

ADAM'S GENE

Peter F. Hamilton

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When he was in his youthful prime, the thirtysomething years beloved by advertising companies, David Milton devoted his life to pushing the revolution, a quaint 1960s ideal of the pastoral alternative. The bands his management company signed up reflected his politics; no pop pap for him, he promoted musicians with causes. It was a shrewd move, for radical youth culture remained a popular cliché at the turn of the century; they sold a lot of albums. He made a great deal of money.

And then it actually happened: a different kind of world blossomed. Adam's vigorous biotechnology usurped the established order just as all the hippy lyrics had prayed for.

David Milton dropped out of the public eye. Not bitter, but resentful and afraid, alienated from the power of the new Green wonders. Poetic justice in a way; so it was only ever going to be a question of time before his past caught up with him.

It took 22 years.

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Eve arrived in Francet on a warm sunny June morning, walking into town under a cornflower blue sky ribbed with faint opalescent cloudbands. They called her Eve now, though to David she would always be Charlotte. Charlotte with the shy smile and uncrushable spirit.

She walked down the middle of the road, out of the heat shimmer's silver and black ripples, a comet's tail of multicoloured butterflies swirling erratically in her wake. Seventeen years old, clad in a simple snow-white sleeveless dress, strands of fair hair waving in the balmy air. The epitome of classic beauty, a girl da Vinci would have paid a king's ransom to paint.

The children saw her first and squealed with excitement. They raced across the shaggy overgrown verges towards her, frightening the butterflies away. There were nine of them; all girls, of course. Even David's only child was a daughter: Kirsten, 18 years old, and just as zippy as her mother had been when they married. He had neither the courage nor stubbornness to fight the battle against gender.

The efficiency with which Adam and his kind were spreading their biotechnology empire across the globe was quite irresistible. The old mechanized economy was smothering and dying below their genetically adapted creatures and plants. There was no requirement for ordinary boys in such a world, only Adam's sons.

David heard the girls' twittering laughter through his open study window, and voicelined the computer's finance display to hold. His Audio Visual distribution company was just keeping afloat, not that economics as he understood it played much part in modern life. Not with people able to grow almost

anything they wanted, from landcoral houses to an entire genealogy of servitor animals, none of which cost anything. But the AV trade had remained reasonably stable over the last 20 years. No matter the physical changes in lifestyle, people would always want entertainment. And there was still all of David's generation left to cater for, the has-beens and real-life refugees, surviving on an AV diet of the regurgitated past. Nostalgia, reliving the dead days, always paid.

The girls were dancing around Eve, guiding her off the road onto the broad verge. Eve walked slowly, careful not to bump into any of the impromptu cortege, a passive smile elevating her delicate lips. She stepped up onto the verge, dew from the ragged grass sprinkling her bare feet. And David could hear the girls singing.

Eve's here to play

Eve's here to stay

Eve'll drive the past away

Grow Eve grow

One of the new nursery rhymes, more truthful than any of those it replaced.

Eve stopped in the centre of the verge, ten yards from the entrance to David's drive. Her eyelids closed, and the girls whooped for joy, their dance redoubling in vigour, frilly skirts billowing, arms flapping.

From where he was the figure appeared as a blank doll. But distance didn't mean anything; 22 years and David could still sketch in every feature of that adolescent temptress face.

In the late afternoon, when the ecstatic girls had abandoned their vigil for tea and bed, after all the local adults had shambled past for their surreptitious look, David put the lead on Rusty, his ageing labrador, and sauntered down the drive. Close up, Eve's face set off all the old pangs, those sad middle-aged tingles and thoughts of what might have been. The Graften Park executives had known what they were doing when they chose her for Adam. *Almost*, he reminded himself sorrowfully. They understood the equations for lust, and completely forgot about love.

Eve's eyelids remained closed, wisps of hair blowing across her face. It was a shame, he would have liked one last look into those enchanting green eyes. When he glanced down, he saw her toes had already melded together. The soles would be sending their roots down, blind yellow worms burrowing through the soil a hundred times faster than any natural plant.

Rusty was sniffing round her ankles. David was tempted to let him cock his leg on her, a last defiant two-fingered gesture. In the end he was quite relieved he didn't have that kind of worthless spite.

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The first time David encountered Charlotte was back in 2007 when he was managing a band called Castlestorm; back when the world was comfortably insane, and solid metal machines performed industry's hard labour. Castlestorm was a five-piece band out of Manchester, playing what he called pixie rock, rehashing the kind of thing Genesis had mastered in the '70s: long meandering tracks, poetic lyrics not quite sung, not quite spoken. He didn't care about the music, they were a good investment, that was all.

The coach was taking Castlestorm to Worksop, the last week of a ten-week UK tour. A rainy night in mid-December, and they were already late. The driver stamped hard on the brakes half a mile after they turned off the A1, right in the middle of nowhere, with a terminally bleak pine forest on either side of the

road.

