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# CONTENTS

# C O N T E N T S

Chapter 1: Genetic Alteration Process . . . . .	5
Travis in hospital . . . . .	6
Doctor discuss with Travis . . . . .	7
Chapter 2: Alicia and Travis meet . . . . .	9
Discussion about father . . . . .	10
Romance of Alicia and Travis . . . . .	11
Chapter 3: Einstein's Brain . . . . .	14
Incubator connection . . . . .	15
Clone of Travis . . . . .	17
Chapter 4: Travis' Mother . . . . .	20
Travis seeks Mother . . . . .	21
Travis finds photos . . . . .	23
Chapter 5: Damen's plot to stay alive . . . . .	25
Thomas walks in on Alicia . . . . .	27
Alicia is revealed . . . . .	31
Chapter 6: Transplant begins . . . . .	41
Travis finds the clues . . . . .	42
Alicia turns on Travis . . . . .	47
Chapter 7: Travis talks to Einstein . . . . .	58
Einstein saves the twin . . . . .	64
Damen seeks revenge . . . . .	72

PETE  
THANOS



TRANSPLANT



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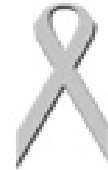
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## C H A P T E R   O N E

A decorative flourish consisting of a series of interconnected, flowing, and somewhat symmetrical shapes, resembling a stylized wave or a calligraphic flourish, positioned below the chapter title.

T ravis Kilbourn stood before the mammoth fireplace, and looked down into the brilliance of the flames as they danced amongst one another. The warmth radiated over his cheeks and forehead , as the fire hissed and sparked all the while a large bed of coals glowed.

He took a long hard gulp of premium scotch warming his innards, and regretted its kick with a sneer. Raising his head to the ceiling toward the heavens he closed his eyes and wished he could be somewhere else.

When he opened his eyes he found himself staring above the granite mantel and into the painted eyes of his father and of himself. Recalling the day that

## PETE THANOS

the brass framed hanging portrait was complete in his fathers home office, amid all the genetic research books and reports. That's when the experiment was just that, an experiment.

Travis's brown hair, green eyes, and youthful smile covered the canvas eloquently and developed with time since the painting was complete. However his father hasn't smiled much since that day, age had crept up and finally caught the ever-spry Damen Kilbourn. This portrait of himself and his father was done five years earlier, however the last five years have brought some new and extraordinary possibilities, for them both, and the entire world as well-

'After all, how many young men in their mid 20's can say their the heir apparent to a family owned conglomerate that's worth billions of dollars, and the successor to all his fathers genetic experiments? It's the stuff movies are made of,' Travis thought emptying his rocks glass with another hard gulp as the diminished cubes clanked at the bottom. Then wiping the excess with the sleeve of his Cardigan all the while staring at the likeness of his father.

## TRANSPLANT

Travis thought of the genetic experiments his father had gotten so close to completing and the ones he had. The elder Damen grew tired of building up run down old companies as his hobby, he lusted after a new challenge, to cheat death itself.

That's why these particular experiments had intrigued Travis as well. They have the most potential more so than the entire portfolio. Having ten times more potential than all the billions the other business's collectively earn. Definitely qualifies them as cutting edge.

'Identifying the strands of DNA was a momentous step in medical technology, something the public is well aware of. But is unaware of the true intention for the future of this technology. However pinning down what the Genome actually is, or was a huge step - it's the 26 chromosomes that make up the human genetic code.'

With the aid of this genome blueprint, cracking the diseases that lie in all has become reality, and this was Travis's father's genetic team's biggest discovery. However, desipheroing it was the tricky part, but coming up with a strategy to



battle the diseases is the teams challenge for the time being. 'Imagine stopping life threatening ailments before they can get started. Preventative medicine brought to the extreme, stopping the disease while it has yet to begin.'

'Generation to generation once haunted by diseases doesn't make it so with this new technology. A quick alteration of the DNA's genome configuration and then no genetic ailments will coime into any future ancestors lives ever again. What a dynamic way of life, look at all the children that had or have diseases while they lie dormant in their mothers fetus.

