

Siân Davies - Affordable Beauty

There was electric classical music playing in the elevator when Alan Winterm alighted, his eyes fixed on the pre-released PDA in his hand. The silver ring he wore glinted in the cold, artificial light, dancing in his peripheral vision as he sent emails, replied to messages, booked appointments. He didn't look up when the elevator stopped at his penthouse, much in the same way he hadn't looked up when the valet had greeted him outside the office, or when the doorman had bowed his hello in the apartment lobby.

He didn't look up when his girlfriend beamed at him, taking his briefcase and his suit jacket, and he didn't look up when she set his mail and a coffee down on the imported rosewood table.

"Your brother called, Mister Winterm." She cooed, standing beside him as he sat in the lush, leather couch. He turned the TV on. Riots, again. He rolled his eyes and rubbed his temples to stave off the first twinges of a headache. He felt nothing but disdain for the poor, unintelligent saps on the screen, protesting noisily outside the building he'd bought his girl from.

She didn't seem to remember it, or care, but that didn't surprise Alan. She didn't remember or care about anything he didn't tell her to. She'd been given to him a blank slate, armed with perfect bone structure and pre-trained to cook, clean and be beautiful. Once, when he was drunk, he'd asked her if she remembered who she was before. Before she was modified to his specifications. Before her brain was wiped clean. Before Elysium Genetics made her "the most perfect version of you you can be."

Sometimes she cried. Sometimes he caught her staring at a picture of his parents that hung in the guest room. He'd have to get a refund if she kept it up. He made a note of that in his PDA.

"What did he want?" He mumbled, half watching a beautiful red headed woman being beaten down by two police officers outside of the Elysium building. What a shame, he thought. No doubt she'd end up back at the same building later in the year, willing to be "perfect" rather than try and survive in prison. She had the looks for it.

His girl, who he'd called Ivy, sparked back to life, her eyes widening at the sound of his voice. "Your brother wanted to talk to you about a recent complication with his wife's pregnancy."

"Jesus." Alan half hissed, half laughed. Was Ivy a crack addict before she went to Elysium? Had she wanted to kill herself? That was the usual driftwood that entered the shimmering steel doors. Lost women. Poor women. Broken women. "Fix me!" They beg, and Elysium

opens their arms. Come, little girl, and we'll make you perfect. We break your mind and remake it how your owner wishes you to be.

Ivy didn't have a family that she remembered. She didn't have a skill or a talent that he hadn't requested her to have. She'd cost him a lot of money.

He drank his coffee, waving her off to make dinner. The riot on the TV was replaced by a friendly, brightly coloured advert for Perpet, a company that specialised in animals the same way Elysium specialised in women. All the police dogs came from Perpet, he knew that.

It was after he'd eaten the wild mushroom risotto Ivy made and taken three of his genocaine tablets that his brother called again.

"Al?" His brother started, premeditated outrage in his voice. "Al, you gotta talk some sense in to Helen."

"Slow down, Rick," Alan groaned, stretching in his seat, the genocaine making him dopey, taking the edge off the headache that was threatening the inside of his skull. "What's wrong with Helen?"

"Everything!" His brother's voice shrieked, piercing Alan's ear. He furrowed his brow with temporary anger, then waved his hand at Ivy. Immediately she appeared behind him, rubbing his temples, running her nails over his scalp.

"Clarify." He mumbled, and Rick was only too willing to assist.

"As if it wasn't bad *enough* that she lied about her G-Mods, you know, last summer? We'd been married for *two years* before she dropped that little bombshell! I knew I should have left her, but God damn it I love her, you know? Anyway, so I'm married to this unmodified *liar*, and she wants a baby. Ok, I say, we can have a baby, but I get to pick the G-Mods. You know, make him fast, make him strong, smart, give him the edge, you know?"

Alan did know. He'd undergone routine genetic modification before he was even born. His parents picked his keen foresight, his fantastic memory, made sure he'd never get a disease and that his body and mind would be, in a way Elysium's girls would never be, perfect. It was the only thing he was grateful to them for. He groaned at Ivy's hands making their way to his tense neck, and that was answer enough for Rick.

"Anyway, we're getting to the point where we need - I need - to decide our baby's G-Mods - she's been putting this off for ages, weeks, God damn it, and then she says to me today, listen to this, Alan, she says, I don't want G-Mods for the baby, I want him to be natural and healthy. Whatever that means! She used your headaches as a reason not to, can you believe that? Said that genocaine will kill you one day and she doesn't want that for our baby, she doesn't want our baby growing up all - listen to this - *genetically mutated* she called it. Can you believe that?"

Alan could believe it. Helen had always been a bit stupid, a bit slow. It didn't surprise him at all that she wouldn't want to G-Mod her

baby. In a world of affordable beauty, there was something heraldic about her poor looks and intelligence. He shook his head. Poor kid.

“Anyway -”

“Stop saying anyway.” Alan growled under his breath, Ivy's hands moving down over his shoulders.

“Anyway, Alan, I told her that was the cruellest thing she could do to him! Can you imagine going through school the stupidest kid in class because Mommy didn't want you to be 'unnatural'? Christ, I knew I should have divorced her. Anyway, you have to talk some sense into her. Tell her your headaches aren't that bad, make her see how terrible life without G-Mods would be. She'll listen to you.”

Alan took a deep breath through his nose and hung up. The news was back on the TV, the protesters waving banners and boards before the police tore them down. Imperfections in a perfect society. A society of perfect women, perfect pets, and perfect properties. People like Helen, people like the red headed woman, they ruined it. He turned off the TV. Ivy's hands stopped moving.

“Mister Winterm?” She whispered, tentative, how he liked.

He pushed a hand back through his thick, full hair. “Get me a genocaine and a scotch, Ivy.” He whispered.

While she scampered off, he stared in front of him. A world of affordable beauty. Where your past life could be completely erased. He could see Ivy's reflection in the TV screen. Who was she, before all this? Before she was retaught, retrained, reprogrammed? What did she hope for, what was her first memory? Ivy couldn't remember being a child. Ivy would never be sick. Ivy would never feel, think, or hope for anything he didn't tell her to.

Ivy was perfect.

My name is Siân, it's Welsh but I'm not. I live in a tiny rural town in Shropshire, selling people kettles and trying to learn how to write.