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Experimental Ambiguity

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Experimental Ambiguity

SCIENTIST
MOM 1
DAD 1
JIMMY 1
DAD 2
JIMMY 2
MOM 2
JIMMY 2 (OLDER)
JIMMY 1 (OLDER)
LISA
THE END

A single light comes up on a woman, holding a clipboard, standing front SL.

SCIENTIST

June 14, 2145. The purpose of this experiment is to determine the effects of environment on personality. In order to preserve the integrity of the experiment to the highest possible degree, we have controlled as many aspects of the experiment as current technological advances allow. Using our recently perfected cloning technology, we have cloned two copies of embryo #6694, to be placed in unique firmo-holographic environments. Firmo-holographic imaging is the new technology of creating solid images – holograms that can be physically interacted with. In no case will another real human being or object be introduced to the subject’s environment. All firmo-holograms will be destroyed at the conclusion of this experiment. The first copy of embryo #6694, hereafter referred to as Jimmy 1, will be placed in an ideal environment – reminiscent of the perfect 1950s household. Jimmy 1 will be their only son. The second copy of embryo #6694, hereafter referred to as Jimmy 2, will be placed in a carefully modulated

abusive environment with an alcoholic father and a drug addicted mother. Jimmy 2 will be their only son.

Lights fade on Scientist. MOM 1 enters SL, sits on couch. Lights up. DAD 1 walks in from SR.

MOM 1

There you are, honey! *(stands)* You're home late – was it a tough day at work?

DAD 1

You've no idea, sweetheart. *(walks over to her, gives her a small kiss)* Do you have dinner ready for me by chance?

MOM 1

It's hot on the stove for you – why don't you sit down and I'll –

JIMMY 1

(running in from SL)

Dad! DAD DAD DAD!

(runs in circles around his father, before finally stopping in front of him, waving a piece of paper)

Dad, you'll never guess what I –

MOM 1

(interrupts, disapprovingly) Jimmy! Hush now! You know better than to accost your father right after he's gotten home from work. Go play outside!

JIMMY 1

(turns to his dad) But Dad, I –

DAD 1

You heard your mother, son. I'll be glad to listen to your news later – after you've played outside.

Jimmy 1 sadly exits SR. Dad 1 sits in chair.

DAD 1

What was he so excited about, anyway?

MOM 1

Oh, Jimmy won some kindergarten art contest with his drawings. He's very excited about it – the first thing he showed me when he got off the bus was the certificate they gave him for winning.

DAD 1

I'd be more excited if he was playing on the little league team.

MOM 1

Yes, dear. I'll get your dinner for you and try and keep Jimmy busy so you can relax a little.

(starts to exit SL)

DAD 1

That would be *perfect*, dear. Thank you.

Lights down. Dad 1 exits SR. Light comes up on Scientist.

SCIENTIST

August 29, 2151. Both six-year-olds show an unusual affinity for art and other creative pursuits. We have geared their environments towards offering them artistic opportunities, but have not changed the pre-programmed personalities of the parents. We shall watch how environmental reactions influence their artistic careers.

Lights down on Scientist. Lights up. JIMMY 2 sits on the floor, cross-legged, in the center drawing in his new sketchbook. MOM 2 lays listless on the couch.

Lights up. DAD 2 stumbles in SR. Stops, takes a swig, keeps going – nearly trips over Jimmy 2.

DAD 2

Watch where you sit, ya little BRAT. *(beat)*

Dad 2 looks at Jimmy 2 meanly, then picks him up roughly by the arm.

You gonna say sorry for tripping me? *(shakes him)* Don't ya have anything to say?

JIMMY 2

Sorry, dad! S-s-sorry! *(clutches paper in his hand)*

DAD 2

(letting go of his arm) What? What's that? A letter from school about ya? *(grabs paper)* What is this crap?

JIMMY 2

(stands up taller – worried, proud)

I... I won an art contest dad. That's my certificate... for winning. They gave me a sketchbook... and some new crayons, too!

Dad 2 looks at him in increasing fury, then rips the paper in two; Jimmy 2 starts to cry.

MOM 2

What'd you do that for – look what you've done!

DAD 2

Don't tell me what to do! I can do what I want! It's my house – I'm the man of the house and I can do what I want to, dammit! Gimme those... those *things*.

He waves to the sketchbook and crayons on floor. When Jimmy 2 doesn't move, he starts toward him as if to hurt him. Jimmy 2 shrinks back, quickly gathers the things, and hands them to Dad 2.

DAD 2

These are mine now. Got it? Now get out. Get out so I don't have to look at you.

He points SR. Jimmy 2 fearfully runs, looking back once.