The handicapped people of the world have one pore chromosome in the DNA strand than any other. With this medical miracle the teams of genetic tailors can remove that extra chromosome, and the handicap will transform and literally vanish off the face of the earth, just as small pox has. No child should be robbed of their childhood, by being confined to a bed or a wheelchair. Anything to cheat death anything,' Travis thought reveling in his fathers accomplishments and attitude, starring at the crystal Mikasa clock that's perched a top the

mantel.

Mesmerized by the pendulum as it swayed from side to side. All the while his thirst grew for more of the premium scotch that had begun to numb his pain. He walked towards the bureau across the grand room. He could have called Thomas his faithful servant to bring him one, but he figured why should he bother; Thomas himself was in his own state of mourning.

The quarry tile made a peculiar sound from the heels of his Italian designer eel skin shoes. They echoed throughout the Cathedral ceilings making his mood that much more melancholy. Lifting the lid off the ice cube bucket he plopped three cubes in the glass then lifted the crystal cork, he poured another I hope that it may be the one to make him forget. He wiped his eyes with his thumb and forefinger. Slowly he turned from the bureau and slumped onto a nearby smoking chair that's up against the wall, nearly spilling the intoxicating drink.

"How can this be?" He mumbled softly hoping to gat an answer from thin air, "a man as srong, smart, and as rich, be brought to this point?" Again talking to

the distant heated breezes that radiated his way from the greystone fireplace. Travis marveled at the glow of the logs, as his life unraveled before him, his PHD, and all the years of private schools, namely Harvard and the tutors. The best money could buy they pushed him into the top 10 of his class in grade point average. That's not to mention, gymnastics, hockey, track and field. . . you name it and Travs gave it a whirl. "I owe it all to Pop's," he again mumbled but was unable to contain the rush of emotion that drained into his cheeks.

Crumpling in the chair he clutched his forehead with his open hand. Wiping his eyes and blowing his nose he folded the handkerchief to a dry portion.

"God how would have mother endured such a thing?" He queried as he used the handkerchief again. "I barely remember a shard of an image of her, and the images I do have seem to be nothing but dreams. As if I had wished her to be the way she is in my dreams, like my mind had made up for the loss with some bogus mom memories. An image I had created.

I long to feel my mothers warm heart,

I only can imagine her soulful words. Her comforting thoughts that she may have said or would have if she were here." Travis sat in the high back chair as he wrapped his arms around himself, while strained to get a glimmer of her. A breath, a smell, a touch, the warmth of her breast, the lack of an image shrouded him with a cold empty heart. A loss he has never fully experienced. An empty explanation, she died giving birth to me. 'Well how then? How did she die? I need to know, how and why, and I keep getting this B.S.'

Travis thoughts stirred him to get up from the high back chair. Walking closer to the grand fireplace, and allowing its warmth to cleanse him of his ill feelings he pondered more of his own life's questions.

"All the money in the world I'm worth will never replace my mother." He mumbled to the glowing logs, while he rested his right hand on the mantle. Travis heard footsteps echo from the quarry tile and he noted that they're headed his way.

"Travis, sir," a man with a black tie and tails discreetly said. A skill he gets paid

handsomely.

“Yes Thomas,” Travis said pushing his soiled handkerchief into his slacks pocket.

“Your father wishes to see you now,” the salt and peppered hair man said as he glanced towards the ground and folded his large, white gloved hands as they wound up settling near his waist.

The low moment has come, fear overcame Travis, and he found it very difficult to muster enough courage to go up to his fathers room and say his good-byes. spinning off in his Mercedes sounded far more appealing. However the thought of not being there for hisfather squashed it all together,

The scariest part for Travis right now is he'll have no living relatives alive, his father will be the last. He is now the man of the house by default. To know that he shared his life withj his father made his frown change to a small glimmer of a smile but only temporarily.



## C H A P T E R   T W O



Look at what he has done, not only for me but for mankind as well. His life work has been dedicated to stopping all of these genetic horrors. Like what had happened to my mother, died giving birth to me. I cannot help but feel he's been doing all of this for her. As if, he would be able to make it up to her by wiping out genetic deficiencies throughout the world. Only if his technology had been available when I was born her tragedy could have been averted.' Travis thought as he raised himself from his chair and stood above his servant Thomas.

