

HETEROCHROMIA

Zoey was nestled next to David in his narrow dorm-room bed. She had turned on her side to face him. Her head was resting on an arm to study his two eyes, looking from one iris to the other.

“When applied to us, *you* come first. Always.”

David retorted by suppressing a laugh. “You’re hysterical.”

“I am the antithesis of hysterical.”

“I’ve seen how you paint. All those visions—”

“It’s called catharsis. A release of my inner rage. Purged onto the canvas. It keeps me calm on the surface. Non-hysterical.”

David rolled his eyes. “And yet you pissed off the professor.”

“While *I* remained calm. And it was a joke. I only countered his unanswerable causality dilemma question – ‘chicken or the egg’ – with my own version. That dinosaur is humorless.”

David smiled. “It was a fair analogy, I thought.”

“Thank you.”

“Okay, so which does come first: the sperm or the egg?”

“Neither, if you wear a condom.”

“Therefore, no creation.”

“Dilemma solved. We’re brilliant.” Zoey laughed and searched David’s body beneath the sheets.

“We need to get going or we’ll be late for the class.”

“Is Philosophy 101 more important than me?”

“I can’t afford a bad grade, Zoey.”

“I’m not letting go of you until you rise to the occasion—”

“Will you both shut up!”

David’s roommate groaned and placed a pillow over his head.

“Gary,” said Zoey, “smothering yourself to death won’t remedy your angst. We need to find you a girl.”

“I’m trying to get some sleep. Screw you.”

“Thanks for the offer, Gary, but I’m already taken. Did you know that female eggs prefer *some* male sperm over others? It’s true. Our eggs release these chemicals called *chemoattractants*.”

Gary spoke from under his pillow. “And did you know cows are fitted with nose rings so they can be controlled, not as a fashionable symbol of rebellion?”

Zoey self-consciously touched the nose ring within her septum and let go of David’s flesh beneath the sheets. “Time to go so we can give Gary some privacy to pleasure himself all by his lonesome.”

David slid off the bed, followed by Zoey. They stood and began to get dressed.

“No peeking, Gary. I’m naked.”

“I’ve seen you a hundred times. Please, just go already.”

David put on boxer shorts, black jeans, a Rolling Stones t-shirt, and leather jacket. He sat on the bed to find his socks, then slipped into his boots. “There, I’m good to go.”

Zoey was busy buttoning her jeans that were strategically torn in various locations to show her skin. She slipped into her halter top, forgoing a bra. Her exposed bellybutton was surrounded by a tattoo of a coiled snake. She brushed back her long raven hair, head shaved on one side. “I’ll be going back to my room first. Women need more preparation. We don’t just lick ourselves a few times like a cat and say we’re good to go. Women require more grooming.”

“Like a dog. Right, I see that now. Your eyes could use a gothic touchup before presenting yourself to the world.”

Zoey, an inch taller than David, playfully grabbed the lapels of his jacket, tugging him toward her to be kissed. “Your eyes are what attracted me to you. A person with different colored eyes can see into heaven and earth at the same time. Ghost eyes. So say the Indians.”

“Native Americans. I don’t have that kind of vision.”

Zoey pushed him away with a smile. “Maybe if you try harder.

Of course, European pagans believed being born with heterochromia signifies you're a witch. Please, brush your teeth, at least, bible-boy, while I go and primp myself."

"Don't call me that. I hate comparisons to my father."

"The disapproving minister?" Her lips twisted sideways as she assessed the leather jacket he wore every day. "David, you don't even ride a motorcycle. Only a pedal bike. What if I call you 'bikey-boy?'"

"Marginally better. I'll meet you down in the courtyard."



At the end of the first semester, Zoey and David walked from their co-ed dorm along pathways that led through sections of grass past an array of buildings to reach their first class, Philosophy 101. The classroom was inside a historic brick building near the heart of the campus. It was the final class before the holiday break.

"Why are we bothering to go? So you can gloat?"

"I wanted to thank the professor."

"He took a definite dislike to me. He gave me a C. Whereas you got your stellar A." She stopped on the path by the Student Union. Her abrupt halt prompted David to stop too. Zoey's face presented an enigmatic blank stare.

"What's going on?"

"Congratulations."

David frowned, searching for a clue within her expressionless smokey-black eyelids and blue irises. "What?"

"I'm pregnant."

