



Source: Edward Wong, 'Jihadists split on Islam's true enemy', *New York Times* in *International Herald Tribune* online, 22/07/06.

Tags: [disease](#), [child/parent](#), [corporeality](#)

Writer/s: [Ziggy Edwards](#)

© 2008 Barbara Campbell and the writer/s

"How can you not get angry when she does that?" Cate demanded, staring after Marissa as she wove down the hall away from us, through the river-flow of kids between classes.

Marissa carried herself with a straight back, all puffed up because she'd managed to trick me again into talking in class and getting me in trouble. As we watched she met up with a knot of her giggling cronies at the other end of the corridor.

'I don't know,' I said. 'It's annoying, but not the worst thing in the world. Compared to what a lot of people are stuck with, I have it easy. Besides, I've talked to Ms. Halloran outside class before—apologized and explained to her.'

'You really don't care?' Cate turned to me. 'It's the same thing every day. She wrote more stuff about you in the girls' room downstairs.'

I shrugged. 'Well, obviously the sex-related part isn't true. Although she's right when she says a beaver wouldn't fuck me, but not for the reasons she implies.'

'What?'

'A beaver wouldn't be interested in having sex with any human. But her main point—I don't know, maybe I am pretty unattractive to some people.'

'Mariel, don't say that.' Cate looked as if she wanted to say more, but instead grabbed my wrist and let my hand dangle awkwardly over hers. She let go after a couple of seconds and started off towards her study hall. After a few steps she stopped, letting foot-traffic detour around her. 'See you at lunch,' Cate said, with a crinkly smile I found hard to interpret.

'Mom, I think I need to see a therapist.' I broke this to her over dinner, where she always made a point of the two of us sitting down and discussing events in our respective days.

Her eyebrows tilted up towards each other in a confused expression. 'You're...not feeling okay?'

'No, I feel fine. But Cate—she seems to be worried about me. Something I noticed today. It came up because of that whole thing with Marissa. But anyway, Cate is worried. And she feels sorry for me, too. It might be that even though I feel okay, I'm not relating to people the way I should be.'

Mom was nodding, but tears had sprung up in her eyes.

I stepped around the table and clasped her in a clumsy, from-behind hug. 'Mom, don't get upset. I'm not upset. It's probably best if we get this taken care of now, so I can function as a grown-up.'

'You're right, you're right,' she sobbed, scraping chair-legs on the kitchen floor as she turned to bury her head in my chest.

'Wow, so the couch thing is true,' I commented to Dr. Alcode. The door clicked shut behind me.

Dr. Alcode gestured for me to sit on it. 'It's comfortable,' he said with an accent, hard to place.

I sat down. Dr. Alcode gave me a long, level, once-over. He leaned forward in his leather chair.

'Mariel, there is an important piece of information you must have before we can begin to talk about the best

treatment for you.' He paused; I nodded to show that I knew he was about to tell me something serious. 'You are not 100% biological.'

'I'm an android?' I thought of the 24-hour cashiers at Wal-Mart, their flat crayon-colored skin tones and internal price scanners.

Dr. Alcode unlaced his fingers and gave a faint, reassuring smile. 'Not exactly. As you may have noticed, your body grows and bruises just like anyone else's. Well, like most other people's,' he amended. 'It's your brain, your mental wiring, that's manmade.'

I nodded slowly so he would continue.

'Regenerative medicine has gotten to the point that we can keep just about anyone alive, physically. However, once the brain has died—that's continued to be an obstacle.'

'Computers?'

'They're getting pretty sophisticated, too. I must say you're doing a pretty great job of it.' Dr. Altone scrutinized me. 'Is this too much to process?'

I shook my head. 'I want to know everything. Why didn't my mother tell me?'

Dr. Altone shook his head, too. 'Perhaps she should have. Maybe she thought she would never have to. She told us that she wanted to tell you last week when you brought up the problems you were having, but she just couldn't force herself to take that step.'

'Did she think I was going to flip out? She knows I wouldn't. Now I guess I understand why.'

'It has to do with your mother, not you,' Dr. Altone said. 'Barriers within her, contradictions. She needs more conventional therapy. It might be hard to understand why people do what they do. Are you finding that?'

I nodded miserably.

'Welcome to the club.' He smiled, more broadly this time. 'Let's talk about treatments.'

'What's to treat?' I asked. 'It sounds like I just am how I am.'

'Well, that's one approach to take—and there's nothing wrong in that. We can approach it from a cognitive angle, fine-tuning your mirroring behaviour—more than you've been able to get from your core programming or trial and error.'

'The other approach is a bit of a breakthrough, we hope.' Dr. Altone uncrossed and recrossed his legs. 'It's not that you don't have emotions, as you know. You and your peers just process them differently. Particularly anger. The hardware isn't there, for many reasons. It's more like software—in the form of an injection, temporary.'

'Basically, we pump you full of fury and venom. It's an inpatient procedure; you'd stay here overnight. Many patients like you find they have plenty of reasons to be angry; they just never looked at their lives from that perspective before. It's drastic, but afterwards you have experiential understanding of an important force behind human behaviour.'

'Your choice,' he said.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Ziggy Edwards.*