

## OF SMALL ACCOUNT

**ROSS  
WILCOX**

I told her not to, but Heidi 3-D printed a little boy. He came out thin with oily blonde hair and a dirty face. He looked to be maybe five or six, and he wanted nothing but to have a father. In fact, he wouldn't stop crying until he got one.

"You see? I knew this wasn't a good idea," I said.

I mostly meant that we couldn't afford to have a kid, not if we hoped to pay off the house. After all, Heidi and I worked at Soy-In-And-Out, a bottom-rung meatless fast-food joint.

Heidi said, "I can fix this."

She 3-D printed the boy a really good father. This guy was tall and handsome and slicked his hair back and wore an English-cut tailored suit. He had a big house in a nice neighborhood. Sure, this father worked a lot, but he came home every night, unlike some fathers. At any rate, he could afford to pay for the boy's college.

"I don't want this daddy!" the boy yelled. "I want *this* daddy!"

The boy latched onto my leg. I looked at Heidi. She was smiling. She walked up to us, and we group-hugged.

In this way, we became a family.

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We named the boy Adam, after the first who was also, in a way, 3-D printed.

The day before Adam's first day of kindergarten, we took him to the store to buy clothes and school supplies. Heidi pushed the plastic cart, and

Adam and I walked along either side of her. If you didn't know any better, you'd think Heidi and I 3-D printed our little Adam the old-fashioned way, if you know what I mean.

"My god," said Heidi, examining a spiral notebook, "they want *three dollars* for one of these?"

I showed her the school-supply list from our local paper.

"It says we're supposed to get him *three* notebooks," I said.

"This stuff is all so expensive," Heidi said, glancing at the pencils, the scissors, and the folders.

I grabbed one of the cheap, ten-cent folders and put it in the cart.

"I want *this* folder!" Adam said.

He held up the most expensive one there was, a shiny, Optimus Prime folder that cost sixty cents.

I wasn't all that serious, but I kind of was, when I said to Heidi, "You know, we can just 3-D print all this stuff."

"That's a *great* idea."

We abandoned the cart on the spot, which only contained off-brand glue, off-brand crayons, and the generic folder. Adam threw a fit, bemoaning our denial of Optimus Prime.

"It's not fair!" he screamed.

Heidi and I glanced around at the parental onlookers, judging us cruel and unfit parents, no doubt. Certainly the other children present felt fortunate not to have to go home with us, empty-handed as Adam was.

He started bawling.

I grabbed his hand and drug him out of the store. I remember thinking in that moment that for a 3-D printed kid, Adam was a lot like all the other greedy, non-3-D-printed kids I'd ever known.

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When we got home, we 3-D printed Adam all his clothes and school supplies, including a passably semblant knockoff of the Optimus Prime folder. When we tucked him into bed that night, Adam was satisfied and eager to start school.

Again, I wasn't all that serious, but I kind of was, thinking about

money and all, when I said in bed later that night, "You know, school is so expensive."

"I *know*," Heidi said. "Just think about all the lunch money he's going to need."

"That, and stuff like band."

"And sports."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

Heidi and I jumped out of bed and dashed down to the 3-D printer, which we kept locked in a basement room, hidden from Adam. We hauled it out to the backyard and spent the rest of the night 3-D printing a small building, which would serve as his elementary school. We 3-D printed teachers, other six-year-olds, textbooks, even a pudgy bully with a too-tight striped shirt and a cowlick.

The next morning, after Adam had his breakfast, we waved goodbye to him. He walked out the backdoor, across the backyard, and into the little 3-D printed school, which we named Washington Elementary – the least-suspicious-sounding name we could think of.

Heidi and I held each other in the kitchen and pretended like it was real, like we were watching our real son attend his first real day of school.

"We're *such* good parents," Heidi said.

I pulled her tight and kissed her, but only briefly. We had on our Soy-In-And-Out black slacks and polo shirts, and we had to be to work in fifteen minutes.

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Over the next few years, we 3-D printed Adam new 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade teachers: Mrs. Dobbs, Mr. Levinson, and Miss Topf, respectively. When he joined the 3-D-printed little league baseball team in 4th grade, we 3-D printed all his opponents using substandard materials so that Adam would always win.