DAD 2

OUT, ya little bastard! (*takes another swig*)

Lights down, Mom 2 and Dad 2 exit. Lights up on Scientist.

SCIENTIST

February 15, 2156. Jimmy 1 and 2 have both celebrated their eleventh birthday. We have created a journaling class in school to instill the practice of journaling within them. Both mastered the material and continue to journal frequently, as we'd hoped. Especially during the fast-paced and tumultuous teenage years when data collection will be most critical, this practice of journaling will help us better understand the deeper effects of our experiments on Jimmy 1 and 2.

Lights down on Scientist. Jimmy 1 on, Mom 1 stands center stage behind him hands folded, looking perfect.

JIMMY 1

Dear Journal. I'm eleven – can you believe it? I'm starting the fifth grade and Mom and Dad say I'm doing *really* well! They're so proud of me because of my math and science grades – and sometimes they hang my art on the fridge! Though... usually it gets taken down so they can put up my test grades. Still, it's great that they're so proud of me – life feels really good. Well, there's not so much else to say... Night!

Lights down. Mom 1 exits, Dad 2 enters, stands in background, drinking or in an aggressive pose.

JIMMY 2

Dear Journal. Dad's drunk. I think he's beating mom right now – but I'm in my room so I can't hear it. It happens a lot these days, and she gets quieter every

time. I don't know why. If I were her I'd scream. Maybe she's afraid he'll kill her if she screams. Maybe he'll just kill her, anyway. Maybe he'll kill me, too. I am so scared of him. If I get big, I'll kill him before he gets me. Or maybe I'll just run away. I have to get out of here, as soon as I can. School is the only place I feel safe, but I don't like doing that work. I just like to draw. My teacher says I'm really good but that I should do some math and science. Still, I – *(pauses and listens, then speaks fast)* gotta go. Dad's coming up the stairs...

Lights down. Exit. Mom 1 sits on couch. Lights on stage up. Jimmy 1 enters, sets down bag, mumbles "Hey," goes to room.

DAD 1

Good evening, dear.

MOM 1

Dinner is hot on the stove for you, honey.

DAD 1

I was planning on having a chat with Jimmy first.

MOM 1

(stands, curious)

What about?

DAD 1

Got his grades in the mail yesterday – but he was at that baseball team sleepover last night so I couldn't talk to him about it until this evening.

MOM 1

Were the grades... bad?

DAD 1

Not his usual best. Other than his art grade, he's slipping. He's got time to redeem himself – but he has to pick up the slack by high school or he won't get into a college the med schools will notice. You get dinner on the table while I talk to Jimmy – we'll be down in a minute.

Mom 1 exits SL. Dad 1 to "Jimmy's room" and pretends to knock. Jimmy 1 sighs heavily and shuts sketchbook.

JIMMY 1

Come in.

DAD 1

(steps in)

Son, we need to have a talk about your grades. What happened to you this semester?

JIMMY 1

I just had other things I wanted to focus on.

DAD 1

Like what? How can you put anything before your grades? School is serious, son. If you don't pull these grades up at least ten points by your freshman year you can kiss medical school goodbye. I don't want to lecture you too much – I'm sure you get my point. I want to see these grades up and I want a change of attitude. When I was a teenager, it was rough for me too. But I pulled myself up by my bootstraps and became valedictorian and baseball captain at my high school. I know you can do the same, if you just concentrate on your studies and practice with that ball... and maybe put down the crayons for a little while.

JIMMY 1

They're pastels, Dad. Oil pastels.

DAD 1

And that's another thing. You should be saving your money for college – not wasting it all on paint and paper. You need to be more responsible, son. Your mom and I are just trying to look out for you.

JIMMY 1

(sarcastically) Gee, thanks, Dad. I really appreciate it.

DAD 1

Now, come on down to dinner. Your mom's waiting – you'll want to apologize, I'm sure.

JIMMY 1

(sets down sketchbook)

I'm sure. You head on down, I'll be down in a minute.

Dad 1 backs through "door" and freezes when lights dim.

JIMMY 1

(steps into upper SL light)

My parents make me so mad sometimes. Like I'm always supposed to be perfect and fulfill their dreams for me. Do they ever ask about my dreams? Everyone expects me to be the best and become a doctor and be the perfect son. They don't know me at all. Whatever.*(pause, changes tone)* So why I am so upset that I disappointed them? Why can't I talk to them about being an artist instead of

being a doctor? I have to hide what I really love just because I'm afraid of what they'll think of me. There's so much pressure to be perfect here, since everyone else is. Why can't I be perfect, too? What's wrong with me?