David stormed up to the front as the doors wheezed open. "What the hell have we stopped for?" he demanded.

Adam and Charlotte clambered in out of the dark, misery and gratitude all over their faces. They looked like a pair of East European war refugees; no coats, thick sweaters soaked and sagging, hair plastered down like rats' tails. She was 17, he looked even younger, he certainly didn't need to shave yet.

"Jesus, you've got to be joking, you stopped for a pair of hikers?"

The driver gave him a sullen glance. "They've got a kid."

A bundle of cloth in the girl's arms squirmed slightly, and started to cry.

"Oh hell," David groaned. But it was too late, the band were in the aisle watching him, their faces hardening. Of course, they were into humanitarianism in a big way. Well, so was he, when it didn't interfere with schedules.

"Come and sit back here," Maxine, the lead singer, said to the youngsters. Her eyes locked on David, glaring, defiant. She itched for a chance to unleash all that suppressed fury at him now he was in a minority of one. Maxine, in her black lace Gothic gear, and her straggly raven hair, whom he had bullied into having an abortion four months ago. Her singing voice was too distinctive to risk losing to motherhood, not now Castlestorm were starting to break.

"Sure, help your bloody selves," he told the youngsters morosely. "Freebie express, this is."

They slithered past him nervously, the aggravated authority figure, dripping cold rainwater water down the aisle. The roadies found them dry clothes, and Maxine sat with the baby on her lap and wistful sentiment in her eyes all the way into Worksop.

For the next two decades David was haunted by the question of how history would have turned out if he had just possessed enough common sense to put his foot down and turf them off the coach once they arrived at the concert hall. But he didn't. So Adam and Charlotte and baby Graham stayed on the coach for the rest of the tour. David couldn't be bothered to make an issue of it, not with only six days to go. In any case, they acted like damping rods on Castlestorm, which was no bad thing. The story they blurted helped, strumming the band's collective sympathy chords.

As fantasy went, he had to admit, it was awesome. He would sit halfway down the bus, feet up, eyes closed, listening to their story as the procession of eco-friendly, zero-emission Korean and Australian factories colonizing north Yorkshire unwound past the window.

They were on the run from Graften Park, they said, a Ministry of Defence genetics facility. And the why of it went like this: At the start of the '90s, when the Cold War ended, and the Tories were selling off government assets to City spivs, Graften Park was told to Get Real and earn a living. It couldn't be privatized outright, not with the work that went on in some of the labs; but the director was encouraged to set up collaborative ventures with industry. Adam was the result of one such venture, his genes altered when he was a humble zygote, quasi-secret, quasi-legal.

"Those fascist bastards," Don Lock, the lead guitarist, said. "Using a military lab to screw around with human life. If we break this to the press the defence minister will have to resign; nobody could stand a scandal this size."

"The Prime Minister too," Maxine cried. "He's bound to be a part of it."

Don Lock grinned. "Maybe they'll be forced into a vote of confidence at Westminster."

"And they lose! We could do it, we could make it happen," she said.

David's lips twitched in a silent smile below his wrap-round shades as Castlestorm planned their putsch. Rock stars really shouldn't be allowed out into the real world, it was far too complicated and dangerous. He sometimes wondered if Don actually knew it was illegal to pick up girls under 16.

And it seemed as though he wasn't the only one who knew that the band's collective mental age probably wouldn't make it into double figures. When it came to playing on the conspiracy-theory paranoia which ran through Castlestorm, Adam was a master. God alone knew how a 15-year old kid could think up such a convoluted fairy tale and make it consistent. But he did, and it worked, because Castlestorm wanted to believe. It fitted their world view, where the CIA and Big Business formed the devil's alliance, and went out gunning for democracy, clotting up the biosphere with nuclear pollution, and making people pay too much for lead-free petrol and CDs.

David knew the doctrine well enough; he had believed himself, once. That was what the music was born for, to fight, to bring a better world into being. The dream of renewal. Elvis and the Beatles struggling against the stifling know-your-place conformities of the '50s and early '60s; Dylan and the Grateful Dead had Vietnam to spark off. Then by the time the Pistols and the Clash gobbled all over the supergroups' complacency it was turning in on itself, it wasn't a movement any more, it wasn't about saving the world, filling the cosmos with peace, it was about royalties and deals. The establishment struck back and won. Effortlessly. Performers became stars, and the bands churned out conveyor-belt music. The message got lost, or abandoned, among the sponsorship tie-ins. Rock was entertainment, newer than Sinatra and Glenn Miller and Mozart, more fashionable, but no different. The flower children and the punks didn't have an alternative to offer after all. Because there was no alternative, not to modern medicine and electricity and centrally heated houses and telecommunications, only what the world had taken 20 centuries to crawl up out of, medieval squalor. The system, the hated, despicable, ridiculed system devised by money lenders and politicians, worked. Not particularly well, but there was nothing else. Wet, freezing tepee communes in Wales, scabby kids sleeping in their own excrement? You could keep that, he thought. The dream wasn't dead, it had never lived; a stillborn chimaera, pickled in acid.