"What?"

"I'm pregnant."

"I heard you the first time. How?"

"Don't you understand how sex works?"

"Yes, and contraception too."

“You’re an A student. Except you flunked Intercourse 101, an elective course. It’s the only course I either failed or aced, depending on your point of view.”

“I used a condom every time!”

She placed her palm upon her bare midriff, covering her snake tattoo. “I guess condoms are not foolproof.”

David looked skyward, closing his eyes. “*God ... damn it!*”

“Immaculate conception? No way. Definitely your doing.”

David fixed his eyes on Zoey. “This is really bad. I can’t ask my pro-life parents to pay for an abortion. How do we fix this?”

“Fix what?”

“Afford the cost of an abortion!”

“We don’t. I’m keeping it. A cute baby with multi-colored eyes, just like yours.”

“That’s not how genetics works, Zoey.”

“It’s possible.”

“Heterochromia occurs in less than 1 percent of the population. There’s no certainty the embryo will—what the hell are we talking about? This can’t be happening.”

“I googled it. The baby has a fifty-fifty chance of inheriting your freakish condition.”

David’s forehead beaded with sweat. “Zoey, are you messing with me? You can’t be serious. You’re the one who keeps saying the planet is doomed! That it’s no place for a baby to—”

“Minds can change. I want to be a mother.”

“A *teenage* mother.”

“By the time our baby arrives, we’ll both be twenty.”

“This is a nightmare.” David began to pace in a circle. “I can’t afford to be stuck with a baby. My father will likely disown me.”

“Why? You don’t think your parents will approve of me?”

David stopped moving to stare at her goth appearance, thinking *no*, but saying, “That’s not the point, Zoey.”

“Then what *is* the point?”

“A baby will sabotage my career goals. Now I'll never be able to afford to make it into med school and be a doctor.”

“Become a nurse,” she said cheerfully, a rarity for her.

“Fuck you.”

“Mission accomplished, daddy-boy.”



Six years later, Zoey and David were seated at a breakfast nook with their five-year-old daughter, Daphne.

“Why do I have to go to that stupid school?”

“To play with other kids,” said Zoey. Her black hair was long and disheveled, in need of brushing. “And so that your Mommy can find time to groom herself and get some rest.”

“And for you to socialize,” added David. He was wearing green scrubs and eating his cereal in a hurry.

Crunching on a mouthful of Froot Loops, milk dripping off her chin, Daphne asked, “What’s that?”

Zoey reached over with a napkin to wipe her mouth. “Baby, eat slower. Try not to make a mess at every meal.”

“Daddy eats fast.”

“Because I’m late for work. To socialize, Daphne, means you learn how to play nice and get along with other kids.”

“Other kids make fun of me.”

“What kids?” Zoey self-consciously touched her septum, feeling the hole where there once was a nose ring.

“Because I have funny eyes.”

“You have beautiful eyes, like your father. A hazel green eye means you’re mysterious and determined. Your blue eye means that you are full of love.”

“Why can’t I have normal eyes, like you?”

Zoey looked to David for help but he was distracted by the ping on his cell phone, reading a message. “Honey, because God wanted you to be special. That’s why.”

“Why aren’t you special, Mommy?”

David looked up. “Your mother is super special. And I have to run off. My shift starts in twenty minutes. I can’t be late again.”

“Was that the hospital?”

David grimaced. “Doctor Jennings. A super bitch. Always on my case. She treats me like she’s—forget it.”

Daphne drank from a glass of chocolate milk, leaving a wet mustache trace across her upper lip. “What’s a bitch?”

Zoey wiped her daughter’s mouth. “It’s not a word we use.”

“Daddy used it. Are you a doctor too?”

“Your Daddy is a nurse. A *very* good nurse who helps people.”

“And very late. Goodbye.”

“Why aren’t you a doctor, Daddy?”

David stopped to stare at Zoey. She shook her head with a stern look that warned him. “Don’t.”

Daphne said, “Don’t what?”

David kissed his daughter’s forehead. “The reason I became a nurse instead of a doctor is so that I could spend more time with you. And it is because you are you that I have no regrets.”

Zoey looked at David. She teased him with an amorous smile before addressing their daughter. “Besides, before you were born, your Daddy and I had plenty of practice playing doctor.”

“I don’t know what that means,” said Daphne.

“You will one day,” said David.