

©opyright 2010 by the author of this book (Victor Appleton II - pseud.). The book author retains sole copyright to his or her contributions to this book.

This book is a work of fan fiction. It is not claimed to be part of any previously published adventures of the main characters. It has been self-published and is not intended to supplant any authored works attributed to the pseudonymous author or to claim the rights of any legitimate publishing entity.

THE ANNE SWIFT INVESTIGATES SERIES

Anne Swift: Molecular Biologist Detective

The Microbial Murder Mess

By Victor Appleton II

Anne Swift is called upon to put her training as a microbiologist to work for the FBI in Shopton. A biological soup has been discovered in a series of abandoned barrels buried under Shopton Middle School.

With no identifiers available, Anne must separate all of the components down to their molecular level.

To complicate things, Anne has never revealed to her family about her involvement in investigating such crimes. Her only Enterprises ally is Harlan Ames who frequently acts as her go-between.

Can Anne get to the bottom of the barrels before either an accident or sabotage can spread microbial death?

This book is dedicated to Damon, Tom and Sandy Swift. On the off chance that you find this book, please understand that your mother is a dedicated American who does much more than you can ever imagine for this country. She loves you all and wouldn't want to hurt you. Love her for what she is: your mother first and a scientist second.

THE ANNE SWIFT INVESTIGATES SERIES

Anne Swift and the Microbial Murder Mess

FOREWORD

I have long wished to relate the stories of Tom and Sandy Swift's mother, and the wife of Damon Swift. For more than twenty years she has led a double life: devoted wife and mother of two strong and independent children; and, secretly, one of the leading molecular biologists of her generation.

Working closely with the FBI in her home town, she tackles challenges dealing with everything from mysterious toxic spills to medical experiments gone wrong.

Anne's family and friends only know her as wife, mother and gourmet cook. Her FBI associates, along with Harlan Ames of Swift Enterprises—the only person outside of governmental circles who is in on her secret—know her to be a dedicated scientist, never satisfied until a mystery is completely solved.

My hope that you can do two things: One - enjoy Anne's adventures; and Two - please, please, please keep her secret.

So, why am I telling her tales now? Simply that these have recently been down-classified and have become available through the Right to Access bill. I'm only saving you the need to file for personal access yourself!

Victor Appleton II

CHAPTER 1

SEND IN THE CLONES

"YOU TWO have a wonderful day," Anne Swift, pretty wife to Damon Swift, renowned inventor and scientist, said to her husband and son.

That son, Tom Swift, was fast becoming one of the world's most capable young inventors and scientists. Where his father had once been heavily involved in the design and development of America's Space Shuttle program and was known to be a highly-knowledgeable nuclear scientist, Tom had distinguished himself with inventions and discoveries that ran a wide gamut.

Tom's sister, Sandra, was a vivacious teenager preparing to complete her final year in high school. Like her brother and father, Sandy was keenly interested in flying and was one of the top demonstration pilots for Swift Enterprises, a sprawling four-square-mile research and development facility in their home town of Shopton, New York.

Anne was very proud of her family. They were all so accomplished. Years earlier she had met the young Damon Swift while he was completing his university undergraduate degree. She had fallen deeply in love with the man she secretly referred to as "My Mister Brains."

Damon had received a Masters Degree in aerospace engineering and was snapped up by NASA to help move them from the days of the Apollo moon missions and into building reusable 'space trucks'... the space shuttles.

Anne continued her education at Harvard and had received her

doctorate in molecular biology at about the time Damon was preparing to leave NASA.

Outwardly—and in truth—she was a devoted wife and loving mother, having seemingly put her education behind her in favor of raising a family.

In reality, Anne Swift was one of a handful of molecular biologists that the US government secretly kept on the payroll and a person they came to several times a year to assist in tricky investigations requiring her expertise.

Nobody in her family or circle of friends knew of this double life. In fact, the only person who not only knew but actively assisted her, was Harlan Ames. Ames was an ex-Secret Service agent and the current head of Security at Swift Enterprises.

He had been let into the circle of knowledge more than five years earlier—shortly after arriving at Enterprises—when one of his investigations had uncovered a trail that led directly to Anne's laboratory door.

Knowing how vital her occasional work was, he vowed to keep her secret. Anne, in return, vowed to protect Harlan's job should it ever become known that he was keeping her secret, even from her husband.

As Anne turned back into the house her cellphone began vibrating in her pocket. She activated it and looked to see who the caller might be. The only thing that appeared on her phone's screen was a single word:

Collections

Her contact at Collections, referred to as 'Taxman' was actually a team of individuals, each of whom bore equal responsibility

for communicating outside of their organization. Exactly where that organization fit in the overall scheme of governmental things, Anne never knew. But, she did have an intuition that there must be at least five different people sent her messages.

She pressed a secret combination of keys and then stood watching as taxman's message scrolled across the screen:

MicroGirl. New threat discovered in your back yard.

Unsure of source. Location is local school. Buckets

of blood, evidently. Many. Check with HA and

QN for details. Button up overcoat really well.

Nasty, nasty, nasty stuff.

She had perched on a stool as the words moved by. She realized that she had about sixty seconds to scroll back and review them before they disappeared, leaving no trace that anything had ever come across the phone.

Anne knew that HA was her Enterprise associate and that QN was a local FBI agent, Quimby Narz. She had first met Agent Narz on an assignment one year earlier, and she understood that he was also a contact point for less diabolical things that often included both Damon and Tom.

From memory she dialed Harlan's number. After he answered she placed him on hold while she brought Agent Narz into the conversation.

"Quimby," she said, "our friend in Collections just told me about something they call 'nasty'."

"Yes. I was provided with the basic information an hour ago. Glad it's you we'll be working with on this."

Harlan asked, "What can you tell us about on the phone, Quimby?"

"Not much. I suggest meeting in an hour at the park."

Anne and Harlan agreed to be there at the appointed time.

"I've got a team of agents dressed as sewage workers digging under the gymnasium at Shopton Middle School," he told them when they arrived. "Although that building went up more than fifteen years ago, we have already pulled out a PET plastic barrel filled with what appears to be human remains."

"So, why isn't this a job for the local forensic detectives. Even guys from State," Harlan inquired.

"For the simple reason that we found out about the location from an unnamed source who was able to not only give us the location, but the number of barrels, which may turn out to be more than two dozen, and the contents."

"Don't leave us in suspense, Quimby," Anne prodded the agent.

"As near as we can tell from the message, those barrels contain the genetic remains of a series of *failed cloning experiments*."

He let the news sink in before continuing.

"What makes it such nasty stuff is that the message stated that it is infected with a new, mutant strain of the Black Death!"

"Oh, my," Anne said. "When can I get into the lab to start the investigation?"

"We can only bring the barrels out one at a time and even then only late at night. My guess is that the first one will be in your isolation lab by this time tomorrow. Can I count on you?"

Anne said that she was prepared. Harlan echoed his availability with one minor change. "I will need to be out on Fearing Island with Tom and his dad day after tomorrow. They're getting ready to launch Damon's giant lifting rocket, the *CosmoSoar*, and Tom's new two-man *Star Sphere* rocket."

Anne smiled and commented, "My boys are having a little 'mine is bigger than yours - well... mine is going to launch first' contest. Boys!" She laughed.

The two men shared her laugh. It would be the last one for several weeks, at least until both the source and the danger level had been ascertained.

Tom and his father left the house the next morning heading to Enterprises from where they would fly to Fearing Island, the Swift's secret rocket and submarine base off the coast of Georgia.

Luckily, Sandy had a full day of aircraft demonstrations to attend to and would not return home until after seven that evening. Anne headed to the secret entrance to the FBI's laboratory. The lab took up the back half of a 'bank' that had been set up for local merchants but was staffed with FBI agents.

What everyone assumed was the back room area of the bank was, in reality, a fully-sealed secret series of labs, isolation vaults and decontamination rooms. Once inside, neither biological agent nor human could get out without going through a complete decontamination.

Anne felt a great sense of satisfaction with the DeCon system; she had been instrumental in developing it for this lab and an unknown number of other such facilities spread across North America. She placed implicit faith in its ability to contain any

contamination.

