



THE LAST QUEENSLAND

BY

JARED BENTLEY

WHY I LIKE IT: Fiction Editor JOEY CRUSE writes...

“The Last Queensland,” by Jared M. Bentley, is like reading a small masterclass on fiction – there is so much to take away from this story while reading. Well-paced and controlled, somber yet humorous, creatively absurd but grounded, the tone and voice of this piece is subtle, heartwarming, ingenious, and truly tender – like a much-needed hug from Frankenstein’s monster or Gene Wilder smiling and telling you you’ll live happily ever after in a chocolate factory.

The premise is simple. As technology has advanced in the future, two scientists are able to exponentially increase the life expectancy and intelligence of the dog that they love through cloning as well as develop humanity’s lifespan and regeneration. The world is better for their creation, and, as the intellectual capacity of canines surpasses the average human, the bond between dogs and masters disintegrates into equality and affection.

In a world where intelligent canines have more emotional and intellectual power than most humans, Bentley’s story could have easily devolved into some hokey, tongue-wagging dystopia of humanity’s enslavement at the paws of the formerly oppressed, but, thank Christ, not in this case. The world crafted is a world which, the more that we love, the more that we learn to empathize with one another, the more that you recognize the need for a good scratch behind the ear, demonstrates our true potential and capacity for kindness – that reminds us of the potential for connection in another...human, dog, animal, whatever (but never cats, they do not care for us and use us to do their bidding).

Five Stars.

WHY I LIKE IT: Senior Editor CP writes...*There is a certain breed of snob that looks down its nose at science fiction. But quality favours no genre. The story you are about to read demonstrates much finer word craft than much of the ‘literary’ fiction that will pretend to be more than it is. And at FOTD, it’s all about good writing.*

Five Stars

WHY I LIKE IT: Titles Editor WADE SPRINGER writes...*Yeah, I know the last Queensland is female. But she is also cloned and as mysterious as she is lovable. The image I created attempts to capture both her other worldliness as well as the enigma ‘she’ represents—an aristocrat of her kind. A really great story.*

Five Stars

QUALITY QUOTABLE *(for the love of language...)*

Lagotto's eyes were moist as he looked down at the Milk-Bone. He recalled Queenie III's first walk as a two-month-old, and how the three of them went down to Lake Huron and marveled at the vacuum turbines and water-cycle assistors. Queenie III then learned about how humanity had once saved itself from environmental destruction. Since then, any time they said "Lake," Queenie III attached her leash to her collar and waited patiently by the door. He remembered how he taught her all the words she knew. "Rigorous exercise," Lagotto said, and Queenie III jumped off the couch and did her daily thirty laps in the pool. Mostly he recalled their daily routine where she made the coffee. At first, she spilled everywhere, but after years of practice, she made him and Alex a cup each morning. She did all this just for the promise of a scratch behind the ear. Lagotto had come to understand that Queenie III's intelligence had not diminished her charm in any way. She was an exceedingly smart dog, but she was still a dog and Lagotto's best friend.

The Last Queensland

The last Queensland, Queenie II, was dying for the second time from acute indigestion. On this day, of May 21, 2061, caninity1 took its first steps toward intelligent life.

The thirty-five-pound gray, black, and white Queensland Heeler was stretched out on a doctor's table, panting and whimpering. Queenie II's life expectancy had come up as a topic of discussion over the years, and now that she was on her deathbed, her two owners had to decide who would give Queenie II her last Milk-Bone. It was decided this way:

Alexander Akita and Bertram Lagotto, childhood friends, then college roommates, then veterinary partners, worked together at Akita-Lagotto Multi-Clone Veterinary Facility. There they sat with Queenie II, nearing the start of the cellular fractionation for replication2 sequence.

Their facility was quite ordinary—paintings of dogs on the walls, a bench for owners to sit on, and a medical bed for the canine patient.

The only oddity was the blue door. Bright light emitted from around the frame. As creators of the Multi-Clone, Akita, and Lagotto knew what lay behind the cold, blue door—feet upon feet of that eerily irregular door.

