

A Twin out of Time

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A 10-minute play

by Rom Watson

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## Cast

BEN WEAVER, a grieving widower  
MATTHEW, a familiar stranger

The location: an airport.

The time: a few years from now.

"Cloned puppies are like identical twins born at a later date. A twin out of time."  
-- Hwang Woo-suk

MATTHEW enters carrying a large, nondescript paper bag and a piece of poster board. He looks around and determines the best place to stand so he will be seen by travelers as they disembark the plane. He plants himself in that spot, places the bag over his head, and holds the poster board in front of his chest. His sign reads “Ben Weaver.” He waits. Soon BEN enters, dragging a rolling carry-on bag behind him. He sees the sign and stops. He looks around to see if he is being filmed as part of a prank. No one is around, so he cautiously approaches.

BEN

My name is Ben Weaver. But I wasn't expecting anyone to meet me.

Matthew lowers the sign and takes an envelope out of his jacket pocket and hands it to him. Ben's name is written on the outside in large letters.

BEN (CONT'D)

You must be waiting for a different Ben Weaver, but maybe this will explain it.

Intrigued to read the letter, he crosses a few steps away, opens the unsealed envelope and takes out a one-page letter.

BEN (CONT'D)

(Reading.)

“Dear Ben, our sincere condolences on the recent death of your husband, Matthew Weaver.”

He sinks into a chair, looks around again, and continues reading.

BEN (CONT'D)

(Reading.)

“Three years ago, your husband signed a contract with us. In the event his death preceded your own, he instructed us to create “a twin out of time” --a replica of himself to comfort you. He is yours for a period of one year.”

He stares at Matthew, then continues reading.

BEN (CONT'D)

(Reading.)

“The man who presented you this letter is not your late husband. However, he does look and sound like Matthew. Please don’t scream when he reveals himself to you, as it will upset anyone in the immediate vicinity.”

He sets the letter and envelope down, rises and crosses further away from Matthew, staring at him.

BEN (CONT'D)

I don’t know who’s pulling this prank, but it is not funny. Take that bag off your head.

Matthew sets the sign on the floor, then reaches up for the bag. He hesitates.

BEN (CONT'D)

Take it off! NOW.

He removes the bag. Ben is shocked and covers his mouth with his hand. He doesn’t scream but he does make a sound. It’s hard to tell if it’s a squeal or a moan because his hand is over his mouth. He lowers his hand and starts hyperventilating. He sits. Matthew hands him the paper bag and he takes it, gathers the opening around his mouth, and breathes into it. After Ben regains his composure, he sets the bag aside and stares at him. Then he runs to Matthew and embraces him. After a moment, something seems “off” to him and he releases Matthew and stares at his face.

BEN (CONT'D)

You’re not him.

MATTHEW

No, I’m not. I don’t have his memories.

BEN

Of course not. You’ll never be him.

MATTHEW

That is correct. I will never react like him, or smell like him, or love you the way he did.

BEN

(Pushing him away.)

Then why are you here? To remind me how much I miss him? What is the point of having a clone of Matthew?

MATTHEW

Your husband had me made to ease your sorrow. To give you time to adjust to life without him. And, if his death was sudden, to give you time to say a proper goodbye.

Ben turns away from him to process this information.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

And by the way: we don't like being called clones.

BEN

You are a clone.

MATTHEW

I, am "a living replica of your recently departed loved one." Think of me as a twin, born at a later date.

BEN

Where did you come from?

Matthew hands him a business card from his jacket pocket. Ben takes it and reads it aloud.

BEN (CONT'D)

(Reading.)

"A Twin Out of Time. Relieving the grieving of those the dearly departed leave behind." (He turns the card over.) Silicon Valley. Figures.

He hands the card back to Matthew who doesn't take it.

MATTHEW

Keep it. In case you have any complaints.

Ben puts the card in his pocket.

BEN

And what if I don't accept you?

MATTHEW

Then I turn around and catch a flight back to the Bay Area.

BEN

You act just like him. How is that possible?

MATTHEW

Your husband submitted many video recordings of himself, which I have studied and committed to memory.

BEN

How much did Matthew pay for you?

MATTHEW

Thirty thousand dollars.

BEN

What!?

MATTHEW

It was worth it to him to make sure you were taken care of after his death.

BEN

Wait a minute. Barbra Streisand paid fifty thousand dollars to have her dog cloned. You mean you're not even worth as much as Barbra Streisand's dog?

MATTHEW

Sammi was a Coton de Tulear. [Ko-TAWN doo Too-lee-ahr]. That breed has an average life span of fourteen to sixteen years.

BEN

How do you know that? How do you know . . . anything?

MATTHEW

During an early phase of my growth, the company surgically implanted a "Brain Computer Interface" into my head. This enabled them to download directly into my brain any information I might need.

BEN

That must come in handy. I could have used that when I was studying for my law degree.

MATTHEW

Anyway, I didn't cost as much as Sammi because I have a life span of only eighteen months.

BEN

Why only eighteen months?

MATTHEW

In order to get me from an embryo to your husband's age, they had to accelerate my aging process. The result is a shortened life span.

BEN

Are you going to age rapidly over the next eighteen months?