As he did so, he thought of those experiments. 'My father built and financed a private hospital with some of his hard

earned riches. This was no ordinary hospital though it has been working on cracking the genetic blueprints for the last fifteen years,' he thought mulling over the impending fate his father is about to meet. Contemplating the very thing his father has pioneered made him excited. And to know what his father has accomplished will go down in history long after he passes. This was enough to get him out of his depression and pay his last respects.

'My father has created for all practical purpose the fountain of youth with the help of modern technology of course. The sad thing for both of us is that he is too old for his own discovery to save him. Much like Moses who was to lead the Jews from Egypt but never live in the Promised Land. Many of the very things he was fighting to eliminate, diseases and sicknesses have already ravaged his body to the point of no return. We all have a ticking time bomb inside us, genetically, and it is only a matter of time before it goes off.

I am fortunate I will be able to benefit off his life's work. It's a shame that the mad scientist can't save himself.' Travis thought as he walked towards the

staircase with his butler at his side. Their footsteps echoed throughout the grandiose room nearly in unison. He is the spitting image of Damen. A softly sculpted jaw line helped define his full but slender facial features accented his budding athletic build. Travis towered over the stocky Thomas while they both walked to the staircase. A strong and loyal soul of his father's whims and needs for the last thirty-five years.

'My father always said that all those visits to the hospital would eventually pay off. I always thought it was rather odd that I would go to my father's hospital as often as I did. But from what he has told me, his teams of genetic engineers have been preparing me for my genetic alteration.

What a relief that it is all but over. All those MRI's, and blood work, jeez,' Travis punctuated resoundingly, adding to his relief that all this has finally passed, 'I've been stuck so many times I feel like a pin cushion. Steroids, vitamins, electrolyted, genetically altered cells, anything and everything I guess, to alter my genetic makeup for the future of my health. All this to ensure my families survival. Preparing my body for the ge-

netic alteration that I will soon undergo is scary, and exciting all in the same breath. The doctors say that it should increase my life span by a hundred to a hundred and fifty years. I only wish my father were to go along as well,' Travis thought.

'Something has always struck me as odd though. A few years ago when I was going to the hospital for my tests so my genes can be ready to be altered and I got lost. I found myself on a floor that I had never seen before. Don't ask me how, but I must have stepped off the elevator on the wrong floor, because I thought I had seen everything in the place.

Naturally, I wanted to see what was up because one day the hospital would be mine so I figured I had a right. But to my dismay, I was denied access, which bothered me. My curious nature would ensure that I found out what was on that floor,' Travis mulled over the moments of that particular day in his mind, not knowing why except maybe to avoid the anguish of his father's imminent death.

As he stared at the long reaching flight of stairs that contain a beautiful array

of paintings on the wall just above the staircase handrail, light shimmered onto the canvases from the sparkling chandelier that hung overhead.

The well-crafted stairs reach up to the balcony with a thick banister made of cherry holds fine wooden carvings at each landing. The trek felt endless for Travis, the dark brown hand woven carpet felt smooth and soft beneath his every step. Depression crept further and further into his heart. The higher he climbed the heavier his feet became. 'This isn't just an old man here this is my father,' Travis thought and prayed for some words forgetting about the moments in the hospital, a least for now.

"Thank God you're here Thomas I don't know what I would do without you," Travis said as he followed the wide shouldered butler.

"I'm honored to be at your side sir," the man said not breaking his stride.

"There's nothing worse than to die, but I guess it's better than to die alone. He has people who love and care for him, and he's in his home, wouldn't you agree Thomas?" Travis said looking up at the butler.

Thomas stopped and turned towards his young master. "Travis, I've seen your father go through many hardships in his days. None as tragic as your mothers of course, but real lean times you know. This is what made your father the man he is today, it's such a shame that his life's experiences couldn't be passed on to you somehow, because I really have grown fond of you," the butler said in an unassuming manner and resumed his course up the stairs.

"What's that supposed to mean?" The young man asked. Thomas stopped, turned, and looked down from the stairs towards the still burning fire then said.

