Replicas

Kevin Schwartz, young and tall, had been hunting all his life. When he was ten, he shot his first bear with a simple air rifle. He enjoyed being one of the best hunters in his little city of Cleaville, a city of only six million people. His only competitor was Tammi Jennings, also young, but a very smart hunter, too. On a single hunting trip, she shot four twelve-point bucks with an electrolight shotgun. As they both grew older though, hunting animals became too easy for them and they started to feel bored with the activity. That’s when they first turned their interest into hunting clones.

Clones were overpopulating the ideal size of the cities. The government of the United Republic issued a law in 2507 that stated, “…from now until further notice, it is not unlawful to fatally wound a clone to better improve environmental standards and a city’s population limit.” At the time, a city could not have a population of more than eleven thousand people per square mile. The government also set up preservation rights so that any of the few forests left on Earth could not be cut down, used, or lived in. Unfortunately, the forests were where the extra clones fled to escape being enslaved and treated like science experiments. The government then banned all clones from coming in contact with other clones, and confirmed that they may be killed on the spot if found in groups more than three without a human supervisor. But, what’s a clone?

Helen Brigshaw’s A History of Clones, states that in the year 2280, geneticists had successfully mastered the scientific art of cloning humans. However, according to the interviewed scientists, the clones have a very limited brain capacity that doesn’t allow them to think about anything other than their own survival, very much like animal minds in a human body.
Today, wild clones roam the forests in search of freedom. Rumors say that they are devising a plan to overthrow the government and bring justice to all clones. The government fears an uprising. They know that they can easily defeat the clones, especially with their advanced weaponry, but they don’t want to disturb the peace or destroy the forests the clones are taking refuge in. If the worst comes, they will, but for now they permit recreational hunters to shoot the clones for $250 a piece.

Kevin Schwartz and Tammi Jennings made a bet. They bet that they could find and kill more clones than the other could in a single day. The winner would claim all the prize money, including the loser’s. They agreed to meet at the edge of the forest just outside Cleaville at the crack of dawn.

Kevin always arrived to events early. The sky was still dark when he went to wait by the forest for Tammi. During his wait, he began thinking of the best location to start looking for the clones. He knew that for any animal to survive long, they’d have to live near water. There was a river that wound its way through the forest and into the fields beyond approximately two miles away. He could begin there. But walking all the way there would take a long time, and running would use up all my stamina before the hunt even starts, he thought as the sky turned into lighter and lighter shades of gray.

Finally, when the sun peeked over the top of the horizon, Kevin started to wonder when Tammi would arrive, if she was coming. He decided to call her. He took out his cell phone, the screen as thin as paper that could be bent and folded up, and dialed her number. He waited for her to pick up but was sent straight to her voicemail, which meant that her phone had to be off. Cursing, he waited for twenty more minutes, then decided to go to her apartment in hopes that he’d find her there.

Upon arrival, he knocked on her door. Nothing. He knocked again.

“Tammi?”

The door opened and a burly man with bushy eyebrows and a crooked smile emerged.

“Hello, I’m Tammi’s father.” The man said, his voice deep but friendly, “You can call me Richard if you prefer.”
“Hi, uh, Richard. I’m Kevin Schwartz…um, I-I’m um, looking for Tammi.” Kevin stammered. He hadn’t expected to meet her father.

“Ah, she spent the night at a friend’s apartment and said she wouldn’t be back until 6:00 this evening.”

“Oh,” was all Kevin could think of to say. *Did she really just forget about our hunting trip? How could she? We’ve wanted to challenge each other for years!*

Richard looked questioningly at Kevin. “Why are you looking for her?”

“Um, I mean, we were going to go hunting together,” Kevin replied, “for clones.”

At his last words Richard’s body instantly went rigid and his eyes narrowed. He seemed kind before, but now his body was colder than dry ice.

“What?” It wasn’t a question… well it was, but it was more of a how-dare-you type of “What?...” the sort of “what” that you don’t know how to respond to.

“Well um, you see, we were planning to hunt for clo—”

“I know what you said!” Richard shouted nervously, then he calmed down and said quietly, “Come in.”

Kevin was afraid, he didn’t know if it was wise to walk into Richard’s apartment when he was giving Kevin an evil glare. He reluctantly went in. It’s not like Richard was going to hurt him, besides, even though Kevin may be smaller and younger than Richard, Kevin was still a tough hunter. He had his weapons and he knew how to use them without anybody getting killed.

