

The Copy

by Paul Jennings

I was rapt. It was the best day of my life. I had asked Fiona to go with me and she said yes. I couldn't believe. I mean it wasn't as if I was a great catch. I was skinny, weak, and not too smart at school. Mostly I got Cs and Ds for marks. And I couldn't play sport at all. I hated football, always went out on the first ball at cricket and didn't know which end to hold a tennis racquet. And Fiona had still said she'd be my girlfriend.

Every boy in year eleven at Hamilton High would be jealous. Especially Mat Hodson. It was no secret that he fancied Fiona too. I grinned to myself. I wished I could see his face when he found out the news. He thought that he was so great and in a way he was. He was the exact opposite to me. He was smart (always got As for everything), captain of the footy team, the best batsman in the cricket team and he was tough. Real tough. He could flatten me with one punch if he wanted to. I just hoped he took it with good grace about Fiona and me. I didn't want him for an enemy.

I headed off to Crankshaft Alley to see my old friend Dr Woolley. I always went to see him when something good happened. Or something bad. I felt sort of safe and happy inside his untidy old workshop and it was fun seeing what crazy thing he was inventing. Everything he had come up with so far had been a flop. His last invention was warm clothes pegs to stop people getting cold fingers when they hung out the clothes. They worked all right but no one would buy them because they cost two hundred dollars each. All of his inventions had turned out like that. They worked and they were clever but they were too expensive for people to buy.

I walked on down past all the other little shop-front factories until I reached Dr Woolley's grubby door. I gave the secret knock (three slow, three fast) and his gnomish face appeared at the window. I say gnomish because he looked just like a gnome: he was short with a hooked nose and he had a white beard and a bald head surrounded with a ring of white hair. If you gave him a fishing rod and a red cap and sat him in the front yard you would think he was a little garden statue.

He opened the door. 'Come in Rodney,' he said.

Tim, I corrected. He always called me the wrong name. He had a terrible memory. 'Where's that screwdriver?' he said. 'It's always getting lost.'

'In your hand, ' I told him.

Thanks, Peter, thanks.'

'Tim', I sighed. I don't know why I bothered. He was never going to call me by my right name. It wasn't that he didn't know who I was. He did. I was his only friend. Everyone else thought he was a dangerous crackpot because he chased them away from his front door with a broken mop. I was the only person allowed into his workshop.

'Are you still working on the Cloner?' I asked.

35 His face turned grim and he furtively looked over at the window. 'Sh ... Not so loud. Someone might hear. I've almost perfected it. I'm nearly there. And this time it is going to pay off.' He led me across the room to a machine that looked something like a telephone box with a whole lot of wires hanging out of it. Down one side were a number of dials and switches. There were two red buttons. One was labelled COPY and the other REVERSE.

40 Dr Woolley placed a pine cone on the floor of the Cloner. Then he pressed the button that said COPY. There was a whirring sound and a puff of smoke and then, amazingly, the outline of another pine cone, exactly the same as the first, appeared. It lasted for about ten seconds and then the machine started to rock and shake and the whirring slowly died. The image of the second pine cone faded away.

'Fantastic,' I yelled.

45 'Blast' said Dr Woolley. 'It's unstable. It won't hold the copy. But I'm nearly there. I think I know how to fix it'

'What will you use it for?' I asked. 'What's the good of copying pine cones? There are plenty of pine cones already. We don't need more of those.'

He started to get excited. 'Listen, Robert.'

50 'Tim,' I said.

'Tim, then. It doesn't only work with pine cones. It will work with anything.' He looked up at the window as he said it. Then he dropped his voice. 'What if I made a copy of a bar of gold, eh? What then? And then another copy and another and another. We would be rich. Rich.'

I started to get excited too. I liked the way he said 'we'.

55 Doctor Woolley started nodding his little head up and down. 'All I need is time: he said. 'Time to get the adjustment right. Then we will show them whether I'm a crank or not.'

We had a cup of tea together and then I headed off home. That was two good things that had happened in one day. First, Fiona saying she would go with me and second, the Cloner was nearly working. I whistled all the way home.

60 I didn't see Dr Woolley for some time after that. I had a lot on my mind. I had to walk home with Fiona and every night I went to her place to study with her. Not that we got much study done. On weekends we went hiking or hung around listening to records. It was the best time of my life. There was only one blot on the horizon. Mat Hodson. One of his mates had told me he was out to get me. He left a message saying he was going to flatten me for taking his girl.

65 His girl! Fiona couldn't stand him. She told me she thought he was a show-off and a Bully. But that wasn't going to help me. If he wanted to flatten me he would get me in the End. Fortunately he had caught the mumps and had to stay at home for three weeks. Someone had told me it was very painful.

