'd brought her there. Of course there were doors on the upper levels of the house, but they weren't easily accessible as entrances. She'd thought he was joking when he'd told her he was buying a "small mountain east of Stevens Pass." Even the richest man in the world couldn't simply buy a mountain, could he? But, of course, he could. An article on him in the *New York Times Magazine* had suggested he'd chosen to build his house inside and atop a mountain simply to trump all the previous generation's software billionaires. "Privacy and security," he'd said. Now that Kate had some idea of how murderously he was hated, she thought there must be some truth to both explanations. In any case, the environmentally minded said that nothing justified his bulldozing part of a mountain, no matter how kindly he intended to treat the mountain's habitat after he'd finished or how many grants he made to the Nature Conservancy.

Shivering and hugging herself, Kate faced the door, all too aware of her waiting audience. "House, it's Kate," she said.

"Welcome, Kate," said the smooth male voice her father had deliberately modeled on that of Kubrick's Hal. "How are you this morning?"

"Very cold, House," Kate said, "and impatient to get into the warm."

"Your father will be very sorry to have missed you, Kate."

"Yes, House. I've brought two guests with me, Joseph Gleason, who's a security escort, and Jerry Gwynn, who I'm sure you will recognize."

"I sympathize with your eagerness to enter, Kate. But I'm afraid I must request you to sing me a few bars of your special magic song."

Kate *hated* this rigmarole when she was alone, but with an audience it was downright humiliating. *Lighten up, Kate*, she could almost hear her father saying. He had always considered it a moral offense not to appreciate "affectionate" humor, whether one was the butt of it or not. Kate drew a deep, chilly breath and sang, hoarsely, desolately, hurriedly, and off-key. "I'm a little teapot, short and stout; here is my handle, here is my spout. When I get all steamed up, hear me shout: Just tip me over and pour me out."

A burst of canned applause filled the garage, and the door to the little vestibule that held, simply, an elevator access, slid open. Kate entered, glanced at the embarrassed-looking men, and said, "House, we want to take the elevator to the guest level." The doors slid shut and Kate unzipped her parka and pulled off her gloves.

"Service level for me, Ms. Abbotson," Joe Gleason said. Kate flushed. Her father usually put such "guests" on the service level, but though Kate knew the rooms there were perfectly adequate, it embarrassed her to make such a distinction. "My supervisor told me a couple of the rooms there have special accesses to the security monitoring system that aren't in any of the guest rooms, and since I'm here to protect you, I definitely need that access."

"Service level for me, too," Jerry Gwynn said. "I have some personal things in one of the rooms there, since I live here when Mr. Abbotson's in residence."

Worse and worse, Kate thought. She cleared her throat and said, just as the rear door slid opened, "House, forget the guest level. Service level, please." She looked at Jerry and pulled the

weariness of her face into a smile. The doors slid shut. "You know the arrangements better than I do. I'd appreciate it if you'd show Joe a room he could use and explain about how House works." She looked at Joe. "And of course, if there's anything I can help you with, just tell House. There are speakers and mikes in every room, and if you ask it to, House will patch you through to me."

"Real sci-fi stuff," Joe said, obviously trying hard not to smile. "Which is how my supervisor described it, actually."

Not just his supervisor describes it that way, Kate thought, wondering if he'd been miffed when he'd been told about House's constant surveillance. Most guests *hated* it, even though her father always assured them that House served, rather than spied, and wouldn't divulge their secrets to him or anyone else.

When the door slid open to the private level and Kate stepped out into the cathedral-ceilinged foyer all chrome, cedar, and black and white marble, the familiarity of the surroundings and the strangeness of her arriving there in her father's indefinite absence wrapped her in an icy blanket of shock. The cold reality of his absence here in the heart of his empire drove home the extremity of the case far more than did the sight of him lying unconscious and hooked up to a hospital unit. Walking through the immaculate rooms and halls, breathing the perfectly filtered, 68-degree air, Kate felt like an intruder on her father's privacy, as though it were viscerally wrong for her to be making free with his house without his presence or knowledge. He had selected all the furnishings and decor, had designed House's functions and mechanical extensions with the specific goal of eliminating the need for human maintenance. "The one thing a really rich person should be able to buy is privacy pure and simple without having to sacrifice service. Until now, service has been at the cost of privacy. House is the brilliant, elegant answer." But it meant that every item brought into the house had to be identifiable to House and easily manipulable. Which meant that service with privacy came at the price of a certain Spartan starkness.

Which her father claimed represented his aesthetic preference.

Kate left her overnight bag in her rooms and wandered out to the kitchen. Facing its bare black marble counters and white ceramic tile floor, she looked around for the faintest trace her father might have left behind—knowing, as she did so, that House would never tolerate so much as a rinsed-out coffee mug sitting harmlessly in the sink. She recalled an underchef of a caterer her father sometimes employed for dinner parties saying on the CNN Report that the kitchen of the richest man in the world was "super-glitzy, but of little use to anyone interested in actually cooking." And it was true, Kate thought, that the microwave and the freezer were the two most important appliances in it. Lucky thing, she guessed, that he'd figured out how to enable House to clean and pare fruits and vegetables and make all those potassium-rich juices that he was always gulping.

Her eyes spied Cat's empty water and food dishes on the far side of the enormous freezer. She said, "House, where's Cat?"

"Cat isn't here. Your father took Cat with him."

Of course. Before going to L.A. he'd probably taken Cat to the office, to be petted and pampered by his personal staff, who always cared for Cat when he was away. Kate rummaged around in the cabinets for a bottle of water—half-expecting to be questioned by House about what she was looking for—and was relieved when House kept silent.