Kevin gingerly stepped into the apartment and was welcomed by tons of animal heads mounted to the walls, Tammi’s great kills, and immediately felt at home. They had hardwood floors, a luxury now since wood was so scarce. The government stopped the cutting down of any trees, not just ones in forests, in the 2400s, almost a hundred years before they announced that deforestation was prohibited. It saved the environment, but with no more wood available simple things such as cardboard and paper became rare. Instead of wood, buildings were made of concrete, steel, and a new hard plastic, fabricated in the 26th century. Kevin stared at their vintage apartment in awe before he remembered what he was in here for. He hurriedly shut his mouth that he did not realize he was gaping, and
turned around to look at Richard. Richard just looked wary now, not at all angry anymore.

“Listen, I’m sorry for yelling at you Kevin, but I will not let you and my daughter go clone hunting. I know you may not believe me, but clones are actually a lot like humans. They are dangerous. If they catch you, they would not think twice about killing you. Trust me. Also, there is something you should know about Tammi. But you cannot tell anyone, particularly not—”

Just then my cell phone started ringing out my favorite tune, alerting me that I was receiving an incoming call.

“Um, ex-excuse me.” Kevin stuttered as he dug his phone out of his pocket. He unfolded it a little to see whom the call was coming from. Tammi. “Could you please wait for a moment? I need to take this call.”

“Okay.” Richard looked suspiciously at Kevin but left the room. Kevin waited a second then took the call.

He spoke, “You could have told me you couldn’t go hunting, you know, so I didn’t have to wait forever for you to show up!”

“What? No friendly ‘hello’ or anything? Jeez, Kevin…besides, you could’ve waited for like ten more minutes because now I’m waiting for you.

Kevin was puzzled. “Wait, what do you mean by I should’ve waited for ten more minutes? Your dad said you were with a friend.”

“Yeah, well my dad didn’t want me to hunt so I told him I was going to a friend’s apartment, but instead I camped out in that abandoned shack near the forest, just east from where we were going to meet. I woke up too late this morning and rushed to get ready. I could already see you standing out by the forest through the window. Once I got down to our meeting place though, you were gone. I decided to wait a while because I thought that you possibly forgot something or had to use the restroom, but when you never showed up I decided to call you. I realized that my cell phone was off, so when I turned it on, it instantaneously beeped and said that I had a missed call from you.” She quickly exclaimed. “And did you just say my dad told you I was with a friend? Kevin, I seriously hope you did not run into my father while trying to look for me at my apartment!”
“Uh, yeah, about that…”

“Leave right now! If my dad finds out he’s going to kill me!” She said in a harsh whisper, “Meet me at our agreed place in fifteen minutes.” Then, she hung up.

*What, no *good-bye*?* Kevin thought as he stuffed his phone back into his pocket.

Richard strolled back into the room. He must have been listening. Kevin involuntarily stiffened.

“Who was that?” Richard asked lightly.

“Oh, eh, just…a friend of mine,” Kevin answered, trying to sound casual, “wondering where I am.” *It was mostly true.*

“Hmm…” Richard grunted. He didn’t believe him.

“Alright, well I have got to get home, or my parents will start to worry.”

“You didn’t tell them where you were going?”

“No, it must have slipped my mind.” With that, it was all Kevin could do to not sprint out of the apartment. Once outside though, he ran down to greet Tammi.

“Our father kind of scares me.” Kevin panted, trying to catch his breath. Tammi looked at him, trying to keep a straight face, but failed and laughed good-naturedly. She was wearing camo pants and a brown long-sleeve shirt, partly covered by a bright orange vest; the typical hunting attire. She held a long semi-air rifle in one hand rather than her usual electrolight shotgun, and small, solar-powered binocular glasses in the other. She had modern hunting technology. All Kevin had was his simple air rifle that he had since he was ten.

“Nah, he’s just *trying* to frighten you. He thinks hunting clones is too perilous for us. For *us!* The best hunters in all of Cleaville!” she joked. Her light brown hair was tied up in a ponytail so tightly it seemed to stretch the skin at her scalp.

“Whatever. Let’s just get started, we already wasted a lot of time.” Kevin’s hazel eyes swept the landscape before he walked forward into the forest, it’s dense combination of leaves and branches soon hiding him from view.