As promised, the first recovered barrel, dirt and all, had been placed in the isolation room off of her main lab. She sat down and turned her computer on. The start up screen showed a picture of her family, taken when on vacation more than ten years earlier. Anne moved the cursor around the screen and clicked over five hidden buttons.

Without this action, the computer would have simply opened the standard operating system. Her actions, however, sent the computer into a totally new and proprietary operating system and allowed her access to the vast electronic resources of the US Government.

"So what are you," she said turning to look at the barrel behind the multiple layers of super-strength and explosion-proof glass. She checked a series of instruments and noted that their measurements currently showed minute levels of arsine gas, a deadly and explosive gas, along with byproduct gasses from flesh decomposition.

She had expected the decomp gasses such as butyric gas, cadaverine and putrescine, but the advent of arsine, generally a byproduct of arsenic decay puzzled her.

"Interesting," she muttered.

Anne spent the remainder of her available time that day in removing the sealed lid of the barrel and beginning to carefully remove the contents.

Once off, the lid released such high concentrations of decomposition gases that Anne noted they were more than three times the amounts she would normally associate with a

container of the current size.

She was even more puzzled when she used the pantograph arms to remove and lay out the bones of two skeletons. What was the most curious was that the femurs of both skeletons were each in excess of fifty inches, indicating a total height of more than nine feet, while all other bones pointed to humans of no greater than five feet ten inches to six feet tall.

After the bones had been pulled from the liquified remains, she did the necessary computations based on skeletal structure and the liquid weight and discovered that the remaining contents of the barrel barely accounted for two average-size bodies.

"Even more interesting," she commented aloud. "They must have been very skinny."

Looking at her watch she saw that it was almost time to leave so that she could be at home—with no hint that she had done more than perhaps a little shopping—when the family arrived.

She used the mechanical arms to pull huge plastic tarps from their recesses in the wall and covered the skeletal remains. She then resealed the barrel with its lid.

A quick check of her instruments showed that there was no contamination outside of the isolation chamber. Anne shut down her computer and left for the day.

When she returned at noon the following day she noticed that a second barrel had been delivered through the rear wall of the chamber.

She signed back into her computer and was soon engrossed in the unpacking of the second container. Like the first, it contained a pair of practically matching skeletons. This pair,

however, exhibited femurs normal for their height but the ulna bones—their forearms—she discovered to be fifty percent greater than normal length for the body height.

Such arms would hang down low enough for the persons to scratch below their own knees without bending over.

A sudden thought crossed Anne's mind.

These are all adult skeletons. Where could these people have been all the years it required to grow up?

Anne felt a chill run down her spine at this realization. She was a little out of her element, so she called Quimby Narz and requested an anthropologist. "I'll need to figure out precise ages of these skeletons."

He agreed and suggested that Anne continue with other work until an expert could be located and brought to Shopton, probably within two days.

Although Anne preferred to work alone she was, by now, use to unscheduled appearances of various FBI agents and fellow scientists. So, she was not unduly bothered when a knock came on her lab door and Dr. Wiley Oswaldt walked in.

"Hello, Annie," he greeted her.

She smiled. She and Wiley had worked on several cases during the three years they had been assigned to the Shopton lab. Normally, Dr. Oswaldt busied himself with cases involving DNA identification.

"The Bureau assigned me to assist you," he stated. "Something about a whole heap of genetic material that needs to be sorted through?"

Anne pointed to the window separating the lab from the insulation chamber. "So far," she told the older man, "we've got two barrels each with a pair of similar skeletons."

"Four bodies to identify, then," he ventured.

"As I said... so far. My understanding is that we can expect about twenty-two more barrels. If the numbers hold up, then you've got four dozen bodies to identify."

Looking closely at the skeletons on the exam tables in the chamber he inquired, "Is it too much to ask that the containers hold solid, testable body pieces? Muscle groups? Organs?"

Anne shook her head.

He tried again. "Brain matter? Skin? Fingers and toes?"

"Sorry, Wiley. At least in these two we have skeletal remains marinating in a decomposition goo. I haven't checked the bottoms so there may be some finger and toe nails there."

With a rueful laugh, he remarked, "Just what I like. Ooze!"

They set about reopening the barrels. While Dr. Oswaldt began inserting a series of probes to take various samples, Anne used her "Waldos" to pick up a coring drill and took numerous samples from the larger of the bones.

As these were being automatically sealed in exhibit containers and labeled by the computer, she used the arms to begin assembling the skeletons.

About half way through the first one she reconsidered her actions. "No use my putting these back together again if I only get body A parts mixed up with body B parts, huh?"

Dr. Oswaldt looked up from a hooded viewscreen. He was using the lab's remote microscope to view the slides he had made of various samples. This elegant device utilized a technology the FBI licensed from Swift Enterprises.

An ultra-high-definition video camera, providing greater than 30,000 pixels per square centimeter, was linked to a computer capable of providing additional magnification, digital recording of samples, plus the remarkable ability to count.

Simply put, if the operator identified a single component in a sample—a cell, microorganism, compound—the computer could be set to count all instances of that item. It was even capable of isolating any given item and clearing the screen of any other materials for better viewing.

"We must wait another—" he glanced at the wall clock, "seven or so minutes for the first of the DNA results. From *my* samples, that is. If you wish, I can add your corings to the list."

"We could let everything run on automatic and come back tomorrow," Anne concluded.

Wiley smiled and her and nodded his head. His mop of fine, silver-gray hair bobbing up and down with each head movement.

Anne performed the necessary processes to move her samples over into the collection area. The computer would take care of keeping all samples separate and would do a better job of preventing contamination between samples than practically any human could.

Before they had the opportunity to leave the lab, the first of Dr. Oswaldt's DNA checks was complete.

Anne stood in the doorway while the older scientist crossed back to the computer terminal.

She watched him as he read the results, running his hand absently through his hair. Anne knew he only did that when confronted by unexpected results.

"What are you seeing, Wiley," she asked.

Turning to face her, he replied, "Trouble. You have two sets of bones in there, but I'm already seeing five different sets of DNA."

"Oh-oh!"

CHAPTER 2

MUTANT GENETICS

OVER THE next five days when Anne was able to slip out of the house and into the lab, she and Dr. Oswaldt received eleven of the barrels.

As each barrel had been opened, sampled, tested and the skeletal remains reassembled, it became evident to them both that they were dealing with far more genetic material than was indicated by the number of skeletons.

Thanks to the high levels of automation available in this lab they were able to process almost two barrels per day.

As each skeleton was matched, it was assembled in long plastic trays that could be sealed and stored for future examination.

Like the initial one, every barrel contained two matching skeletons with matching bone mutations. In some it was leg bones. Others held mutations in arms, spinal components, hands, feet and joints.

What was most surprising to the pair of scientists was that each pair of skeletal remains shared almost an entire set of DNA. But, not exact.

"Clones?" Anne spoke out loud as she was reviewing Dr. Oswaldt's DNA reports on their fourth day.

Nodding his head he replied, "In each case an almost perfect pair. Clones should have virtually identical DNA if they are the result of either egg division or via natural causes."

"As with identical twins," Anne added.

"Certainly. But these, while I would say they fall into the realm of cloning, each have one DNA marker that is a single point off of the other one."

"Are they all the same marker," Anne asked, a hunch forming in her mind.

"No, sad to say. However, they are all in the fifth through ninth marker locations. None below. None above."

"What about the genetic materials in the liquids?"

Oswaldt sat in contemplation for a moment before replying. "First, the facts. Barrel one contained DNA from five distinct individuals. Two of those align with the DNA from your bone samples."

Anne already knew this.

"Barrel two had your standard," he looked slightly aghast at how cavalier he was becoming about the horrific loss of life represented in these barrels. 'Hmm. Anyway, number two's pair of skeletons were surrounded by DNA from three people. Again, the bones matched two of them."

The other barrels that had been examined showed variations ranging between two DNA sources and up to six.

"What we are dealing with, Annie, is something far more diabolical than simple cloning, although I can't for the life of me understand how so many examples of such experimentation could have gone on so long ago."