Beside the blue door, in the veterinary patient room, Akita and Lagotto professionally and somberly attended a touchpad terminal. They fed the terminal Queenie II's genetic data and adjusted questions to its needs. Certainly, Akita and Lagotto, and all other dog owners like them, were entitled to share in the foolproof accuracy offered by the Multi-Clone Facility.

In recent years, Multi-Clone facilities defined the new standard for world citizens' pets, increased life expectancy, and developed larger brains in canines. Since the creation of Multi-Clone facilities, traditional dog breeding has been considered inhumane. Instead of breeding

purebred dogs, Multi-Clone facilities helped to keep purebred lines from going the way of the dodo. It was because of the taboo around dog breeding that Queenie II was, in fact, the last Queensland Heeler. Queenie II's predecessor, Queenie, was the Akita family dog. Upon her death, the Akitas ordered a traditional cloning sequence, which meant Queenie II would become the first dog in history to be cloned twice.

There had been speculation about Queenie II's cloning sequence. Akita and Lagotto theorized a significant increase in her brain function. And on this day, of May 21, 2061, what had been a strong theory became fact.

After a round of cloning, Queenie III would have a life expectancy of forty to fifty years and the ability to understand and interpret over two hundred thousand words. Brain function increased over three times Lagotto and Akita's prediction.

"It's amazing when you think of it," Akita said. His long face had lines of weariness in it. As he sipped his coffee slowly from his to-go mug, he burnt his tongue and thought of his dog, who would be incinerated after the cellular fractionation. "The same dog, but thrice as smart, and living twice as long. At this rate, our dogs will soon outlive us."

Lagotto tilted his head sideways, but not out of interest. He couldn't help himself from playing the role of contrarian, and he wanted to be contrary now—partly because his friend hadn't also brought him a cup of coffee—partly because he was losing his dog of twenty years—and lastly because it had not yet been decided who would give Queenie II her last Milk-Bone. "She won't be the same," he said.

"Oh, hell, just about the same, Bert."

"That's not the same

"Alright, then. Looks the same. Sounds the same. Smells the same. Same mannerisms. Same personality. You satisfied?"

Lagotto ran his fingers through his scruff of hair, which was golden and fair, like that of a retriever. "What if we didn't clone her? I'd rather not have to go through this again..."

He gestured over to Queenie II who panted and drooled on the table, without the energy to raise her head. She was a shadow of her former playful self, riddled with tumors, suffering from muscle failure, partially blind, entirely deaf, and with a gut that could no longer stomach breakfast. Despite all of that, she was still endearing, especially to her two owners who had helped raise her for all those dog years.

"Well, it'll be a long time before we have to worry about that again."

"It's not enough. People shouldn't have to go through life losing their dog and cloning it again. It's a never-ending cycle of death and despair."

Akita drank his coffee. Then he said, “That’s a little dramatic there, Bert.”

“I’m sorry. This is harder than I thought it was going to be.”

Akita put his arm around his friend and embraced him. He held up his hand and waved across their line of sight for dramatic effect. “But now, we can go through life experiencing the smartest dogs in human history, and bond with them like never before. Ask the Multi-Clone if you don’t believe me.”

“I can see it right now,” Lagotto said, bobbing his head at the screen. “I don’t have to ask the Multi-Clone.”

“Then stop running down what the Multi-Clone has done for us,” said Akita, scooching away, “It did alright.” “Who said it didn’t? What I’m saying is that Queenie III will not be the same dog.”

Lagotto pointed a judgmental finger at the other. “Don’t you say I’ll like Queenie III just as much.”

There was silence for a while. Akita put his coffee to his lips only occasionally, and Lagotto’s eyes slowly closed, like Queenie II’s when she wanted a nap.

Then Lagotto’s eyes snapped open. “You’re thinking you’ll love Queenie III just as much as you love this one, aren’t you?”

“I’m not thinking.”

“Sure, you are. You think our next dog will be exactly like her, so why not love her just the same? But we’ll know that she won’t be the same, Alex.”

“I get it,” said Akita. “Don’t shout. After Queenie II is gone, and cloned again, we’ll have a new dog that won’t know us yet. And even though much of the genetic makeup will be similar, she’s not exactly the same dog.”

