Brian & Andy

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Two identical 12 year old boys wake in a fallout shelter, both believing the other to be their copy

For more from Joel Allyn please visit http://th3scribbl3r.wordpress.com/
Brian searches the bookshelf for the perfect book. He’s familiarized himself with the available library during their stay, however long it’s been – the only clock is frozen at 11:23. They are the only company he has here besides Andy. Andy sticks to the movies, says he doesn’t like any of the books they have, but Brian thinks if they had every book ever written it wouldn’t interest Andy any more than the eighty or so at their disposal now. Just another reminder they aren’t completely identical. On the outside they’re almost a mirror image of one another. Both thin boys around twelve, with chestnut hair just below ear length. They are both in jeans but Andy wears a blue, yellow and red striped polo shirt and Brian has on a grey t-shirt.

Brian looks around the small room they share, looks at the stone steps leading up to the metal door, and the light above it which they both silently hope will turn from red to green. He looks over the rest of his windowless white haven. Most of it at the moment is of little interest to him, the shelves lining the wall filled with records and movies where Andy sits before a glowing screen, his back to Brian. The bathroom and washing stations behind the curtain, the extinguisher and the first aid box hanging adjacent on one wall and the large mirror on another, the oversized red area rug trying in vain to warm the place, he passes over all of it without pause. His eyes settle on the wall that houses the bookshelf on one side of their cots and the pantry shelf and fridge on the other, Andy’s side. How long, Brian wonders will all that food and water last? The air filtration systems, or tanks, or whatever the hell keeps pumping air through the vents seems to be fine - though he still worries that any moment toxic gas from outside the door will come seeping through. The rest though, how long will the rest last? It’s enough for a long time sure, but maybe not long enough, and the way Brian figures, it’ll last just about half as long as it would if he were here alone.
He wouldn’t mind sharing if it was his family with him, he’s not greedy, that’s not it, but Andy is just a copy. He isn’t real. There’s not much difference these days, that’s true, but even with blood and living tissue, a perfect copy is still just that, a copy. It’s not a person, it wasn’t born. It was created, and let’s skip the test tube baby point or we’ll be here all day. Brian might feel a little worse about it if he could even remember how the hell he’d ended up in here with Andy in the first place. He can remember everything before getting here and everything since he woke up staring into his own face without the aid of a mirror, but he must have blocked out finding Andy and then the shelter. And he has to be a replica, Brian has a brother and a sister, but no long-lost-twins, last he checked. Before everything was silent and grey, there were folks rallying and demanding rights for the copies, even to charge those who killed them with murder. Brian doubts that trying him will be a top priority in whatever new world comes next. Not just because they’ll be busy either, Brian knows in his heart that the survivors will understand. They say humans can get used to almost anything, but it seems most of us never get used to the idea of dying, and do what we have to survive.

Brian is still before the book shelf, running his fingers over the spines when he hears the familiar squeak of Andy’s chair swiveling around, “Just pick one already, haven’t you read all of them by now anyway?”

“Haven’t you seen that movie?” No response is given, and after another moment the chair squeaks again.

Any correspondence has become short and clipped – and usually derisive - since the fight. Brian had finally lost it, watching Andy enjoying his day’s rations, and grabbed the food away, yelling at him that he was just a copy and didn’t need it, just thought he did, was programmed to. Andy had the nerve to deny it, even going so far as to claim that it was Brian
that was the copy of him. The argument went on, got vicious and eventually physical, both
drawing blood from the other. They’ve since been forced to dance the awkward ballet of those
feuding in tight spaces.

Brian takes *War and Peace* down off the shelf, passes it from one hand to the other, *too heavy*, and then puts it back without opening it. He’ll feel when it’s the right book. He’ll *know*. Just like he knows he is not a copy, he just knows. The thought occurs to him that Andy may feel the same way. This is more troubling to him than he would like to admit. So he asks Andy what he’s been asking himself since the fight.

“How do you know you’re real?”