We really wanted to get Adam some real stuff – a real trumpet, say, or a real wooden bat, or a real human friend – but each month, when the mortgage payment came due, it was easier to just keep on 3-D printing our son all

his needs. Plus, Heidi got promoted to Manager at Soy-In-And-Out, which meant that, in addition to getting to wear the gold Manager Sport jacket over her black polo, she also got a raise. We started setting money aside for retirement. If you didn't know any better, which no one did because we didn't have any friends, you'd have thought we were actually successful.

In 5th grade, when Adam became interested in Eves, we 3-D printed him one of those, too.

The first Eve had auburn hair and freckles. She looked like the mascot of a long-defunct meat-centric fast food chain. Overall, I'd say she was a success. She gave our Adam his first hand-holding experience, which took place one day at the lunch table. We made her ask him to the 3-D printed school dance we held that fall, and we made Adam say yes. To this end, she provided Adam his first slow-dance experience, during which Heidi, as the parental chaperone, made sure Adam's hands stayed on Eve's hips and Eve's hands stayed on Adam's shoulders.

That summer, as he became more serious about baseball (he was a good shortstop), Adam broke up with the first Eve. He told her, "I just really need to focus on fielding grounders right now."

But by the next fall, he seemed ready, or at least Heidi and I were ready, for another Eve. To save a bit of money, we recycled some parts of the old Eve, and, this time, 3-D printed a tall brunette one. She was athletic and played softball. We figured shared interest might keep Adam from getting bored as quickly.

For a while, it worked. Adam and the brunette Eve played catch together, practiced hitting and pitching. But Adam didn't show any interest in Eve beyond having her as a glorified teammate. Heidi and I spied on them often, and Adam didn't want to flirt with her or hold her hand, despite his other 3-D printed classmates all having boyfriends and girlfriends by that point.

We cornered Eve one night in the backyard while Adam was in his room studying.

"You know the All-School 3-D-Printed Dance is coming up," Heidi told her.

"Yeah," Eve said. "So?"

"So, are you going to ask Adam?"

"Um, probably not," Eve said. "I don't think he'd say yes."

"Why not?" I asked. "He seems to have taken a special liking to you."

Eve shook her head. "I don't think he likes, um, my kind. Not like that."

"What do you mean?"

"*Girls*. I don't think he likes girls."

"Really?" Heidi said.

"Yeah," Eve said. "He's always staring at Josh. You know Josh, the catcher on the team?"

It all became clear to me then.

"We don't need an Eve," I said to Heidi. "What we need is a *Steve*."

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So, using some of the spare parts of the brunette Eve, we 3-D printed a Steve. We tried our best to make him look vaguely like Josh, who was short and stocky with curly black hair. Sure enough, the second Eve had been right. Adam took an immediate liking to the mysterious new student who showed up the next day at school. Before long, Adam and Steve were spending every waking moment they could together.

Steve would meet Adam at our backdoor and they'd walk the ten paces to school together. By this time, we'd upgraded the elementary school into a junior high – Lincoln Junior High, to be exact – and Adam and Steve would linger between classes at each other's lockers, batting their eyes and flirtatiously running their hands along each other's chests and shoulders.

Through our constant spying and questioning of 3-D printed Lincoln Junior High Students, we soon learned Adam and Steve were an exclusive couple. This made it a bit complicated when, one Thursday night at dinner, Adam asked if Steve, whom he referred to as his "best friend," could stay the night tomorrow.

Like any parents worth their salt, Heidi and I were committed to at once fostering the natural sexual growth of our child while also artificially delaying his first real sexual encounter.

"How good of friends are you and Steve?" I asked.

"I told you. We're *best* friends."

"I think what your dad means to say is, are you and Steve friends with *benefits*?"

"Friends with benefits?" Adam said.

Heidi nodded. "Yeah. Like, you know, benefits."

Adam looked confused. "We learned about fringe benefits in social studies," he said.