70 I decided to go round to see Dr Woolley about a month later. I wondered if he had perfected his Cloner. When I reached the door I gave the secret knock but there was no answer. 'That's strange,' I said to myself. 'He never goes out for anything.'

75 I looked through the window and although the curtains were drawn I could see the light was on inside. I knocked again on the door but still no answer. Then I started to worry. What if he had had a heart attack or something? He could be lying unconscious on the floor. I ran around to the back, got the key from the hiding spot in an old kettle and let myself into the workshop. The place was in a mess. Tables and chairs were turned over and crockery was lying smashed on the floor. It looked as if there had been a fight in the workshop. There was no sign of Dr Woolley.

80 I started to clean the place up, turning the chairs up the right way and putting the broken things into the bin. That's when I found the letter. It was in an envelope marked with four names. It said, 'John', 'Peter', 'Robert', and 'Tim'. The first three names were crossed out. Dr Woolley had finally remembered my name was Tim after four tries. Inside the letter said:

TIM

85 IF YOU FIND THIS LETTER SOMETHING TERRIBLE HAS HAPPENED. YOU MUST

DESTROY THE CLONER AT ONCE.

WOOLLEY

90 My eye caught something else on the floor. I went over and picked it up. It was another letter exactly the same as the first. Exactly the same. It even had the three wrong names crossed out. Dr Woolley really was the most absent-minded person.

95 I looked at the Cloner with a feeling of dread. What had happened? Why did he want me to destroy it? And where was Dr Woolley? The Cloner was switched on. I could tell that because the red light next to REVERSE was shining. I walked over to it and switched it over to COPY. I don't know what made me do it. I guess I just wanted to know if the Cloner worked. I should have left it alone but I didn't. I took a Biro out of my top pocket and threw it inside the Cloner.

Immediately an image of another Biro formed. There were two of them where before there had only been one. I turned the Cloner off and picked up both pens. As far as I could tell they were identical. I couldn't tell which was the real one. They were both real.

100 I sat down on a chair feeling a bit dizzy. This was the most fantastic machine that had ever been invented. It could make me rich. Dr Woolley had said that it could even copy gold bars. All sorts of wonderful ideas came into my mind. I decided that nothing would make me destroy the Cloner.

105 I went over and switched the machine on to REVERSE. Then I threw both of the pens into the Cloner. I was shocked by what happened. Both of them disappeared. They were gone. For good. I turned it back to COPY but nothing happened. I tried REVERSE again but still nothing. It was then that I noticed a huge blowfly buzzing around the room. It flew crazily around my head and then headed straight into the Cloner. It vanished without a trace.

The Cloner was dangerous when it was switched on to REVERSE. It could make things vanish for good. I wondered if Dr Woolley had fallen into the machine. Or had he been pushed? There were certainly signs of a struggle.

110 I thought about going to the Police. But what could they do? They couldn't help Dr Woolley if he had fallen into the Cloner. And they would take it away and I would never see it again. I didn't want that to happen. I had plans for that machine. It was mine now. I was the rightful owner. After all, Dr Woolley had said that 'we' would be rich. Unfortunately now it was just going to be me who was rich.

115 I went back to Fiona's house and spent the evening doing homework with her. I didn't tell her about the Cloner. I was going to give her the first copies I made from it. At ten o'clock I walked home through the darkened streets, keeping an eye out for Mat Hodson. I had heard he was over his mumps and was looking for me.

120 The next morning I borrowed Mum's gold cameo brooch without telling her. I decided not to go to school but instead I went to Dr Woolley's workshop. Once inside I turned the Cloner on to COPY and threw in the brooch. Immediately another one appeared. I turned the Cloner off and took out both brooches. One was a mirror image of the other. They both had the same gold setting and the same ivory face. But on one brooch the face looked to the left and on the other it looked to the right. Apart from that they were identical.

125 I whistled to myself. The copy was so good I couldn't remember which way Mum's brooch had faced. Still it didn't matter. I would put one of them back where I had got it and give the other to Fiona.

130 Next I decided to experiment with something that was alive. I went outside and hunted around in the long grass. After a while I found a small green frog with a black patch on its left side. I took it in and threw it straight into the Cloner. In a flash there were two frogs. They jumped out on to the workshop floor. I picked them up and looked at them. They were both alive and perfectly happy. They were both green but one had a black patch on the left and the other had it on the right. One was a mirror image of the other.

This Cloner was wonderful. I spent all day there making copies of everything I could think of. By four o'clock there was two of almost everything in the workshop. I decided it was time to go and give Fiona her cameo. She was going to be very happy to get it.