Lights fade. Dad 1 exits SL. Jimmy 1 exits SR. Mom 2 comes in and lays crumpled on the ground. Lights up on scientist.

SCIENTIST

October 17, 2159. Jimmy 1 and Jimmy 2 are now fourteen and a half. Today is an ordinary day in Jimmy 1's life, but a much more significant day for Jimmy 2.

Lights up. Jimmy 2 enters SR. Sees Mom, stops.

JIMMY 2

Mom? Mom? MOM?

Runs to her side and kneels, upstage of her.

Mom are you okay? Oh my god... MOM!!!

Lights fade. Jimmy 2 freezes.

SCIENTIST

Today, Jimmy 2's mother died from an overdose of prescription painkillers.

Lights fade on scientist. Jimmy 2 to SR light.

JIMMY 2

Today is October 17, 2002. Last year, today, my mother Louise Jennifer, died of an overdose.

He pauses and looks away for a moment.

And she left me alone with that bastard of a father she picked for me. Did you know he hardly cried for her when he got home and found the paramedics there, zipping up that black bag with her body in it? He makes me sick.

(pause) You know the other day he tried to hit me?

JIMMY 2 (Older) enters here SL and begins talking with Jimmy 2 as he walks across stage toward spotlight.

JIMMY 2 (OLDER)

Well, he can't hit me – not like he hit Mom. Like I told you all those years ago, when I was grown and big I said I'd hit him back – and I did. Because now I'm grown and big.

Jimmy 2 (Older) stands in front of Jimmy 2, who slowly backs out to kneel by his mother.

I'm fifteen, strong, bad – uncontrollable. The teachers at school say I'm wild. The girls love it, though – they think dangerous is so attractive. They don't know how dangerous I really am – but my old man knows. He knows now, anyway. Cause I hit him back. I fought 'im. Can I tell you how good it felt? To take back the power from him and stop being scared? It felt real good. Real, real good to hit him. Doesn't mean I want to do it again – but the look on his face when I popped him one right in the nose... it was great. Almost as good as when I finish a painting and it turns out well. Yeah, that great.

Lights fade on Jimmy 2 (Older). Jimmy 2 and Mom 2 exit; Dad 1 enters in background. Lights up on JIMMY 1 (OLDER).

JIMMY 1 (OLDER)

Mom and Dad found out last night that I didn't try out for the baseball team. I'm grounded for lying – and for not trying out for that 'great opportunity'. I feel so alone, journal. I feel like I'm constantly failing at everything. I'm such a disappointment – I can't even enjoy my art anymore because I know my parents hate it so much. Why am I the only one that can't be perfect? No one understands me... what it's like to be me. I keep trying to lose all my bitter, bad feelings in my art but it's not enough anymore. They pour out of me at every opportunity. Even my feelings are all wrong. How can everything seem so perfect, and yet be so wrong? I am so wrong for this world. I don't belong here.

Lights down. Lights up on Scientist. Jimmy 1 (Older) freezes.

SCIENTIST

April 3, 2162. Both Jimmy 1 and Jimmy 2 have reached the age of seventeen. I have begun to worry for Jimmy 1 who has become increasingly depressed. It would require intervention to pair Jimmy with the firmo-holographic counselor I've introduced, which is strictly against experimental policy. Hopefully, Jimmy 1 will seek help. (*breaks*) Is... is this right? Can we do this to other people?

Lights down. LISA enters SR to C. Jimmy 2 (Older) to SR spot.

JIMMY 2 (OLDER)

I finally sold enough art to pay the rent for the pad I've moved into – a shithole on the west side of the river, but it's still better than living with my old man. Here, it's just me, art, and... Lisa. God, my girlfriend... she's the most beautiful girl I've ever met. She loves my art, my tattoo... I can't even begin to tell you how much I like her. Recently, I've been using her as a model for my art – nude, which is kinda cool. And if some of our paintings end with a little... playing around, what's the harm in it?

Lisa walks forward. Jimmy 2 (Older) does not see her.

LISA

Jimmy... Jimmy, I'm pregnant. *(She freezes.)*

JIMMY 2 (OLDER)

What's the harm in it, anyway?

Lights down. Jimmy 2 (Older) and Lisa exit. Mom 1 and Dad 1 sit on couch.

Lights up as Jimmy 1 (OLDER) walks on.

DAD 1

(standing)

Jimmy – sit down. Now.

(He does).

Your mother and I are at a loss with what to do with you. Your grades are far below average – you may not even make it into college, Jimmy. We've taken away everything we can think of... what can we do to make you behave? What else is there?

JIMMY 1 (OLDER)

Gee, Dad, I actually can't think of anything else you can take away. Maybe chores – I still have some of those.