David could remember the exact moment when he realized what a sham it all was, that the hype and the self-importance had become to the stars what the stars were to the fans. The Nelson Mandela gig at Wembley, when he was 20, a junior record company gofer, making sure the stars' mineral water was the right temperature. Mandela had spoken to a select respectful backstage audience. The moment they'd fought and waited for, their Cause in the flesh. And the first thing he said was, "I don't know who you all are."

David didn't hear the rest of it, he ran outside and laughed and laughed. The *look* on their faces!

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Kirsten Milton rode home on the six-legged piebald hansom her father had given her for her 16th birthday. Its hindquarters bubble membrane had unfurled so that Joanne, Stephanie and Nicola could sit in the passenger recess, leaving Thomas to sit beside her on the shoulder saddles above the forelegs. She enjoyed Thomas's company, he was a year older than her and the other girls, bright and sensitive, but so soulful. It seemed as though the only time he ever smiled was on one of those long lazy afternoons when they all piled upstairs into a bedroom, and the four of them took it in turns to bounce up and down on top of him. But even then he was always their lover, never their stud.

Sometimes she tried to imagine how a man would feel about being out-evolved, consigned to genetic

obsolescence. Tried and failed.

They talked about him occasionally, the four girls, when he wasn't about, wondering if they should have a daughter for him: a charity act, giving him some sense of purpose. A straight-genotype daughter wouldn't be so out of place even this close to the passing of the old world. And the sperm-gender filter kits were still on sale at the local chemist. One day they even went so far as to cut four lengths of string, but never quite had the nerve to make the draw. In their hearts they knew they were waiting for Adam's immaculate sons to arrive and fill their wombs with fresh and exciting life, making them part of the new society.

They were cantering down the road, a hundred yards from the house, when Kirsten saw Eve standing outside the driveway, partially occluded by the dusky shadows thrown by the avenue's elegant trees. She ordered the hansom to halt, its clattering hooves the only sound in the twilight serenity.

Eve was always the first wave of the new tide to arrive. Kirsten had seen Eve many times before, when she had been down south visiting her mother in Nottingham. Eve was a walking womb, rooting herself into the soil and blossoming, fruiting some marvellous new species. Then the rest of Adam's creations would follow, to be absorbed by the community. Slowly, gently, spreading out from his headquarters in Kent. Adam wasn't stupid, he could empathize with the need older people had for time to adapt, to adjust their lives. There was even talk of establishing reserves; aboriginal flora, aboriginal lifestyles, aboriginal resentment of change. People like Dad, a tiny sad voice sounded inside her head.

The hansom crouched down, its big wedge-shaped head angling round to look at Eve, and they all climbed down. Thomas had a terrible defeated slump to his shoulders. Kirsten pretended not to notice.

There were towns and cities where the first Eves to appear had been fire-bombed, down south, years past. The news programmes had carried images of parks with long ranks of black human shapes blazing like tarred torches, melting and contorting, shooting thick twisted streamers of soot into the air and radiating the stink of charred flesh until they sickened and shamed the old reactionaries. Kirsten didn't think anything like that would happen in Francet. Nothing ever happened in Francet. The town was built on a solid bedrock of boredom.

They examined Eve closely; her feet had deliquesced to saucer-like pads with small buttress roots flaring out from her ankles, her dress with the texture of a petal was fraying around the hem, the skin had turned a lovely walnut brown, striking a sharp contrast with her hair.

"What will she be, do you think?" Joanne asked.

"A hansom," Stephanie said wistfully. David Milton had brought Kirsten's back with him from London. Her family still used an electric car.

"House chimps," Thomas said. "Adam always starts with something insidiously helpful, something you can't ignore. There's a lot of old people in Francet who could do with a hand around the home."

Kirsten went indoors to find her father in the lounge, a third of the way through a bottle of five-star brandy, tears glistening on his cheeks. He had slotted an AV memory chip in the player, the wallscreen was showing a 22-year-old video of Castlestorm performing "Daydream Revolt," their last ever song. He always watched it when he was maudlin and depressed.

"She hasn't changed," he said brokenly to his daughter. "Not one little bit. Jesus, why did Adam have to use Charlotte as a model?"

"Because he loves her," she answered automatically. Everybody knew that. Then his words registered. "What do you mean, hasn't changed?"

"That's how she was when I first met them. Do you know how old that makes me feel? How sodding useless?"

