

Homunculus

Davy Cameroon took his brogue clad feet off the desk as the Minister for Golf Courses, Jim Beam, swung into his office. Cameroon had been contemplating Melanie's attempt to persuade him to get infested like the other ministers. His wife could be very determined and he was glad of the break from making such a serious decision.

'Mornin' Davy,' said the golf minister, parking his large behind on the visitor's squeaky chair on the other side of the desk.

Cameroon told his computer to divert all calls to voicemail and flipped off the screen. He looked at his colleague expectantly, trying to muster an appearance of enthusiasm for the imminent discussion on golf and its importance to the economy.

'Well, Jim, what can I do for you?'

'It's about your support for the new course in central Birmingham, Davy. You didn't seem that keen at our last discussion,' replied Beam.

'I was just a mite worried about the shifting of a lot of small businesses to the outskirts of the city so that a few high paid execs could get to the golf course in their lunch breaks. Have you really thought out the consequences of this enterprise, Jim?' replied Cameroon, looking at the other man and his parasitic companion.

Beam took his time replying while his homunculus whispered in his ear. It had neatly combed hair and even though it comprised only head and shoulders, it sported a tailored jacket that matched his master's pinstripe Saville Row suit. Beam listened intently for a full minute, his head inclined towards the being growing out of his shoulder.

'I can see your point,' Beam replied, 'but there are plenty of advantages to the scheme, my advisor tells me.'

Cameroon looked at the two heads facing him, wondering what it would be like to have a skilled advisor on tap, or on shoulder, 24 hours per day.

As soon as he stepped through the door, that evening, Cameroon was assailed by Melanie once more.

'Have you thought any more about getting an advisor? Everybody who is anybody has one. Just look at the golf minister: he has one, and the PM,' she expounded even before he'd put down his laptop.

He took a breath ready to reply, but his wife sailed on in full flow.

'I was round at Cynthia's today. Both of her sons have theirs growing nicely. And it's not just politicians who have them nowadays; it's people in the city, bankers, CEOs, the entire ruling class in other words.'

'But what about

'If you don't have one, nobody will want to talk to you. They won't trust your judgement. You'll be left behind!' she wailed.

Cameroon finally got out of the hallway of their apartment and into the living room. Melanie trailed after him mouth agape, ready for another salvo. He sat heavily on the sofa.

‘I have plenty of advice available. My department is overflowing with Oxbridge people giving me advice. I don’t see why I should have an advisor, as you call it, growing out of my shoulder. It’s a bloody parasite for God’s sake. And there’s the risk of incompatibility. There have been a suicides, you know.’

‘That’s very rare. Look, if you don’t have one, I’ll be looking for a man who will. That’s it; my ultimatum. Get infested or I go. I don’t want to be married to a has-been who won’t accept progress.’

‘Are you going to have an homunculus as well?’

‘Of course not. I don’t need it do I? You’re the government minister, not me.’

‘And I’m the government minister with a shit degree in media studies and art history, whereas you’re the one with a doctorate in genetic manipulation. Is that what you mean?’

‘Well, if that’s the way you want to put it; yes.’

Three weeks later, going through his morning bathroom ritual, Cameroon glanced at the lump growing on his right shoulder. It had been easy to start off the homunculus. All he’d had to do was swallow a capsule containing the genetically engineered embryo. He didn’t know how it worked, not being a genomic specialist like Melanie. Rather, he had a vision of a small cartoon-like being swimming backstroke through his bloodstream until it reached his shoulder and then anchoring itself, ready to grow and burst out like the monster in the film, *Alien*. He hoped it wouldn’t be painful. Talking to others like Beam, he’d found that it hadn’t been painful for them. Apparently, the homunculus grew slowly at first and then blossomed into a fully functional advisor over a period of a couple of days. Cameroon had let his wife choose the exact model. She’d done the research and knew what he needed, she’d said. Now all he had to do was wait. His objections about it interfering with their sex life had been discounted with a smile. Melanie had said that it might introduce a bit of spice having a bit of Thatcher in bed with them.