

Claude straightens his red bow tie and grins in the mirror to ensure no bits of food are lurking between his teeth. The doorbell rings and he answers.

"And you must be Judy. You're even prettier than your photo," he says. The woman on the doorstep is dressed in a short skirt with flashy costume jewelry hanging from her neck and wrists.

"You too," she says unconvincingly.

Claude sidles out the door, trying not to let it open too far.

"What the crap?" says Judy. "You're not gonna invite me in for a drink?"

Claude tugs nervously at his tie, which is suddenly too tight. "Of course." He grins.

"Wow," she says, glancing at the tattered couch sprinkled with potato chip crumbs, "Cool house."

A man comes strutting through the kitchen door, a man who looks exactly like Claude, except he's wearing a tee shirt and boxers.

"I thought you said you lived alone," says Judy, eyebrow raising at the stranger. "He your twin?"

Claude clears his throat. "Not exactly. Judy, meet Claude 2."

Claude 2 raises a hand to Judy like he's stopping traffic. "Hey lady," he says, then plops into the divot on the couch and opens a bag of beef jerky.

"He's my clone," Claude explains.

"Really?" says Judy, curling a lock of her brown hair around a finger.

"I hope this isn't a deal breaker," Claude says.

"Actually, I think clones are hot," she says.

"Well, this lazy bum's is *supposed* to do all the housework for me, but he just sits around all day watching tv."

"Oh my god! Are you watching *Dallas*? I love this show."

Claude 2 slow-turns to Judy. "I've got all 14 seasons on DVD."

Judy's jaw drops.

Claude looks at his watch. "Reservation's for six o'clock. We'd better get going."

"Excuse us," says someone from the porch. Claude and Judy move aside and two more Claudes enter the house. Both are shirtless and carrying tennis rackets. They examine Judy from head to toe. Judy giggles and turns around for them.

"Going on a date, Claude 1?" one of them asks. "Naughty, naughty."

"I told you, it's just Claude," says the original Claude.

"More friends of yours?" asks Judy.

"This is Claude 3 and 5. They're moochers too."

"You guys play tennis?" Judy points at their rackets. "In high school I went to state in tennis doubles."

"Doubles is the only way to go," says a shirtless Claude, his eyes fixed on Judy.

"Anyway, we really should be going," says original Claude.

"Where's number 4?"

The shirtless Claudes look at each other knowingly. One of them finally says, "He's upstairs. Hard at work."

"Oh?" Judy touches her dangling earring. "What does he do?"

"He works from home, that's all," original Claude blurts.

"Nothing special about it."

"What kind of work?" Judy persists.

All the Claudes look at each other. At last, Claude 2 hollers from the couch, "Runs a porno site."

Judy giggles. Claudes 3 and 5 watch her like hawks.

"We're going to be late," says original Claude, grabbing Judy by the elbow. She shakes out of his grasp.

"How many clones are there around here?" she says, walking further into the house.

"None more, this is it," says Claude, his forehead beaded with sweat.

"This is it for now," says Claude 2, looking away from the tv. "But there's 15 on vacation. They'll be back on Monday."

Both shirtless Claudes approach Judy, crowd in on her. "Oh," she says. Original Claude reaches to grab her elbow again. She slaps his hand away.

"Want to see my bedroom?" says a shirtless Claude.

"Okay. I'd like to meet number 5, too. His work sounds really interesting."

The Claudes escort Judy upstairs.

Claude 2 watches them for a moment then bolts up from the couch to follow.

Now the original Claude is left alone, sitting on the sofa, watching Dallas.

Someone strides through the front door. A woman, though she looks incredibly like Claude, except with soft-features and a more ample bosom.

"Claudia!" shouts Claude. "You're home early."

Claudia sits next to Claude on the couch and smothers him in kisses. "I just couldn't enjoy Los Angeles without you, so I took the first train home after the conference." She looks around suspiciously. "Where is everyone?"

"Upstairs," says Claude.

Claudia's eyelids lower and she leans in to Claude, laying him back onto the sofa. "Do think we have time?" she says, smirking like an imp.

"There's always time," says Claude, struggling to unsnap her bra.

"I love you," she says, her breath becoming heavy.

"I think we should get married," he whispers into her ear.

She freezes. Brushes the bangs from her eyes. "What?"

Claude sits up. "I mean, we always have a good time together. We say we love each other. It's the logical next step."

Claudia narrows her eyes. "First of all, this is not how you propose to a woman. You need a ring, some wine, and a nice dinner, and you need to be on your knee, not on your back. Second, have you considered what might happen if we ever accidentally have kids?"

"I'm not ready for kids right now either, but some day..."

"No. Our kids would be mutants because we have the exact same chromosomes."

"They're not exactly the same, I mean you're a woman."

"Just stop."

"Okay."

Claudia stood from the couch and adjusted her garments. "I hope we can still be friends," she said.

"Of course."

"I think I'll stay at a friend's house for a while. I need some time alone."

"Are we breaking up?"

"I think so."

"Oh. Well, then I suppose I have a confession. I brought a girl here today. I meant to take her on a date, but the other Claudes were more interesting and she's upstairs with them now. Nothing happened between us. I don't think she even liked me."

Claudia cocked her head. Her eyes went cold. "You were going to cheat on me?"

"It's not like that," pleaded Claude, his head in his hands.

Claudia staggered to the fireplace. "You know I'm a jealous woman."

"Would it help if I said I'm sorry?" he said. But when he looked up, he saw Claudia holding a poker with both hands, rearing back like a baseball player. She struck the side of his head right at the sweet spot, so that the spike went into his temple, killing him instantly.