

The Dolphinate

Claire King, short of cash, set about breaking her second pledge with the least amount of damage. *Raising my grandson, that's first.* She messaged the dolphin-lovers with her contract.

They brought *three* captives despite Claire's instructions. "Because we'll need genetic diversity to build us a tribe, right?" they said.

After sampling the poor animals, Claire swam them to the laboratory's sea-gate. Encouraged them to swim away, never to approach another human. The least she could do.

Next, she aspirated eggs, sperm, and stem cells from the relevant human donors and refrigerated them.

Now. The next step. Not that she'd be telling her clients the details. *Let them think it magic.* Claire drove the forklift truck to the basement. Stacked the tray with 10 jugs of the alien mud. In the laboratory she centrifuged the mud and sieved the resulting fluid. Boiled the liquid down. Let it cool.

She decanted the silvery syrup into ten Petrie dishes. Over the next ten hours, added eggs and dolphin sperm, or dolphin eggs and human sperm. Stared open-mouthed into the microscope at each joining. Gob smacked. Froze each sample.

The laboratory door swung open. "Gran, it's late," Callum said. "I cooked us dinner. Vege burgers."

She looked up. Saw that same alien silver on him. His teeth, pearlised. His hair, a silver sheen. His skin shimmered when he moved. *And he's not even my doing.* "I'll just shut down. Tidy up."

He came in. "Are you earning us credit to buy me more clothes?" His pantleg cuffs were around his shins. His shirt too tight.

"Yes. And more education."

He chuckled. "I can learn everything I need right here. Will you make me a friend?"

"More education," she said, walking him toward their quarters.

Next session she altered her clients' genomes with their own hybridised stem cells. One by one she took the unnatural humans back to their ground-floor accommodation, the rooms surrounding the facility's enclosed sea-basin. "Now we see if the changes take," she said. "You'll need to look after yourselves as there can be no staff from outside for this."

She went back to the lab. Defrosted a fertilised egg. Watched it develop. The silver sped the process, what else could it be? The fetus passed the stage where it could be re-frozen. *I'm not ready! What do I do? What do I do?*

With gut-wrenching fear she readied the computerised womb connected to one of the breeding tanks. Curtained it from casual viewing. Went to test her clients. Ran back purse-mouthed to hold in her terror. Shoved the fridge onto the fork-lift. Drove down.

Defrosting a fertilised egg every hour, she implanted them into the night. At dawn she drove to the viewing-platform to watch over the hybrid, exhausted.

"Gran! Thank you for my friend! Best surprise ever!"

Claire woke. *Callum? Friend?* She opened her eyes. Callum and the hybrid—call him dolphinate

—frolicked in the tank.

“Open the sea-gate, Gran! We’re hungry! We’re going fishing!”