

PROGENY
by
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“CeeCee, this is your son, Trevor.”

The man in the green coat pointed at a small boy in a metal bed. White bandages encircled his head, covering his eyes.

CeeCee peered at the boy’s pale unmoving hand atop the covers, then looked at her own yellow-skinned hand. She shook her head a little. He didn’t look familiar.

“MY son?”

“Yes.”

“Talk?”

“Right now he’s too sick to talk.”

“Why?”

“He hurt his head. But we will make him better.”

“Good.”

The man in the green coat motioned, and her gaze followed. The room was huge and clean. It was packed with beds, all holding children, toddlers to teens. Black and yellow and red and white chins showed below their head wraps. They didn’t move. They didn’t talk.

She turned back to the man in the green coat. He wore a badge with “D R”...something...on it. He was nice to her.

“All mine?”

“Yes. They’re all your children.”

“Fix!”

“We will fix them together, CeeCee.”

The man in the green coat led her out of the room. She moved slowly, uncertain where to put her feet. She staggered now and then. The doctor steadied her elbow. They walked down a long hall to a room with a table surrounded by big equipment.

“CeeCee, please lay down on this table. Put your head on this pillow.”

Her slanted eyes, wide with fear, reflected in the polished machinery. “Hurt!”

"Don't be scared, CeeCee. These machines won't hurt you. I won't hurt you. You liked your children?"

"Yes."

"You want to help make the children healthy?"

Her forehead wrinkled. "How?"

"We will fix them together. All your children will be healthy soon. You're a good mother. Now lie down."

She glanced once more at the machines, then laid herself on the table and put her head on the pillow.

"Good job. I'm going to put you to sleep now so you can help make children healthy. You'll feel a little pinch on your arm."

"OK."

The recorder registered her informed consent.

"Afterwards we'll get some ice cream."

CeeCee drifted away smiling.

She was surrounded by the beds of all her sick children. There were so many! She didn't know what they needed. She didn't know how to help them. She didn't know how to take care of them.

How could she be a good mother?

She bent down and kissed one pale boy's bandaged head.

The boy sat up with a start. The bandages were gone. He smiled at her. He had a pretty smile.

She felt warm and happy inside.

She went to each bedside and kissed each child on the top of his or her bandaged head. Each one sat up and smiled at her. They all had pretty smiles.

The man in the green coat smiled at her too.

She had given them something special. She had made them healthy. She was a good mother.

Dr. Bakeesh was harvesting CeeCee's fertilized eggs when Administrator Stoddard came in from the viewing room. Stoddard's starched white coat rustled as he walked. He stopped at a safe distance, tapped his handheld, and peered at the patient.

"She's in REM now, isn't she?" Stoddard asked.

"Yes," Bakeesh replied. "We give her pleasant dreams whenever we do a procedure. She's happier after she dreams."

"How do you know the dreams are pleasant? The war generates nightmares for most."

Bakeesh placed the last egg in the collection vial and told his nurse to begin closing. He pulled off his surgical smock and gloves, then scrubbed his hands. "She smiles sometimes. See?"

With a soapy finger, he pointed at CeeCee's face. One corner of her mouth was slightly raised.

Stoddard sighed. "She's lucky. Despite the sacrifices, she's happy. I wish I could be. So many children have been lost — I warned them the brains of young children aren't developed enough to manage the neural interface of the new weapons. But what choice did we have?"

"Not much." Bakeesh swallowed. His small son had suffered a stroke at the Neural Academy. But the older boys and girls were already fighting at the front. Only the young ones were available for training. "How bad is it?"

The Administrator checked his handheld. "Brain injuries are up fifty percent in two months. The neurology ward is overflowing."

Bakeesh looked at his sleeping charge. "Maybe she's happy because of her sacrifices. She knows she's helping. Not everyone can know that." Bakeesh moved to the head of the bed. He stroked CeeCee's face with a finger. He liked the feel of her skin. Her smile broadened.

Stoddard looked at the collection vial on the surgical tray. "That's a nice crop."

"She's a good producer. She'll be one of my best."

Stoddard tapped his handheld and glanced at the figures. "Did you check the stats before you began harvesting? We've reached our baby limit for the month. The Neural Academy's full. You can't allow those eggs to produce children."

Bakeesh scowled at Stoddard. "I wouldn't burden the Academy with more kids than they can feed. I know how limited resources are."

Stoddard looked surprised. "She's not a Qualified Breeder?"

Bakeesh cupped CeeCee's face with one hand. She was still beautiful. "No, she's not authorized to make children. She suffered epigenetic damage from a neural virus during the first wave of the invasion. She's just a startup incubator."

Stoddard nodded. "So she's not genetically healthy enough to breed, but still a soldier in the service of her world. Too bad she can't fight now."

Bakeesh smiled proudly. "She has a higher calling. There's a piece of her in each kid in that neurology ward."

"Ah. A stem cell donor."

"Yes. Even with the increased casualties, our eggs should meet their transplant needs through spring."

The Administrator patted Bakeesh's shoulder. "You're sacrificing too."

"We all do what we can." Bakeesh draped his green coat over CeeCee and gave her hand a gentle squeeze. He kissed the top of her head. He loved his wife.

She smiled dreamily.