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## Transplant

by Melvin L. Clermont

Today was the most smashing Thanksgiving Day I had ever seen and I thought it would be cold. But it was quite warm, around 50 degrees, without a cloud in the sky and a welcome breeze. A far cry from what I was used to. Just up the street, the Macy's balloons were in the air, waiting to be taken for their annual morning walk to entertain all of these families that had come to see them. The floats were ready to be taken for a ride so admirers such as myself could marvel at their presence. Celebrities got themselves camera-ready while balloon handlers and marching bands got in formation. Float drivers also idled their vehicles before the excitement began.

Police allowed tourists to take photos of the parade stars before they went into action with the American Museum of Natural History serving as a picturesque and appropriate background. Further down the street along the parade route, people lined up on the pavement and the edges of the streets, camcorders and cameras in hand. Everyone was smiling and seemed to be happy even though nothing had happened yet. Small children were propped up on high shoulders in the back rows.

Almost everyone was dressed down for the occasion since the weather was being cooperative. People from more tropical climates were easy to spot though. My tattered knickers and trench coat, tangled beard, and uncombed hair made me easy to spot too, but I wasn't as welcome as they were. Security kept the streets clear but they allowed people to cross that were still looking for a

good viewing area or that didn't care about the parade at all and had other destinations in mind.

My destination was the halfway point of the parade route which is Columbus Circle where the balloons and floats take a detour onto Broadway before retiring down the street. There is a statue of Christopher Columbus in the roundabout that serves as a centerpiece for the huge Time Warner Center behind me. I heard that the city had decided to start a new tradition in this location. Now they'd start serving a hot Thanksgiving meal to homeless people like me much to the dismay of people that lived in and frequent the Center. But having unsightly trespassers once a year was a sacrifice that the building owners were willing to put up with for good public relations, I'm sure.

The Salvation Army was sponsoring the outdoor buffet. Utility tables with red-and-white plaid table cloths laid upon them encircled the statue. There were two servers behind every table. One of them was the son of one of the servers. Just a little blonde-haired boy, probably about two or three-years-old. He was smiling and had on the cutest little red Salvation Army apron and a Garfield rucksack while holding a ladle; ready to serve the gravy in front of him on the table. His nametag said Henry. Such innocence and tact made me proud.

Silver pans of hot food such as macaroni and cheese, turkey, and cranberry sauce lined the tables as some of the other homeless of New York slowly began entering the area from the south corner of the building and from the north where I walked from. Greeters awaited and gave us paper plates and utensils upon our entrance. No matter where we may be in the city, the smell of

good food will always attract us like seagulls to the ocean. It had taken me some months to get here to take care of some business and I wasn't particularly accustomed to these recipes. So I decided to please my palate and lolly about for a spell.

I was only able to see because of a pair of taped-up spectacles I found in Central Park. Without them, I was no better than a blind man and my first few months here weren't the most memorable. There were a lot of coppers around our eating area which happened to be the cold cement ground, but there were no complaints from any of us because we had sat and slept on worse. One of them approached me and just for a bit, I wondered why.

"Excuse me. You need to come with me," the officer told me very close to my ears in a stern tone holding a baton in his right hand. It was like he knew that my hearing wasn't the best in the world. The homeless sitting around me simply grabbed their plates from the ground and walked away. I could see in his eyes that he wasn't in control of himself and I knew I was getting closer to finding Godfrey.

"And where is it that you'll be taking me if you don't mind me asking?" And at the finish of that sentence was when horns began to blare, drums began to beat, and confetti dropped from the sky as the parade was officially started.

Ever since I had been here, my voice hadn't been the same. It hurt to talk and that's why I rarely did. But the pain would be worth it now that it appeared I had reached the end of my journey.

"You already know the answer to that, Elmo," he said in a higher tone so I could hear him over the festivities. "Just come with me calmly and don't make a scene." He gently grabbed my left arm to escort me away. I left my plate on the ground and it didn't even take a millisecond for someone to start eating from it.

"There a problem, Murphy?" another copper said to the one that had me by the arm as we walked to the entrance of the Center.

"Naw, Lewis. I just gotta ask this guy a few questions about somethin'. No biggie. I got it," he replied.

"Okay. Gimme a holla if he gives you a problem, a'right?"

"Yep." The officer took me inside through the spacious lobby where the upper crusts didn't even bother to stop and stare as if this was an ordinary occurrence. Or maybe they didn't even care because they had their own matters to tend to.

"So Godfrey, why are you doing this when you know what I plan on doing once I see you?" I said to this officer who I guess went by the name Murphy as we waited for a lift. In a place as busy as this, I figured more people to be waiting here with us, but there was no one. And I quickly figured out why. He grabbed the spectacles off my face and threw them into an expensive looking wastebasket next to us as we walked in. A little too much detail for a trash can in my opinion. Just when I was soaking in the ambiance of the place my sight was taken away from me. Lucky for me I saw where Murphy kept his gun before he blinded me.