"No," I said. "We're not talking about fringe benefits. Although those are good to have, and Soy In-And-Out's could be better. We're talking about *sexual* benefits."

Adam's face turned red. He was a smart kid, and he could tell that we knew.

"So you know," he said.

Heidi smiled warmly and took hold of Adam's hand.

"Of course we know," she said. "Which is why Steve is welcome to stay, but he has to sleep on the couch in the living room."

Adam smiled, and the redness slowly left his face.

"Thanks, Mom and Dad."

I almost said something about unprotected sex leading to pregnancy, but fortunately stopped myself before opening my mouth.

*Duh*, you know?

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It all came crashing down because of a stupid oversight on our part: Sex Ed. Heidi and I hadn't even bothered to examine the contents of the Lincoln Junior High curriculum. We just 3-D printed it.

So one day at school, Mr. Jeffrey, the Sex Ed teacher who relayed the events of that day to us later on, taught Adam and his 7th grade classmates all about the process of human reproduction. This was kind of ironic since literally everybody at the school, including Mr. Jeffrey himself, had been 3-D printed and not sexually reproduced.

It became clear to the students something was off about the reproductive process Mr. Jeffrey spoke of, since none of them had actual parents who had had actual sex to produce them.

"Don't we come from a 3-D printer?" said Jessica Kemp.

"Yeah, that's what I always thought," said Benjamin Martinez.

"My earliest memories are of the insides of a machine that took raw materials and made them into limbs and a body and a face," said Darla Friedman.

"Technically, you're right," said Mr. Jeffery. "*We* come from a 3-D printer. But the School Board wanted you to learn how *humans* reproduce."

"Humans? Aren't we human?" said Steve.

Mr. Jeffrey shook his head. "No. We're 3-D objects."

"Who is the School Board?" asked Adam.

"You don't know?" Mr. Jeffrey said. "It's your parents, Guy and Heidi."

At that, Adam came storming all ten paces home, throwing open the backdoor. Heidi and I had gotten home from work shortly before and were preparing supper.

"Adam," Heidi said. "You're home early."

"Guess what we learned about in school today?" he said.

"What's that?"

"Human sexual reproduction."

"Shit," we both said, which gave it away. He knew.

"I want to know the truth," Adam said.

Heidi and I looked at each other, still in our Soy In-And-Out garb. We had no choice. We led Adam down the basement stairs and into the room we kept locked.

I pointed at the 3-D printer. "That's where you come from."

Adam walked up to the 3-D printer and pressed the button. Out came a Steve. He pressed it again, and out came an Eve. He pressed the button again and again, until the room filled with Eves and Steves and friends and clothes and parts of schools.

"My whole life is a lie!" Adam screamed.

He looked at us accusingly. His eyes were moist, his face red.

I nodded.

I don't know what movie Heidi had recently seen, but she said, "Your life may be a lie, Adam, but our love for you is real."

This only made him angry.

"I hate you! Both of you!" Adam yelled. "I'm leaving and never coming

back!”

He grabbed the hand of a nearby Steve – a husky one with olive skin – and together they darted out of the room.

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We never saw our Adam again. Looking back, it’s surprising Adam didn’t figure out on his own he was 3-D printed. He was such a smart kid, but I guess even smart kids don’t stop to wonder if they were 3-D printed rather than sexually reproduced.

But it’s okay. We have a better setup now. Heidi and I ground up all the stuff from the old Adam’s life and used it to 3-D print a new Adam. However, this new Adam never becomes truly self-aware because, before he does, he automatically removes his own rib and uses it to 3-D print a new Eve.

Then he dies, and the Eve grows and does the same thing with her rib. Then she dies, leaving us with an automated, low-maintenance cycle of toddler Adams and Eves – which, we learned the hard way, are the best kind.

Now, we actually own our house outright, as well as the Soy-In-And-Out franchise we work at, which is especially profitable nowadays.

If you didn’t know any better, which no one does, you’d think our 3-D printed veggie burgers were actual veggie burgers, and that our 3-D printed employees actually got paid, which they don’t, and that our whole 3-D printed life is an actual life, which it really isn’t, but kind of *is*.