“Damn right, she won’t be,” muttered Lagotto. “It’s just like the ship of Theseus.”

“You and your Greeks...,” said Akita.

“You know Queenie will never be the same after this.”

It was Akita’s turn to be the contrarian. He enjoyed prodding Lagotto in these moments. “And who’s to say you won’t love the next Queenie MORE than this one?”

“Never.”

“Why not? Maybe someday.” “Never.”

“Tell you what. Since you love her so much, I’ll let you give Queenie II her last Milk-Bone.”

“Really?”

Lagotto was just sad enough to give in, and getting to feed Queenie II her last Milk-Bone was certainly a triumph. He nodded without really thinking of what Akita might say next.

“But if you end up loving the next Queenie as much or more than this one, then the next last Milk-Bone is mine to give... Assuming we’re both still alive.”

Akita held out his hand partly as a gesture, and half in jest.

Lagotto paused for a moment and looked at Queenie II. Soon, they’d give her a shot, and the process of cellular fractionation would begin. Lastly, they would incinerate her. Then her cells would grow in a tiny embryonic tube, and she’d transition into a blind little thing with hardly any hair. She wouldn’t be that cute. Not really. Thinking that his love could not be rebuilt half as well as Queenie II’s cells, he agreed with a swift handshake. “Deal.”

#

Bertie, Betty, and Xander watched with starry eyes as their fathers processed the cloning sequence. Akita and Lagotto’s children were told that their dog, whom they called Queenie to avoid confusion, was to be revitalized. Based on how the process looked those days, this was seemingly true. The children watched Queenie III on a monitor. Their dog, whom they’d each had years with, was about to be replicated, and have an increased lifespan.

Queenie III was not dying or in pain, as Queenie II had been. Rather, she was in her twilight years and due for an upgrade. Having a full understanding of the process that she was about to undergo, Queenie III sat patiently in a blue tube behind the blue door of the Multi-Clone Veterinary Facility.

To Akita and Lagotto, this was more than just another routine dog-cloning exercise. This was their dog that was about to undergo the procedure—their dog who happened to be the first of the advanced canine species—their dog who happened to be the last Queensland.

“That’s it,” Akita said confidently. He stretched his back and reached out with all his limbs like he always did before his morning walk. “There’s our numbers.”

Queenie III’s statistics over the last forty years had surpassed Multi-Clone’s predictions. Her brain function, vocabulary, understanding of situations, and consciousness had proliferated much like the technology of the Multi-Clone Facility.

Multi-Clone technology had advanced to the point where it could increase the lifespan of humans. Minor corrections with revitalizing checkups helped to eliminate old cells and replace

them with younger ones—cellular fractionation for replication, but on a much smaller and palatable scale.

This advancement happened thirty years ago. Lagotto and Akita were not immortal, nor were any living things, but humanity had successfully increased their lifespan by a hundred years or so. Though Akita and Lagotto were now in their seventies, neither looked a day older than when they put down Queenie II forty years prior. Seventy had become the new thirty.

On the monitor, Akita and Lagotto's children ran around in circles and chanted, "Queenie will live forever! Queenie will live forever!" The three were of various ages under ten but had remarkably similar personalities.

Akita smiled before hitting the mute button on the monitor. He and his childhood friend, then roommate, then coworker, then husband had something to discuss.

"The numbers look... Good," Lagotto said. Of course, this was quite an understatement. Queenie IV would have a seventy-year lifespan, completely self-aware consciousness, and with machine modifications, the ability to speak. She would go on to win them a Nobel Prize, and based on the specs they examined, she might have a chance of winning it herself.

Akita sipped coffee from his insulated tumbler. He forgot once more to bring Lagotto one. Akita cleared his throat and asked, "Do you remember our deal?"

Lagotto looked down, plucked a single dog treat from his pocket, and held it in his hands like it was the little bling thing Queenie III had been.