"You knew them?" she asked incredulously. "Adam and Charlotte?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, Kris, I should have told you before. Couldn't, too many memories." He took another gulp of brandy. Up on the screen a black lace strap fell from Maxine's pearl-white shoulder, shifting her dress to a dangerous angle.

Kirsten couldn't believe what she was hearing. Her own father knew Adam, had spoken to him! "What were they like?"

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By the time Castlestorm played their last gig in Newark, David was reconsidering his position on the two youngsters. Simply put: they were adorable. He watched the fuss Sandy and Tiffany, the two backing singers, made over Adam every time he was around. The boy had a sun-god face, baby-smooth skin, mesomorph physique. They couldn't keep their hands off him. There was serious teen-idol potential there.

Then there was this crazy story of theirs. They had stuck to it religiously the whole time. That took discipline, a kind of discipline which could translate very neatly into studio work and promotional extravaganzas.

David didn't think there would be any trouble about parents. He reckoned they must have run away from a rainbow tribe convoy, the clothes they turned up in, plus their general weirdness was proof enough.

Adam said not, even in private. He had it that he was still on the run from the black hats of Graften Park; they were breeding him, you see.

"Breeding you?" David asked tolerantly. The two of them were sitting backstage while the roadies set up the holorig, big crystal projection spheres arching overhead, linked together by thick braids of optical fibre. Even inert, it cast a beautiful prismatic corona; switched on it was glorious.

"Yes," Adam said. "They're interested in the children I can produce. So they brought Charlotte to me on my 15th birthday. She's an orphan, and she's got a high IQ. She's gorgeous, as well." He blushed. "That was supposed to make it easier."

"Yeah, I can imagine." Charlotte had breasts like a Penthouse Pet after the pixel artist had finished revamping with a mouse; but the rest of it... David recognized the reference, pure Dr Strangelove. After that it became a private game in his mind, seeing if he could identify which snippets of videos and books had gone into constructing the myth.

"She wasn't alone," Adam said in a scared whisper. "There were 40 girls waiting for me. I made 12 of them pregnant before we escaped with Graham."

David struggled to keep his face straight. "So how come you left? That harem arrangement sounds pretty close to heaven if you ask me."

"Because Charlotte and I are in love. And because they would abuse what I am; she explained it to me, all they want me to do is make money for them. They can't think outside those terms. And she's right. There's so much I can achieve if I'm allowed to go free."

Such a serious little boy. But so imaginative.

Castlestorm was due for a two-week break over Christmas, after that they were going straight into a studio to record the next album. David had chosen Alsworth Grange, a manor house in Kent with accommodation for 20, a studio with a 100-track deck and a rehearsal hall. Isolated in 15 acres of its own parkland, it was almost groupie-proof. Milton Management owned it, and David had used a large chunk of the record company's advance to book them in for a six-month stretch.

"What are you going to do with Adam and Charlotte?" Maxine asked him in Newark's shabby airless greenroom. It was showdown time, and arranged perfectly. Maxine again, he guessed. Castlestorm were due on in five minutes, but they had all gathered round, riding a buzz of shop-steward militancy.

"Me? They're your strays, remember?"

"You can't hand them back to the military," she said firmly.

Military! "I wasn't planning to. Look, the social services can take care of them."

"No way!" Don bellowed. "Those Adolfs would have them back at Graften in an hour. They're Government, man, they're part of it."

"What then?"

Don's anger burnt out as fast as it had flared. "How about letting them stay at Alsworth, just for Christmas? We'll be down straight after, we can sort something permanent out then."

"We'll pay for the rooms," Maxine volunteered.

David pursed his lips, and said: "Okay, sure." Then he walked away; leaving them in a bewildered huddle, wondering what kind of tabs he was dropping to flip moods so fast.

"They'll find us," Adam said bleakly after David made the offer to stay at the Grange. "Moving about, we're all right, but they'll pin us down if we stop."

Charlotte stood beside him, clutching his arm, giving him a forlorn look. Adam was visibly melting under it.

"Look," David said, all sweet reason. "If anybody comes, anybody at all from your past, I'll stall them. I'll throw writs and injunctions at them until you're legally old enough to make decisions for yourself. Listen, when terrorists grow up they become music-biz lawyers, nobody beats them in court. Ask Maxine. Besides, it's Christmas coming up, you don't want little Graham to spend his first Christmas in a hostel, now do you?"

Charlotte tugged insistently on Adam's sleeve.

"We haven't got any money," Adam said lamely. "We can't pay you."

"Think of it as an advance," David said, and smiled benignly.

Adam must have enjoyed Christmas at Alsworth after all. It was early March when David realized Charlotte was pregnant again. He had long since trained himself to watch for the vital signs, pregnancy could be a real dog turd on the path to fame.

The shine it put on her face was joyous. David began to devote more of his time to her, taking her shopping, spoiling little Graham with presents. It wasn't as though he felt randy about her, not a young mother, more like enchanted. It was the same as having a daughter without all that tussle over telephones

and boys and clothes.