There is no squeak this time, but after a second there is a reply, “I just know. You can feel it when you’re real.”

“So then how do you know I’m not?” Brian asks.

Another second, then after a small squeak, “I don’t know. Maybe you are - maybe we’re twins or something.”

Brian turns and looks Andy in the eye, “We’re not. You know we’re not.”

“All I know is I’m real.” He says.

Brian pulls *The Brothers Karamazov*, repeats the hand to hand gesture, *too light*, and returns Dostoevsky just above Tolstoy.

“How do you remember how we got here?”

“How?”
“Everything was, well ya know, it was happening, and I got lost. Then I found you, or you were already here when I found the shelter, I don’t really remember. But I woke up and found you lying on the cot next to me, figured you’d got us in here.”

Brian starts to tell himself that must be exactly what happened, that he just blacked out, met Andy and got them both safely inside. Yes, that sounds right. It feels wrong, but it sounds right. He continues perusing the titles with his fingers, and asks something without looking at Andy. “What else do you remember, from before?”

“Everything,” Andy says.

“Go on. I just want to see if they really give you all my memories.”

“I have a family. My little brother Jimmy, Sandra is my sister, and I have a dog named Ozzy who’s -”

“- a black shepherd your dad named after Asimov, his favorite science fiction author. God, it’s so creepy how they get all the details right.”

“I’m real!”

Brian gave him a thumb up, his eyes still on the books, “Okay, Pinocchio.”

“Kiss my ass, shitbrains,” another squeak.

Brian’s hand drops from the books it’s dancing over and falls to hover by his side. He turns and stares at the back of the chair. That eloquent phrase has been barked at Brian by his sister Sandra since before he could even say her name. It jarred him a little to hear this imposter, this fraud, use it as though it were his. It isn’t his! That face isn’t his, that voice isn’t his, none of it is his! The only things that belong to him are that stupid shirt and his name. He stole the rest. Or not. For just a moment Brian thinks that perhaps it’s true that it’s not Andy’s fault that he was created the way he was. But those words are too personal, they are sacred. It’s silly, he knows,
but they mean too much, they are like a hidden talisman helping to shield him against this farce and they have been violated by this vile doppelganger. Something about him using them made Brian finally lose his certainty, his feeling of knowing, and question whether he was really her little brother at all and that can’t be allowed. It crosses a line. Using that phrase and turning his back on Brian sealed his fate.

Brian exhumes *IT* from among the seven King selections. He tosses it hand to hand, hand to hand, *just right*, and then holds it tight in both. He feels the heft of it. It feels right. He walks up behind the chair, and as he does he again hears strange muffled noises from behind the mirror. He’s been hearing them but dismissed it as part of the movie. Now looking at the screen he sees that’s not the case. No matter. He walks around the left side of the chair to face Andy, who after ignoring him for a few moments sees the book in Brian’s hands.

> “What?! Finally found one you like, freak?”

Brian smiles, and tightens his grip, “Yup, it’s perfect.”

Brian waits until Andy’s attention is drawn back to the film. Once it is he pulls his arms back over his left shoulder, twisting his body tight like a coiled spring. Then he releases. The first shot connects hard to the face with loud thwack, shattering Andy’s nose. *We don’t look alike anymore, shitbrains.* The sound bounces through the room like the echo from a high dive belly flop. He feels the weight of the object in his grasp, sees the red of the polo shirt turn a dark crimson. Either the movie or the mirror suddenly gets louder. Andy screams and grabs at his face, he tries to get out of the chair but the second shot slams him back hard against the soft leather. The third shot to the face leaves him stunned and he drops his hands away, the fourth knocks him from the chair and his skull hits the rug below without a sound.
Brian is no longer smiling. He kicks Andy onto his back, kneels over him and brings the book down on the other boy’s head again, and again, and again. When he can’t bring it up above his head anymore, he grips both sides of the thick novel in hand like a rock, or a sandwich, and proceeds to smash the book down like a coconut on a white stone. He knows it isn’t the way they’re made anymore but he wants to see metal and bolts and cogs and springs and lights beneath the stripped synthetic skin, but as the skull caves under the force of the blows there is only a dark red pulp. Brian is crying as he continues to erase any semblance of a head, yelling into the mess the same thing repeatedly.

