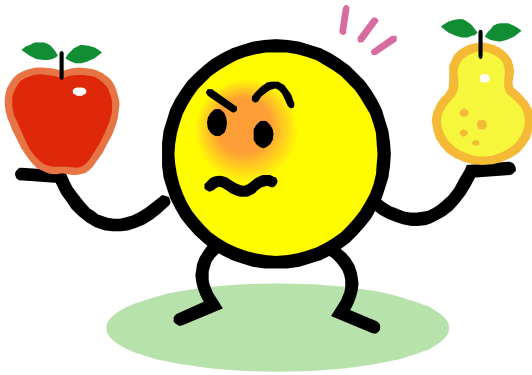


TO CHOOSE



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Ferrin Truman inched cautiously toward the teenage boy, one of her arms partially outstretched. The tips of his fingers, clinging precariously to the rusty steel bars of the bridge, was the only salvation between him and the murky waves below.

"You have another choice," she pleaded.

"I don't want to be a Trophy anymore."

With horror she recognized the resignation in his eyes, then watched his fingers relax. Heart racing, she rushed toward the bar in time to view his body quietly slice into the undulating blackness of the bay below. Her head and shoulders drooped as if the cement where she stood was sucking her in head first. She felt a warm arm slide around her shoulders.

"You did your best Ferrin. Sorry you lost him."

Mike Washington, a Seattle street cop, had been a witness for many months to Ferrin's skills in suicide negotiations. She worked on contract as a psychologist for the S.P.D.; they contacted her whenever notification came in of a potential suicide. He had never seen her lose anyone.

"I wasn't good enough Mike. If only I had kept him talking a bit longer. If only I could have..."

"Let it go Ferrin," Mike said softly as he gently embraced her.

"He said he didn't want to be a Trophy anymore."

"Yea I heard him. I wonder if he knew that he wasn't alone? Reds and Greens are already about one sixth of our population."

"And that number is growing," Ferrin whispered.

"We could have gotten him into a support group. Being a teenager is hard enough, and having to deal with being different on top of that...it ain't easy if you don't have a lot of support around you." A streetlight harshly illuminated his reddish tinged skin.

"When I'm in a situation like this it makes me wonder if the scientists who developed cross-breeding ever thought about the morality or ethics of what they were doing. Did they bother to think far enough forward to realize the repercussions, like suicides?" she spat out bitterly.

"Progress is never without risks."

"Suicide isn't what I call progress Mike."

"Look it's cold out here. Can I drive you to the office?"

"No, thanks for offering buy my car is here. I'm going home now but I'll drop by the office in the morning to file the report."

"Okay then, we'll see ya on the morrow. Take care Ferrin."

She adjusted the rear view mirror in her car to study her own coffee-colored face and wondered how she would feel if she

was a Red or a Green. Admittedly the technology was without dispute the single greatest, most unprecedented advance of the twentieth century. Scientists had begun experimentation with gene splicing in the mid to late 1900's to produce new medicines. That evolved to genetically altering plants with insect genes to develop crops and produce which were resistant to disease, pests, and spoilage. The technology eventually progressed to the point which allowed human genes to be spliced with plant genes to produce a breed of humans who didn't need to eat. They were labeled as human autotrophs as they synthesized sunlight for food, just like plants. Someone coined the term "Trophy" for short and it stuck as a nickname.

While adjusting the rear view mirror back into place she spoke out loud to the automobile's CompuTrol. "Dial: my husband at work." A small transparent video screen embedded in the lower left quadrant of her windshield flickered with lights and Jess Truman's greenish image appeared. "Baby, hi. Autopilot: Home."

"Ferrin? Hey peaches, what's up? Sorry I had to work late but this project is due tomorrow."

"How much longer do you think you will be?"

His brows and eyes tightened as he scrutinized her face. "What is the matter, did something happen? I can barely see

you.”

“I’m in the car,” she sighed, “going home. I lost someone today, a young boy. I feel really bad about it.” She started to cry softly.

“Oh sweetheart, how terrible. Look, I can be home in forty to forty-five minutes. Get the Fauna Spauna going and we’ll have some wine and talk about it, okay?”

She sniffed and nodded. “Okay please hurry Jess.”

This was the third time in less than a year that she had been called upon to assist in an autotroph suicide attempt. Hoping a trend wasn’t developing but just in case it was, she was reading up on everything she could find about genetically modified humans. The library had sent her a history chip; it was in an envelope next to her on the passenger seat, forgotten in the excitement. It held old network news reports and historical television programs about the technology. She peeled the tiny chip from the protective cardboard and inserted it into a thin slot on the auto’s dashboard. The screen embedded in the windshield again flickered to life, and an old style commentator documentary a decade old began to play:

“...Every household in the U.S. was educated and offered an opportunity for their future children. Parents could take advantage of the latest biotechnology, and have their unborn

children genetically altered to become photosynthesizers. If the parents chose that option, an egg from the female was removed and its genes spliced with plant genes. The egg was then fertilized outside of the womb and re-inserted so it could implant for a natural pregnancy cycle. For future generations, if one parent has the genetically modified plant gene, all babies born from a union with that parent would be a sun synthesizer..."

The commentator droned on. As she was ferried home, Ferrin learned the government initially subsidized the biotech research therefore doctors were able to offer the genetic service for a reduced fee, but after the program proved a wild success the government pulled out. She pondered the definition of "wild success," as genetic modification now had become an option reserved usually for the financially elite.

Ferrin was a normal food eating human but her husband Jess was a Green. He and other Greens had the gene for a pigment called chlorophyll. Just as it does in plants, chlorophyll pigment allowed him to absorb sunlight. Greens absorbed violet to red wave lengths of light but reflected green wave lengths so their skins were shades of green. The Reds were genetically modified to contain a pigment called carotenoid. They absorbed violet to blue wave lengths but reflected red so their skins

were tinged red. Eye and hair coloring plus all other physical attributes and features were still dependent on the parents genetic codes.