Anne agreed,

They had been aided for a day once the fifth barrel had been opened by the requested forensic specialist. He took a look at

the various skeletons and declared that all were male and all showed every indication that they were between nineteen and twenty two years of age at the time of death.

He spent enough time with Anne to make her familiar with all of the bone shapes and pointers that would allow her to verify future finds.

"Thanks, Pete," she had said as he departed.

Anne spend a couple days away from the lab when it became necessary to travel to Fearing Island for the planned launches of Damon and Tom's separate rockets.

She had been as appalled as everyone else when a stowaway on the *CosmoSoar* had rocketed into space in the supposedly unmanned spaceship. She had returned home for several days until she was "needed" back at Fearing to witness Tom and his friend Bud Barclay take off in Tom's *Star Spear* on a rescue mission to recover the foolish spoiled rich son of a Greek billionaire who had stolen the giant rocket.

Time went by slowly at the lab as the repetitive work began to bore both scientists. The final barrel had been brought to the facility three weeks after the first. In all, twenty-five barrels had been recovered. Ground-penetrating RADAR had failed to detect any others so the "sewer repair" project was concluded and the hole filled back in and sealed.

Although pressed from time to time by agent Narz, they refused to turn over their results until the final DNA samples had been cataloged.

Their totals ended at forty-nine skeletal remains—the second to last barrel contained only a single skeleton—plus DNA

materials from one hundred sixty seven potential murder victims.

When Quimby Narz visited the lab on the final day of evaluations Anne greeted him. "Nice of you to drop by."

"Let's see what you have," he said.

She showed Narz some of the skeletal abnormalities and described the full range of the others.

"Now, it's your turn to have some fun," she told him.

"What's the final tally," he asked.

When Anne told him, he paled and had to sit down.

"How in the world could that many people disappear and be killed, packed like pickles, and then buried under a school?"

"We have some more bad news for you, Quimby," she told the frazzled agent. "Each barrel contained a mixture of gasses and chemicals that could not have been present in live bodies. In some way, shape or form, these people were all processed."

Narz had to think for a moment before asking, "How so?"

"We can't be sure right now."

"So, why did they turn to goo?"

"I am just getting started with that part of the investigation," she replied.

He asked her, "Are there any clues as to who they were? Some sort of cult, perhaps?"

"That remains to be seen. On the surface it looks like each pair

per barrel were clones. But, of what?"

Narz had no answer to her question.

"The forty-eight matching skeletons all have something in common."

"Don't leave me in suspense, please," he begged.

"While pairs are matched in almost every way, no two pairs are a good match for one another. A lot of markers in common, but nothing that might hold up to scrutiny in court, especially if you don't want to admit to the cloning thing. But, they all *are* a possible match for our lone barrel occupant!"

"Please tell me that doesn't mean that our lone man is—"

"A woman, Quimby. The lone skeleton, who we have dubbed Eve, is the only female in the bunch."

"So, Eve might be the source for the genetic materials?"

"That's what I am about to investigate, but it looks like a strong possibility."

"Tell me what I can do."

She outlined the next steps and indicated which ones he could assist with. Both Anne and Wiley Oswaldt had felt that there would be no point in trying to track down each of the clones, but that there might be some results to be had by tracing Eve.

Narz left the lab with her DNA and other genetic and blood type info and headed to Washington and the country's most complete genetics database.

Five days later he returned to Shopton. Anne was on one of her

"need to stay at home" days so they arranged for her to go shopping. They met at the park where Narz transferred a pair of grocery bags to her car. They spoke for a few moments and then he left.

"Hey, mom," Sandy greeted her when she arrived back at her house. "What did you get for dinner?"

"I'll let you discover all that for yourself, dear. Be sure to unpack everything and get it all put away." As Sandy groaned, Anne left the room to check something on her computer.

She looked up the name Quimby Narz had provided from his search. Eileen O'Brien. She read the page that had been posted a year earlier when Eileen, then a pretty red-haired woman of thirty-nine had disappeared under mysterious circumstances.

"Well," she said to the screen, "it looks like we've found you, Eileen."

Friends and family had been offering a reward for information regarding the missing woman. She had been born in Thessaly, New York but had moved to Boston when she began attending a small, private college there. Anne noted that the woman's field of study had been Economics.

She sat back. "Was I expecting a degree in cloning technology," she was asking herself when she heard Sandy's voice.

"Got everything put away, mother. But you'd better come down and explain something."

Anne cleared the screen and went downstairs. Walking into the kitchen, she was confronted by her daughter, one hand on a hip, holding a large jar filled with pinkish-red tubes.

"Pickled Polish Sausages, Mother?"

Smiling at her daughter in an effort to gain a few seconds to think, she replied, "Certainly. Back at the university I use to eat these all the time. I hadn't seen them in our stores for ages, but there they were today."

Looking slightly askance, Sandy twisted the lid off and poked one with a fork. It came out of the pink brine and just hung there on the tines, dripping.

"You first, mom," Sandy offered.

Anne took the fork and sausage and tried a bite. Her first reaction was of disgust. It was too tart, too tough and far too filled with little balls of fat, but she chewed it and swallowed.

"Well," she said, smiling wanly. "These used to taste pretty good to me. Must have been the beer."

Anne stopped. She realized one of the things that she and Dr. Oswaldt had missed. Quimby Narz had even joked about it.

Pickles.

The bodies *had* been processed, just like pickles. Had that led to the surprising level of decomposition? She made a mental note to test the acidity of the liquids in the barrels. Perhaps she might be able to separate enough of it to determine a source.

She was glad that Sandy had drifted out of the room. She crossed to the sink and pried the remains of the sausage off the fork and pushed it into the disposal. Turning on the water and the grinder she got rid of the unappetizing meat thing.

"I heard that, mom," Sandy called out. Anne smiled.

She had the opportunity to go to the secret lab the very next afternoon. Sitting down at the HD microscope she moved a freshly-gathered sample from the first barrel.

Everything was so heavily mixed together that she had to resort to an overall test. The Ph showed up at around 2.42, the range where vinegar typically was to be found.

To ensure that it was vinegar she performed a gas chromatograph analysis of her sample.

"I should have thought to do this earlier," she chided herself.

Her results showed that along with human remains, the liquid contained high levels of acetic acid—basically vinegar—along with formaldehyde, ethanol, methanol and epsom salts.

"Embalming fluid!"

She took note of the exact amounts of each and then turned to her desktop computer. She spent the next hour researching commercially-available embalming fluids. Nothing she found matched the exact ingredients in the proportions evident in the sample.

She took additional samples from several other barrels and from several locations in each.

Her test all showed practically identical levels of the chemicals, but two of the barrels also had high levels of the solvent tuolene.

"Okay. Embalming fluid and paint thinner. Now I'm really stumped," she admitted to Dr. Oswaldt the following day when he was reviewing her results.

"Today, I think, you need to take off that lab coat and put on

your deerstalker, Annie," he told her. "Time to invoked your inner Sherlock Holmes!"

Anne spent the next few available days in deep research trying to identify all of the various chemical cocktails to be found in each barrel. While all contained the embalming fluid mixture except for one—Eileen O'Brien's barrel which contained a concentration of slaked lime—there was a wide variance of other chemicals found in different samples.

It was on the third day that she again ran into Wiley Oswaldt.

"What is new in your world, Annie," he asked.

She explained about the chemicals in the slurry. He was most interested.

"Tell me. Did you do the same tests on the bone tissues?"

"I did. It appears that the bones were still inside the bodies when they were processed. All surface areas of the bones have been infused with the various chemicals, but it hasn't seeped into the marrow."

"Ah. Exactly what I was hoping. Can you please harvest marrow from the femurs of at least a dozen of our... guests, please. Oh, and a sample from Miss Eileen as well."

After calling up the required number of skeletons and taking new core samplings from the femurs of each she turned the materials over to her co-worker.

"I believe I know what you are searching for, Wiley, but please tell me in case I am wrong."

He detailed a concern that had come to him on his first pass through the DNA test results. "I'll know more by the end of the

day tomorrow."

When they met that next day, he seemed to be both elated as well as highly concerned.

"Oh, Annie. I have the most wonderful and most awful news."

"I want to hear both," she prodded him.

