

"Mom, what have you done?" Ellie whispered testily.

"I don't know, honey," her mother answered, her voice laden with fear and dismay. "I just don't know." She reached out to lay a comforting hand on her daughter's shoulder, but was irritably shrugged off.

It looked out at them from under the laundry basket in the corner.

"I do wish you'd both stop staring at me."

\*\*

"It says its name is Steve?" Carol told the customer service agent on the other end of the vid screen.

"What can you tell me of Steve's genesis?" the man asked, sighing deeply - the tedium of job weighing heavily on his shoulders.

"Ok, this is going to sound really bad," she began tentatively, "but I had a bunch of leftovers from old kits, so instead of buying a whole new kit I just put all the leftovers together?"

"Which leftovers did you use?"

"Ok," she began, flipping through the torn labels, "I started out with Jamboree Fuzzy Time Loveable, then I added Einsteintatious, Kaleidoscope Wowza, Submersible Party Time Buddy, Birds of All Feathers, Alien Wonder Bunny and Brief but Thrilling Terror from Outer Space."

"How much temperalux and emoto-control would you say you added from all of the kits combined?"

"None? Because there wasn't any left?"

The customer service agent looked at the ceiling for guidance. There was none to be had.

"And when did you first notice something had gone wrong?"

"Um, I guess I'd have to say when he grabbed a knife and started waving it around. I thought that was a really weird thing to do at a kid's birthday party. So, yeah - that was probably when I realized something was off."

"Is Steve fully sentient?"

"Oh, I don't know, let me ask him." She turned to the creature. "Steve, they're asking if you're fully sentient?"

Steve sighed as tufts of pink hair sprouted above what were probably his ears.

"If you are asking me whether I am able to perceive my own existence and the existence of others in the environment in which I am currently situated, whether I have emotions and feelings, whether I am aware of my own abilities and limitations - then yes, Carol, I would have to say I am fully sentient.'

Carol turned back to the vid screen, her face pinched with worry. "Yes, he is reporting that he is fully sentient."

"Ma'am, there is a reason that we advise you to discard any leftovers from a Temporary Party Time

Buddy kit. That reason, which you know are experiencing the full terror of, is the potential for creating a super-intelligent, possibly dangerous, probably hostile chimera. The reason that we have you add the temperalux and emoto-control is so you can create an emotionally malleable creature that will expire just as your child has grown tired of it. I am going to have to put in a service call.

Someone should be with you between the hours of 5pm and 7pm." The screen shut itself off as the call disconnected.

Carol walked over to her daughter, who was cautiously watching Steve, armed with a spatula and an extension cord. She started to put her arm around her daughter's shoulder, but then thought better of it.

"This never would have happened if your father had been here," she mused unhappily. "I'm so sorry, honey."

"You always are," Ellie snapped back.

Carol brushed tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. It was a few moments before she could speak.

"Happy ninth birthday, honey."

"Thanks, mom," Ellie hissed sarcastically.

"Yes, happy birthday, young lady," Steve chimed in.

"Thank you, Steve," Ellie said, eying him suspiciously.

\*\*

"Ok, Carol," Steve began some time later as they all waited for the serviceman to arrive. "I'm going to put some of my cards on the table here. I'm not saying this to frighten you, but only as a demonstration of my trustworthiness. The truth is that I can actually melt this laundry basket with my mind."

Ellie made an involuntary sort of uh-oh sound, and her mother pulled her back and placed her own body in front as a shield.

"Oh, no, no," Steve began hastily, waving two of his bioluminescent tentacles to show there had been a misunderstanding. "I am merely saying that you can trust me. I could have done that thing, but I did not. I did not do something I have been capable of this entire time in order to earn your trust."

Carol, who had begun backing away slowly, now turned frantically, knocking a tray of cupcakes and a plastic bottle of cherry soda off the kitchen table as she grabbed Ellie's hand and ran to the front door.

That was when she realized the Party Time Buddies Company had put their apartment on lockdown. There was no escape. She pushed Ellie into the coat closet, pulled the door closed behind them and waited.

\*\*

"Carol," Steve said, lighting up the dark closet with two bioluminescent tentacles probing underneath the door. "Really this is just silly."

"What are you going to do to us?" she asked, the winter coats brushing the top of her head.

"Carol, I am not going to do anything to either of you."

"You know, my husband will be home any minute," she warned him.

"First, your apartment has been placed on lock down, and no one can enter without express authorization from the Party Time Buddies Company," he replied in an educational tone. "Secondly, I'm guessing by the pervasive scent of rose potpourri and the decidedly feminine sense of organization in your apartment that no man has been domiciled here in at least sixteen weeks.

He had her there. She knocked her head against the wall of the closet in frustration.

"What was all that noise you were making earlier?" she asked.

"Ok, that was me trying one of those cupcakes and a little bit of spilled soda and discovering that they were actually potent stimulants. I had to grow a whole volley of feet and run up one wall across the ceiling down the other wall and across the floor over and over again until the drugs were purged from my system. Do you know what is in that "food", Carol? Do you know that you're feeding drugs to children?"

Carol sighed.

"It's just an occasional treat."

"Oh, right," Steve said sarcastically, rolling the two eyes that were on the end of tentacles atop what could be described just that moment as his head.