Adam fitted in to Alsworth as if he'd been born to the nuclear stress of studio life. Chomping through Chinese takeaways in the early hours, sitting up with the band watching videos on the big wall screen, banging the tambourine in the studio.

Castlestorm's recording schedule hit new peaks. They cut five tracks in two and a half months, with another eight being squabbled over, re-written, rearranged. Even Maxine and Don were keeping their artistic-conflict screaming fits to a minimum.

Best of all, David coaxed the boy behind a mike. At first he got the distinct impression Adam was doing it just to humour him. But the boy's attitude shifted fast enough after the band, his real friends, switched from encouragement to hardline adulation.

Adam's voice was audio nectar; he could sing anything from ballads to glam punk, and mean it. Even the engineers were silent when he was recording. Now that was an omen David couldn't ignore.

He started to think about shunting Castlestorm off onto one of his vice-presidents so he could concentrate solely on Adam. With the right handling the boy become the new millennium's first macrostar. There was just the question of a contract.

"He'll rip you off," Maxine said when David called Adam into his office for a conference. That Castlestorm would come with him was inevitable, guarding their adopted soul-brother against the lord of darkness. "But they all do that," she grumbled. "And he's better than some. I'd say sign it."

"And I love you too," David told her, blowing a kiss.

Adam turned to Charlotte. She gave him a tender smile, and nodded.

So he signed. David felt like the man who bought Manhattan island for ten glass beads and a bottle of whisky, like Brian Epstein seeing the crowds waiting at JFK.

The trim blue handwriting just said: Adam, no surname; but the legal stormtroops said that was okay, it was intent which counted. David didn't press the point, he would make up a name and a history later.

And then, at the start of April, Charlotte wasn't pregnant any more. She just came downstairs one morning, the little bump under her T-shirt missing, her cheeks pale. She never said a word, never complained.

But it was Adam who shocked David. The miscarriage didn't even register with the boy, if anything he seemed brighter afterwards. Shock? Trauma? Explanations like that didn't seem likely. David began to wonder about the boy's background again, really wonder. What could immunize him from emotions like that?

He called the discreet doctor from Harley Street, the one whose phone number seemed to be branded into his soul, and asked her to come and take a look at yet another of his protegees. She gave Charlotte a check over, and pronounced her all right. Here's a pill, make sure she doesn't do anything strenuous for a month. I'll send the bill to your office as usual.

Not even the doctor cared.

So in the end it was only David who wept over gentle Charlotte's loss. Hiding away in his study, with his bottle of brandy, and a conscience he hadn't acknowledged for 15 years; thinking about Charlotte, alone in the night, flushing the foetus out between her legs in a rush of blood and horror and pain. An obscene

way to end a life that had never begun. She was too young, too beautiful for all this teratoid ugliness. Locked away in a mansion full of well-meaning circus freaks and computer-brained ring masters. She deserved a life of her own; he wanted to let her go, pay her off and set her free. But she said she loved Adam; she believed it.

And he couldn't let Adam quit, not now. He just couldn't.

The music biz, he reflected, was made up of the most dismal collection of bastards this shoddy old planet had ever known.

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Kirsten held her little summit in the house's conservatory; her father didn't use it much these days, not since she had sent off to Alsworth for the fruit kernels. The original Swiss-cheese plants and fuchsias had been uprooted, replaced by Adam's flora. They were beautiful plants to look at, with thick dark trunks, broad heart-shaped leaves and rubbery juice sacs dangling below most branches.

Kirsten squeezed a lemon teat, filling Joanne's glass.

"I say do it," Nicola urged belligerently.

"Your father being friends with Adam," Stephanie said. "Who'd have thought it?"

Kirsten handed Joanne the glass, and flopped down into her sponge chair. The bulging amorphous plant flowed beneath her, adapting to her shape. "I always knew he managed Castlestorm," she admitted. "I just never made the connection until yesterday. You know, he actually still owns Alsworth Grange. He told me."

"My God," Nicola squealed. "Do it, ask him!"

The grin on Kirsten's face wasn't quite as full as she would have liked. She glanced at the slim crystalline AV pillar in the corner of the conservatory. It was omni-directional, shooting a widescan image straight into her retinas. These days she more or less kept it spliced permanently into the feed from Mars.

A bright rainbow sparkle, and she was looking out over the Martian desert, Mare Erythraeum, showing delicate pink sky with a hint of yellow on the horizon. The rust-red ground was stippled by a billion jagged stones and hazed by an airborne seam of dust as fine as lake mist. Patches of oxygen-liberating lichen were mottling the ubiquitous stones, their dark green shading a sharp contrast to the planet's indigenous pastel colours. In the centre of the image was a tree; the layered branch structure reminiscent of a cedar, except here the leaves had been replaced by giant membrane sheets draped over entire branch forks. Around the base of the trunk the bark was sculpted into a frieze of human silhouettes. Some of them had protruded further out of the integument than others. Even though the camera was too far away for details, Kirsten knew whose face was etched on each figure.