Lagotto's eyes were moist as he looked down at the Milk-Bone. He recalled Queenie III's first walk as a two-month-old, and how the three of them went down to Lake Huron and marveled at the vacuum turbines and water-cycle assistors. Queenie III then learned about how humanity had once saved itself from environmental destruction. Since then, any time they said "Lake," Queenie III attached her leash to her collar and waited patiently by the door. He remembered how he taught her all the words she knew. "Rigorous exercise," Lagotto said, and Queenie III jumped off the couch and did her daily thirty laps in the pool. Mostly he recalled their daily routine where she made the coffee. At first, she spilled everywhere, but after years of practice, she made him and Alex a cup each morning. She did all this just for the promise of a scratch behind the ear. Lagotto had come to understand that Queenie III's intelligence had not diminished her charm in any way. She was an exceedingly smart dog, but she was still a dog and Lagotto's best friend.

"I can't help but feel funny about it," Lagotto said.

"Why, for Pete's sake?" demanded Akita. "You can't tell me with a clear conscience that you didn't love Queenie III just as much as Queenie II. There are millions of dogs on this planet, and we happened to have the best one. Good lord, our children have bonded so well with Queenie III." He gestured to the screen where their children danced in a circle. Then after a reflective

pause, “I tell you, it’s a lucky thing we developed the Multi-Clone Facility, otherwise someone else would have the world’s smartest dog.”

“I know, I know,” said Lagotto miserably.

Akita said promptly, “Our dog is the best dog in the world.”

“I think so, too,” said Lagotto, tousling his long, golden hair.

It was a nice feeling to have a Multi-Clone of your own, and Lagotto was glad he was part of this generation and no other. In his father’s youth, human life expectancy was less than eighty years, and dogs lived a measly ten to twelve on average.

Lagotto felt uplifted, as he always did when he thought about the Multi-Clone Facility, and how it was so much more efficient than it was forty years ago when they first cloned Queenie II. Still, he wondered with canine intelligence increasing this rapidly, would they, at some point, cease to be dogs? Would they no longer walk on leashes, or eat food that we give them? Or play games as simple as fetch?

“We’ve cloned so many dogs, Bert. So many dogs,” sighed Akita, busy with thoughts of his own. “I suppose families of all the generations to come will have the same dog through all their lifetimes.”

Their children walked in at that moment, perhaps bored with their chanting, and wondering what was taking so long.

“Not the same dog,” said Lagotto, with a smile.

“Oh, not this again.”

“Not the same dog, Daddy?” shrilled Xander.

Akita gave Lagotto a nasty look that said, “You better fix this.”

“Xander, my little sweet. Queenie will be different after this.”

“Isn’t she just getting a procedure to live longer?” Bertie, their firstborn asked, properly utilizing “procedure” as a reprocessed word from a previous conversation.

“Yes, but she’ll be a little different. She’ll be smarter, and maybe even able to talk,” Akita said.

“A kid at school said that dogs get smincinerated when they go to Multi-Clone Facilities. What does smincinerated mean?” Asked Betty, their second-oldest.

Xander set up a howl. “I don’t want Queenie to get smincinerated.”

“Now look what you’ve done,” whispered Akita, exasperated.

“How was I to know they were going to walk in right when I said that?” Lagotto whispered back.

“It’s okay, kids. Daddy will take you back outside, and when Queenie comes out, she’ll be good as new,” Akita said, ushering the children toward the door. With that, he gestured to Lagotto and made him go out with the kids.

As Lagotto passed, Akita whispered, “Hey. Aren’t you forgetting something?”

Lagotto set his eyes on the ground, reluctantly placed the Milk-Bone in Akita’s hand, and exited.

Akita sat with his thoughts for a moment as he held Queenie’s favorite treat. The tiny brown bone’s smell of old meat and oats brought him back to when he gave his childhood dog,

Queenie, her first treat. Her innocent, black eyes bulged as she licked her chops with anticipation. He missed Queenie, and he missed Queenie II, and he would soon miss Queenie III.

He pondered then, what Queenie IV might bring to his life, and to the world. He wondered if they kept doing this—furthering the lifespan and intelligence of their dogs— would they eventually stop being dogs, and become something else? Would they take the world from humanity? Would they kill all humans for keeping them as pets for generations? Would they make humans pets?

He shrugged and glanced at the Multi-Clone terminal data. “Nah,” he said aloud and entered the blue door to give Queenie III her last treat.