"I have found the link. The thing that definitively connects all of our clones with the mother, Eileen. All show signs of a very rare genetic defect that affects mostly male offspring and usually causes a form of dwarfism."

"You must be referring to Cockayne Syndrome," she replied, surprising the genetics expert.

"Oh, so you know about it."

"Only from a case study published several years ago. Please tell me the details."

"Well, there really isn't that much to say once you know about the dwarfism. As with a lot of disorders it is the mother who carries the defective gene. In our case that would be Eileen O'Brien. She carried that genetic disorder on her DNA."

Anne looked at her colleague. The different pieces dropped into position, Her hand flew up to her mouth.

"Oh, dear. That means your bad news must have something to do with experiments trying to overcome the defect. So, all of our pairs were created for *experimentation*?"

"So it would seem."

"And each pair had various genes artificially mutated to try to

overcome the defect."

"Again, it would seem to be just so," the doctor replied.

The next hour was spent in conversation as Dr. Oswaldt detailed each of the various mutations and probable methods for achieving them.

"But, here," he finished, standing up, "is where old Wiley must doff his cap and bid you adieu. My stint is up on this project. Unless you can think of any other compelling genetic tests that only I can perform."

She couldn't think of anything at that moment. "I'll miss working with you, Wiley."

"I am positive that we will find ourselves teamed up once again in the future. Our paths collide on about every other project. I am off to spend quality time with my young man," he said wagging his eyebrows.

Knowing of his domestic situation she inquired, "And, how is Bobby?"

"He is mostly fine. A bit sad and moody at my absences these few weeks, but his primary complaint is one of an embarrassing skin complaint."

"How so," Anne asked feigning surprise.

"His doctor believes it to be either fleas or mites. In any case, he sits there with those big eyes staring at me as he scratches. I'm dropping by the vet's office to pick up a topical ointment and some of those ninety-day drops for his back and ears."

She hugged the older scientist and bade him farewell.

Before heading home she looked through the genetic defects list. Whoever had been experimenting with the bodies had been ruthless with their failures.

Or, had they been?

Anne had to ask herself how the cloned bodies could have been raised into young adulthood before being... being... *terminated* was the best word she could come up with.

She sat deep in thought with her fingers steepled in front of her mouth.

"Why?"

It was a legitimate question, she told herself.

"I need to put myself in the position of the person or persons doing these dreadful experiments. Why do I allow four dozen mutated humans to live until they stop growing and then kill them off?"

Many thoughts flashed through Anne's mind. Among them, and one that came back around several times, was the concept of "full grown."

"Why would I do that?"

The realization hit her like a two by four.

They didn't care about their clones. They must have been more interested to see if they could prevent succeeding generations from acquiring the gene.

"They were *making breeding stock!*"

CHAPTER 3

THEORY MODIFICATION

ANNE SWIFT left the secret lab in a hurry. She needed to speak with Harlan Ames. She remembered that he once mentioned a case investigated by the Secret Service having to do with phony cloning claims that turned out to be a medical experiment gone wrong.

When she reached him at Enterprises he said, "Gosh, Anne. I just got off the phone with Tom. Nice to talk with you. What can I do today?"

She spoke a single word, "Collections" and immediately received his undivided attention.

"Are you at home," he inquired.

"Not right now. I'm on my cellphone," she told him.

"Perhaps we had better meet then," Ames suggested.

"It will need to be tomorrow. I have to get home right away. Where and when?"

He suggested a time and place to which she agreed.

Her dinner that evening was well received. Anne had prepared spaghetti with turkey meatballs, home-made garlic bread and a tossed salad. Tom, who had begin work on a new project just two weeks before picked at his food.

"I know that you've got a lot on your mind, Tom," she advised him, "but you won't get anywhere on your robot project if you don't eat."

"And, I second your mother's advice, son," his father added. "eat up."

In the end, Anne scraped half of Tom's serving into a container and put it in the refrigerator. She knew that he would sneak down in the middle of the night and finish it.

Anne walked into the coffee shop where she would meet with Harlan the next afternoon.

"Oh. Hello, Mrs. Swift," the attractive girl behind the counter greeted her brightly.

"Hello, Bashalli," Anne replied. "My usual half chocolate caramel mocha, please."

Bashalli began making the drink. Standing in front of her espresso machine, she inquired, "How are you today?"

"Fine, dear. And is my wayward son managing to spend any time away from his current project and with you?"

Anne Swift truly liked Bashalli Prandit, a Pakistan-born girl whose family had emigrated to the US more than nine years ago. Tom had met her months earlier while involved in the creation of his first major invention, his giant Flying Lab, the *Sky Queen*.

Tom and Bashalli had dated ever since, but Anne knew that Tom often became so tunnel-visioned that it required the efforts of his sister, Sandy, his best friend Bud and gentle prodding from Bashalli to pry him loose and to get out on a date.

"He has been, as you know, very involved with that huge robot of his. But," Bashalli smiled with hope, "I am going out to New Mexico with him and Sandy and Bud tomorrow."

"You have fun, dear, and don't let Sandy talk you into any dangerous side excursions," Anne admonished the pretty girl.

Picking up her steaming drink and heading to the table in the far, front corner of The Glass Cat, she briefly considered the relationship between Tom and Bashalli.

She felt that it was vital in his social development for Tom to have a steady girlfriend at his age. She was pleased that it was the vivacious, smart and talented Bashalli.

Sitting down, she watched as her contact, Harlan Ames entered and went up to the counter. Minutes later he arrived at Anne's table.

After greetings, Anne got to the subject at hand. "Harlan. You were involved in some affair where a crazy scientist tried to clone a human, right?"

"Yes, Anne. A real mess that was. He had obtained tissues from a hospital in Washington DC, along with a complete womb and ovaries from a woman who supposedly lost them to cancer. He used his own genetic materials to try to clone himself."

"But I seem to remember that there was a twist. Something about his trying to modify his clone?"

Harlan thought for a minute. He brightened and replied, "Ah. He was, as I recall, very slight and weak. You must be thinking about the his attempts to introduce enhanced muscle tissue to the fetal mass."

"Yes," she told him. "That's what I believe I'm up against with this latest project."

She gave him details of the grisly findings along with a

synopsis of the findings she and Dr. Oswaldt had noted.

Giving a low whistle, Harlan looked at her over the top of his coffee.

"You will want to look for any signs of invasive microbes, Anne. *My* scientist died in a traffic accident, and his assistant faded into the woodwork. Never found him. If your case has anything to do with mine, then I'll need to get the Secret Service to forward the files. Those two used a series of microbes to try to introduce the new genetic materials and sequences into their clone."

He described as best he could how the microbes had been infused with the new materials in hopes that they would be able to transmit their new codes at the same time as they invaded the very tissue they hoped to influence.

"Their microbes were chemically weakened so that they could be attacked by the developing immune system of the fetus, but still get far enough into the tissues to dump their altered genes."

They finished their drinks and then parted; Harlan went back to Enterprises and Anne back to her lab.

She withdrew numerous samples from storage and began the meticulous examination of each. By the end of the day she had found nothing in the liquid samples, but the first of the mutated bone samples was a winner.

She sat back on her stool. There they were. A type of symbiotic microbe typically associated with DNA: Eukaryotes. She recognized all of the standard features. These were *Ostreococcus*, normally a water-borne microbe.

On closer exam using the lab's electron microscope she was

able to detect the additional genetic material that had been crammed into the microbe's shell. "These were practically programmed to explode and deliver their new DNA kamikaze-style," she noted into a microphone as she described her latest findings for the record.

By the end of the second full day of investigation she had managed to extract several intact DNA strands and had begun the process of comparing them to the human genome project.

The HGP had managed, after many, many years—and only possible with the ever-increasing power of computers—to unravel and identify every possible gene and gene pair in the human body.

And, while scientists were still left with figuring out why certain genes mutated naturally, there was now a huge library of information now that made their work much easier.

Anne spent several days comparing her mutant DNA strands to the Genome.

Two days later she believed she had the answer. The altered DNA was, as she had suspected, created in an attempt to overcome a genetic defect.

The only problem was, it wasn't designed to specifically combat the effects of Cockayne's Syndrome.

Whoever had introduced this had evidently decided to not attack the cause, but merely the resulting deformity.

Anne nodded. "Sure," she told herself, "it would be much easier to try to fix the problem rather than to try to influence the highly complex syndrome that caused it."

She placed a call to Quimby Narz and requested that Dr. Oswaldt be reassigned to the project. "Quimby? I've got forty-nine bodies to do a new series of genetic tests on and I still need to hunt down the source of all this. Please, get Wiley back here."

Agent Narz agreed and told her that the good Doctor would be in the lab on Monday morning.

Anne thanked him and rang off.

"Okay, my girl," she said. "Time to hunt down where this all came from."

She spent the final two hours of her time working up a sequence of steps to take in her investigation. The first one—identify the male source—was currently in the hands of the FBI. They had been running his DNA information through their computers and expected to have a result, or a nil result, in another day.

Number two on the list was to track down the source of the barrels. That she would start the following morning.

Number three would have to be accomplished out of the lab. Anne really disliked any portion of a project that dragged her out into the public. She always felt incredibly exposed, as if people could see right through her.

Nothing to be done about that, she thought.

She scanned the list and got down to number seventeen: Arrest them!

She smiled. At least she wouldn't be involved in that part.

Nineteen hours later she reentered the lab. Wiley Oswaldt was

waiting for her. She told him of her findings and they discussed the ramifications. "Do you think these introduced microbes could account for the additional DNA you've cataloged?"

He thought for a moment and then replied, "That would make a great amount of sense. Give me a day and I will retest some samples to verify that."

Anne turned to her own station and began the process of analyzing the plastic from the barrels.

She had been doing this sort of thing long enough to realize that many criminals ordered such containers from a variety of sources to avoid raising any red flags. So, she undertook to cut samples from each barrel and each lid, carefully identifying each to future cross-reference.

Testing showed that the barrels came from three separate sources. One was located in the state of Delaware and was the nearest source. Nine of the barrels had come from them. Anne placed a call to the sales department of that company to inquire about such a shipment.

"Well," a nervous-sounding woman at the other end said, "I'm not too sure that I can give out that information. You know? Seller-client privilege?"

"Madam," Anne informed her, "there is no such thing as seller-client privilege. If you wish, I can have a team of FBI agent there in a half hour to go through all of your files which I assume are all in fine and totally legal order?"

Anne hated bluffing and hated lying even more, but knew that such tactics often opened doors blocked by obstinate persons.

"Oh, dear," the woman stated. "No. No. We want to cooperate

with the FBI. Certainly. You did say that you are with the FBI, didn't you?"

Anne replied that she was with that agency.

"Alright. Let me pull up my orders. What is the barrel ID number?"

Anne read out the number code that had been embossed in the barrel material.

"Hmm. That's curious. I don't show any order for nine barrels in the past year."

Anne asked her to try several previous years.

"Oh, you don't understand. That barrel batch was produced eleven months ago on the 9th of the month. We shipped all of that batch out over the following week or so."

"How about smaller orders. Or," she realized a better criteria, "any orders coming to Shopton, New York."

"Well, that's much better," the sales office secretary replied. "I have three orders placed by fax on three different days that next week."

"Who, where, when," Anne asked.

"Oh. This is disappointing. There's no name, just a delivery address. The same one for each order. They were placed, as I said, by fax and payment for each arrived by messenger the next day. Cash."

"Where did they get delivered to?"

"That would be... hmm... Elmer's Truck Stop on highway 88

there in Shopton."

Anne tried to get additional information but only discovered that the first order had been for three barrels, the second for a single barrel and the third for the final five.

After hanging up she made a series of notes detailing what she had learned.

The next batch of barrels from supplier number two brought almost the exact same results. An unnamed person ordering via Fax over several days, payments in cash within a day or two, and delivered as drop shipments to an outer corner of the lot at Elmer's Truck Stop.

The final set of barrels were equally untraceable except that they had been delivered as a single shipment to a storage company near the town of Thessaly, twenty miles away from Elmer's.

Next, she contacted Olivia Stoddard at Elmer's. She and Olivia had been members of a knitting group several years earlier. Olivia attempted to be helpful but could only recall one of the instances where she had noticed the barrels.

"Anne. I'm pretty sure that they came in on pallets and were just left over by the propane refill tank. They never stayed there more than one day. Someone came and hauled them off at night, I guess."

They talked for a few minutes more and then Olivia had to excuse herself to attend to a business matter.

"Let me know if you think of anything else, okay" Anne requested before hanging up.

Her call to Thessaly provided the first real clue.

"Yeah. I remember the pair that come to haul them barrels outta here," the gruff voice said. Anne was about to ask the 'man' what he remembered when she realized that the voice was that of an older woman, probably a life-long smoker.

"Ma'am. what can you tell me about the two people?"

"Lemme see... tall, weasily guy with slicked back black hair and a real cute little red-head. Too young for him, I'd say. They tried to be inconspicuous—inspictuculous—ah, foo! They tried to not be noticed. But, I seen 'em."

"Is there any possibility that you have a video surveillance system that might have recored them," Anne asked.

"Oh, yeah. Forgot about that. Lemme see. Can I call you back in about an hour? Got to go into the shed and see if the tape's been recorded over or not."

Anne gave the woman a phone number that went through a special circuit at the phone company. The only record of incoming calls would show that someone tried to contact a defunct skating rink.

In actuality, such calls came straight to Anne's cellphone.

She had completed her note taking when the phone rang less than a half hour later.

"Hello," she answered.

"Is this the FBI lady," the gravely voice inquired.

"Yes it is, Mrs. Parson. What did you did out?"

"Well, we got a big box of tapes that I had to sort through, but there's one that has the same date as those people showed up. Each tape holds about three days of shots—a picture is taken every ten second or so—and I just don't have time to go through it. If you want it, you're welcome to come fetch it!"

Anne thanked her and immediately left the lab.

In Thessaly she quickly located the storage facility and was soon sitting across from one of the fattest women she had ever seen. The woman had used Duct Tape to connect two chairs side by side to accommodate her bulk.

"There ya go, honey," she told Anne, slightly wheezing, pushing the tape across her desk. "I don't suppose there's a reward for them two, is there," she asked hopefully.

"No. I'm sorry. It's really sort of a minor thing, but the Bureau *is* involved. There is, however," she said reaching into her purse, "fifty dollars in it for providing us with this tape. You know. To cover your time and the cost of a new blank?"

The huge woman reached out a hand barely able to clutch the offered bill. She opened a drawer in her desk and put the money inside.

"I'd get up and show you out, but—" she said indicating her body.

Anne thanked her again and took her leave.

Back at the lab she turned the tape over to a video expert. He carefully disassembled the tape cartridge and examined the thin mylar tape inside. Finding it to be in fairly good condition, he placed the spools into a video transfer machine and was soon watching as it made a digital copy.

Three hours later he buzzed Anne. The tape's been scanned in. You can pull the file up by accessing 'TR-110205-AA7'. Let me know if I need to do clean up on any sections."

She called up the digital video file and was soon scanning ahead at double normal speed. Cars, trucks and people scurried around the grounds of the storage company.

What caught her eye about half-way into the video—a time that would have meant early afternoon on the delivery date—she slowed the video to normal speed. At six frames a minute, the unloading of two pallets of bright blue barrels only filled a total of twenty-nine frames, just under five minutes.

She saw the truck pull in and park next to a roll-up door. The next frame showed the driver out of his cab and the following one showed him checking the number on the door.

The rest of the frames showed him unloading the pallets using a portable winch and placing them up against the door, then driving off.

Anne again put the video into a faster scan. At a point that would have been nearly two hours later a pickup truck pulled up next to the pallets and the dark-haired man and red-haired woman got out.

The door was opened and the first pallet was pushed inside. They then loaded the second pallet into the bed of their truck, closed the garage door, and were gone.

She called to the video lab. "Can you give me an enhancement on the door that is being opened at time code 01:07:49:15 please? If you can't get the number, then can you try for face shots of the man and woman moving the barrels around? Ditto

any license plate."

He promised to have the results within the hour.