The sight gave her a supreme thrill. Adam's dominion was reaching out to claim the planets. It wasn't just Adam, of course, a surprising number of countries had been running genetic projects on similar lines to Graften Park.

With Adam and his peers, and then their children, nestling in the heart of every nation on Earth, the revolution, the switch from mechanical to biological, became irreversible.

Doomed to succeed, her father said.

He had told her about his time, the perpetual squalor and the endless individual striving. Of every life

being a 40-year struggle for survival. Of the sick and the dying. Of how they all wanted it to change, but could never bring themselves to believe the dream they shared was real.

"The bands didn't make the dream," he said. "They fed on the dream. And in the end they made us pay to hear it."

Thankfully it was over now, possessing only the dwindling menace of a nightmare at the break of day. Adam was remorselessly eviscerating the sickness of her father's culture with his new genetic order. And more than anything she wanted to be a part of that, to birth the children who would grow up amid such wonders — who would live in a world that was safe and kind and still had challenges. Adam's empire, all things to all people. Except those who remembered, she thought sombrely.

She turned away from the AV cylinder, determination crystallizing in her mind.

"I don't see why you're all so het up," Joanne complained. "I saw three more Eves on my way here this morning. Adam's sons will be along in a year or two anyway."

"Oh Joanne," Stephanie wailed. "She could have one of Adam's children. Why settle for second hand?"

"It won't make any difference to the DNA," Joanne said.

"We're not talking about DNA, we're talking about Adam. We're talking supreme kudos. Who else in backward Francet is going to have a child fathered by Adam himself? They'll crown her queen of the county after that."

"I'll do it," Kirsten said. "I'll ask father for an introduction."

Nicola whooped delightedly. "Atta girl! Hey, can we watch?"

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Now it had found David, the past seemed intent on inflicting a psychopathic revenge, not so much poetic justice, more poetic vengeance. There was Eve, deforming further every morning that he took Rusty out for a walk. Her dress had rotted away by the second day. The body it exposed had no sexual characteristics, no nipples, no navel, no vagina. The darkening skin had hardened, wrinkles deepening until it had become bark. Her entire torso was swelling rapidly now, legs amalgamating into a single stocky trunk to support it. How could Adam shape the walking wombs like her, then commit such sacrilege on each one?

Kirsten and her gaggle of friends were playing a guessing game over what Eve was going to birth. Judging by the size of the swelling, David thought it would be a cow. Adam had sequenced them with an extra womb-like organ, one which produced solid nodules of flesh. Herds today grazed their pastures as always, excreting football-sized steaks all over the grass and buttercups. It was the same for sheep and pigs; he hadn't heard of chickens doing it yet, but that would be only a matter of time. Everything in Adam's kingdom was only a matter of time now.

Right at the beginning he had known what would happen, how powerful the new genetics would be, how dominant. He more than anyone. But he went ahead and had Kirsten anyway. He had never regretted that, not once.

Until today.

Now she knew what her father was, his trivial footnote in history, that evolutionary turmoil raging so remotely outside his house had suddenly swept in through all the locked doors and windows to become

excruciatingly personal.

Kirsten had come into his study this morning, knocking timidly, bringing his cup of tea, smiling the way she always did when she wanted to melt his arctic heart. And asked the terrible question.

"You want an introduction to Adam? Why?"

"So I can have one of his children," she said. She grinned sheepishly, because it was so obvious and uncomplicated. And how could it possibly hurt anybody?

"What about Thomas?" he asked. Now there was someone who would make an excellent son-in-law, a lad he could take down to the pub for a swift jar before lunch. David had thought Kirsten and Thomas might even be lovers.

Her shoulders twitched in an embarrassed shrug. "Thomas is good company, but he's..."

"Like me? Unmodified, genuine." He couldn't help his bitterness from burning the words.

"Oh Daddy, why do you always try and hide from what's happening?"

Because with the dream denied him, he had nothing left but conformity. Family and children; leaving behind some living memorial. Because he could visualize what few chromosomes of his were left in her ovum, his sole heritage, swamped by Adam's superior sequences. Junked. You just couldn't punish a man harder than that.

She knelt down on the floor, touching his forearm. Cherub's face full of longing, the silent melancholic appeal. Daughters, he realized, had complete telepathic control over their foolish fathers.

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They came for Adam on a dank foggy morning in May. Eight of them, packed into three Ford Nevadas that cruised smoothly out of the listless grey mist hugging Alsworth's long straight drive. David came out to meet them, walking down the portico's steps as they pulled up outside. He couldn't see more than a hundred yards, the world comprised a crescent of trim lawn, hulking penumbra mirage of the elegant summer house, stark outline of horse chestnut trees standing sentry duty along the drive. Behind him came the steady patter of water dripping off the ivy.