She retreated to her rooms with the intention of getting a few hours' more sleep. When she entered the sitting room, House greeted her with "Query please, Kate: the object on the sofa." Kate requested medium-low lighting and saw that the "object" was her overnight bag. She told House so and instructed it not to dispose of it or attempt to clean it, then went into the bedroom to the pale orange wicker chest of drawers and pulled out the first pair of sweatpants and

sweatshirt she found. "Oh really, Dad," she said as she got a good look at them. The sweatpants were tan printed with pale orange triangles, and the sweatshirt was turquoise with tan stripes at the cuffs and hem. When he'd furnished these rooms, he'd programmed his AI "decorator" to use only Santa Fe colors and styles. When she'd brought a terrarium with a small rock waterfall that helped her sleep and set it on a table in the bedroom, House had warned her and her father had actually *complained* about it not "fitting," and lectured her about how the cacti and bromeliads the AI had tastefully recommended looked "natural" in the setting! So were the sleeping clothes a joke, or an attempt to get *her* to "fit" better in the rooms?

Impatiently, she threw the clothes aside and rummaged in the drawer for the plain black she favored. Muttering to herself about how his allegiance to his AI programs had gone too far, she suddenly, with a shock, remembered. Cold, stunned, she glanced around the room feeling as though she'd never been there before. Except for the trickle of water cycling over rocks, there was nothing of herself in this room, nothing of her father. It might as well be an upscale hotel room. Shivering, she pulled on the black sweatpants and sweatshirt. She realized she wouldn't be going back to sleep after all. First a latte, she thought, and then the vault.

The lift took Kate down to the vault that was, according to House, below the utility level. "There's no button on the manual panel," Kate said to House. "Does that mean that if you crash while I'm down there I'll be trapped?"

"The vault has a clearly marked emergency exit," House said. "While the vault can be exited without my assistance, it cannot be accessed manually, even by Mike himself."

The rear door opened on a short fluorescent-lit corridor. "Just like in the mad-scientist movies," Kate muttered.

"I didn't process that, Kate," House said.

"Now where do I go?"

"To your right and around the corner, Kate, is Mike's Top Secret Office. To the left you'll find a rest-room, bedroom, and small kitchen."

Kate walked the short distance to the end of the corridor. To her left, a heavy metal door slowly opened. "House. Is this place supposed to be bombproof?"

"The vault has been constructed to be impervious to not only an EMP, but also percussive explosives to 25 kilotons. It has its own air supply and ventilation system, as well as a year's supply of water and food for five persons."

"Five persons, hunh," Kate said, still hesitating at the threshold. "Can we guess who those five persons might be? Somewhere in this Top Secret Office maybe there's a Secret Decoder ring that can give us the answers."

House ignored that. Kate drew a deep breath and went in. Discreet halogen lighting. Enormous brilliant Persian carpets on a lustrous parquet floor, complemented by woven tapestries covering every inch of the walls. A pair of red leather couches and matching recliners flanked by brass halogen reading lamps. An enormous media center. And at the end of the room, a massive mahogany desk. Kate was flabbergasted. Her father *never* went in for this style of décor. Stark, functional monochrome was his thing. And he almost never sat at a desk. Desks were bad for one's back, he always said. Only grunge workers, tied to keyboarded monitors, needed to suffer that torment.

"All right, House," Kate said as she approached the desk. "What is it I'm supposed to do now?"

"Hey, Kate, you there?" her father's voice said as she sat down in the leather, high-backed swivel desk chair. "So whaddaya think, kid, of my *den*?" The voice cracked up in giggles. "From my AI designer? *Not!* Fact: I've pretty much duplicated—except for the halogen lamps, that is—a real VIP bomb-shelter. Your assignment, kid, is to give me three good guesses as to whose."

Kate slammed her fist onto the desk top with such force that her eyes smarted with the pain. "Goddam it, Daddy, I'm not playing your stupid, so-called *fun* games. And *no*, I'm not pretending I can talk to you, when every nerve in my body tells me you're lying unconscious in that fucking stroke unit." Kate glared at the emptiness surrounding her. House's voice, much less her father's, didn't make a damned bit of difference. She was sequestered in a lifeless place, alone. And if he thought—or rather *had* thought, when he made the program—that she was going to play his silly games, he had another thing coming.

"Ready for guess number one, Kate? And remember, it has to be an *intelligent* guess."

"House," Kate said hoarsely, "get me the right program. My father's had a stroke. There are things he wants me to know, documents he wants me to have possession of. Help me bypass his guessing game."

House said, "I cannot bypass the protocol in progress, Kate."

"Guess number one is wrong, Kate. Try again."

"Pablo Picasso," Kate said sarcastically.

"Guess number two is wrong, Kate. Third try's the charm!"

"Gertrude Stein," Kate said indifferently.

"Wrong again! Kate, I bet you didn't even try. Where's your sense of *fun*? Someday you'll realize that your mother did you no favors teaching you contempt for fun, always encouraging you to take yourself too seriously."

"Got me right where you want me, hey, Dad?" Kate said angrily over the voice's continued speech. "A captive audience that has to feel guilty for every twinge of irritation. *Fun*, right. And I suppose you have it written in your will that everyone has to play silly children's party games at your graveside, instead of hearing the usual crap about life passing?"

"So, Kate, what can I do for you?" her father's voice said, the cue, she thought, for selecting the proper branch of the program's tree. "If I'm dead, and you're taking over, say 'One.' If I'm unconscious with brain damage, say 'Two.' "

Despite her dread for what was coming, Kate felt relief that he'd dropped his inane bullshit. She swallowed and said, "Two."

