

Mother's Day?
by Lesley L. Smith

As I helped my mom into the car in the King Sooper's parking lot I saw her, a little girl that looked exactly like me as a child. "Mom, look at that red-haired girl. Doesn't she look like me when I was a girl?"

Mom slowly swiveled her head to the storefront. "What girl? I don't see any girl. Quit dawdling and get me in the car, Doris!"

I had to pause and count to ten. "Yes, Mom." I supported her as she shifted from the seat of the shopping cart onto the front seat of our fifteen-year-old red Ford Escort. She still gave me grief about getting the red one when we'd agreed on a silver one.

I unloaded the groceries into the trunk and kept an eye on the front of the store. Just as I finished up, the girl came back out. "I'm taking the cart back, Mom," I yelled over my shoulder.

I intercepted the girl and the man she was with near the entrance. "Morning. Nice day, isn't it? May is so pretty in Colorado, isn't it?"

The man blanched and jerked to a stop.

The girl smiled. "Hi. You have red hair, like me." She pointed. "Look, Daddy." She was dressed in some kind of sports uniform.

Up close, the girl did look amazingly like me from her wavy red hair and her dimples to her skinny legs. Mom called them spindly flamingo legs. I shifted my gaze back to the father. He would have been handsome with his sandy-blond hair and athletic build if he didn't look like he was about to be sick. What was wrong with him?

"I like your outfit," I said to the girl.

"I play soccer. We got ice cream on account of I kicked the winning goal. I'm the MVP." She giggled. "That means I'm the best. And I won the spelling bee yesterday."

"Your parents must be very proud." I smiled.

"It's just my dad." She shrugged. "Do you play soccer? It's fun when you get to kick the ball and be the hero. And get ice cream."

"That sounds great. I was never lucky enough to play soccer." My mom said I had no athletic ability.

The man cleared his throat. "We don't want the ice cream to melt, Tiffani. We better get going." He glanced at me. "Uh, nice to meet you, Doris."

I nodded and turned to push the cart into the store. "It was very nice to meet you too, Tiffani, and ...Bert." Wait a minute. How did I know his name?

Tiffani and Bert were already walking away.

I abandoned the cart and ran after them. "Hey, wait a minute. How did you know my name?"

Tiffani stopped not far from our car, where my mom was frowning in the front seat with her arms crossed.

"My daddy knows everything. He's a scientist. He studies blue jeans." She pointed at his pants.

A smile snuck onto Bert's face, and he tousled Tiffani's hair. "No, honey, that's g-e-n-e-s."

"Doris, what are you doing? Who are those people? Let's go." My mom had rolled down the window and was yelling across the parking lot.

"Wait a minute, Mom," I hollered back at her. "How do I know you, Bert?"

He shuffled his feet. "Uh, maybe we dated a while back?"

Tiffani giggled. "I didn't know you had a girlfriend, Daddy."

I would have remembered dating a good-looking guy. For that matter, I would have remembered dating anyone. I shook my head. "No, I don't think that's it."

"Doris!" my mom shrieked. "Come on!"

I glanced at her and wondered if she still had that old grade school picture of me in her wallet--the last good picture taken of me, supposedly.

I held up my forefinger. "Just a minute, I need to go talk to my mom for a second." I jogged over to her. "Give me your wallet," I said, a little out of breath.

She gasped. "Is that girl robbing you?"

Honestly, how many grade school robbers are there? I stifled a sigh.

"No, Mom. Please let me borrow your wallet for a few minutes."

She grumbled but gave it to me.

Grinning, I pulled out the picture and handed it to Tiffani. "Recognize anyone?" She was the spitting image of me at ten.

"It's me!" She frowned. "But I didn't have long hair like this, did I Daddy?" She looked up at him.

He shook his head. "No, honey." He looked at me and scowled. "All right, Doris. We need to talk, but not now." Setting down his bags, he got a business card out of his wallet and handed it over. 'Bertrand Jones, M.D., Ph.D., Senior Scientist, GeneTech Inc.' "Come see me at work on Monday."

In a daze, I nodded, and they scurried off.

I went back to the car, got in, and started driving.

My mother started in on her usual litany. "...can't believe you kept me waiting. Only a floozy would pick up a man in a grocery store parking lot. If your father hadn't deserted us in our time of need...."

I tuned her out. Fourteen years ago I must have met Bert at that company, GeneAmerica, that I donated eggs to. They paid me \$2000 for my time and commitment, and back then I really needed the money because I still had hopes of getting my own place.

Could Tiffani be my daughter? Was I a mom? It was such a wonderful thought I was afraid to say it out loud.

I was outside the front doors of GeneTech long before nine o'clock Monday morning.

Bert didn't stroll up until 8:55.

"Is Tiffani my daughter?" I asked as soon as I saw him.

He pulled keys out of his pocket and started unlocking the door. "Not here. Inside."

Once in his office, I blurted, "Well? Is she my daughter?"

Bert sank down in his chair. "Yes."

"Oh my God! That's awesome!" I was pushing forty and thought I'd missed my chance to have children. "Who's the father? Are you the father?"

He rested his face in his hands. "Sort of."

I sat down in the visitor's chair. "What do you mean, sort of? Her father must be where she got her athletic abilities and her brains." Bert sure looked athletic, and all those letters after his name meant he was smart. "You are the father, aren't you?"

"I've been dreading this day." He sighed. "I'm not able to have children. All Tiffani's genetic material came from one person."

"As my mom says, I'm not that bright, Bert. Say it in English."

"She's a clone," he whispered. "She's your clone." He held his breath.

"But, I didn't know you could do that. How come I've never heard of other clone babies?" I paused. "Is that even legal?"

Bert held himself very still. "No."

I just looked at him.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

Finally I said, "I thought a clone was like a copy of the person, exactly the same."

He nodded. "She's you."

"But Tiffani is so cute and smart and sweet...."

"You must be, too." Bert smiled. "Maybe you'd like to be in her life? She needs a woman in her life--especially with puberty approaching. If you could be persuaded not to bring the authorities into this, we would both like to get to know you much better." When he smiled, little laugh lines appeared around his sky-blue eyes.

I didn't even know what authorities to call--the clone baby authorities?

"We're having a barbeque this Sunday after Tiffani's next soccer game. Can you join us?" he asked.

"But that's Mother's Day." My mind was reeling. I was a mom!

He nodded. "Please come."

I smiled as wide as the Rocky Mountains. "I'd be honored."

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