“Whoa! Wait up, you can’t start yet.” Tammi protested after him. “There has to be an official signal or something!”
Kevin halted, his black and green camouflaged shirt and jeans came back into sight. “Okay, are you ready?”

“Yes.” Tammi replied, trembling with excitement.

“Then, go.” Kevin turned around again and quickly walked toward the direction of the river. Tammi sighed and proceeded to walk directly ahead into the heart of the forest. Soon they were a long distance apart. In a little less than half an hour, Kevin had found the river. He decided that he would wait up in a tree for a clone to come around for a drink of water. He selected a tall oak with leafy branches that could easily conceal him from anyone who thought to look up. He sat about fifteen feet from the ground on a long thick branch and looked out at his surroundings with eyes as sharp as a fox’s and ears as keen as a hawk’s. Kevin took in every small movement and noise: the flutter of a butterfly’s wings, the rustling of fallen leaves, an owl hooting in the distance, an occasional snap of a twig from small ground creatures, and then a quick report of a gun. Kevin scowled. Tammi must have just discovered her first clone.

About forty-five minutes had passed and Kevin had still not detected a clone. Patience is greatly valued in hunting, but after thirty more minutes had gone by with no trace of a clone, Kevin began to grow restless. He climbed down from tree and tried tracking them by foot. A hint of a footprint here, a clump of hair tangled in the brambles there, but nothing that could lead him to where they could be. He wondered how many clones Tammi had caught already. At least one more than me; I haven’t caught any, he thought. Kevin was extremely disappointed. He usually caught at least three animals by now on a normal hunting day. But then again, today wasn’t normal and he wasn’t hunting the usual animals.

It was well past lunchtime and in Kevin’s rush, he forgot to pack a snack for himself. He decided he’d go back to the edge of the forest where they met and call Tammi. He wanted to invite her to his house for lunch because he didn’t want her to continue hunting without him. It wouldn’t be fair. As he walked back he began thinking about what had happened that morning. He thought about what Richard was going to tell him, something about how clones were human like us. Kevin strongly doubted it. They cannot make choices for themselves or invent plans. They’re not intelligent enough to even organize an army to rebel. I don’t
understand why the government is so afraid of them. Then Richard had also tried to tell him something about Tammi—

Suddenly, he heard a loud crack to his right. It sounded like something big had stepped on a fallen branch and broke it. Muffled footsteps slowly crept toward him. Kevin lifted up his gun, aiming at the source of the sound. He held his breath, his heart beating faster than any old Kentucky Derby racehorse. He cautiously took a pace back. Unexpectedly, Tammi emerged from behind a bush in front of Kevin and froze. She was wearing a white T-shirt and dirty red khakis.

“Oh my gosh, Tammi, at first I thought you were a clone! Where’s your rifle? Did you lose it? And why did you change clothes?” Kevin indicated at her shirt and pants. “Did you kill any clones yet?” At this last question, Tammi frowned and her eyes darkened.

“Can I see your rifle?” she asked tentatively, her bottom lip quivering. Kevin wondered why, but handed it to her anyway. She took the gun in both her hands and analyzed it for a few seconds before abruptly facing Kevin and pointing it straight at his chest.

“Hey! What are you doing?” Kevin shouted. His heartbeat picked up again and he started to panic.

“Put your hands in the air,” she said, “and follow me.” She started striding toward the center of the forest, glancing back every five seconds to know if he was still following and to make sure he wasn’t going to attack her from behind. “You’re lucky I didn’t shoot you already like Marvin did to your girlfriend.” Kevin gulped and began to feel sick.

“You are not Tammi, are you?” He breathed in deeply.

“No, I am not. I’m her clone.” She spat out the last word like it tasted bitter in her mouth. “But we prefer to use the term ‘replica.’”

Kevin was too curious to be shocked that she could speak so fluently even though she was a clone. “Where are we going?”

“To see other replicas and Marvin who will decide your fate.”

“What about Tammi?” Kevin knew she already said something about a “Marvin” who supposedly killed his “girlfriend,” but he was hoping that this was all just a joke. That
this “replica” of Tammi was actually just Tammi messing around with him. He didn’t want what was happening to be real.