"Having selected Option Two, Kate, it's likely I've either had a stroke or been in an accident. As you know, because of my genetic predisposition to stroke, I've been doing a lot of research into the subject. Of all conditions that could befall me, stroke is among the worst, because while it's trivial to regenerate ordinary tissue, neural tissue is special, in that its exact structure of connections and patterns holds the key to memory and individual identity. If I'm lucky, I'll escape with enough of who I am to be able to achieve some kind of personal continuity. But that's probably something that can't be determined before the replacement tissue is generated. As I'm sure you probably know, given the special character of neural cells, new tissue can only be generated by using fetal stem cells as starter cells. I've had a series of short videos made up for you, explaining how it works. But for now, it's enough for me to assure you that there's a good success rate in transplanting neuroepithelial cells to damaged brain sites where they can integrate with the existing, healthy cells and differentiate into the appropriate types of neurons and glia as needed. The neurology docs have probably already explained this procedure to you,

so my wanting you to arrange to have it done will come as no surprise. But Kate, there's another aspect of this that those docs won't have told you about. The standard procedure would be to wait until matching fetal tissue becomes available, and use that. When I first thought about all of this a few years back, I came to loathe the idea of such important cells coming from just anywhere. It's true that the way in which the cells would be integrated and differentiated would follow my own genetic mapping. I've heard plenty of arguments to the effect that the imported tissue should be regarded as neutral, empty matter utterly pliant to the form its host gives it. But the fact is, the scientists simply do not *know*. And given the *uniqueness* of the brain responsible for most of the Progress of our day . . . well. I don't want to risk it. My first thought was to ask you to have an embryo made with my sperm. But the more I read and questioned scientists about the matter, the more uneasy I became with the idea of using a foreign ovum, contributing its own genetic material, particularly given that most of the genetic material governing the executive brain functions is taken from the maternal chromosomes."

"Oh god, Dad, no," Kate said. "Don't tell me you want *me* to get pregnant with . . ." Kate did not finish the thought. It was absolutely unthinkable.

Her father's voice did not take account of her interpolation. ". . . back in the nineties. These guys, Surani and Keeverne, made patchwork mouse embryos they called chimera, enabling them to force the selection of paternal genes for brain cells. The result was super-stupid mice with enormous heads perched on tiny bodies. The executive brain was underdeveloped, while the limbic system, or hind brain, dominated. In short, they found the first evidence that paternal genes contribute most to the primitive parts of the brain, and maternal genes to the cortex and striatum. Later research by them and others gradually confirmed that this was true not only for mice, but for most mammals—including humans." Kate listened to her father draw a deep breath. "Honey, you can imagine how this blew me away. Maybe you remember my talking to you about this? It was the second time you came to visit here, around the time I was having the guest level decorated. Well of course, what it means is that all my genius comes from my mother's genetic contribution. But it also means that I can't pass it on to a naturally produced child! *You got your* higher brain functions from your mother, I'm sorry, so very, very sorry to say. As would any other child of mine, were I to decide to have one. So. To make a long story short, I hired a couple of research teams to work secretly—and separately—in competition—on finding a way to clone me using only my own tissue. You know, using an ovum as an envelope for containing my genetic tissue, but not recombining my chromosomes with the ovum's. Well of course it had to be secret, since all official institutions persist in refusing to lift the global ban on human cloning that followed the Porta scandal. One would think the cloning would be easy to do, considering the routineness of animal cloning. But the fact of the ban, and the tightness of research funding these days, has meant that the teams I hired had to start from scratch. And of course since they're using my rather aged DNA, they have to deal with a certain number of transcription errors. Interestingly, they each took a different approach. I have a number of video abstracts for you to view. I think Team B is probably going to be the best bet, since it's not long-term viability of the fetus we're interested in, but simply generating neuroepithelial cells. Since you're listening to me tell you all this, it means that their competitive research is still in progress, and that I haven't declared either team a winner. Which means, in turn, that you, Kate, will have to decide which team is to make the embryo from which the stem cells are to be taken. The winning team will not only have its research implemented—and tested on me, personally—but will also be awarded a cool five mill that I have sitting in an escrow account in Seattle Pacific International Trust and Investment."

Another deep breath. "Okay, Kate. I suggest you take a break now and then come back in a while and ask House for the videos on stem cells and cloning. Later, after you've seen them, I'll tell you where to find the codes Matt is probably hounding you for."

Kate slumped down in the chair. Her body was so rigidly tense she was shaking.

Contrary to her father's recorded advice, Kate did not take a break. She watched and listened to and read every video and electronic document House provided. It was mid afternoon by the time she'd finished, waking from a daze of engulfment into a sudden sharp awareness of hunger, thirst, and aching muscles. Kate instructed House to prepare a disk with all the codes that were solely in her father's possession, then took the lift up to the private level. Though she knew House was fully capable of heating up any number of a variety of frozen dinners, she rummaged in the freezer herself. "Have I had any telephone calls?" she asked as she removed the foil wrapping from a curried eggplant and rice dinner.

Matt, Marjorie, Jeff, and Joel had all called. No surprise. But Matt had called four times with increasing urgency. Since Kate had told House to interrupt her only for a call from one of the docs, she was sure Matt's urgency involved either business or PR, neither of which struck her as of any importance. Instead of returning the calls, she spoke—via House—to the driver and told him she wanted to leave for Seattle at around three a.m.