MATTHEW

No, at the end of my life the aging will happen all at once. Like when sunlight hit Christopher Lee at the end of Dracula.

BEN

The letter said you would comfort me for one year. What do you do for the other six months?

MATTHEW

I return to headquarters and live out my days answering phones in the customer service call center.

BEN

Thirty thousand dollars is a lot of money for one year. How come I don't get you for the full eighteen months? I mean, if I decided to keep you. Which I won't.

MATTHEW

After twelve months, I could die at any time. The company takes me back after a year to make sure you don't see your loved one die twice.

BEN

Once was enough. So why should I keep you if you're going to leave after a year? That would be like losing Matthew all over again. How does a company that cruel stay in business?

MATTHEW

Actually, many of our clientele send us back after nine or ten months.

BEN

Why?

MATTHEW

They don't need the full year. With our help, they're able to come to terms with their loss and find peace.

He thinks.

BEN

A paper bag? Really?

MATTHEW

Normally we're introduced by a representative from the company. Darlene was supposed to be here. She was going to introduce herself and prepare you for meeting me.

BEN

Where is this "Darlene?"

MATTHEW

She got sick so she gave me that letter and told me to hide my face so you wouldn't faint or scream.

BEN

What do I call you?

MATTHEW

Matthew. That's what the people who created me call me.

BEN

How did you know I would be on that flight?

MATTHEW

Your husband said that when he died, you would visit your mother. He also gave us access to your calendar in Outlook, so we could ensure prompt delivery.

BEN

He knew I'd go to Mom's. He thought I couldn't survive without him. That's why he had you made. Well he was wrong. I don't need you. I'm stronger than he gave me credit for.

MATTHEW

I'm sure you are. But even strong people need comfort in times of sorrow.

BEN

You think you can comfort me? Every day I ache for him. Every day is lonelier than the one before because every day his absence cuts deeper. I used to feel such gratitude every time I looked at him, knowing how lucky I was to have found him. Now I feel like an anvil is sitting on my heart. I don't want to go anywhere because half of me is missing. I don't want to stay home because everywhere I look I'm reminded of what I lost. His smile, his touch . . . I miss holding his hand. And how he made me laugh. I miss hearing him sing. Matthew could sing. Can you?

MATTHEW

I don't know. I've never tried.

BEN

I even miss the way he used to belch after he ate too fast. And his cooking --he used to poach pears in red wine. I miss his conviction that our love was as valid as any other love. I miss his belief in me; even when I didn't believe in myself. Growing up I'd always felt like an ugly duckling, but he made me feel like a swan. How can you expect to be everything he was to me? You're a stranger with his face. How could you possibly replace him? How could you ease my sorrow? I'm not even sure I'm ready to let go of my sorrow. So what good are you to me if you're not him? What could you do, to give me even a modicum of comfort?

MATTHEW

Besides the obvious comfort of sexual intercourse?

Pause.

BEN

Go on.

MATTHEW

There are many other ways I can provide solace and comfort. I can cook and clean for you. I can help you sort through his possessions and donate his clothes to a thrift store. And, if you don't like your husband's relatives, I can pop up unannounced and freak them out.

BEN

Tempting.

MATTHEW

But most of all . . . I can listen. You can tell me everything you never got to say to your husband.

This gets to him.

BEN

Oh.

MATTHEW

Sure, you can talk to a gravestone or an urn of ashes, but wouldn't you rather talk to me?

He nods his head.

BEN

I would.

MATTHEW

Try it. Tell me something you want to say to him.

He thinks for a moment.

BEN

You bastard! Why didn't you take better care of yourself? Were you trying to kill yourself, to get away from me? Is that why you never exercised? Is that why you drank too much? Is that why you didn't eat healthier food? And what am I supposed to do now that you're gone? Start dating again? No. No way. I would rather die alone than go through that again. Was that your plan? Leave me to die alone as your revenge because I spent too much time on my career and not enough time on you? Was that it? We were supposed to grow old together! How could you leave me alone like this?

Pause.

MATTHEW

Feel better?

BEN

Yeah. He used to drive me crazy sometimes, but I miss talking to him.

MATTHEW

When you're ready, I can help you find someone else to love.

BEN

You're a matchmaker too?

MATTHEW

I was trained to be everything you might want.

BEN

Can you poach pears in red wine?

MATTHEW

Not only that, I can teach *you* how to poach pears in red wine.

Ben wanders toward where he had sat earlier. He sees the letter and picks it up.

BEN (CONT'D)

(Looking at the letter.)

It says, "In the event his death preceded your own." What if I had died before he did? Would the company have refunded his money?

MATTHEW

Some clients choose that option, but your husband chose the "die or buy" plan.

BEN

"Die or buy?"

MATTHEW

In the event that your death preceded his, he elected to spend the money on a replica of you.

He lets this sink in.

BEN

Then he really did love me.

Matthew picks up the paper bag and the poster board sign and tucks them under his arm.

MATTHEW

Shall we go?

Ben nods and slowly heads toward the exit, rolling his carry-on bag behind him with one hand.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

Let me get that.

He takes the handle of the bag from him.

MATTHEW (CONT'D)

That's what I'm here for.

BEN

Thank you. Matthew.

Ben smiles. Matthew offers his hand. Ben takes it. They exit, holding hands. End of play.