He didn't have to ask. As soon as they stepped out of the cars, he knew. They reminded him of the Prime Minister's bodyguards; suit like a uniform, and eyes which could look inside your skull. After 15 years in the music biz of course he knew trouble when he saw it, and it didn't come any worse than this. Adam wasn't paranoid. Adam hadn't been fantasizing about his past.

The first man stepped up to him and smiled politely. "Good morning, Mr Milton, I'm Officer Rutherford." A white and blue card was flashed at David. Rutherford didn't bother to say what kind of officer he was. "Is young Adam inside?"

"Yes," David said meekly.

"Excellent. Let's go in and see him, shall we? That boy is a human Chernobyl. The sooner he's back where he belongs, under proper supervision, the better for all of us." A courteous hand gestured at the front door.

David hated him, the calm assumption that no one would resist, the sheer righteousness. He wanted to ask what would happen to himself, to the band. But he didn't have the courage. Suppose Rutherford told

him straight? Suppose...

"You won't hurt him, will you?" David asked.

Rutherford's regular smile tightened. "Certainly not. Used properly, young Adam will become a highly valuable resource."

"Resource? He's a human being, you bastard."

"Ah. But he's not, you see. Not quite. That's the whole point, isn't it?"

David shivered, seeing Adam's golden smile, golden body, golden mind, golden voice. Impossibly perfect.

Something moved out in the garden, right on the fringe of vision. There was a savage splintering sound of timber subjected to abnormal forces. Glass shattered. The summer house burst apart in a flame-less explosion, long splinters of wood tumbling across the lawn. Three midnight-black shapes lurched out of the debris, creatures with a hide like newly-hewn coal, stretching out their limbs and tentacles.

David felt his grasp on reality fracturing. He had seen them before, a few months back, during the tour when they'd played the video of *Alien 5: The Home Planet*, on the coach's seatback screens. He'd laughed and gone, "yuck" along with all the others when the monsters began shredding butch space marines into tatters of gore. And now here they were again, bounding crab-like across the dew-soaked grass towards him, fast as a panther, tentacles lashing about like tormented pythons. And it wasn't a video. And it couldn't possibly be real.

Rutherford's face contorted with fear. "You fool!" he yelled. "You let him breed!" His panicked team tugged stumpy guns from their jackets, lining them up on the charging monsters. An erratic crisscross grid of needle-thin emerald targeting lasers punctured the air around David, eerily delicate, fluorescing the fog into solid threads of neon.

Two short gunbursts sounded, their roar shaking his sternum. Then the first monster reached the cars. It hit one of the security men head on. He just seemed to detonate into a cascade of scarlet offal.

David knew he was screaming. He couldn't hear it, not amid the chaos of semi-automatic fire, slashing lasers, dismembered bodies jetting blood, and a near-ultrasonic keening.

Then he was falling to his knees, vomit surging from his mouth. He curled up on the cool slabs, wrapping his universe tight around him.

"Mr Milton. Please, Mr Milton. It's over."

David opened an eye to see Adam leaning over him. He jerked away in reflex. "What the hell are you?" The shout hurt his bruised vocal chords.

Adam was on the verge of tears. "Please, Mr Milton. I didn't want any of this."

The band were clustered together on the portico, trying to take in what had happened. David could hear sobbing, someone heaving their guts up. When he rolled over he saw the carnage; bodies, blood, scraps of pulpy flesh. Two of the monsters had been caught by the guns.

"They are real," he gasped. The surviving monster was standing beside one of the cars, motionless, waiting.

"Yes. I saw them on the video. Do you remember? They were so tough, nothing could beat them. And I knew Rutherford would come eventually. So I copied them."

"How?" David asked. Some part of him quailed at being told.

"It's what I am," Adam said. "That's what they spliced into me. I can control the nature of my own germ plasm. Ninety percent of human DNA, any DNA, is inactive; it's garbage, spacing. But it has all sorts of redundant traits locked away in the helix; the difference between us and any other living organism is only the thickness of a chromosome away."

"You mean you can bring the world's fossils back to life?"

"Yes, if they were needed. But I can also produce babies with flawless immunology systems, that won't ever get ill; I can make them tall, small, brilliant, stupid, black, white, oriental; I can make them super athletes, I can give them life spans of two centuries, I can give them gills to live under water, lungs that can breathe the Martian atmosphere. Once I learn how, there's nothing I can't produce; servitor animals, maybe even plants. Nothing. That's why Graften want me back."

"And that?" David gasped, waving at the monster. "Don't tell me that's in our ancestry."

"No. It's ordinary bone and muscle and blood, I just rearranged the structure, that's all."