"Do you think for even half a second that you'd even be allowed in the interior of such a place if this cop wasn't with you?" said Murphy in a normal tone since the lift was so quiet. "Don't be a fool, Elmo. You've waited a long time for this moment and I'm giving it to you on a silver platter. Just be patient and I'll give you your chance to give me a piece of your mind," he said in a non-New York voice as he appeared to type in a code and then pressed a button to take us to a higher floor.

We were on our way up in the clear glass lift and I was sure the view looking down was spectacular but it was all a blur without my spectacles. I was sure someone had to find it weird that Murphy was taking me into the building rather than out of it.

"I'll save my words for when I see you since you know how it hurts for me to talk. You're responsible for that after all."

We came to a stop high up and switched lifts. When we went up in that one, we got out on a floor where the carpet and walls were a mixture of light and dark blue colors that matched the officer's uniform. Murphy still had me firmly by the arm as we walked forward through a short hall until we came to a large brown door that clashed with the blues. Then the door opened inwards as if we were expected. My old friend Godfrey welcomed us with the usual smirk on his face.

"Welcome, Elmo. It's been a few months, hasn't it?" He said, tightening what looked like a white robe as me and Murphy walked in and sat down on a sofa.

"I can't see that well right now but I can see well enough to know the strain of controlling us both and the people in the lobby back then is taking its toll on you. What will you do when your effect on us wears off? I know what I'll do," I said, pointing to Murphy's gun who still had me by the arm even as we sat.

"When it does, believe me, you of all people will know," he said, taking a seat across from us in a recliner which he got comfortable in, waving his long silver hair to the side. "You've come for revenge for my killing Juni just like before, but you will fail as you did then..."

"He trusted us with the implant and you betrayed him by using it to kill him? That just can't go unpunished. Not by me. As long as I'm alive, I'll avenge him," I said angrily as I tried to get up to attack him but he was still controlling me and Murphy yanked me back down.

The Juni he was referring to was Junichiro, our lab partner in Germany. He moved there from Japan when he heard of my research in wireless technology. Ironically, my name was the same as the man who pioneered it and that was only because my mother was Italian and insisted upon it. Juni created a microscopic brain implant that allowed someone referred to as the master to see through the eyes of and sometimes control another person with a different implant called the slave. It was supposed to be used in military applications but Godfrey decided otherwise.

Godfrey was my partner before Juni came along. He's from South Africa and I'm from Great Britain. All of our loves for science and invention brought us together. We were both blown away by Juni's creation. It was truly unique. The

only problem that existed was that Juni needed to use it on people rather than animals like he had been to test it to its full capabilities. Me and Godfrey eagerly volunteered to be his subjects. Unfortunately, Juni chose Godfrey as the master. And, the genius that he is, he found an unknown that allowed the master to control not only the slave but also anyone else within a still unspecified range of the slave implant.

"Whatever floats your boat, Elmo," he said. "You don't know what I'm capable of now but you'll find out soon enough. And have the pleasure of knowing that you contributed to it." I could see the smile on his face when he said that. "You created your 'world wireless' blueprints which are still stamped within your head and that was going to allow the entire world to be connected for free via the three satellites you need to build. An admirable feat and your vision is why I partnered with you to begin with, my friend. That vision is the future. And then along came Juni and his creation."

Godfrey got up and walked over to what had to be his liquor bar because I could hear the clanging of the glasses and bottles and it didn't take him long to pour his drink. No one drinks water in that small of an amount, I don't think.

"Friends don't kill friends in cold blood," I said.

"He never bled and I never put my hands on him. And if I did, I could simply transplant any evidence to clear myself of any wrongdoing, which I did. So I would've been free and clear either way. Free to move about and explore the finer things in life. Like this penthouse. Much better than my previous quarters, isn't it?" He sat back down in the recliner.

He was referring to how he used his transplant technique to get away with murder. He patented a surgical procedure which could change anyone's identity to fool any biometric scanner; most of which are located in airports. He fled the country after Juni was found strangled to death and a homeless man was found to be the suspect. But I knew that he performed the technique on himself and transplanted the homeless man's hands with his own.

I called him a genius before and he's earned the title. How many doctors can perform surgery on themselves? Especially with such delicacy. What he does is transplant the skin. The fingerprints, eyes, footprints, teeth...the things that can identify a person when scanned or autopsied. He can even change the bone structure of a face. Who knows what else he can do. And he does it so well that any marks or cuts are completely unnoticeable. He is amazing. But he is diabolical. Unlike German authorities, I knew he was the one who killed Juni. I knew it in my gut.