After she ate the curry dinner she lay down in her room to take a nap. The Madrona Bitter she'd drunk with the food should have knocked her out, but it didn't. Though she managed to block all thoughts about having to deal with the two competing research teams, other thoughts broke the surface of her mind, dragging with them a host of memories. She recalled that visit her father had mentioned, the occasion on which he said he'd told her about the "executive" functions of the brain being transmitted only through maternal genes. She didn't remember him explicitly talking about that, but she did remember that it was during that visit that he'd announced he would stop bugging her about getting involved in the business—and be conferring a billion-dollar trust fund on her that would grant her financial independence. *I have no choice but to accept that you not only aren't, but can't be, a chip off the old block*, he'd said. *I can see some of me in you, but you're definitely your mother's daughter, and there's no getting around it.* At the time, the words had hurt because she knew that he loathed her mother and could only consider being like her a terrible shortcoming. But she'd been thrown off by his magnificent gesture and had thought that that was only his way of expressing his lingering disappointment that she would never play the role of crown prince of his empire, disappointment that had finally been tempered by acceptance. *He had taught her to ignore "the negative."* He had taught her to see the positive wherever it showed up. So she *had* seen the positive, she had clutched the positive to her as proof that he accepted—and loved—the person she had grown up to be, even if she wasn't exactly what he'd been hoping for. And she took every subsequent mention of her resemblance to her mother as rhetorical teasing. Only now did she understand. She had always thought of herself as her father's (though not her mother's) Good Daughter. Now she knew she might not even have rated as the Good-enough Daughter.

All the time he'd been plotting to clone himself. Had he been intending at some later time to raise a clone to maturity, to be his heir? It wasn't unthinkable. The clone would have had *his* brains, would have been everything he wanted in his offspring. The clone would have been everything that *she*—having inherited her mother's "executive" brain functions—was not. Lying there, belching beer and curry, Kate grew utterly sick to her stomach. It was all too, too clear. He had loved her as any dutiful father would, but as one stuck with a bad bargain. And so he'd arranged to use her, second-rate but faithful offspring, to make everything come out *right*—as she, in herself, was not, and could never, genetically, be.

As the van was crossing the Evergreen Point Floating Bridge, Kate sat up and called out to the driver, "Take the Montlake Exit, Jerry. It's about a quarter of a mile to the hospital. I want to go straight there."

She hadn't been able to sleep. What she wanted was to confront her father, to question him, to argue with him, to yell at him. To let him know how much he'd hurt her—if such a revelation could ever be made between them, which it couldn't, given all their unspoken—unspeakable—rules. Telling him he'd hurt her would be tantamount, in his eyes, to a confession of self-pity. That was

how they were, father and daughter. What she needed was reassurance. Or to be let off the hook. Or to be understood. From or by him alone.

She could not imagine ever telling anyone else the things lying between them.

After checking her ID, the stroke unit's single graveyard human, who did not know her, allowed her into her father's room. Her father's nurse rose to his feet at her entrance. If he was surprised at the hour of her visit, he didn't show it, but simply said, when she requested she be left alone with her father, that he'd be in the cafeteria getting a latte and would return when she had him beeped.

Everything looked the same since her last visit. To all superficial appearances he might be frozen in time. What could not be seen, though, was what was going on in his brain. Bledsoe talked about waiting before launching into a regeneration project. But she knew, now, that her father had intended her to get the cloning project started right away—in order to be able to provide Bledsoe with stem cells when he decided they were necessary.

Necessary. Kate felt as though she were frozen in time—caught in a world like Alice's, a world in which it was impossible to make sense of "facts" and expressions of desire. *Whatever* cells they used—a stranger's or a clone's—her father would likely no longer be the person he'd been. The literature he'd had summarized for her had described only small-scale regeneration projects, in which the cell damage had not caused unconsciousness, but only very specific sorts of neurological "deficits." None of the cases involving unconscious patients resulted in a persistence of any memory whatsoever following successful cell regeneration. Wasn't memory the very core particularity of who a person was? She might be persuaded to believe that the new cells—especially if they were taken from a clone—might duplicate quirks of her father's personality, or even the full bloom of his acclaimed genius. But his *consciousness*, surely that wouldn't be the same? And would he not be like a child, emotionally, without the experience of a man's life?

Kate bent close to his ear. "You say I owe this to you, Dad," she said, her voice almost a whisper. "You say I owe it to you to keep your genius going. You gave me life, and now I should reciprocate by giving you a new life that would be a truer immortality than that of having a son. But you never asked me face-to-face, Dad. You never gave me a chance to decide whether I wanted to be the one charged with the responsibility. Dad, the whole thing makes me sick. All those embryos you've had those teams experiment with. All those chimeric clones that were too grotesque to be allowed to grow. I don't want anything to do with this scheme, Dad. It won't get me you back, unless it's only a few cells that need regeneration, in which case Bledsoe can get them legally, without burdening some woman with the need to plug into some other woman's uterus and carry the fetus around in a titanium carapace until it's ready to be harvested for its brain tissue. Oh, she'd be well-paid, I know. Better paid than any surrogate has ever been. But don't you see, the fact that you can buy such services doesn't mean it's morally *right*. Women like that can't afford to have children of their own. The economic state of affairs accounts for the availability of such services. A state of affairs you've helped to create, however much you disavow the consequences of your genius."

Genius. The word was bitter in her mouth. It was a word she'd been hearing all her life. First from her mother—admiring, then sour, then finally sarcastic. From him. And from the world, either sycophantic or hating. Presidents always liked to make some kind of reference to her father in their speeches—as a mark of hope, as a symbol of all that was brightest and best in twenty-first-century America. Sociologists always cited him as the fount of all the changes that had destroyed the traditional fabric of postindustrial society. Most people, she thought, would agree that such *genius* must be kept going, whatever the moral cost—and regardless of whether the person named Mike Abbotson became another individual entirely. The world *needed* him more than ever—or so the New York *Times* editorial had claimed two days after his stroke. It needed his genius to see the world through to the new era, to ensure that the *promise* of his achievements was not allowed to be swept away by the greed, indifference, and lack of imagination now exploiting them.