“I previously told you that Marvin had shot her. Look you can ask questions later, maybe for your death wish. Now shut up.” Just then, they arrived at a large clearing. There were replicas everywhere. They all stopped and stared as Tammi’s replica and Kevin walked into the crowded space. An older man came forward. He was tall and lean, and had an air of authority about him.

“Hey, Marvin. I caught him wandering through the forest. I think he’s a clone hunter like that Tammi girl was,” Tammi’s replica said.

Marvin’s eyebrows furrowed. He gazed hard into Kevin’s eyes and paused before saying, “I bet you’re wondering about all this.” He waved his hand at Tammi’s replica and all the other replicas in the clearing. “I’ll explain.

“For centuries, us replicas have been treated worse than sewer rats, grasping on to what little dignity we have had to survive. We have been persecuted worse than the African Americans had been hundreds of years ago. We aren’t even identified as human beings! We are lowlier than animals. But the time has come for a change.

“For decades, replicas have escaped their ‘caring masters’ in search of a new life, a life where they can speak to fellow people without the worry of being shot in the head. The time has finally come when we will start a revolution. We were just waiting for that golden opportunity to come along, and now we have one.

“Seventeen years ago, Mr. and Mrs. Richard Jennings, including their baby, Tammi, got in a severe shuttle train accident in which they feared for their daughter’s life. Thinking she was going to die, they had a doctor illegally take a cell from Tammi to clone her so that they could still have a replica of their baby girl. They had the money.” Kevin thought of the expensive wooden floors in the Jenning’s apartment and of the pricey hunting gear Tammi brought hunting today.

“Of course, miraculously, Tammi lived and they no longer needed her clone. So the clone grew up neglected, like many clones do, and became a textile laborer, working in terrible factory conditions. Eventually she ran away and came seeking independence here,
where she is loved by many for the first time in her life. Her name is Trish.” Tammi’s replica, Trish, blushed and coughed to hide her embarrassment.

Marvin continued, “And now our plan is to send Trish back, pretending to be Tammi, in hopes that she can gather information and perhaps stir up some ideas that replicas really are humans. But it’s going to be difficult to get people to believe she’s Tammi, especially when she doesn’t even know where she lives or who her friends are. We need trusted outside help. We need someone to help Trish adjust to Tammi’s old life. Will you be that person to help us save the replicas’ humanity?” When Marvin finished, he gave Kevin an intense look of hope. Kevin felt overwhelmed. This was too much knowledge he could barely take in at once. He did not know what to do. First, they were enemies, putting a gun up to his head, now they were asking for his help.

“Umm…” was all Kevin could get out.

“Sleep on it. You can decide in the morning.” Marvin said, mistaking Kevin’s hesitation, “Just think about it for awhile.”

But Kevin did not want to. He did not want to help these people who killed Tammi in cold blood, who were scheming a war against his family and his friends. The more he thought about it, the clearer his answer became. Even though these replicas had every right to start a rebellion, he did not want to be that specific person that assisted them in starting it. He would be a traitor to his own kind. Kevin felt guilty about thinking that the replicas were not humans, but he held firm to his beliefs. His beliefs being that no matter what the cost, he had to protect his loved ones.

“No.” Kevin blurted out.

“Excuse me?” Marvin turned back to look at Kevin, his eyes no longer lit with the fiery passion of revolution, but with an acidic hatred of anyone who stood in his way to freedom.

“No.” Kevin said again, this time much calmer, “I will not help you destroy the people who I love and who love me in return.” It was weird. Kevin never admitted how much he actually loved his parents or any of his friends. He had not planned on giving a brief speech that dramatic either.
“Well then,” Marvin said gruffly, a tiny bit surprised, but his voice still full of venom, “hand me the gun.” He gestured to Trish. Trish bit her upper lip and gave Marvin the air rifle. She looked like she was about to say something, but thought better of it and turned to walk away. The other replicas diverted their eyes from what was about to take place, too.

“It’s a shame that this is your decision,” Marvin commented ominously. A random thought sidled into Kevin’s brain that Marvin looked slightly like his Uncle Charles. Then Marvin cocked the gun and pointed it straight at Kevin’s head. *Never mind, definitely not like Uncle Charles.* Kevin stared down his own air rifle’s barrel. He had no more thoughts. His head just went blank and he began to sweat excessively. Nonetheless, Kevin did not regret his choice.

“You are a pretty brave kid though. I admire that,” were the last words Kevin remembered before he heard a loud bang and the world went black.