He fled the country for reasons of glory. Because he was off the hook successfully and he knew he had perfected his technique enough to fool professionals, he came to the US to profit from it, leaving me with the lab and all of its debt. I abandoned everything there and stalked him out of revenge since slaves can backtrace the location of their masters. When I found him, he was living in a shanty in Albany. I was blinded with rage and had completely forgotten what Juni had put inside my brain. And as a genius and the master, Godfrey knew I was coming. He knew more about Juni's creation than Juni did.

I thought his quest for fame, power, and glory was a failure by the unsightliness of the neighborhood he was in, but it was all a ruse. He captured me and performed his technique on me instead of outright killing me to shut me up and cover his own tracks. I think his ego may have been a part of it, too.

He had killed the previous resident of the home and transplanted all of my scannable parts with his and he reconstructed my face. Next thing I remembered, I woke up in an alley in Hoboken across the water. My 20/20 vision was gone and finding those spectacles was a godsend. When I saw myself, I didn't know who I had become until I was scanned for the first time. I also had other problems that I didn't have before. At first I thought his procedure had failed on me but he knew exactly what he was doing.

"You think I don't know how you got this place?" I said. "You never had the money before and you haven't been here long enough to afford such luxury. You did another transplant procedure, didn't you bugger? Where's the person who really owns this place, hm?"

He finished his drink quickly and got up from his chair. He walked over to the window.

"Ah, Guglielmo. Ever observant as usual. It matters not how I got here. All that matters is that I *am* here. And so are you. I don't need *you*. But I do *need* you." I didn't know what he meant by that. I could sense weakness in his voice. The strain on him was getting stronger and I could feel his hold weakening on me. Murphy's gun was going to be the end of all this. If only I had my spectacles.

"If only you had them indeed, eh Elmo?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"Did you know that I found another use for Juni's implant? The world isn't wireless yet, but it will be thanks to you. For now though, only certain parts of it are. I can tap into those wavelengths. Those same wavelengths that pass through everyone. That are so similar to the wavelengths produced by the human brain once manipulated. The brain which holds knowledge...and memories. Do you think it's a coincidence that I allowed you to make it this far after all these months, Elmo? That you'd find me here by chance on your own? Spare me. The only strain on my person is having the patience to let things play out as they must."

I was baffled by his revelation, the bastard genius that he is. And for the moment, I could do nothing. I let him talk so that I could get more info from him before I made my move on him. A move that would either prove fruitful or fatal. All the odds in the world were against me. But if I died, I'd know it wasn't without effort.

"Nothing to say now, eh?" he said. "Do you need a drink for your dry throat? Or a hearing aid for your weak ears? Robert Pachenko lived with them for decades. Why couldn't you just do the same? You could have prolonged the inevitable and enjoyed your life while it was still your own, but it's too late for that now, isn't it?"

"Who is this Robert you speak of?" I tried to play dumb although I knew full well who it was since I had been scanned multiple times. It was too late for prolonging anything, so it was a foolish question to ask.

"You'll agree with me when I say that I don't have to answer that one. It's time, Guglielmo. No more games. Time for this 'bastard genius' as you call me to take things to the next level. To end the charades. I'm ready now. *We're* ready. Me, you, and Juni. Together again just like old times. Go ahead and take the gun and then you will be free."

The son of a bitch strung me along the whole time. I was getting the feeling that all of this was part of something bigger. But what?

Murphy let me go and pulled out his gun. He held it out as if he wanted me to take it. The last thing I wanted was to be mollycoddled. I could feel no pressure on my cerebellum from the implant. Godfrey wasn't controlling me anymore.

"What's your plan, Godfrey? You claim you need me but you don't need me? What's that mean? Why don't you face me man to man? I thought you said no more games?" I said, standing up with my fists clinched. The sun started shining into the windows hurting my eyes with the light. I could barely see him standing against it. Because of my blurred vision, he looked almost...angelic.

"Why bother when you'll be the one who ends your own life? You'll be seeing me again soon, so why leave on bad terms? Go ahead and take the gun."

I had to think. He knew my memories somehow. He knew what I was thinking. Things that have passed. Things that are present. But what about my future thoughts and actions? What about spontaneity? I grabbed the gun as fast as I could and shot at him three times but I could still barely see. I heard no glass break so the windows must have been well constructed. I heard no screams of pain from him either so I must have missed, even at such close range. I fired no further shots to avoid unwanted attention.

"Blast you, Godfrey. Don't think for a second that this is over. I'll be back to finish this," I told him running toward a large brown area on the wall that I thought was the door but it was actually just the wall itself painted brown in that spot.