"But where did it come from? Look at the size of it!"

"They grow very quickly after they hatch."

"Hatch?"

Charlotte walked up to Adam, and placed her arm round his shoulder, protective and defiant. "I grew the eggs for Adam," she said quietly.

"Oh, Jesus." David put his hands back over his face. There never had been a baby, a miscarriage. How she must love Adam to let him sire those abominations inside her womb, to nurture them with her own fluids.

"David, you have to stop Graften from taking Adam back," Maxine said.

When he looked up at her he saw the white trembling face of someone trying very hard to be brave.

"Don't you understand, David? Think what he can give to the world if he isn't restricted and exploited."

He glanced over at Adam and Charlotte as they clung together. He was terrified of Adam; but Adam was terrified of the whole world. A mortal god.

"Publicity," he said. "That's what you need. They can't do anything to you in public." It also meant he didn't have to decide what to do with Adam, that would be down to lawyers, courts, committees of MPs, public opinion. Anybody and everybody except for him: the Pontius Pilate of the 21st century.

The press conference was his testimony. He worked every trick, pulled every favour accumulated in 15 years of backhanders. In the end he wound up with reporters from 43 countries, 19 television crews. And Adam's performance was like everything Adam did, immaculate. David stood on the side of the makeshift stage watching the mesmerized reporters, thinking the old thoughts of rebellion, knowing every dream of a different world was about to come true.

That evening he overheard Maxine asking Adam to come to bed and make her pregnant. She wanted a

baby that wouldn't suffer illness, she said, who would live for centuries, who was smart and strong and beautiful. She even told him the eye colour she wanted: green. This was Maxine, who thought a matriarchy was the only true form of government. And Charlotte stood there all the while, smiling encouragement, because she loved Adam enough to share him with the whole world.

David saw the future then, a lucid prescience outshining any midnight dream image. The droves of women who would become incubators for Adam and his sons, flourishing for one brief generation as they birthed the new order, then left oh-so far behind by their own children. And no role for other men. None at all.

He packed a small suitcase, left the keys of Als-worth Grange with Charlotte, and drove his methane-powered BMW down the long drive, never looking back.

* * * * *

Adam read the letter Kirsten gave him, remembering the horror and the glory of that day over 20 years ago, the last time he had seen David Milton.

As letters went, it wasn't much. But it was pure David.

This is my daughter, Kirsten. I want you *to listen to what she says*. Then do *exactly as she asks*. *And make it supreme*. Remember, you are still under *contract to me*.

Adam often wished the gulf hadn't been so great, nor the shock so abrupt. David Milton would have made a wonderful friend, he felt. Tough and practical. He would have welcomed David's cynicism and advice down the long difficult years.

"What is it you want?" he asked.

Kirsten turned from the study window to face him, sucking bashfully on her lower lip. "A son."

"Of course. What kind?" Adam had heard so many bizarre requests over the decades, from supermen to monsters to reincarnations of historical figures, he didn't think anything could surprise him any more. But Kirsten managed it; after all she was David's daughter.

* * * * *

David had gone through all this once before. The heavy forced panting, the sweat, the straining, the shrill cries of pain. Nineteen years ago, watching his then wife give birth to Kirsten. Now it was Kirsten's turn.

Men weren't built for this, he thought, not sharing their daughter's suffering.

But she had insisted. So here he was in a room of polished stainless-steel fittings and white-tile walls, wearing a green surgical smock, and hoping to God he wouldn't faint.

No doubt Adam would incorporate subtle redesigns in his female offspring to eradicate all this pain and effort.

Kirsten gave one final savage yell, and her son was born. The midwife and a couple of nurses clustered round, mercifully sparing David the ordeal of total participation. Kirsten gripped his hand tight enough to squeeze the feeling out.

"Did you see it happen, Daddy? Did you?"

He dabbed a tissue over her forehead. "Yes, I saw."

"I wanted you here more than anything. I came from you, and he came from me. Do you. understand now? The continuity? Without me, he wouldn't exist.

That means you do have a part in all this. You belong in Adam's empire, Daddy, you truly do. Please believe me. Please?"

The nurses finished cutting the umbilical chord. David's grandson began his first anguished wailing.

He brought Kirsten's hand up to his lips, and kissed her sweaty knuckles. "I do."

The baby was passed to Kirsten, his tiny white wings flapping wetly. David felt a hopelessly proud smile lift his mouth as she hugged the infant angel to her chest.

Peter F. Hamilton is the author of the sf novels *Mindstar Rising* (Pan, 1993) and *A Quantum Murder* (forthcoming from Pan in 1994). His short stories have appeared in *Fear*, *New Moon* and the anthologies *In Dreams* and *New Worlds*. The above is his first story for us. He lives in what used to be England's smallest county, Rutland (near Leicester).