#

Akita and Lagotto stared into the black depths of Queenie IV’s eyes as she sat on the floor of the blue room behind the blue door. “Are we ridiculous to be concerned about the matter?” Akita said.

Lagotto shook his head. After looking at the terminal and the data it presented, Queenie IV would grow to be more intelligent than an average human being. “You know, hyper-intelligent dogs will outnumber unintelligent ones in five years at the present rate of the cloning cycle.”

Both sat with perfect posture, despite their age. One-hundred and forty was the new forty.

“If this keeps up, our dogs will walk us on leashes,” Lagotto said.

Perfectly remembering his thoughts from seventy years prior, Alex coughed up the coffee he drank from his proliferated ion-heat flask. “That’s a little dramatic there, Bert.”

“That’s the only thing that stirs you up these days.” Akita sighed. Before seeing the data, he hadn’t actually feared caninity surpassing humanity. Still, the thought of not cloning Queenie IV

was difficult for him. “Look, I don’t think Queenie is the type of dog to create some kind of canine coup against humanity. Look at her.”

Queenie IV sat like a good girl, waiting patiently inside the blue room behind the blue door. “Hello, Father, and Father,” Queenie IV said, utilizing her robotic voice box. “Is the cloning procedure soon to commence?”

“Soon, dear,” Lagotto said, then muted the connection.

Akita raised his voice only a little. “If we had bet all those years ago, I’d once more be the one to give her the last Milk-Bone. This Queenie was perfect. The next Queenie will be the same.”

Lagotto fought back a grin. “Not the same,” he said.

“For God’s sake, give it a rest.”

“Queenie V will live over three hundred years. She’ll outlive us, Alexander. She might even outlive our children. Caninity might even surpass us in our lifetime.”

Akita chuckled to himself.

“What is it?”

“What if we’d have had a cat?”

“We’ve both always been dog people,” Lagotto countered.

“Yes, but what if we were both cat people?”

“Then I suppose we would have worked harder to make the appropriate adjustments to the Multi-Clone Facility to perfectly clone our cat.”

“We’ve cloned plenty of cats. Besides increased lifespans, there has been no effect on their brain function,” Akita said. “I’m wondering why. Why dogs, and not cats? Why not chimps? Or dolphins? Or magpies?”

He’d had the thought plenty of times before. Akita knew that dogs had a special set within their seventy-eight chromosomes that allowed them to rapidly evolve after their exposure to Multi-Clone technology. Cats and other intelligent animals did not have the same genetic makeup, and thus, they did not respond in the same way. Caninity was the outlier.

However, much of the science pertaining to these outlying chromosomes affected by the Multi-Clone Technology was tweaked by Akita and Lagotto. The rapid evolution of canines and the Dawn of Caninity were tethered to their research.

“Ask the Multi-Clone Terminal,” Lagotto said.

Akita already knew what it would say, but he asked anyway. He typed: “Why don’t Multi-Clone Facilities advance brain function in felines?”

After a few moments, the terminal spat back an answer. It said: INSUFFICIENT DATA TO PROMPT A MEANINGFUL ANSWER.

The two men looked at each other and shrugged, then began the cloning sequence. Though they had their doubts, their curiosity killed them.

#

Queenie V’s eyes scanned the funeral attendants. There were so many of them, each with its load of humanity, or caninity. The attendants came from far and wide to celebrate the life of the acclaimed scientist, and Queenie V’s co-creator, Alexander Akita.

Queenie V had never been to a funeral before, as they were quite rare. Her creator had been involved in an unfortunate Bubblecar accident, and because of the explosion, none of his matter could be salvaged. Though the UN had decidedly deemed human Cellular Fractionation for Replication legal, Alexander Akita’s cells had already been incinerated, and therefore could not be replicated.

Queenie V stood beside her other creator, Bertram Lagotto, who occasionally dried his tears with a handkerchief as the eulogizer spoke. “And so, we must say goodbye to a beloved UN citizen and hero. Be at peace,” the black dog in a black suit said.

There was no coffin to lower into the ground. They had nothing, not even ashes to spread. Akita’s body had vaporized.

