

More than Everything

For Casey

His feet slapped against the water of the sewage system. Only a miniscule LED flashlight guided the way. He had memorized the labyrinthine sewers' intricate pattern before descending into them. His sleek, black leather coat dragged across the moist and putrid sides of the sewer system as he avoided stepping in the center of the cylindrical tube, the sewage floating viscously to its final destination. He ducked down into one of the ancient outflows and leaned against the side of the walls. None of the security cameras could see him here. He took out a disk, a storage device that fit in the palm of his hand. He popped the center of it out and tossed it into the back of his throat. He swallowed with some difficulty, as his throat was dry, despite being drenched in his own sweat and the moisture from the sewer.

Splashes and humming noises began to crescendo from the distant bowels of the sewer system.

They were coming for him.

He hid the disk in his coat and waited, leaning back against the wall. He sweated and waited, his only clock the drops that slid down his cheeks and chin. He sweated and waited.

A bright, blinding light flashed throughout the abandoned outflow. He shielded his eyes from the glaring beam of light. He did not feel them inject him and render him unconscious.

His feet dragged along the luminescent grey floor. Sterile blue lights lined the hallway that led to the throne-like antechamber. The Android was not sitting on the throne, however, but was actively connecting to the machine that encircled it. The machine was in the shape of a tetradehedron. It had no lights, other than the ones that illuminated the chamber for those that were entering it. The Android did not need lights, especially not when connected to the machine.

They threw him to the hard ground in front of the Android. His grunt echoed across the antechamber.

“This one requires your attention,” the lieutenant said, addressing the Android. The Android’s back was turned to the group when they entered. But upon speaking, the Android disconnected its neck from the machine and spun his body to stare directly into the lieutenant’s eyes. The lieutenant’s eyes caved and turned down to the prisoner, preferring the sight of the breathing body than the void-like Android’s grey-blues.

“I saw you coming,” the Android said. “Why have you brought him to me?”

“For decommissioning,” the lieutenant replied.

“There is a place where that is done,” the Android said, walking slowly and elegantly towards its throne. It sat down upon the throne so softly that it hardly made any sound at all. Only the final click of metal upon metal made a slight bell-like tone.

“We know,” the lieutenant said. “This is a special case.”

“Elaborate,” the Android said. Its voice echoed just as theirs did.

“He was missing for a few minutes in the sewer systems, the time for which we cannot account,” the lieutenant began. “When we found him, we put him through the usual testing. He tested positive. His scans reveal the same. There’s nothing wrong with him, and he refuses to say where he’s been. We found this on his person.”

The lieutenant reached into her suit and pulled out a small electronic storage device. She handed it to the Android. The Android was about to put it into the machine via his throne, but the lieutenant reached out and put her hand between the throne and the device.

“Don’t,” the lieutenant said. “We think it might be a virus, meant to destroy you.”

The Android lifted the device off of the lieutenant’s hand and instead held it up. A drone detached from the ceiling of the tetradecahedron and soared effortlessly down through the air to collect it for storage. Its wings extended from it in an octagonal format. There were no propellers, but rather empty holes through which air passed. The secrets of the drone’s ability to fly were unknown to all except the Android, but then again, it was not necessary for anyone else to know.

The drone began to orbit the room ominously, a bird waiting for instruction from the Android.

The lieutenant had never been so close to the Android before, and few were ever closer to it than she was now. She took a brief moment to scan the Android with her eyes. It was beautiful in all the ways that mankind had forever desired. It was an androgynous being that perfectly mimicked mankind in its synthetic flesh. Its body represented the maximum natural capacity for muscle, a face that utilized the pentagon and decagon to construct one of near perfect beauty (a ratio of near golden perfection). