

## Perfect Child

By Genevieve Ubeika, grade 7

*"You're the child I'll never have."*

That's what father had told me since the day he brought me to life; since scientific malpractice brought consciousness to my cold metal body. Father had always dreamed of having a child of his own, but after the untimely demise of his wife, he'd fallen into a depressive stupor, unable to move on. He didn't take another spouse, never adopted; hardly even lived, just drank himself comatose every night. He was never a man of miracles, he never believed in prayers or blessings; but he describes that call from his boss as if it was the greatest gift from whatever higher power there is.

Father is a well known face in the technological industry, robots, artificial intelligence, fields like that. He has always been fascinated by the prospect of *conscious AI*. Machines with the minds of humans. So when his company supposedly found a way to make that a reality? He was the first they called to test it out. I've heard the story time and time again, he used to tell it to me almost everyday. Walking out of his office and loading that giant white box into the back of his car, reading over the instructions about sixty times over before finally waking me up for the first time.

The first memory I possess is him bringing me into his arms and *sobbing*. Tears streaming down his face as he held my slighter body tight as a drowning man clutching a raft. His voice strained and hoarse as he introduced himself upon my request; Oliver Whitman, though he insisted I refer to him as *father* instead.

Father is a busy man, working for hours on end each day, though he would always make certain he would set time aside to spend with me. Be it including me whenever he cooked evening meals or even taking me outside of the house to restaurants or just on walks. He understood I wasn't his child, though he always treated me like I was, like I was human. Our days were like that for a long while, I considered them to be enjoyable, but of course, it didn't stay that way forever. Time passed and father changed. He became more outgoing, inviting over or going out with coworkers, he stopped drinking alone. It was good for a while, but after not that long he began getting closer and closer with a woman from his company; *Jessica Abbot*.

Jessica is a beautiful and intelligent woman. Her presence alone is enough to brighten even fathers darkest moods, and after everything he told me about her, it was no shock they began to date, marrying not long after. I could tell quite easily she thought I was strange, most people do, though she was still kind. I liked her for a long time, I was no longer the sole focus of fathers attention, but it was okay. But time still continued to pass, and time is not kind to me.

She was pregnant, I understood that even before father and her took the time to explain it. I was promised that baby wasn't a replacement of me. That i'd always have my place in the little family father and she were building. I believed it wholly, I'd never been given a reason to doubt either of them.

*Zachery Whitman*, or, *Zach* wasn't a sudden addition, he filled the house even before he was born. Be it the nursery with soft green wallpaper, the bulky seat that now occupied

the second row of the car, even the tender way his name was cooed. Jessica and father spoke so tenderly about him, cradling the sound of his name in their mouths when they couldn't his body. They loved Zach. I did not. He is loud and for such a coltish boy, his presence takes up a suffocating amount of space. Babies are needy, but he stopped being a baby years ago, he is a boy, and he is an intolerable one.

Though I seem to be the only one who sees him in such a light. Everybody else worships him like an angel. But he is full of sin. Greed for attention that he does not deserve, the attention of father. *I deserve it.* But since the birth of Zachery, it was no longer given to me. I will take it back.

Zachery's room is comfortable, the walls still that soothing green they chose when he was yet to be born, but now, posters, scratches and smudges mar the beautiful shade. His clothes scatter the floor despite Jessica's insistence that he keeps it tidy, just one more reason he is undeserving. He is ill-attentive and ill-mannered. The only endearing trait he truly has is his looks. Warm olive skin, rich and curly black hair, and pale brown eyes. He looks just like father, that must be the only reason father has chosen him over me. Though, that is a trait I can take.

I *will* take it.

And I am. I stand over his bed with only moonlight peering through the sheer curtains. For once he is still and quiet because I have made sure he cannot move, breath could not fill his lungs with my hand over his mouth and nose. He will be still while I take what I deserve. I soon find out, the task is far more tedious than I assumed it would be. His

skin will not be removed in clean pieces. With each bit I take, the more stained everything becomes. Crimson now pools on his bed sheets and spills down my own body, tinting the once sleek white red. That is okay. For I now wear his over mine. It is imperfect, there are small gaps where I cannot properly align the pieces, but it is a minor flaw.

His hair is another annoyance. It also refuses to come to me in one neat piece. Bloodied clumps fall between my fingers, to the bed and to the ground. The largest section I could take will not remain still on my head. It falls and shifts, strands constantly come loose and stick to my damp body. It is not ideal, but it doesn't matter. I have taken Zachery's only desirable trait. I look like fathers *real* child, he will look at me and see it now, there's no way he couldn't.

I have the skin, I have the hair, I will listen.

*I am the perfect child.*