

TED AGONISTES

A job for life.

BY RAHUL KANAKIA

Why won't the message get through that I am important, so important, and that whenever people come around the office and see me wedged into the little desk right by the door, they should know that I am the one who is really in charge?

Didn't the boss once say to me: "We couldn't run this place without all of you"? But he really did not mean you in the plural but you in the singular, meaning just me, because all the other 'me's they've created were just created from me.

You people walk in and think, "Oh, it's just another Ted. And I'll treat him like I treat the other Teds. I'll smile at him. He dies for a smile. He's maladaptive in a way that perfectly adapts him for high-stress environments." I read the reports. They wrote the reports after talking to me. I'm not another Ted, I am *the* Ted.

The other Teds do not believe me. I see them everywhere now. They're phasing out the Bills, replacing them with Teds. So there are clones of me wedged into tiny desks behind the doors of half the offices in this building: by 2051 it'll be half the offices in the world, or so Xerogenesis' statements say. I am a stockholder in Xerogenesis. I bought one stock in the company, just so I would get their quarterly statements and their newsletter to shareholders. I used to go to their big meetings down on Amelia Island in Florida. I'd catheterize myself and drive down, 15 hours from Friday night to Saturday morning and take a quick nap in my car, then go to the meetings, but all the executives started getting confused and telling me to handle their appointments and shooing me away to the upstairs rooms where their Teds were working. So I don't go anymore.

You don't want to hear this, but I am the real Ted. My semen cells were the ones double-dipped and recombined to make fetuses of me. I am the real one. I was the one who grew up in that third-floor apartment in Omaha. I was the one who looked behind the couches every morning to see if there were little chunky messes to clean up before the stink of my mom's regurgitated



dinner seeped into every inch of the house.

I wasn't born in a crèche, though I wish I had been. I think I would have liked it. At least in the crèche, the Teds know they're important, they know they'll get taken care of, as long as they do their job and find all the messes before the shift manager sounds the alarm. I never had that assurance.

Of course I'm a Ted, I had myself registered with the agency and everything. Looking the way I do, it was the only way to get a job. No one wants to hire an unlicensed Ted: he might have gone bad since leaving the crèche. But I'm somehow less than a Ted. Because I was not subjected to quality-control scrutiny, I'm not eligible for Ted-Care. And employers won't give it, not to me. I can't talk with the other Teds about life in the crèches, or the sweaty adolescent

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orgies inside the tight little blind spots in the network of video cameras. And I'm older than them, much older, and

more ugly, and they look at me like I am a stranger.

I'm less than them, when I should be more. But no one is interested in my life. Even nice Dr Avery, he lost his professorship and stays at home all the time now, except for a few meetings a year with Xerogenesis people. He won't even answer my e-mails. I understand. He's ashamed of me. But why? I'm a human being. I'm like them, like all of everyone. No one exploited me. No one enslaved me.

I signed those papers, and I got my pension. I'll get it soon enough. The money's in the account, I can see it. I'm not stupid, though, you know. That's a pretty common misconception. I'm not stupid. I can read the reports. I know that they don't think I will live past 65. But what do they know? They are not gods. They can't predict the future.

I eat right. I exercise. I'm slim and trim and I have just one goal. I'm going to live to be a hundred. We all are. We all have our pensions, guaranteed from birth. That's what the report said. We're going to live to be a hundred, and I'll be the first. I'll show the hundreds of thousands, the millions, the tens of millions, show them all the way.

They'll stop making us, but then it'll be too late. We'll come up from the underground, and oh... not do anything much. I will not remake the world with my doing, I will only remake it with my being. We'll live to be a hundred, and sit at desks behind the doors of tiny rooms. And we'll scratch away at keyboards. But we'll own the desks, and the rooms and the keyboards. We'll own everything.

You're smiling at me, and I know that you're thinking about all the little Teds sitting perfectly quiet for hours at a time, knowing that if they make a move they definitely won't get to eat, and knowing that even if they don't move, they still might not get to eat.

But I will get to eat. I'll eat my fill. I know it. ■

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