“I’m real! I’m real! I’m REAL!” As the warm blood splashes all over his face, he imagines it is oil and bares his teeth.

The book, now coated in blood, finally slips from his hands and he collapses onto the rug, panting, drenched in sweat and staring at the ceiling with vacant, unseeing eyes. He lays there until he catches his breath, already thinking about what to do with the body. He hadn’t thought that far ahead he realizes, and now pictures a corpse rotting away and filling the small space with its putrid odor. Brian looks at the stone steps leading to the metal door with the red light over it. He sees the yellow suit hanging there and decides he can risk the time it will take to dump Andy outside, it’s not like he’s going to bury him. It’s only a few minutes at most, what’s the worst that could happen? He gets to his feet, grabs Andy’s legs and hauls him towards the door. The spine and skull remnants leave a trail of blood.

Brian hits the button on the door and it slides open. He looks over the landscape and after seeing a drop off that way, decides east is as good a direction as any. He pulls the body by the ankles, fogging up the screen on his suit with his labored breaths. He gets to the drop off and without looking rolls Andy over the side. The noise the body makes when it hits something is not
the sound of a body hitting dirt. The sound reminds him of the thick smack of meat hitting a butcher’s block. His gut tells him to just walk away but his curiosity gets the better of him, and Brian looks over the edge. He stares unbelieving for a few moments then starts screaming and turns and runs back towards the shelter, looking behind him as he goes to make sure the things form the pit aren’t coming after him, coming to drag him down with them.

Brian runs in through the door, and after he is decontaminated he paces around the room mumbling to himself. He looks up and sees his reflection in the large mirror. He turns from his reflection only to run into it again over the sink. He smashes the drinking glass beside the sink and is digging the shards into his wrist when a deafening buzzing noise sounds throughout the shelter, the tone of the alarm does something to Brian and he drops the shard of glass and just stands there, motionless.

The red light above the metal door turns green. The lights in the shelter go dim, and only then are the silhouettes of people behind the mirror visible.

There are three of them, a woman in glasses with her auburn hair in a tight bun, an older gentleman with white hair and a beard to match, and the third, who looks how you might picture either Brian or Andy to look like around the age of forty, all of them wearing long white coats.

“I really thought we had it this time,” she says, tossing her pad and pen down on the table.

“I’m lost. They’re as close to perfect as we can get. We can’t possibly alter them to make them any more genuine. They’re indistinguishable from a regular person down to the molecular level.”

“Maybe that’s the problem. We made them too much like us,” the younger man says, and then walks to the changing room.
The other two follow and without another word, they put on their full-body yellow suits, strip off the boys’ clothes and take Brian out through the metal door. As the door slides open the dark turbulent skies are visible over the scorched earth. They drag the body a hundred yards east of the facility and push it over a drop-off into a large hole. It lands atop a pile of twelve year old boys in varied states of decomposition, some with slit throats, others with their wrists opened or stab wounds in the chest, many more with twisted necks and more than a few without a head. They walk back to the shelter and go inside.

“My father was right about all of this. Even after years and years of work, after his success at copying me, he knew it wasn’t the answer. Now all these perversions of my own boy…that’s enough. I can’t watch it anymore”

“You know how you feel after, but we need to keep at it, you know that, it was your idea. Otherwise that’s it. One more and then we toss it in, okay. I know we’ve said that before but we don’t have access to equipment for any other option, and we know you and I can’t -- I mean…” she says, looking away from the younger man, her cheeks reddening.

The elder man picks up where she left off, “We’re going to need to take a new sample from your boy, and I’m sorry but that’s all-”

“It’s not worth it. That was it.”

“Please honey, we-”

“We’re done. I’m burying him tomorrow, properly.”

“We need him!”

“He’s done. We’re all done.”