"The door handle is several feet to your right, Elmo. I'll allow you to run to devise another..."

"Cobblers! It's now or never," I yelled, tossing the gun away. I ran towards what I thought was him and tackled him. His shiny white clothes and hair weren't hard to miss. I only got in one punch before I stopped and realized it was Murphy that I tackled and hit. Now he was manipulating my reality...or was I just barking mad? What else could he do? He retrieved the tossed gun and handed it to Murphy as I backed away.

"Go after him, Murphy. And call your comrades below," he said as Murphy got up chasing me out the door, down the hall, and into the lift. Once inside and on our way down, any aggression towards me he may have had

disappeared. But he put on a stellar voice act that could have won him an award.

"Lewis, 98 with me on the first floor and bring backup. That perp I brought in...he got a little crazy on me and I'm gonna take him in...He's already popped me once...Hold on, dammit, stop resisting...Lewis..." he yelled with heavy breathing during the performance, banging against the door and walls for sound effects before we had to switch lifts so that people wouldn't watch him doing a one man act.

Once we switched and got low enough for people to pay attention was when he did a reenactment, but this time it was a two man show. We struggled with each other, and below in the lobby I could see several blots of blue in front of the lift and what had to be a crowd forming behind them. He grabbed me and threw me to the ground and practically gave me his gun. He pulled the trigger as I was forced to hold it into his vest-protected belly. He wasn't dead but he was squirming in pain.

To the crowd, it would appear as if I did it. But it was actually Godfrey the entire time and they were none the wiser. And no stops on the way up or down either time? Him again.

We reached the first floor in the lobby. The door opened to a bevy of blue and more noise than a transport train. Godfrey had no control over me as I walked out with my hands up and the gun in my right hand. They incessantly ordered me to drop it and get down on the ground. As I was going to drop the

weapon, although I couldn't completely understand what was said, I heard a cry from a woman over everything else.

"Henry, no! Where are you going? What..." and a small child holding something orange ran towards me. I grabbed the child and held him close in my arms and began to run outside.

"Drop the boy! Drop the boy! Drop him and you won't get shot! Drop him," is all I could make out from the coppers yelling over one another.

"Are you daft, boy? Those bobbies will kill us both. This is no place for you to be right now," I said maniacally, still running to the exit.

My intention was to protect him from the situation and they actually let me get all the way out into Columbus Circle without shooting me. I still had the gun--like a plank--and the homeless people and servers scattered like cockroaches with the lights just turned on. The parade was in mid-swing and was moving through the halfway point. Even with all the coppers yelling and people running away from the situation, parade viewers across the streets seemed to be in unawares of the dire straits at hand because it looked to me like they stayed put. The parade continued and the music played uninterrupted and I found it quite rummy.

"Run, lad! Run away from here," I yelled to him, but he clinged to my coat like glue. He was close enough to me now that I could see his blonde hair. His little red apron. The Garfield face on his sack. And I could feel his name tag. It was Henry. And he wasn't crying even in the slightest during this heciticity. Then

it hit me. This was Godfrey's doing. And he was willing to sacrifice the innocents in order to use me as a pawn for whatever game he was playing.

I couldn't even fathom how much power he had gained from the implant to allow him to orchestrate such a scene. The thought of never coming here entered my mind briefly, but all regrets left me in a fit of final rage. The confusion made me forget all of the obvious signs and I couldn't recognize any of them when I needed to. The realization that all of this was nothing more than a demonstration for his ego made me lose control.

"Godfrey, you blinking bastard! Damn you to bloody hell," I yelled, looking up into the sky, firing the gun with the boy in hand. The end result of all this was no surprise. I saw Henry's bloody corpse in front of me as I lay on the cement. My last visual before everything went black was of the parade's Garfield balloon deflating in the distance as it fell toward the statue and then onto me. I thought all of this some way or another had to be caught on telly or a security camera. But if it wasn't, it would be of no shock to me given what I had just experienced. Not that it mattered now anyway because I was dead. I came here with the intention of doing the bollocking but instead, I was bollocked.

Or so I thought. The very next thing I saw after seeing orange and black was a very well appointed bathroom. Where in blazes was I? I thought I was in heaven but I had no control over my body as I flushed the loo. I could see crystally clear and I saw that I was wearing something white. I walked over to wash my hands and caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror as I turned on the

tap. But it didn't look like me. When I looked up directly into the mirror, it wasn't me at all.

"Yet another use I found for Juni's implant, Elmo. Imagine the possibilities once those satellites are constructed and in orbit," Godfrey said with the usual smirk on his face.

No thoughts of malice entered into my mind which wasn't my own anymore. I only remembered what I said to him before about what I would do as long as I was alive. And technically, I still was.

The End

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