The aging bodies that surrounded Queenie V were each touched by the eulogy, and they wept for a man who had changed the world.

Queenie V was roused from her reverie upon feeling Lagotto’s hand scratch her behind the ear. Even with all her intelligence, she enjoyed scratches from her creator.

The funeral had ended, and the attendants paid their respects to Lagotto and his family, which included Queenie V.

Lagotto and Akita’s children had all grown up and had spouses and children of their own. Queenie V was proud of the adults they had become, even Xander, who had always been a bit yippy.

Lagotto and Queenie V had bid the guests farewell and had alighted their Bubblecar to head home.

“That was nice,” Lagotto said.

“It was.”

Something had been on Queenie V’s mind. She and her two creators had some distinct conversations where they had revealed some hesitancy to cloning her in the past. She wondered if she were to pass early from an unforeseen health circumstance, would Lagotto clone her again?

Queenie V nestled up to Lagotto, placing her head on his lap. Though she was hyper-intelligent, she wasn’t above a cuddle.

“If I were to die, would you clone me again?” She asked, shifting her eyes upward to look at him.

Lagotto wriggled his nose as the self-driving Bubblecar took them to their destination. “You’re going to live longer than me, my dear,” Lagotto said, clearing his throat.

“And what if I died as Father did?”

“Well then I couldn’t, and I would be beside myself.”

“What I meant was, if I were to die, and you could clone me again, would you?”

Lagotto scratched under his chin. “Your father and I were always at odds about this.”

“I know. He told me.”

Lagotto patted Queenie V’s head and scratched once more behind her ear. “To tell you the truth, I was always concerned about you not being the same dog.

Queenie V nodded.

“When we first set out to clone you, all those years ago, it was because we knew our dog was the best dog in the whole world.” He paused and recalled the conversation he’d had with his husband a lifetime ago. “Everyone thinks their dog is the best, but we knew. You were the greatest dog in the world.” “Dad,” Queenie V said, drawing out the vowel in embarrassment.

“It’s true. We both knew it. And so, I was worried because I knew you wouldn’t be exactly the same. We even had a bet about who would give you your last Milk-Bone.”

At the sound of the word “Milk-Bone,” Queenie V couldn’t help but perk up her ears excitedly. Even she could not withstand her primitive urge for luxuries such as Milk-Bones.

“I’m sorry. I don’t have one,” Lagotto said, smiling.

Queenie V slouched back down on Lagotto’s lap.

“I lost that bet,” Lagotto said, “Because I’ve loved you the same with each new you. It’s like... I’ve always known you this way. Like you were always my equal.”

“So, you would clone me again?” Queenie V asked, looking up with her little puppy-dog eyes that hadn’t changed.

“In a heartbeat.”

#

Bertram Lagotto first forgot Queenie V’s name when he was two-hundred and eighty-nine years old. Two-hundred and eighty-nine was the new ninety. Queenie V could tell that Lagotto’s mind was beginning to freely melt away. She knew that he would see her as no different from any other canine. She found this to be utterly devastating.

“I’m dying,” Lagotto said.

Queenie V looked at him, a man whose light was rapidly dimming. His once lush, golden scruff of hair had thinned and turned jet white. He was once a luminous star but had become a white dwarf, fading to the end. New scientists had filled his shoes, working tirelessly as he had, to continue the work of Multi-Clone Facilities. Queenie V thought of those humans and canines working in labs, and how they too, would one day run down.

Lagotto said, “Where’s Alex? I’d like to see my husband.”

Queenie V rested her head by Lagotto’s feet, for the last time she spoke, it had frightened him. “Where is my husband? I’d like to see him. I’d like to see him before the end.”

“My husband is a doctor. Perhaps he knows if my death can be reversed. Let us ask him.”

Queenie V stayed with Lagotto when he couldn’t remember that Alex had died many years ago. She stayed her paw before she thought to say anything that would bring Lagotto further pain.

Lagotto said, “I shall wait.”

#

Lagotto lingered on this way, while litigators toiled behind the scenes. Death was a strange business, for Lagotto’s children believed that he did not want to be cloned. Queenie V,

on the other hand, wanted to return the favor and bring him back to raise him as a little blind thing of her own.