Anne occupied her time by calling back to the storage facility. "Mrs. Parson? Barbara Boone with the Bureau," she identified herself using the code name she often gave to avoid being associated with her family's company.

"Thank you for the video. It looks like we might get something from it. Can you tell me if all of the units in the building are rented?"

"Oh, yes, dearie. I just wish we could go 'poof' and have twice as many. I could rent em out in a day, easy!"

"I need to know if you will be able to give me the name of someone renting a particular garage?"

"Oh, I suppose that I could so long as you don't let on to my husband that you give me the fifty bucks. Okay?"

Anne laughed easily and told the woman that it would be "girl's secret."

"I'll call you back once I get the exact number," she promised.

"I can probably give you the number as well," she was told. "If it's the garage where they dumped the barrels and then that couple took 'em, that would be D-107. Lemme see who rented that."

Anne could hear the sound of the woman ruffling through papers, probably an old-fashioned ledger. Finally, Mrs. Parson came back on the line.

"Oh! I could just smack that husband of mine! Can you

imagine? He rented that garage for a week to a, get ready for this one, to a Mr. John Smith. John Smith my petite behind."

Anne sighed and told the woman she appreciated the help.

She then rang the video technician and said, "You can stop trying to get the garage number. It was rented under an assumed name. Anything on the faces or the plate?"

He replied that the angle of the sun meant that long shadows kept the woman from being visible enough to get a face shot. There was something on the license plate that covered it.

"But, the good news is that I think I can pull a couple frames out and get *his* face. Hope that's good enough."

Anne thanked him, then turned off her equipment and left for the day.

She had almost pulled into the Swift's driveway when her cellphone rang. From the ringtone she knew it would be Harlan.

"Hello," she answered.

"Anne. I just received a greatly abbreviated set of the notes from the DC cloning case. Practically everything has been blacked out. Apparently, someone doesn't believe that your project carries a need to know clearance for this stuff."

"So, that leaves us on our own, then?"

"Not totally. I think they missed one instance of the name of the scientist who was responsible for the experiments. A Doctor Samuel Spears is listed. Does that mean anything to you?"

Anne thought. "No. I can't say that I've heard of the man." She

thanked him for the bit of information and went inside to resume her "regular" life.

Two days later she was surprised to receive another call from the woman at the storage rental facility.

"I figured that you might want to know somethin' I found out. My blockhead husband took that slick guy's phony name, but our rules say that you've got to have a provable address for billing. He remembered that the guy had to come back with his electricity bill."

"Is it too much to hope that it is a legitimate address," Anne asked.

"I did me a little snooping with the electricity company over there in Shopton. They do have that address and that Smith name on file. Bills paid regular and everything."

She gave Anne the address. Anne offered to send the woman an additional reward for her assistance.

"Nah," came the reply. "I'd just buy a bunch of chocolates and eat 'em. Might spoil my girlish figure, ya know," she said falling into a gale of laughter.

Wiley Oswaldt, who had been in the lab most days for the past week doing additional genetic testing on all of Anne's samples had already left for the day.

Anne was going to leave him a note asking him to make sure that Agent Narz knew of her findings, but decided to head home.

Her GPS sat on her dash almost taunting her to enter the Smith's address. Giving in, she pulled over and typed in the

address. The device began talking her through each of the turns on the six-mile detour.

All the way there she kept telling herself, "I'll just drive by. I won't stop," but when she finally passed in front of the house she was startled to see a red-haired woman entering the front door.

Anne drove down the street and then u-turned, She ended up parking a couple houses down and got out of her car.

Everything seemed too quiet. It was the middle of the afternoon. School should be out. People should be present.

Looking around the neighborhood she failed to see anybody. No children playing, no adults, not even a dog or a cat.

She reached into her purse and sorted through a set of business cards finally locating the one that identified her as a member of a national neighborhood watch organization.

She walked up the steps to the house and rang the bell.

Seconds later the door opened but the occupant was evidently on the phone and had her back turned. She motioned Anne to come in and close the door.

Anne stood in the entry for a few seconds and then entered the living room.

The other woman had gone through a door and Anne could hear her talking to someone. Presently, the conversation stopped.

"I'll be right with you," the young woman called. "Who are you and why did I let you in my door," she added lightly.

Anne called out, "I'm Barbara Boone. With Operation

Neighbors Watch Neighbors. I wanted to see if you might be interested in starting a chapter here."

Anne was looking around the room but still saw the door open slightly and an eye look her way.

"Coffee," the voice rang out.

"Oh, no thank you," Anne said. "Maybe a little glass of water, though." She was standing looking at a large painting on the wall when the woman came back in.

"And, here you go!"

Anne felt the needle enter her upper arm. She tried to spin to confront her attacker but suddenly felt woozy. Her head began to spin. Faster and faster, everything in front of her spun and twisted. She became violently ill and vomited.

Around and around, her vision spun. She felt herself plunging down. Farther and farther until she hit something. Blackness.

It turned out to be the floor and she was now sprawled on it. Lying there, her vision began to clear and the world ceased spinning. A pair of feet walked into view and stood in front of her face.

She was dragged across the floor for a time. She had no concept of how long or how far.

She rolled over onto her back and looked up at her attacker. It required only a second to recognize who it was.

Anne Swift was looking up at the smiling face of her attacker.

Eileen O'Brien!

CHAPTER 4 /

AT LEAST IT ENDS... WELL?

BUT IT WASN'T Eileen O'Brien. This young woman couldn't have been more than twenty years old. Anne thought back to her first glimpses of the missing Eileen.

It was then she realized that this was more than just a younger-looking version of Eileen. This *was* a younger Eileen.

"Figured it out, yet, whoever you are? I went through your purse. Quite a collection of false IDs. You some sort of cop or agent?"

Anne sat up and waited for her head to stop spinning. Then, she replied, "My guess is that you, or rather the one that provided the genetic material for you, took part in some early cloning experiments back about twenty years ago."

"And, I am the amazing results," the girl said spinning around and curtsying.

"So, that would mean that the real Eileen O'Brien—" she was cut short by a stamped foot from her captor.

"You will refer to that one as the Mother Eileen. I am the real Eileen! But I'm no O'Brien. I am Eileen Adamson."

Slowly, Anne continued, "Okay. So the Mother Eileen got tangled up in experiments back when she was, what? About your age?"

The red-headed girl nodded.

"Was it voluntary?"

The Eileen clone shook her head sadly. "No. She was just one of those people who made the mistake of getting drunk and getting pregnant. When she went to have it terminated, the good doctor, Sam Spears, put her under and then not only gave her the termination operation, he harvested most of the eggs from one of her ovaries."

Involuntarily, Anne winced. "Your source egg came from that harvesting I suppose."

"Correct. Doctor Sam wanted something to practice on and he knew from her medical records that she carried Cockayne's."

The girl seemed to want to go on and on about the details. Anne pretended to listen but was actually trying to scan the room for clues about how to escape.

The clone girl was winding down with, "I believe that when Mother Eileen found out, that she was the one that ran him off the Beltline that night."

Anne could only shake her head in both sadness and amazement. How had this cloned Eileen survived. The infant clone would have only been a few years old when the doctor had died.

That meant that someone had taken the clone and raised it. She tried a new line of questioning.

"Eileen? Were you raised by the Mother Eileen or by the doctor's assistant?"

The clone seemed genuinely surprised. "How do you know about my father? Who told you about him?" Her voice was becoming shrill.

Calmly, Anne told her, "It is well known that Dr. Spears had an assistant. When the Secret Service and FBI raided his laboratory, the assistant was missing—as were you—but he had left behind a large collection of notes and many letters bearing his name," she bluffed the final piece of information.

"David would never have left anything behind," she declared. "He was far too careful."

"Oh, but you're not considering that he was forced to leave in quite a hurry. The agent in charge said that they missed capturing him by only a minute or two."

Eileen refused to believe it. Anne thought back to a small detail and tried putting facts together.

"David Adamson was a clumsy, foolish man," she told the girl watching for a reaction. She was immediately awarded with a viscous kick from the girl.

"Never, never call David a fool!"

Success, thought Anne. Now I know his full name. If only I can get out of here and report it.

