

Children of the Wrong Time

Flavia Idà

ONE

MICHAEL HOLMES AND NORA SAVINS passed through the bottleneck of the security checkpoint, stepped into the ornate atrium of the Department of Vital Privileges, and looked at the white marble statue of the Founding Father.

The Founding Father beamed down on them above the busy crowd, a handsome young man with long black hair, who carried in one hand an ancient movie script rolled up into a scroll and, in the other hand, an auto racer's helmet. The wreath of laurels at his feet hadn't wilted since the national celebration of his birthday.

"Keanu Reeves," Michael said reverently. "Best thing America ever gave us."

He pointed at the inscription carved in tall letters on the base of the life-sized statue. "And his words that began it all."

He recited the movie line, known to every citizen older than six.

"You need a license to drive, you need a license to fish, you need a license to own a dog, but any moron can become a parent."

Under the inscription he read the First Law of the Republic: *"Never Again Any Moron."*

Behind the statue was the Republic's flag, a field of blue showing an ancestry chart with golden stars in place of family names.

Michael looked at Nora. "Are you all right?"

Nora made a small headshake for *no*.

"Do I look okay?" she asked.

"I told you, you look great."

"Yeah, well, all you have to do is pick the blue suit over the grey suit. Me, I have to be conservative, but not dowdy; feminine, but not trampy ..."

Michael brushed aside her concerns with a good-natured laugh.

"Come on, Grumps. Smile."

He glanced at his holofolder marked *Reproduction – Application One*.

"Here we go," he said softly. He passed his hand over the elevator plaque and stepped in after her.

Anxiety had dropped a wall between them. Too many worries, too many hopes, made noise in their minds. Was he a good provider, and did they really say he must provide for eighteen years? Was she a good homemaker, and did they really say she must make a home for eighteen years?

The elevator was full of people, each headed to their private petition. One elderly couple, the husband in a medchair, was certainly on their way to the Office of End-of-Life Privileges. The man was breathing with difficulty, a portable oxygen mask over his face. The woman wore a look of quiet anguish.

Nora eyed them on the sly. She thought it seemed cruel that a man that sick should be required to bring his application in person; but, of course, it was because anyone might make the application in his name with malice aforethought.

Would these two be granted their License for End-Of-Life Privileges? she wondered. Would she and Michael one day have to bring a similar application?

The elevator bell dinged; the doors swooshed open. People streamed down the hallway in a mingled chatter of voices. Michael and Nora found the door of the office marked *Reproduction – Application One*. Michael bent to kiss Nora's cheek, then leaned into the blinking Sesame panel and said, "Open".