MOM 1

Which you never do, Jimmy.

DAD 1

We're confused, son. Where did we go wrong in raising you? What did we do to have you turn out like this?

JIMMY 1 (OLDER)

I don't know, Dad, okay? I'm just a bad seed. I'm a failure, a disappointment – what do you guys WANT from me?

MOM 1

We just want what's best for you, Jimmy. We want to help you.

JIMMY 1 (OLDER)

Yeah? Well maybe what's best is if I just jump out a window and stop embarrassing you.

(runs off SR)

MOM 1

(standing as he leaves, horrified)

Jimmy!

Lights down. Mom 1 exits SL. Dad 1 exits. Lights on Scientist.

SCIENTIST

February 17, 2163. Jimmy 2's baby girl, Jennifer Louise, is born.

Lights down on Scientist. Light up SR on Jimmy 2 (Older), Lisa in background on couch.

JIMMY 2 (OLDER)

A father at eighteen... huh. Lisa is resting right now, recovering... I'm holding little Jennifer Louise – named after my mother. Lisa wants to call her J-Lo, but I like Jenny – simple and sweet. I'm so scared to be a father. I don't have a high school degree, money... anything to offer her. I'm so scared I'll turn into my father. I can't do that. I would kill myself before I hurt either of them – I will never be that man. It's hard to describe experiences like this one. There's so much going on inside me – peaceful satisfaction, overwhelming fear... the rightness of this moment.

She's perfect.

Lights down, Lisa exits. Lights up on Jimmy 1 (Older). Mom 1 and Dad 1 enter, stand center.

JIMMY 1 (OLDER)

I know I haven't written for a while, but it just feels so pointless. My entire life feels pointless and I hate it so much I don't even want to reflect on it. All the perfection around me makes me nauseous. It's like I'm a retard, the way being perfect is so hard for me. I just want someone, anyone, like me. God, isn't there anyone? I wish I would just die, so I could rid myself of all this guilt and shame. I am so ashamed to be me. I hate myself. I hate my life. I hate everything.

Lights down. Lights up on Scientist.

SCIENTIST

January 17, 2164. I am so concerned for Jimmy 1. He's stopped all normal activity and simply goes on in a parody of daily routine. There is a lifelessness too him, a drudgery, a self-loathing that speaks to me through his eyes. There is nothing I can do to help him. Won't someone help him?

Lights down. Light up on Jimmy 2 (Older). Lisa enters to C.

JIMMY 2 (OLDER)

Jenny's birthday is in a month and I'm saving up for her first present. You know how I told you I was living in a shithole on the west side? Well, that shithole was

too expensive for Lisa, Jenny and I, so we moved into an even smaller, smellier shithole. Lisa's going to get her GED and hopefully a better job afterward, so Jenny can have a nicer home than this one. We'll get out of here – I have hope. I think that's the good thing about life not being perfect – there's always the potential for hope. When life is perfect, nothing can ever get better – only worse. And I think humanity thrives on hope. Anyways, even though things are rough right now, this isn't so bad.

And even so, it's only for now.

Lisa exits SL. Jimmy 1 (OLDER) enters, opens journal, puts the pen to it, sighs, turns his face away, and closes the book with a definitive snap, head hanging, as the lights black out. Exits SL. Lights up on Scientist.

SCIENTIST

(clearly shaken)

December... 6, 2164. Jimmy 1 has just stolen his father's handgun and shot himself through the roof of the mouth. Jimmy 1... is dead. I just... watched Jimmy 1 die. Oh God, I just watched a man die. For the sake of an experiment... I just watched a man die.

(pauses and tries to collect herself)

I... I need to put in a request to the clean-up crew... Firmo-holographic environment number 6211 may be destroyed immediately after clean-up. Oh God, oh God...

She starts to exit, pauses, turns to re-enter spotlight.

Are you a murderer if you sit by and patiently observe a man kill himself? Can we only become murderers if society labels us so? Or do we all silently murder one another every day, just like this, and let each other die?

(Scientist exits)

Light does not dim, but flickers out quickly.

THE END enters.

THE END

Observing Scientist ID 877693 to determine the psychological effects of her attachments to subjects 66941 and 66942 was beneficial to our study on the formation of human connections. Despite having never met either subject, 877693 still formed a significant attachment to both of them. Our next set of experiments will include a study of the chemical changes in the mind and body of the subjects. Once we discover the empathy-causing chemicals, we will mass produce them, in the form of an injection, for use world-wide. Our goal is to

have governments require this mind-altering drug as a shot for all babies upon being born. Inevitably, our experiments here will lead to an interconnected environment in which humanity will thrive. Much good will come from our experimental ambiguity.