135 I never made it to Fiona's house. An unpleasant surprise was waiting outside for me. It was Mat Hodson.

"I've been waiting for you, you little fink," he said "I heard you were hiding in here." He had a pair of footy boots hanging around his neck. He was on his way to practise. He gave a nasty leer. "I thought I told you to stay away from my girl."

140 "She's not your girl", I said hotly. "She can't stand you. She's my ... " I never finished the sentence. He hit me with a tremendous punch in the guts and I went down like an exploding balloon. The pain was terrible and I couldn't breathe. I fought for air but nothing happened. I was winded. And all I could do was lay there on the footpath wriggling like a

145 "You get one of those every day", he said. "Until you break it off with Fiona." Then he laughed and went off to footy practice.

After a while my breath started to come back in great sobs and spasms. I staggered back into the workshop and sat down. I was mad. I was out of my mind. I had to think of some way to stop him. I couldn't go through this every day and I couldn't give up Fiona. I needed help. And badly. But I couldn't think of anyone. I didn't have a friend who would help me fight Hodson except Fiona and I couldn't ask her.

150 My mind was in a whirl and my stomach ached like crazy. I wasn't thinking straight. That's why I did the stupidest thing of my life. I decided to get inside the Cloner and turn it on. There would be two of me. Two Tims. I could get The Copy to help me fight Hodson. He would help me. After all, he would be the same as me. He would want to pay Hodson back as much as I did. The more I thought about it, the smarter it seemed.

I would make an exact copy of myself and together we could go off and flatten Hodson. I wondered what my first words to the new arrival should be. In the end I decided to say, "Hello there, welcome to earth." I know it sounds corny but at the time it was all I could think of.

160 I turned the Cloner to COPY and jumped in before I lost my nerve. In a twinkling there was another 'me' standing there. It was just like looking into a mirror. He had the same jeans, the same jumper and the same brown eyes. We both stood staring at each other for about thirty seconds without saying a thing. Then, both at the same time we said, "Hello, there, welcome to earth."

165 That gave me a heck of a shock. How did he know what I was going to say? I couldn't figure it out. It wasn't until much later I realized he knew all about me. He had an exact copy of my brain. He knew everything I had ever done. He knew what I had been thinking before I stepped into the Cloner. That's why he was able to say the same sentence. He knew everything about me. He even knew how many times I had kissed Fiona. The Copy wasn't just a copy. He was me.

170 We both stood there again for about thirty seconds with our brains ticking over. We were both trying to make sense of the situation. I drew a breath to say something but he beat me to it. 'Well,' he said. 'What are we waiting for? Let's go get Hodson.'

175 The Copy and I jogged along the street towards the football ground without speaking. I wondered what he was thinking. He didn't know what I was thinking. We shared the same past but not the same future or present. From now on everything that happened would be experienced differently by both of us. I didn't have the faintest idea what was going on in his head. But I knew what was going on in mine. I was wondering how I was going to get rid of him when this was all over.

180 'Fiona will like that brooch,' said The Copy. I was shocked to think he knew about it. He was smiling to himself. I went red. He was probably thinking Fiona was going to give him a nice big kiss when she saw that brooch. It was me she was going to kiss, not The Copy.

At last we reached the football ground. Hodson was just coming out of the changing rooms. 'Well look,' he said. 'It's little Tim and his twin brother. Brought him to help you, have you?' he said to The Copy. Well, I can handle both of you.' He screwed up his hand into a tight fist. Suddenly he looked very big. In fact he looked big enough to wipe the floor with both of us.

185 I felt like running for it. So did The Copy. I could see he was just about to turn around and run off, leaving me on my own. We both turned and fled. Hodson chased after us for a bit and finally gave it away. 'See you tomorrow, boys,' he yelled. I could hear the other footballers laughing at us. It was humiliating. I knew the others would tell Fiona about what a coward I was.

I turned to The Copy. 'A fat lot of use you turned out to be,' I said.

190 'What are you talking about?' he replied. 'You're the one who turned and ran off first. You knew I couldn't handle him on my own.'

I realized The Copy was a liar. I decided to go home for tea. He walked along beside me. 'Where do you think you're going?' I asked.

'Home for tea.'

195 'We can't both turn up for tea. What's Mum going to say when she sees two of us? The shock will kill her,' I told him.

200 We both kept on walking towards home. The Copy knew the way. He knew everything I knew. Except what I was thinking. He only knew about what had happened before he came out of the Cloner. He didn't know what was going on in my mind after that. I stopped: He seemed determined to come home with me. 'Look,' I said. 'Be reasonable. Think of Mum and Dad. We can't both sit down for tea. You go somewhere else.'

'No,' he said. 'You go somewhere else.'

