En passant

Family ties.

**Michalis Barkoulas
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"White or black?" asked Franck with a quivering voice while he was poured another glass of French brandy.

"I'd rather play black," little Frank replied.

Franck had expected that answer, so he wasn't surprised. "Sure. Why don't you assemble the pieces and I can take care of the music," he said, and started walking towards the stereo. He looked confused, as if he didn't know what melodies would best suit the occasion. He was quite nervous too. This was the moment he had been waiting for for a long time, and, despite all the forethought, he still felt like a fish out of water. "What about some funky jazz?" Franck asked.

"Why not? That's my favourite," little Frank replied, and they both laughed with gusto.

"I think it's reasonable to expect a tie," Franck pointed out in an attempt to further break the ice, and looked at little Frank with a cunning smile. Then he tapped the edge of the table, 'pam-pam', officially denoting the beginning of the game. As white plays first, Franck decided to kick off with a standard move: pawn to E3. Little Frank wasted no time and confidently moved a pawn to B6.

Franck was a proficient chess player. He had an everlasting, almost erotic relationship with his expensive, silver board. He also had a passion for reading books about the game: books about chess tactics and chess problems. Many books. Even on the psychology of the game. He was a psychologist by trade. Like little Frank, he would always choose black. Not because game theory suggests that black is advantageous, but because Franck was waiting to perform psychoanalysis. "I want you exposed first," he used to say. "After all, that's my job!" He strongly believed that the way you play reveals a lot about your personality. If you follow an offensive tactic, you are aggressive and a risk-taker. If you take your time over each move, then you are careful and diffident. After so many years of correspondence, he could finally spend a few precious minutes together with little Frank. And playing chess was the perfect chance for Franck to remain calm and get an idea of what kind of a person little Frank was.

"Bishop to C4," Franck announced, and then immediately lit his pipe. "I forgot to ask you, do you smoke, Frank?"

Frank moved his knight to C6. "Yes, I always have, but only in secret. They don't want us to die young like Dolly. Dollies are bad publicity for the company, they say."

The arrangement between Franck and the cloning company was simple and not negotiable. They request your genes to develop their protocols. You need the money, so you sign the ED (ethical dilemma) form.

If the cloning

works, you receive an automatic confirmation phone call. You do get to choose the name, but, apart from that, no further action is required. In fact, the company stipulates that you don't make contact with your clone, so as to avoid emotional repercussions. Franck still remembered the day he found out about the existence of little Frank.

"Please spell out the name of your clone after the beep. May I remind you that, according to the terms of our legal agreement, it is compulsory to choose a name for your clone that is distinct from your own name. Beeeep." But Franck was an old-school romantic and found that notion ridiculous. "How can I choose a different name for ... myself?" "FRANK," Franck said, "F-R-A-N-K."

Franck moved his queen to F3. "Look out, little Frank, you are in trouble there!"

But Frank didn't seem to bother and quickly moved his bishop to B7. "What a careless move," Franck thought. "He looks aggressive, but what do you expect from a child who has been on his own from the very early days?" But soon, another thought interrupted his logic: "Gosh, he looks so much like me when I was younger."

There were only two things Franck hated in other people: stinginess and lies. Not disliked, but hated, venomously. "Stingy people are shallow," he used to say, and he wouldn't talk to a person again if he realized they were stingy. But, on this occasion, he was delighted to see that little Frank was not penurious. "A full bottle of vintage Napoleon brandy when he is still a psychology student! What a generous gift this is." He had no doubts about Frank telling

lies either. "Loathing lies is so strong in my mind that I am sure it must be encoded in my genes," Franck thought proudly. So, little Frank must surely be honest. "His name is Frank, after all," he observed.

"Queen to F7 and ... I am afraid it's over!" Franck said apologetically, declaring a precocious finale to the game.

"Oh no! How did I not see that coming?" little Frank replied. "I think I underestimated your Napoleon opening," he added, and sipped down the remaining brandy in his glass.

"Will I see you again ... Dad?" he asked hurriedly, but they both realized how funny that statement was, and avoided making promises.

It was on the runaway train when Frank felt remorseful over stealing the brandy from an off-licence and the black king from Franck's favourite board. He wept with frustration. His life flashed in front of his eyes: several unsuccessful attempts to get into university, no real family, many fears and lies, and no hopes. Fuelled with desperation, he slowly opened his fist, releasing the king from his grasp. "Check-mate," he whispered, and chewed the conium leaves. ■

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