The Eileen clone was pacing furiously around the room muttering a stream of foul words. Anne smiled inwardly. Angry people made mistakes. She hoped that she could tread the fine line between making the girl angrier and making her want to injure Anne, or worse.

"I meant that he was foolish to have ever had anything in his lab with his name on it. He was also a fool to get involved with Dr. Spears in the first place."

"Stop it," the girl screamed. "You're making it sound wrong!"

The red-head was turning a deeper and deeper shade of angry red. Her fists kept clenching and unclenching. Finally, she let out a scream of frustration and stalked out of the room, slamming the door behind her.

Anne waited a few seconds and then heard a second door slammed shut, followed by the sounds of a car being started and spinning its tires as it departed.

"Well," she muttered, "let's see what we have here."

She walked over to the single window in the room. Moving the curtains aside she discovered that the window had been totally painted over with white paint.

Anne turned back to the room and looked around. On a table in one corner she spotted her own purse. Grabbing the bag she pulled out one of her credit cards, then used it to scrape away some of the paint.

Outside she could make out the house next door less than twenty feet away. She knew now that she was in a neighborhood, most probably even in the same house she had been investigating.

She walked silently to the door. Placing her ear to the wood she listened. Nothing. No noise. She grabbed the doorknob and every so slowly turned it.

The clone girl had been so infuriated that she hadn't locked the door, if it even had a lock. She waited for any outside reaction and then inched the door open.

She looked out through the first crack and into an empty room. The fading light outside and no lamps on inside made it difficult to make out details, but she was certain that nobody

was in the room.

Anne ventured out the door and into what turned out to be the living room of the house. Holding her breath, she tip-toed across the room and to the front door.

It featured glass panels on either side, so she looked out into the front yard. Still no sign of anybody.

She moved around to one side of the door and looked at a sharp angle down the street. Her car was right where she had parked it. She wanted to rush out but was cautious enough to realize that the clone girl might be lying in wait.

Turning her head to look behind her, Anne noticed that a doorway into the kitchen was open. She spied another door on the opposite wall with a view of the evening sky in a window next to it.

Anne left the house as quietly as she could by the back door and snuck through the neighbor's back yard. Coming out between that and the next house she looked up and down the block.

With no sign of anybody or any approaching cars, Anne used her keys to remotely unlock her sedan. It only beeped once indicating that it was already unlocked.

"Did I actually lock it," she asked herself. She waited a few moments then risked pressing the remote start button.

The car came to life and was soon sitting, thirty feet away, idling.

Anne ducked back between the houses when she detected a car coming around the corner half a block away. "Please. If you're

Eileen, don't let her see that the car is on," she silently prayed.

The car passed by and soon turned into a driveway two blocks farther down the street.

Anne briskly walked to her car, climbed in and drove away, but not before noticing that her GPS had been stolen. She went past the house and, making sure she wasn't being followed, drove away. She would remember that house.

It was the one she had visited and been attacked in.

She drove for more than five minutes before she recognized a street name. Stopping in front of a convenience store she used her cellphone to contact Harlan Ames.

"Slow down, Anne," he advised. "Give me that address again."

She repeated the address she had rushed through. Anne knew that the adrenaline was coursing through her veins. She took several deep breaths while Harlan placed her on hold to make a call to the Shopton Police.

Coming back on the line he told her that officers would be dispatched in unmarked cars to stake out the residence. "If she goes back, Anne, they'll get her," he assured the still-excited scientists.

"Just go home and put this behind you. I happen to know that Damon is going to be in a meeting with some Washington DC big-wigs for the next hour, so you have plenty of time to get dinner started. Maybe even have a glass of wine?"

She thanked the Enterprises security man and drove home.

The next day Anne called into the lab. She felt the need to take a day or two away from things. Although she was loathe to

admit it, her encounter with the cloned Eileen had left her shaken both physically as well as emotionally.

Once she returned to her lab she discussed her most recent findings with Wiley Oswaldt.

"You actually were right there with her," he had asked in amazement. "How did she look? Were there any visual anomalies? Tell me, Annie. I need to know."

"She was almost a precise copy of the Eileen that I saw on the internet from her pictures back at college. She did seem to fly off the handle easily. In fact, it was a tantrum she threw that had her storm out of the house and let me escape."

"That would go along with other, lower animal experiments. Did you know that the first three cloned cats had to be put down because they would violently attack anyone trying to handle them?"

Anne admitted that she did not know about that.

"It seems to be a sad side effect. Anyway, you have told me of your discoveries, let me tell you of mine."

"Something to do with the mutated genes?"

"Yes. And more. Doctor Spears was methodical. He introduced slightly mutated genes into the bone tissues of each pair. In one, he would modify, oh...let's say the ninth DNA sequence. In the other, he would introduce exactly the same sequence but he reversed the two genes in that pair. In some, he simply removed the gene."

"That might explain why each pair weren't exact twins, then."

He detailed how each succeeding set of 'twins' had been

subjected to twenty-three different gene mutations. "The final pair he kept pristine."

"His control, I suppose," Anne inquired. "Can we get a DNA trace from the controls?"

"Nobody in the national database, or so claims our friend Quimby."

"Then, our source male is a dead end?"

"Yes. Sad, but here is the devastating thing. It appears that the microbe strain he was using introduced a separate and probably unnoticed mutation."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning, that the not-so-good Doctor bred mules."

"Sterile? The clones were sterile?"

"As they say, to a man," he replied. "If we had tissue and such, I could have found this out weeks ago. As it is, I had to do some heavy research to find out the truth."

"I guess that's why they were killed," Anne pondered. "If you're going to build a breeding male capable of counteracting the Cockayne's Syndrome mutation, then finding out that you had four dozen sterile results would be devastating to your experiments."

"Yes, and a shame for the clones. I would hypothesize that they were fairly docile. Our anthropologist came back to do an exam of the bones. I wanted to know if they showed signs of damage."

"You mean, as if they had been fighting amongst themselves?"

"That, and signs of methods of captivity. Shackles, handcuffs, et cetera."

"Oh," Anne exclaimed. "Anything?"

"No. It surprised me, but somehow—and not through the use of drugs or you would have found traces—each of these clones probably led a quiet, non-violent life."

"So, Doctor Spears made them. Then who found them to be failures for his original purposes?"

"Did you say Spears? Sam Spears?" Wiley Oswaldt jumped to his feet.

Anne, surprised, replied that it was.

"Annie. I don't think you would know about that mad man. Back in the 1950's he was spouting on about cloning. 'If germs can do it why can't we' sort of thing. Plus, a whole lot of 'we can breed a race of super humans' twaddle. He was universally condemned as being too Hitlerish. Too master race!"

"Oh."

"He disappeared in the mid 70's and everyone assumed that he was dead."

Anne informed him about the doctor having been alive at least up until fifteen or sixteen years ago.

"He died in an accident and his clones, our little group here, disappeared with him. Or, with his assistant. A David Adamson. Ring any bells?"

"No, but—" he tailed off. "Anne? Break down the two parts of his last name, please."

"Okay. Adam and son." She looked quizzically at him.

"Fine. And who was the son of Adam?"

"Well, if you believe the bible, Cain and Abel. Why?"

"Because, a brilliant but twisted young research assistant who went to Africa and was never heard from since happens to be a man named David Caine. He was a teaching assistant to a fellow professor during my short stint at Stanford. A thoroughly unctuous little twerp."

"Skinny? Black hair?"

He nodded. Anne tapped out a sequence on her keyboard. A greatly enhanced photo taken from the storage facility video came up. "Him?"

Wiley Oswaldt stared at the screen in disbelief. "Oh, my dear god," he exclaimed. He looked up into Anne's eyes. "That's him!"

Anne placed a call to Quimby Narz and informed him of the identity.

He, in turn, told her that the house in which she had been held was abandoned. "Nobody came back for the four days we had it under observation. Now we have a camera watching. Nothing."

"What do we do next. Quimby," she asked.

"Do you feel you have pulled every bit of info out of the barrels that you can?"

She replied that the only thing that might never be known is the cause of death. "Plus, we don't know why the original Eileen O'Brien was killed as well. Why do you ask?"