"Tell me, Dad," Kate said, ignoring tubes and cables to lay her cheek next to his. "Do you have some grand plan to make it all work? You've always gassed about the *promise* of a society free from the obligation to labor, a society free from the necessity to toil. But when you achieved the dirt cheap, truly universal medical system, when you eliminated the need for teachers in educational systems, when you automated every aspect of farming, did making these things cheap benefit *anyone* but people like *yourself*? The fact is, Dad, that it's all just capitalist bullshit, isn't it? And so tell me, just what kind of genius is *that*? A genius that's worth being kept going at any price? A genius the world can't live without? Sorry, Dad. I don't buy it, I just don't buy it at all." His cheek was warm and living against hers. But she couldn't sense *him* there, listening behind the lax mask of his face. She sat up and dug a tissue out of her pocket to blow her nose and wipe her eyes. "It's *you* I love, Dad, not your genius. There's a difference, you know. There's a big, big difference. To me, anyway." And the thought of seeing her father turned into a stranger with whom she could have nothing but a genetic relation in common made her bowels writhe.

And yet to him, apparently, *genetic* relations were *everything*. Morality and ethics—and *love*—had no place in his vision. Though she did not share her mother's, she did have values. Humans, her father always said, by definition could not betray their humanity. Anything they did was "human." And anybody who denied that making war, killing, and even genocide were human was kidding himself. Oh, how they had argued, he and she, father and daughter. And now, feeling the warmth of his cheek against hers, she suddenly heard a voice in her mind—the voice that had spoken to her in the vault, the voice of the image on the laserdisk, a voice she could not imagine coming out of the lips now bereft of even the softest whisper—a voice only slyly resembling his: accusing her of sour grapes. *You think I should be satisfied with things as they are, satisfied to have a daughter as loving as you've been. But your even thinking such a thing proves you are lacking, proves that you're simply piqued by my wanting the immortality my genius deserves. You're just proving your own weakness here, kid.*

Hot tears overflowed Kate's eyes, pooling wet and salty between his face and hers. "You're wrong, Daddy," she said brokenly into his ear. "Deep inside, I *know* you are! Why do you always have to ridicule people for acting on moral bases? You're asking me to coldly exploit life itself—and individual lives—for a cold, instrumental end that is speculative, at best. I'd gladly raise any child you left behind, I'd lavish on it all the love for you I have. But to merely reproduce an executive organization of your brain? My god, Daddy! It appalls me that you don't even love your own, unique self, the person you are and the relationships that make you who you are, enough to value it more than you value the executive organization of your brain! Stop trying to hold me hostage to my love for you! Because I'm not, I promise you, *not* going to do something that's so obviously, terribly *wrong!* "

Kate sat up and wiped her face and blew her nose. For the first time in her life she wished she had religion, wished she had it as powerfully as her mother did. The oughts of the situation would be clear then, and the decision not hers to make. She stared through her still-flowing tears at her father's face. *He* would say she had no decision to make, that he had already made the decision himself, while her mother would say that no decent person could be party to his monstrous selfishness. But Kate felt guilty, treacherous. Whatever she did would be wrong in *somebody's* eyes. "Come on, Daddy, wake up, please," she cried at his stillness. "I don't want to lose you!" For the bottom line was, if he didn't return to consciousness, she would lose him whatever choice she made.

Kate grew obsessive about sitting with her father, to the point that she arranged to be assigned a room to sleep in so that she would not have to leave the hospital to go home. Most of his care was done by machines, but she asked his nurses to teach her how to help exercise and massage his muscles. "Daddy, I'm here," she said to him every few minutes. She was annoyed and embarrassed when she learned that the media were making a Major Production over her staying in the hospital around the clock. **Kate Desperate and Distraught** one tabloid proclaimed on its front page. **Lady Godiva Out in the Cold** claimed another, suggesting a link between Kate's

moving into the hospital and Godiva's "exile." Godiva told Kate over the phone that the main reason she hadn't visited was the media's interest. Sitting beside her father, thinking about his brief relationship with Godiva, Kate fantasized their having married before her father's stroke, and his having left all the regeneration arrangements to *her*. What would Lady have done in such a situation? Surely anyone with a personal rather than a business relation with her father would hesitate to put a stranger in his place. Imagine marrying one person and finding oneself in bed with quite another, someone like a regressed-to-childhood adult. Divorce must be the certain outcome of such a scenario. The stranger wouldn't have his predecessor's feelings for the spouse, and the spouse would probably feel grief and anger at the loss of the predecessor's love and full selfhood.

Daughters, of course, could not divorce their fathers, even when they became strangers. She would probably have become his mother, or his older sister, or governess. He'd remember nothing of their having hiked together for years, of her having shoveled snow with him when she was eight, or of the more than twenty birthdays' worth of ties she'd given him over the years, still hanging in his closet though never once worn since he never wore those kind of ties just as he never wore suits.

"This is where I belong," she said whenever anyone tried to get her to leave the hospital for a "breath of air" or a "change of scene." Jeff and Joel believed that her visit to her father's house had brought home the reality of the situation to her, and that her attendance on her father was an attempt to deny it. Each of them suggested this in his own way, as though putting it into words would give her permission to "let go." "He could still return to consciousness," was her reply. "The doctors haven't given up hope. I know they haven't, or they would have started pushing for regeneration of damaged cells." "But they also say there's been substantial damage to the cerebral cortex," they said, as though she had forgotten it. "The fact that he survived surgery means there's a chance," she said, clinging to what Benoit had said before the operation.

Marjorie guessed there was something more than denial involved. "You're clinging to a slim possibility," she said as they were waiting for the elevator to take them to the Staff Lounge (where they could have coffee with a lowered risk of encountering news sharks). "I can understand that. But your desperation—" She put her arm around Kate's shoulder and drew her close. "That's new. Since your trip into the mountains, in fact. I know you, Kate. And I know a few things about your relationship with your father. It's like he's booby-trapped you, kid. I don't know how, I don't know why. But I'd say that something in his house really got to you."