Lagotto’s dementia had arrived like an uninvited guest, and so he hadn’t added any cloning stipulation to his will. The UN court had deemed him, “not of sound mind,” so no further additions could be made.

One by one, the days passed. Some were good. Some were bad. In the legal case of Queenie vs. The Lagotto Family, things were bad. The court date was arriving and Queenie V felt her lawyer, an old Bloodhound, hadn't caught the scent of enough evidence to back their claim.

Until one day... Lagotto reached for clarity.

"Is this the end?" Lagotto asked. "Queenie, am I really dying?"

Queenie V recognized that his memory had returned but for a fleeting moment, and pressed her paw to a recording device.

"You are almost three hundred years old, Dad."

"I miss Alexander," Lagotto cried. "I'd like to be with him."

"I understand," Queenie V said with a pause. "Dad. If I could clone you again, would you want me to?"

"Well, that's interesting," Lagotto said with a pause.

"What, pray tell?"

"My whole life's pursuit has been the cloning of others, but I never thought much about cloning myself. I suppose my children think I'm against it altogether."

"They do. They say because you won't be the same."

Lagotto smiled, which made Queenie V smile. She hadn't seen him smile so genuinely in years. "But I would be the same."

"But you always said—"

"—I know what I said. But then I think of you, and all your different... bodies. Do you know what I've realized?"

Queenie V shook her head.

"Each time, you were just a little more you."

#

Bertram Lagotto sat on the other side of that cold, blue door of the Multi-Clone Facility. When he had entered, he thought he had a distant memory somewhere in the void of his mind. At this point, he only existed to be cloned, and if the litigation hadn't been so long, he'd have been able to find peace sooner.

All of Queenie V's questions about Lagotto's genetic makeup were answered.

All collected data resulted in this final end. Nothing was left to be collected.

All collected data had been grouped by all possible genetic commonalities or irregularities.

Queenie V had spent a long time doing all that.

She smiled at Bertram Lagotto's three children with whom she had battled in court. After hearing their father's recording, they sided with her.

Lagotto's grandchildren were outside the room chanting, "We're getting a new grandpa. We're getting a new grandpa."

The chanting felt like a vague memory to Queenie V, but she couldn't place it.

Before she began the cloning sequence, she considered all of the things she might say and landed on one that lightened the unbearable weight of anticipation.

And Queenie V said, "LET THERE BE LIFE!"

And there was life –

Endnotes:

1. Ca-nin-i-ty /'kā,nīn,ədē/

Noun

1. The canine race. Canine beings collectively. "Appalling crimes against caninity."

2. Dogness; Benevolence. "He applauded her caninity by barking."

2. Cellular fractionation for replication

Phrase of fractionation and replication

A scientific process used in modern cloning. The medically-induced rapid deterioration of a patient's cellular tissue allows the cells to be copied. The patient's condition becomes unstable, resulting in death.

Outlawed for human trials at the London Accords in 2058.

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

I am unsure how I had the idea to use Isaac Asimov's story, "The Last Question" as a framework for a story about dogs.

I thought, rather than tell the story of a supercomputer that becomes God and recreates the stars at the end, I could tell a story about dogs and their painfully short lifespans. That makes sense, right?

I aimed to create a positive view of the future where dogs live longer lives. Even with longer lifespans, humans would still consider issues like dog ownership, death, and identity. Those were the themes I wanted to explore; mainly the last of the three, identity.

My character, Lagotto, grapples with the idea of cloning dogs and argues that each new clone of Queenie will not be the same. In the end, he admitted he was wrong, stating, "With each new body, you became a little more you."

I guess that's how I feel about life as I age—each year, I become a little more me.

AUTHOR BIO: Jared M. Bentley (he/him/his) is a humble mortal who lives happily with his partner in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Much of his time is spent grading student writing, and coaching tennis. When he is not writing or working, he can often be found walking his dog, playing disc golf, or eating a sandwich.

For more of Jared's stories, please check out his Instagram, where he posts one new microfiction story each week.

<https://instagram.com/myweeklyhundred?igshid=OGQ5ZDc2ODk2ZA==>