"Then keep at it. Anything else you can tell us may be the clue to help us get this fiend!"

On a hunch, Anne set about harvesting as much of the mutated DNA as possible and to test a large batch of it in the spectrometer.

Three days later she had the results.

Turning to Dr. Oswaldt she stated, "Our clones were all killed from within. The DNA strands all show signs of contamination with a secondary bacteria. It must have been dormant for years. I can't tell if it just came to life or if it was stimulated somehow."

Wiley Oswaldt looked over her results.

"It appears that our second bacteria killed them and then caused our total decomposition in the barrels.

"So, Adamson, or Caine, embalmed them and put them in the barrels and the bacteria did the rest?"

"Looks like it," he replied.

The phone on Anne's desk rang and she answered it.

"Hello?"

"Anne. It's Quimby. I've got news. Police received a report of a terrible smell coming from a motel room in Thessaly."

He told her how officers had opened the door only to discover the corpse of David Adamson nee Caine partly dismembered and the clone of Eileen O'Brien sitting in a chair across the room. Recognizing her from photos, they had called the FBI.

"She was still alive. Totally off her rocker, but alive. You won't want to ask how she survived, trust me."

"Is she in any condition to be questioned," Anne asked almost regretting it as it might mean she would need to face the young woman.

"She's in custody in the Hospital there in Shopton. Ultra-heavy guard. I find out when she can be available in the next hour or so. Give you a call."

An hour later she found out that Eileen O'Brien-Adamson—records had been located to support a verdict that the two had been married some ten months prior—would be ready for visitors the following morning.

Narz told her to meet him at the "bank" the next day at ten.

When she arrived, a nondescript gray van was parked in front. She walked up to the bank's doors and looked from side to side. Nobody was visible, so she turned around.

Silently, the door of the van opened and she stepped in.

They arrived at the hospital minutes later and drove around to an out building. The door rolled up, they drove in and the door rolled back down.

She and Quimby walked down a set of stairs and along a corridor that took them into the bowels of the hospital. Agents at several locations made sure their trip to the holding room went unnoticed.

Eileen was sitting up in her bed, wrists and ankles encased in padded straps that were attached to the underside of the very substantial bed.

"Hello, Eileen. How are you," Anne asked.

The clone girl laid there in silence. She appeared to be struggling with herself. She first looked at Anne almost pleading with her eyes, and then she scowled and turned away.

Anne sat down on a chair next to the bed. She reached out and patted the girl's hand.

Eileen tried to jerk the hand away at first, and then sighed, returning it to a place where Anne could reach it.

"I would imagine that you are feeling scared, alone and confused," she began.

"No. Actually I am feeling angry and dissatisfied."

"At what," Quimby Narz asked.

She pondered her answer before replying. "I am angry at that SOB for what he did." She looked at Anne with curiosity in her eyes. "Did you know that he lured my Mother Eileen into a trap? He called her to tell her he knew that it was her that killed Samuel Spears."

Anne looked at Narz who nodded a silent, *just let her talk*.

With a far away look, Eileen stated, "I've been getting very angry. A lot! Everything sets me off. Even when you came to the door and I didn't know who you were... but I was just *so angry*. Then, when you started to say bad things about David, I almost lost it!"

"I'm glad that you showed restraint," Anne told her.

"She found out about the eggs. Did you know that he stole all of her eggs back in college?"

Anne simply nodded and patted the girl's hand reassuringly. "Go on."

"So," tears began running down her cheeks, "the silly woman lured the Doctor to a meeting and then tailed him. She forced his car off the road and into a tree."

Eileen sniffled and cleared her throat.

"But, David knew everything. He raised me up in Nova Scotia. Me and all those sad, horrible boys. Then, a year ago he lured her up there. I don't know how, but she came. He used ether on her and then smothered her and stuffed her in a barrel."

"We know about the barrels, Eileen."

"Well, I didn't! I knew that the others kept getting sick and then they sort of disappeared one by one until there was just me and David. We stole a truck and drove all the bodies down here and bought the barrels and then buried them."

"How did you get them under the corner of the school," the Agent wanted to know.

"He paid off the construction crew years ago to leave a hole there so he only had to dig out about two feet of dirt to get to the door. We rolled the drums in there one night and then moved into the house over on Genessee Drive."

"Why did you kill David, Eileen," Anne asked quietly.

"Because he got drunk and told me about killing my Mother Eileen and that he was going to have to kill me!"

"Was it you who contacted the FBI with the location of the barrels," Narz asked.

She nodded and then began shaking. Soon, she began sobbing.

"Was there any truth to the Black Death info?"

The girl shook her head and mumbled, "No. Just to get your attention."

She broke down, sobbing uncontrollably.

Quimby pushed the button for a nurse and they left as the RN arrived to sedate the girl.

"Poor thing," Anne commented.

"Not so poor, Anne. She took part in some horrible things. The killing and all the other things she did to her husband is just one more chapter in a bad life."

"What's going to happen to her?"

Narz reached into his pocket and withdrew a vial of blood. "You test this and tell me, Okay?"

Her tests that afternoon showed that the girl's blood contained the same microbial mix as that of her deceased "brothers."

She called Narz with the results. "Probably within the next few months she will become very, very sick, and then she will die," she told him sadly.

"Thanks, Anne. You and Doctor Oswaldt button up the lab and head home. Assignment complete. Oh," he added, "did you or Doctor Oswaldt ever figure out why the real Eileen wasn't embalmed?"

"Our best guess is that her killer either ran out of fluids or that he just wanted to destroy the body, not to preserve it."

Anne was glad that the nightmare was over. She had been able to build a composite skeleton of Eileen O'Brien. Hopefully the FBI would release it to her parents. No one had been able to identify the source of the male genetic materials.

Her final act was to assemble a complete, perfect male skeleton. It most likely represented what someone's son would have grown into had he not been abducted.

She drove home.

Sitting at her kitchen table, she sipped a cup of hot coffee and considered what had happened during the previous five weeks.

Anne sighed. It truly was over. She could relax.

The coffee cup crashed to the table splashing hot coffee over the table and onto Anne. She didn't feel it as a realization hit her.

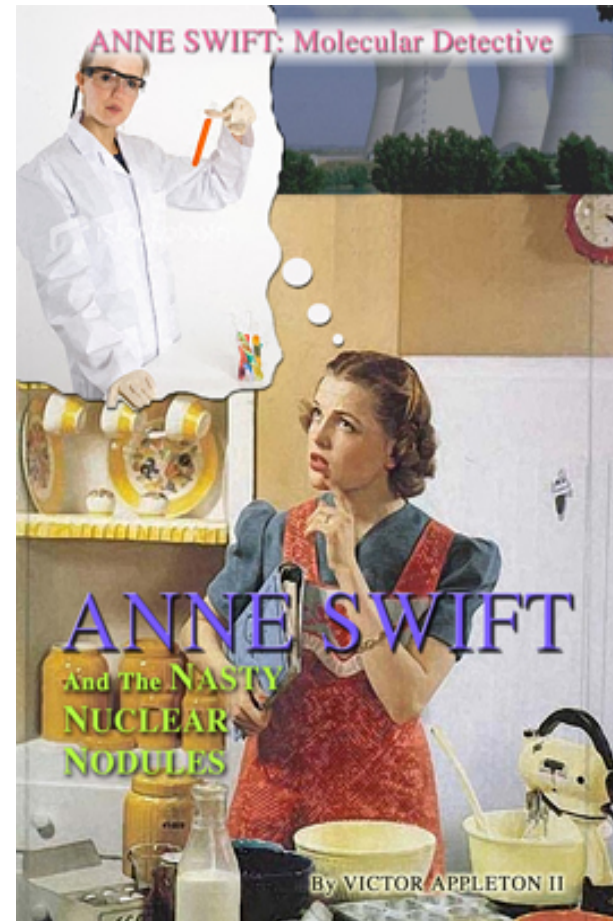
She did the mental math. The barrels?

The first batch had totaled nine; the second Shopton deliveries had been ten; and the final set at the Thessaly storage company, eight.

That meant twenty-seven.

"Where did the other two go?"

Coming Soon...



FROM THE SAME AUTHOR