For a brief moment Kate was tempted to throw herself into Marjorie's embrace and unload everything. Marjorie wouldn't judge her. Marjorie would understand. Marjorie would probably even have a strong opinion, which she'd give, about what the right thing to do was. But Marjorie would also pity her, would realize her father's disillusionment in her, would discover this ugly weakness. She could more easily tell the J's—to whom she'd never once seriously criticized her father—than Marjorie. Marjorie would understand the hurt as no one else could. And the hurt, then, would become more real, once it was spoken aloud. Bad enough that *she* knew what he had thought of her.

And so as they stepped into the elevator Kate said only that she had given Matt all her father's codes because she was tired of his pressuring her to attend an important board meeting and make decisions in her father's name. "Let him be responsible for the business when my father wakes up. I know I can't be." The elevator stopped to pick up somebody in a robot-driven wheelchair, and the moment for confession was past. Kate talked instead about how, living in the hospital, the world had shrunk and how that made her feel like a gigantic Alice who had lost her perspective.

"Which is why you need to get out for a few hours," Marjorie said.

Kate said, "A latte will fix me up." And then asked Marjorie about her latest hypertext project (for a client that was, incidentally, an Abbotson subsidiary corporation).

Three days after visiting her father's house, Kate got a call from a man identifying himself as David Hanson. She at first took him for a news shark who had gotten hold of her personal number. But when he said that her father had told him that it would be she who must authorize the final execution of the cloning project, she remembered his name. He was the scientist in charge of Team B. When she asked how she could help him, he said, "Your father said to me that if a clone were needed for its neural stem cells, you would be authorizing one of the teams to make the clone for that purpose, thus determining the winner of the competition."

"You are premature, Mr. Hanson," Kate said coldly. "It is possible my father may recover consciousness at any time."

"But I understand there has been considerable cell damage," Hanson said.

Kate's jaw went rigid. "Oh? You think your source of information is better than mine?"

There was a pause. "I assume my source of information is the same as yours."

Kate glanced at her father's slack, unconscious face. A spooky frisson rippled in chills over her skin. It would have been simple enough for him to write a subroutine instructing House to call the team leaders a given amount of time after dumping all that data on her. And it would have been simple to include in such instructions a call to Matt Hull, asking him to update the team leaders with hard medical data. Her grip on the phone tightened. "Mr. Hanson, I will be in touch with you when I'm ready to discuss this. I advise you not call me unsolicited. Your position is tenuous, to say the least." His ethical-legal-position. The statutes the cloning teams had been violating were federal. She had only to turn the records House had stored somewhere over to the FBI to entangle him in enough trouble to ruin his life for decades to come, even if he never faced a federal felony charge and conviction.

Of course if she turned them in, her father would then be tarred with the same brush. That was the researchers' main protection, as it had always been.

After she slipped the phone back into her pocket, she stood up and told the nurse she was going out for a latte. She was shaking with tension; she could even feel a tremor distorting her upper lip. The nurse pretended not to notice. Lingering at the foot of the bed, staring at her father, Kate silently addressed him. *What else have you got rigged up to force an unwilling hand?* Knowing her father, it could be more videos, a visit from a confidant she knew nothing about, or some concrete bribe or threat as incentive. Before the call she'd been merely guilty and anxious. Now she was filled with dread. She suddenly knew what Hamlet must have felt like, haunted by the ghost of his father.

The thought should have made her giggle, but she shivered, spooked to her soul by the possibilities.

After the phone call from David Hanson, Kate, already fairly zoned out, moved into a state of near-sleeplessness. When Joel, Jeff, and Marjorie each individually commented with concern on her "edginess" and her marked alarm whenever she got a phone call, she excused herself as being sleep-deprived. The places her mind went whenever she lay in the sleepless dark were so terrible that she began to think longingly of going home to sleep, spooned against a comforting body (Jeff's was softer and therefore more comfortable, but he snored, as Joel never did, so she didn't exactly fantasize any particular one). She *couldn't* go home, though. Something stopped her every time she started getting serious thoughts about doing so. She knew she had to stay in the hospital, near her father. She wasn't sure why, except that she believed something terrible would happen if she didn't. And above all, she had to be instantly there if he woke. She needed him to know that she really cared about him, even if she couldn't execute his cloning plan. Since her visit

to his house she'd had a recurring dream in which he woke when she was off somewhere, stranded in a cold, mountainous desert without a vehicle or phone or any means of travel but her feet, and less than a liter of water and no food or a tent.

Finally Jeff brought her some melatonin and said he'd sit quietly beside her in the room she had been given to sleep in. "What, and watch me not sleep?" she asked him. "Who knows? Maybe my being there will help you sleep," he said lightly. When she neither answered nor smiled, he took her hand and said slowly, soberly, "I wish I understood what was going on. Oh, not your need to be in the hospital all the time. But there's something else, I'm sure. Isn't there anyone you trust enough to talk to about it?"

His lushly fringed eyes gave her a slow blink. She saw him from a distance—maybe, she thought, as other people saw him: his jeans and button-down shirt, his curly black beard and thick-lensed horn-rimmed glasses, his Casio watch. He looked more like a philosopher than a cell biologist, she thought. Her father had said, after Jeff had joined her and Joel, that all she needed now was an "artiste" and an investment banker to represent a reasonable spectrum of American Manhood in her "harem."