205 Finally we came to the front gate. 'All right,?' I said to The Copy. 'You go and hide in the bedroom. I'll go down to tea and afterwards I'll sneak you up some food.'

The Copy didn't like it. 'I've got a better idea,' he told me. 'You hide in the bedroom and I'll bring you up something.'

210 I could see he was only thinking of himself. This thing was turning into a nightmare. 'All right,' I said in the end. 'You go down to tea and I'll hide in the bedroom.' So that is what we did. I sneaked up and hid in my room while The Copy had tea with my parents. It was roast pork. My favourite. I could smell it from my room and it smelt delicious.

The sound of laughter and chattering floated up the stairs. No one knew The Copy wasn't me. They couldn't tell the difference. A bit later he came up the stairs. He poked his head around the corner and threw me a couple of dry biscuits. 'This is all I could find. I'll try and bring you up something later.'

215 Dry biscuits. I had to eat dry biscuits while The Copy finished off my tea. And I just remembered Mum had been cooking apple pie before we left. This was too much. Something had to be done.

Just then the doorbell rang. 'I'll get it,' shouted The Copy before I had a chance to open my mouth. He ran down the stairs and answered the door. I was trapped. I couldn't go down or Mum and Dad would see there were two of us.

220 I could hear a girl's voice. It was Fiona. A bit later the door closed and all was silent. The Copy had gone outside with her. I raced over to the window and looked out. It was dark but I could just see them under the wattle tree. The street light illuminated the scene. What I saw made my blood boil. The Copy was kissing Fiona. He was kissing my girlfriend. She thought he was me. She couldn't tell the difference and she was letting the creep kiss her. And what is worse she seemed to be enjoying it. It was a very long kiss.

225 I sat down and thought about the situation. The Copy had to be sent back to where he came from. This whole thing had turned out to be a terrible mistake. I had to get The Copy back to the workshop and get rid of him.

230 After about two hours The Copy came up to the bedroom looking very pleased with himself. I bit my tongue and didn't say anything about him kissing Fiona. 'Look, I said. 'We can't both stay here. Why don't we go back to the workshop and have a good talk. Then we can figure out what to do.'

He thought about it for a bit and then he said, 'OK, you're right. We had better work something out.'

235 I snuck out of the window and met him outside. We walked all the way to the workshop in silence.

I could tell he didn't like me any more than I liked him.

240 I took the key out of the kettle and let us in. I noticed the Cloner was still switched on to COPY. I went over and turned it on to REVERSE without saying anything. It would all be over quickly. He wouldn't know what hit him. I would just push him straight into the Cloner and everything would be back to normal. He would be gone and there would be just me. It wouldn't be murder. I mean he had only been alive for a few hours and he wasn't really a person. He was just a copy.

'Look,' I said, pointing to the floor of the Cloner. 'Look at this.' I got ready to push him straight in when he came over.

245 The Copy came over for a look. Suddenly he grabbed me and started to push me towards the machine. The Copy was trying to kill me. He was trying to push me into the Cloner and have Fiona for himself. We fell to the floor in a struggling heap. It was a terrible fight. We both had exactly the same strength and the same experience. As we fought I realized what had happened to Dr Woolley. He had made a copy of himself and they had both tried to push each other in. That's why there were two letters. Probably they had both fallen in and killed each other.

250 The Copy and I fought for about ten minutes. Neither of us could get the upper hand and we were both growing tired. We rolled over near the bench and I noticed an iron bar on the floor. But The Copy had noticed it too. We both tried to reach it at the same time. But I won. I grabbed it and wrenched my arm free. With a great whack I crashed it down over The Copy's head. He fell to the floor in a heap.

255 I dragged his lifeless body over to the Cloner and shoved him inside. He vanished without a trace. It was just as if he had never existed. A feeling of great relief spread over me but I was shaking at the narrow escape I had experienced. I turned and ran home without even locking up the workshop.

260 By the time I got home I felt a lot better. I walked into the lounge where Mum and Dad were sitting watching TV. Dad looked up at me. 'Ah there you are, Tim. Would you fill out this application for the school camp? You put in the details and I'll sign the bottom.'

I took the form and started to fill it in. I was looking forward to the school camp. We were going skiing. After a while I looked up. Mum and Dad were both staring at me in a funny way.

'What's up?' I asked.

265 'You're writing with your left hand,' said Dad.

'So?

'You've been a right hander all your life.'

'And your hair is parted on the wrong side,' said Mum. 'And that little mole that used to be on your right cheek has moved to the left side.'

270 My head started to swim. I ran over to the mirror on the wall. The face that stared back at me was not Tim's. It was the face of The Copy.