"It just seems a shame that you have to experience everything your father has already been through, it's just too bad he can't give all of that to you," Thomas said turning back with a smile and began to walk up the stairs.

Both reached the top of the staircase; the gray walls have a display of old paintings. An elegant but small table stood alone on the landing, with a few lit candles flickering amongst many of the framed photos that stood at attention on the table. Travis walked up to the beau-

tiful piece of craftsmanship and, picking up one of the frames, he felt as though he was looking into a mirror.

He found himself admiring a black and white photo of his father, Damen, looked exactly like himself. A chip off the old block, he thought with a tear in his eye making his heart race further. Hindering his desire to bid his father farewell. Scanning through the other photos, he noticed other pictures of his father as an infant, and then an adolescent and even his parents. But the one that was most striking to him was his World War II pilot photo.

Standing on the wing of his fighter plane dressed in full vegaira. His present day image showed a slight glimmer of what that photo did, the wear of old age. Shockingly there are no pictures of his mother. Not that he would have known one if he saw one. Thomas obediently stood right behind him as he gazed at the photos. Both exchanged memories of the special moments they had with this remarkable man.

"A well traveled man," the aid said after a moment of silence.

"Yes, but one thing I don't get is where



my mother is, you'd think there'd be a glimpse of her somewhere. A standing portrait of her, or she should have been on the painting above the fireplace instead of me, yes most definitely," Travis said double-checking the heavy framed pictures once more frantically. "I don't see anyone that could be my mother on this table," Travis said pointing toward the pictures and starrng squarely at the butler.

"This was more of a, forgive me if I do say so sir, memorial for your dear father," Thomas said in a low tone, trying to break eye contact by looking down the hall.

"I understand. But what really happened to my mother, Thomas, really?" The young man asked with a pleading tone.

"Sir, Damen, uh your father never liked when I mentioned or asked about your dear mother," he said looking towards the floor. Noticeably uncomfortable in an effort to answer such trying questions, particularly at such a complicated time.

"I see," Travis, said clutching his chin. "He always did the same to me, it was

as if it was too painful for him to rehash, but I feel I have a right to know." Thomas looked on somewhat relieved that the young man was trying to understand.

"I agree sir, but I wouldn't recommend it in the condition you father is in at this moment. It may put him over the edge," the unassuming butler said.

"You're right! God, I'm so lucky to have you around Thomas," Travis said embarrassed but still suspicious. Travis quickly hugged Thomas throwing off guard, he was reluctant, but reciprocated the comforting gesture, and tears began to pool up in the butler's eyes as well as they patted each other on the back. Then the both of them started down the hall towards his father's room.

Passing the library a thought of the hospital and the secret floor crept back into his mind. He tried to change his thoughts however. Feeling that he was betraying his father by not thinking about what he was to say to him on his deathbed. However, he gave in to the beckoning of his memory to stave off his depression.

'Finally I got in there by sneaking onto an elevator in a gondola. Upon getting

in to the floor of the hospital I walked into what I thought was a storage room. But it was a room with body bags that were filled with what else but bodies and tagged with letters.

No big deal, right, but they were individually marked with letters on the tag and tied up on the handle of the black bag. They went all the way up to the letter "S", each one lay on a stainless steel surgical table. Why did they stop at "S" though?' Travis thought while walking down the narrow hall towards his Fathers room with Thomas.



# INDEX



# TRANSPLANT

## I N D E X

### A

ancestors , 3

### B

butler , 10, 12, 13, 15, 16

### C

chromosome , 3

### D

Dad. *See* father

Damen , 1, 10, 14, 15

Depression , 12

discovery , 10

diseases , 10

DNA , 3

### E

experiments , 9

### F

families , 11

father , 1, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16. *See also* Dad

footsteps , 6

forehead , 5

### G

genetic , 3, 10

### H

handicap , 3

hands , 7

## I N D E X

hospital , 17

### I

intoxicating , 4

### K

Kilbourn , 1

### M

mammoth , 1

master , 13

mother. *See* mom

mothers , 3

MRI , 11

### P

photos. *See* pictures

### S

sicknesses , 10

small pox , 4

### T

technology , 9

Thomas , 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17

transform , 3

Travis , 1, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17

### V

vitamins , 11