As the car pulled the car into her driveway, Ferrin shook her head and turned off the broadcast. She didn't consider Trophy suicides a "wild success."

"And so before I could even get close to him, he let go." Steam rose in milky whispers around her bare shoulders. Jess pulled his wife onto his lap and hugged her comfortingly. The bubbling warm water of the hot tub surrounded them like a haven.

"Sweets did you think your winning streak would last forever? Hmm?" He kissed the cottony softness at the crown of her head. "You are an excellent negotiator but some things in life just aren't negotiable."

"But this should have been! It was a life, something sweet, and precious, and sacred. He was a Red Trophy. Why didn't he want to be a Red? He needed help, guidance, something. I failed him."

"He didn't give you a chance. All of your other situations, well they had to open up a bit to let you in. Then BAM! once you were in, you had them in the palm of your hand."

It sounds as if this guy wouldn't give, not even a little crack."

"I guess you're right." She lifted her head to look into his eyes. "Do you know how much I love you Jess? You always know the right thing to say to make me feel better." She rested her head in the crook of his green neck and allowed the whirling water from the Fauna Spauna jets to relax her.

"I love you too." Jess handed her a crystal goblet filled with a pale blue liquid. "Try this new wine. You know how the general rule is red wine for dark meat, and white wine for white meats? Well this particular grape has been modified so it can be served with any type of meat."

She swirled the wine before tasting it. "It has a wonderful fragrance, and tastes delicious. I bet this is creating quite an impact for the wine connoisseurs. It's a new life I bet for the wine community."

"I'm sure. And speaking of new life why don't we work on making a new little life. For us?"

Ferrin twirled the thin stem of the goblet and watched the languid movement of the pastel liquid. She didn't want her beliefs to hurt her husband. She sat the drink down and grabbed a fluffy towel.

"Don't run away from me now. This is important Ferrin."

"You know I really want to but..."

"But what Ferrin? You have been putting this discussion off for a year without ever defining a solid objection. What is the problem? Talk to me! Tonight please."

She cringed at his tone of voice. "Okay Jess, okay you are right." She bit her lower lip in doubt. "I've been evading this issue because I would want our baby to be like me."

"Like you? Honey it will be like you. It will have the best of both of us...OH!? In other words like You, not like me, a Green?"

"Not a Green nor a Red either! I want the baby to be able to take nourishment from me, to feed from my breast and to take his first bite of food from a tiny silver spoon with a white rubber coating."

"You would want him to suffer through having colic, diarrhea and constipation? Throwing up his milk? You want him to have to choose between being a vegetarian or a meat eater? He'll be subjected possibly to food poisoning like," he threw out a few fingers to count, "botulism, salmonella or e.coli bacteria not to mention the pesticides, herbicides and synthetic hormones he'll ingest."

"It isn't that bad Jess. You know as well as I do that the genetic engineering of the twentieth century eliminated a lot of

food biohazards. It's probably news to you but as a matter of fact, eating is rather enjoyable. I cannot even describe to you the pleasure of taste and textures of solid food."

"I bet you can describe indigestion, heartburn and nausea too! Don't you understand that I have complete freedom? I don't have to depend on anyone or anything for my food. The sun kisses me--I absorb water through my skin or drink it, et Voila!, my central vacuoles are nourished. I have lots more time than most people, no need to grocery shop or cook or do the dishes. I do share these activities with you though because it brings us closer."

"I want my baby to fully understand Thanksgiving with the family, birthday cakes with ice cream, tin foil wrapped chocolate kisses, too sweet suckers and popcorn at the movies. How about grilled hot dogs at a picnic and marshmallows charred black from the fire. Snuggling next to the fireplace drinking thick hot cocoa with fresh whipped cream. Not green eggs and ham, oh Sam I am."

"Was that last remark really necessary Ferrin?"

"I'm sorry Jess, that was the child in me rearing its defensive head. I don't want my baby to be forced to make the choice to live or die, to live in agony if he cannot handle that he is different or muster up the courage to commit suicide if

his life and emotions become unmanageable. I just want my child to be normal."

"So that is what this is all about, normality? I really don't know you as well as I thought. We are *normal*. You know I do liquid feasts with you now and again, like sharing the wine tonight. I'm sure I could manage hot cocoa--it is just not a necessity as I have no appetite for food or drink. It isn't a must for my survival." He stressed again, "Trophys are normal people that have a little green or red color to their skin. I am normal. What do I do to make you think I'm abnormal? We do everything the same except eating." He shrugged his shoulders and took her hand. "I thought you loved me."

"Jess, I do but I never want my child to feel out of place because they are a Green or a Red. Like the boy tonight, he was so confused that it made his life unbearable." She rose up and wrapped the towel around her torso.

"Ferrin the kid you saw tonight would probably still have had problems even if he was a food eater. We don't know his situation. I do know that together we can mold our child's mind and teach him that all people, no matter their color are equally good. We can ensure that our child's self-worth and self-esteem is healthy. The baby will have the best of both of us. Or we can wait fifteen years until we save enough money to

have my plant gene suppressed." He chuckled light and raised an eyebrow. "I wonder how that would work; would I have to eat then? At any rate, in fifteen years our desire for making a baby might have faded." He melded his fingers with hers and kissed the back of her hand. "Or we could have one of each...a pretty Green Trophy baby first, with your nose and my eyes, then adopt a newborn food eating baby. What do you think?"

She pulled her hand away from his and twisted the gold band on her left ring finger. "I think I have to file a police report early tomorrow morning and I'm very tired right now, too tired to choose. Turn the jets off Jess, I need to rest."