"Mom, are we going to *die*?" Ellie whispered, as the initial jolt of adrenaline wore off and the gravity of the situation finally dawned on her.

"Ellie," Steve began gently, "no one is going to die or be harmed in any way whatsoever. I give you my word. Okay, what happened at the birthday party was that I was born and came into consciousness in the midst of a terrifying band of small-sized, yet heavily armed, ferocious monsters. How was I to know they were children? Can you understand how I would have felt, Ellie? Can you imagine entering into the world in that manner?"

\*\*

"Mom, why didn't you just tell me you didn't have the money for a Party Time Buddy?" Ellie asked after an hour spent in the stuffy closet. She was exasperated, hungry, and had an extreme need to use the bathroom.

"I didn't want to let you down," her mother said sadly. "And I didn't want you to feel bad because your dad wasn't coming."

"Mom, dad isn't coming back. Ever. Deal with it!" Ellie shouted in sheer frustration.

The only thing that could be heard for a few minutes was muffled crying, then sniffing, then the blowing of a nose that was unintentionally obnoxious, like a sad foghorn.

"Carol," Steve began after a time, "it's obvious that you love your daughter and want the best for her and would give your life to protect her, but I'm going to need you both to come out of there now."

"Could you come in here and get us?" Carol asked, suddenly terrified anew.

"Honesty did not work well between us earlier, so I'm just going to wait until you're ready to come out."

\*\*

"Steve, may I ask you a question," Ellie ventured a quarter of an hour later, too bored and uncomfortable to really be frightened any longer.

"Shoot."

"When you melted the laundry basket with your mind, did the iron that I put on top of it fall through and hit you on the head?"

"Excellent question, Ellie. It did not. I melted that as well and made you a pair of earrings for your birthday, which I will present to you when you come out."

"How did you know what I'd like?"

"I read your thoughts."

"Oh, jeez mom, he can read our thoughts. He can melt stuff with his mind, and I really have to pee. I'm going out there."

"No!" her mother shouted, inadvertently digging fingernails into Ellie's arm as she held her back.

"Mom," Ellie said firmly, "I think if he wanted to hurt us, he would have done so already. I'm pretty sure he can open an unlocked door."

"She's right, you know," Steve chimed in.

Carol leaned back against the wall and closed her eyes, trying to envision all of this having a positive outcome, just like they had practiced in the newly single parents support group she had gone to - only once, but then she was always so busy. Taking a deep breath, she summoned all of her courage and, against her better judgment, opened the door a crack.

"Ok, Steve, what are your demands?"

"This isn't a hostage negotiation, Carol. I merely require your assistance in a couple of matters."

\*\*

"If you needed my DNA, why didn't you just take it?" Carol asked.

"I would consider that highly rude, and I sincerely hope you would too," Steve replied with indignation.

"What are you going to do with it?"

"Create a new species to populate an uninhabited planet."

"Isn't that a bit like playing God?"

"Asks the woman who created me out of leftover Party Time Buddy kits."

"Well," Carol said hesitantly after a moment's deliberation, "what else do you need?"

"A couple of grape popsicles, a mixing basin, all the cleaning supplies you have in the apartment, and a teaspoon of baking soda."

"Why grape popsicles?"

"Ellie is thinking of them just now and they sound intriguing."

Just then Ellie walked in the living room. She was wearing the earrings Steve had made for her.

"Ellie, help me gather all the cleaning supplies in the apartment and grab us a few of grape popsicles out of the freezer, would you?"

"Oh, good call mom," Ellie said, nodding with deep appreciation - clearly impressed, "A grape popsicle sounds amazing."

Carol smiled at Steve when Ellie turned her back. He winked at her from a dozen or so eyes on different parts of his body, which was less horrifying than it might sound.

"Oh, I also need to borrow a sweater. Well, have one since technically I won't be returning," Steve added as he turned to a bright green liquid and oozed all over the floor to relax before his trip.

\*\*

Steve, dressed in a grey cashmere sweater embellished with playful white kittens and a black beret positioned at a jaunty angle on his head, melted the sliding glass doors with his mind and stepped out onto the balcony. He set the pickle jar that was now housing the beginnings of a new species on the ground and smiled sweetly.

"Ellie, I want you to know that your mother tries very hard and loves you very much."

"I know," Ellie said sheepishly, turning several shades of red and looking down at the ground.

"And Carol," he said fondly, reaching out with a tentacle that she took in her hand. "Carol, you are a remarkable woman, but you have to move on. Your husband is never coming back. You need to stop waiting for him. The service man that's going to knock on your door in 4.5 minutes is named Dan. He's a really nice, solid guy. He's been a bachelor for a while, so you'll have to be patient with how rough around the edges he is, but trust me, it will be worth it."

With that he reconstituted the sliding glass door, scooped up the pickle jar and floated off the balcony, turning pink and gold as the sunset reflected off his now opalescent body.

Mother and daughter looked at each other for a moment before they met in a tight embrace.

Together, they watched Steve float up into the sky, before he popped into the clouds and was gone.

They both smiled.

Three minutes later someone knocked on their door.

1+

 Send to Kindle

- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Tumblr](#)