"I'm all right," she said, squeezing his hand. "Really, I am." But she took him up on his offer to stay with her that night. She popped the melatonin tab and then invited Jeff to lie on top of the covers to cuddle her. One thing, not surprisingly, led to another, and before they knew it they were screwing. Though the melatonin conveniently kicked in after she'd had a couple of orgasms, she woke an hour and a half later and was unable to go back to sleep. Her thoughts were as bad as ever, but pressed up against Jeff's back, listening to him snore, she felt less lost, less alone. She realized, however, that she didn't want to know Jeff's—or anyone else's—opinion of the right thing to do. Whatever that was, it was irrelevant to her actual decision, and even if it offered her agreement, would not be in the least bit comforting.

Kate had known all along that she was waiting rather than stalling or procrastinating. She thought she was waiting for her father to regain consciousness. What she got on the twelfth day after her father's stroke, though, was a definitive crisis that put an end to the possibility of such waiting.

The day started with a private conference with Lee Park. After getting her and himself coffee, Park sat down behind his desk, planted his elbows on its surface, and steepled his long, slender fingers a few inches from his mouth. He asked solicitously after her accommodations in the hospital, then said, "It is my unpleasant responsibility to brief you on your father's options at this point." He cleared his throat. "We have, frankly, been waiting for the equivalent of a miracle, Ms. Abbotson. All of the scans we've done have suggested that your father has sustained considerable cell damage. As I'm sure you know, neural tissue simply does not repair itself. A small degree of cell loss can sometimes be overcome by the forging of new neuronal pathways. But the damage to your father's brain is extensive."

Kate grew very, very cold. "You're saying—what? That he is not coming out of this coma? Is that what you're saying?" *And that you've known that all along.*

Park's lava-hard eyes met hers. "Not without a program of cell regeneration." Park broke his steeple to lift his coffee mug to his lips. "Let me be frank," he said after he drank. "For Dr. Bledsoe to carry out the procedure, he will need neuroepithelial stem cells. These can be found only in fetuses. Cells taken from fully developed bodies are not as adaptable or resilient as fetal tissue, which has a marvelous capacity for differentiating according to the needs of the host organ. Now while the law permits individuals to conceive children for the sole purpose of cannibalizing their organs after birth when the removal of such organs isn't fatal, it does not permit individuals to expressly grow fetal tissue for its instrumental use. Therefore by law we are required to wait upon the happenstance of a miscarriage or abortion. Since these are both rare in the second

trimester, the wait can be lengthy."

While he had been speaking, Kate had wrapped her arms around her body. Her shivering was so violent that she had to make a great effort to keep her teeth from chattering. The pieces of the puzzle now fell neatly and harshly into place, and she saw the whole ugly picture. Her lips quivering with tension, she held up her hand and said, "There's no point in continuing this discussion. I have no intention of trying to regenerate my father's lost brain cells. You've just told me that the loss has been massive. What that says to me is that the person my father was is dead. Generating new brain cells won't bring him back. It would only give me a stranger in his place. Which sounds like a damned ghoulish thing to do, animating his body with a brand new cerebral cortex."

Park stared at her as though he couldn't believe he had heard correctly. "Ms. Abbotson!" Nervously he fumbled with the knot in his tie. "Really, you must— I mean, of course it's only natural that you're shocked by my explaining your father's situation. Wrongly, this medical team has assumed you understood it all along. But . . . I'm sure, on reflection, you will see that you must carry out your father's wishes. You see, Ms. Abbotson, our agreeing to his provisional plans for using cloned fetal tissue was one of the conditions of his continuing, generous support of all the department's research projects. I have on more than one occasion given him my word that if worst came to worst, I would do everything in my power to see to it that his genius continues. And that requires that the regeneration be done, in order to give a second clone time to mature into adulthood. Both teams A and B have begun work on the clones. A gestational surrogate has been approached. All that is required is your go-ahead."

Every drop of saliva in Kate's mouth and throat evaporated. She tried to speak, but managed only a hoarse whisper. "You're in on this insane conspiracy, too?"

Park spoke through suddenly tight lips. "Matt Hull assured me your father had arranged to explain everything to you in the greatest detail. Ms. Abbotson, I think it best that he explain it all to you himself. For there really is no choice in this matter. Legally, you are obliged to follow his living trust. And morally—"

Kate interrupted. "And morally, you are—" but halted when a loud fast beeping filled the office.

Park swiveled to face the monitor on the table behind his chair and clicked on a flashing icon. Text and numbers filled the screen. Park sprang to his feet. "Your father's started a rebleed, Ms. Abbotson. We'll have to discuss this another time."

The dread rebleed! Kate followed Park out of his office and the neurosciences department into the corridors of the hospital proper. Her heart raced with panic. Only when they entered the Stroke Unit did she realize that a rebleed couldn't do any more harm to him than he had already sustained. Her father was gone. The body this man was rushing to attend was a collection of organs that would never again be her father's.

It would be best, she thought, if the rebleed caused him to flatline. Turning in her tracks, she left the conspirators to their emergency and went to pack.

Only moments after Kate arranged her getaway with her driver and security, Penny Eliot phoned her with a request to attend an emergency conference of her father's medical team. Determined to put an end to the charade, Kate agreed to the request. Though she had no illusions about any of the docs on the team, she hoped the strength of her position would be clear enough to carry her point.

Lee Park sat at the head of the table, but it was Eliot who summarized the situation, presumably because Park knew he had lost Kate's good opinion. As a result of the rebleed, Eliot said, electrical activity in her father's brain was minimal. The team—which now included Joshua

Bledsoe—advised a second round of surgery in order to maintain whatever healthy tissue there might still be.

Kate interrupted the recital of technical details. "It's always been my understanding that the central nervous system drives all the vital functions of the body. If the full complement of life-support equipment maintaining my father were removed, would his heart and lungs, for instance, continue to function?"

Eliot bit her lip. Kate could see from the evasion in her face that she hated the question. "No, Kate," she finally said, "they wouldn't."

