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The Viking Look

It wasn't supposed to happen that way. Dr. William Jones' idea was to use genetic engineering to allow men and women to grow a second set of teeth. If children could shed milk teeth and develop adult ones, why couldn't adults grow still another set, just about the time their dentists were beginning to talk bridges and dentures? Jones had majored in sculpture in college, but at age twenty-one found himself still more drawn to medicine and dentistry. He was soon well enough qualified to follow his new inclinations. Having performed impressively in make-up courses in chemistry, he went on to Harvard for a combined medical-dental degree. A remarkably good student with enthusiastic recommendations from his professors, he had no difficulty getting grants to see him through his experimental project.

Then came its step-by-step development, using specially selected cattle as his final animal subjects. By the end of twelve years he felt that the results were positive enough for him to undertake work on humans.

"Wanted, volunteer subjects for a well-advanced experiment in growing a second set of adult teeth," he advertised. The experiment would involve an initial examination, then monthly hormonal injections for at least eight months. None of the subjects would pay fees for any of the procedures, and people living at a distance from Boston would have their transportation and hotel bills covered.

Public interest and public response was almost instantaneous. Newspapers leaped at the story, and within a few days there was nationwide enthusiasm, many volunteers offering to pay their own expenses if they were chosen. Dr. Jones had the applicants screened for emotional stability and dental need. After three months of painstaking selection, he had two hundred men and two hundred women with his desired distribution in age, between thirty-eight and fifty-eight. Surprisingly, most of these risk-takers were well-off financially; not surprisingly, most of them were desperate dentally.

Dr. Jones' results were beyond his expectations during the first three months, and he was the idol of his subjects. Several of the women proposed marriage to him, now that they would be beauties again, and even tried to lure him with exact details of their considerable wealth.

But then the subjects unexpectedly began to complain of lesions in their scalps. In vain they were applying antibiotic ointments—and then . . . a horror appeared. As complements to their emerging teeth, the subjects were developing horns on their heads. This hadn't happened with Jones' animal subjects. (Of course, the physician reflected, his cattle subjects already had horns.) Now Jones' subjects were becoming hysterical, and he himself was distraught. What of surgery to remove the emerging horns? No, he decided, it was far too risky to consider at this stage.

Still possessing a sculptor's eye, he noticed that the horns were shapely, quite like the horns that Michelangelo had put on his sculpture of Moses. (A mistranslation in St. Jerome's Bible had rendered the word for halo—or beams of light—as horns, and Michelangelo had dutifully provided Moses' head with as comely a pair of horns as that supreme sculptor could devise.) But comely or not, horns were horns, so Dr. Jones resorted to delaying action. He told his subjects that they were going through a temporary stage, and all would be well.

Alas, the horns remained, but they were as well proportioned as if God had a hand in this genetic engineering. Mounting a peak of his ingenuity, Dr. Jones assured the women that they were far more beautiful than before, and the men that they had a remarkably virile appearance.

Quickly the sponsors of the study, a well-endowed medical institute and a giant drug company hired public relations experts—"spin doctors" to rescue their medical doctor and themselves from lawsuits. These experts called in hair stylists, cosmeticians, and milliners to make the women, now with their third set of teeth, more attractive than ever before. For the men, designers fashioned new military headware, and a wizard of a lobbyist in Washington got the Secretary of Defense to say that the headware was intended for a new elite military force. Makers of football gear adopted headware to give players a new "viking look." Motion pictures carried the "cornucopia look" for women and the "viking look" for men throughout the world. Showing his political savvy, the president of the United States quickly sensed the public mood; he presented Dr. Jones with a distinguished citizen award in recognition of his achievements as a dentist, sculptor, physician, and cultural ambassador.

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