

Counterpart

Long after awakening from the dream, she still felt sad.

At first it had been silly and fun. She had dreamt that she had a clone. Apparently lots of people did. It was a new fad. But the clones weren't perfect copies of their owners. Hers looked like her, but very pale and without a single wrinkle or laugh line.

There was nothing in the dream about how the clone got there, but there it was. It was naked and had a blank look on its face. She was with some friends and demonstrating how much fun it was to have a clone. She started making faces and the clone smiled. Then she began hurling insults in an increasingly blustery voice. The clone looked confused, then scared.

When she awoke, she was gasping for breath. An image of herself and the clone fleeing from some great danger leapt to mind. That had been part of the dream, too. They were running away from something and the clone kept stumbling as it ran. She swore at it for being so clumsy and the clone looked terrified. She was terrified herself. She knew she had to get away, but she also knew she couldn't leave the clone behind.

She looked at the clock: 5 a.m. Way too early to get up, but it was hopeless to try going back to sleep. For a moment, everything seemed hopeless.

With wakefulness and a cup of coffee the heightened emotion of the dream's chase scene faded. The images that lingered seemed ridiculous except for the visage of her clone. She remembered the frightened look on its face as it heard cruel, angry words in a voice that could have been its own. The clone had no voice, she now realized, no power to answer or defend itself. And it was naked. That had to mean something.

She poured herself another cup of coffee and stared out the front window. Silly dream. Stupid stuff. Why think about it when there were so many real worries to address? Thoughts and possibilities tumbled in her mind as they had virtually every waking hour of every day in recent memory. But again there was no solution. There was never a solution. Every answer her mind put forth just seemed to raise more questions. And there were so many things that were totally beyond her control. Maybe it was better not to think at all. She focused her attention on the houses across the street as if she could look through them.

Somewhere beyond those houses lay the eastern horizon. She tried to envision it. The more she concentrated the more it seemed that there would be an answer there if she could just see past the houses and the trees and everything else that stood between her and the gathering dawn.

The sun finally broke over the top of the house across the street and transformed her window into a sort of mirror. She could still see out, but now she could see her reflection as well. Her white bathrobe blended with the white of the house across the street and made her seem to be naked. She looked into her own face and saw the image of the clone in the dream. There was something about the eyes that was especially pitiful.

The resemblance faded as she took another sip of coffee and wondered how she could ever have been so cruel to that poor creature.