Which meant, Kate recalled from the summaries her father had provided her, that it was doubtful that all the damaged tissue *could* be regenerated. Kate looked Eliot squarely in the eye. "Then unhook the body. You know, and I know, that his brain is dead. There's no point in continuing this charade."

"You're upset," Eliot said softly. "If this were any other case, I would do as you ask if it hadn't been done already. But in this case, it would be wrong. Your father's instructions to me—and to Lee Park and Joshua Bledsoe, as well—were explicitly clear."

Kate swept her a look of contempt. "My *father* is dead. And the only legitimate reason for keeping the shell of his body even nominally working would be an intention to use his organs for transplant. But that's not the case here. *Your* reason—" and here she indicated all of the doctors sitting at the table—"is to carry out a procedure you and I know doesn't at this stage have a hope of working. A procedure that I would, in any case, have opposed, since it would not have prolonged my father's life, but at best produced a bizarre amalgamation of an infant's personality with a middle-aged man's body."

A long silence settled into the room, a virtual paralysis of time, in which the doctors all stared down at their hands. Kate slammed her fist on the table. "Dr. Park," she said harshly. "Give me the odds on whether all the most necessary cells in my father's brain are able to be regenerated."

He stared at her. "You would have to ask Dr. Bledsoe that," he said, glancing sidelong at his colleague.

"Dr. Bontoit!" Kate said. *His* look at her was openly hostile. "What are the chances that my father will regain consciousness if you operate on him a second time?"

Bontoit looked at Park, who after a few seconds gave an almost imperceptible shrug, then looked back at Kate. Dryly, softly, he said, "Without massive cell regeneration, the patient will assuredly not regain consciousness."

Kate looked at Eliot. "Then the only thing we have to discuss is the removal of the life-support equipment."

Park cleared his throat. "It seems we're at a stalemate, then. The regeneration project cannot go forward without your consent to surgery and the other necessary procedures. Perhaps I should mention that Mr. Hull is prepared to go to court to see to it that Mr. Abbotson's living trust is honored." He looked coldly at Kate. "Given your opposition, it seems this will be necessary."

Kate rested her hands on the table and folded them tightly together. "I realize that in pursuing my father's scheme you all feel you're fighting for your professional existence. But I wonder if you really want to be exposed in such a dubious undertaking? You *may* not be implicated by my father's documents in your connection with the cloning project, but I'm sure the FBI will consider the inferential evidence of your involvement sufficient for mounting a thorough investigation. Even if a judge agrees to allow your chicanery with my father's body, when the scheme fails—as you all clearly know it will, and under the glare of the media's brightest spotlight—the federal investigation of the human cloning conspiracy will be all the more likely to go after you." She

looked at each of them in turn. "I suggest that you think about what you're doing, rather than adhere blindly to the previously determined plan. The fact of my opposition and my ability to blow this thing wide open, and above all the fact that the rebleed absolutely negates the ultimate feasibility of the regeneration project, should surely bring each of you to reconsider your position—your *legal* if not *ethical* position."

Eliot rose to her feet. "You're right, Kate. I was adhering to a promise. But the rebleed, as you say, changes everything. If you'll sign the release form, I'll disconnect the life-support at once."

Penny Eliot, Kate thought, had the least to lose. The neuroscience docs, though, had the existence of their entire department at stake (never apparently having considered that she might have chosen to continue their funding).

Lee Park covered his eyes with his hand. "Divide and conquer," he said. "Which is what, Ms. Abbotson, your father did to the medical profession as a whole."

And if it weren't for that, this situation would never have arisen. Kate said, "Yes, Dr. Park, I know." Her father's illness had been an education. She no longer thought it so impossible to believe that a doctor somewhere had taken a contract out on her father's life.

"It would have made an interesting court case," Bledsoe said as Kate and Penny walked to the door.

Kate turned and stared at him. "Interesting?" she said incredulously.

His smile was sharp and thin and slightly malicious. "To see whether the courts decided that a body and its DNA, minus its original personality, has a continuous, legal reality. My guess is that they would have ruled that it does."

"Let's go," Kate said to Eliot, afraid the latter might start having second thoughts. She was glad she'd had that cloning evidence with which to threaten them. It would probably have gone the other way if she hadn't.

Kate stood with her back to the bed as Eliot and the nurse disconnected the life-support equipment. She tried to think calmly about her father, about all that they had shared, but thoughts of what the success of his plans would have meant for her intruded, overwhelming her with hurt and regret. She had disappointed him, in both his life and his death. She had failed his genius, which somehow, it seemed, had become all that mattered to him. Genius was something she did not understand, and it hadn't been what she loved in him. On the contrary.

When Kate heard the heart monitor shift from a steady beep to an uninterrupted flat tone that abruptly ceased, she faced the bed. At Kate's request, the doctor and nurse left the room. Kate went to the bed, leaned low and put her cheek against her father's. "Goodbye, Dad. I did my best. Not what you would have done, but I'm not you, or anything like you, as you've known for a long time now." Kate straightened and looked down at him one last time. His face lay slack and gray under the dazzling white bandage. Not his face at all, Kate thought. Just the remnant of a person—a parent—to be respected for what it had been—a remnant to be left behind.

Kate went out into the corridor where Eliot waited. "Want to attend the press conference?" she asked the doc. "To explain the rebleed and brain death?" Instead of Lee Park, she did *not* say.

"Certainly," Eliot said crisply. "But I hope you realize Matt Hull is probably going to want to kill us both for this."

"It doesn't take a genius to know *that*," Kate said, and then laughed a laugh so corrosively bitter that she knew that Eliot could not possibly understand it.

But then Kate wouldn't have wanted her to.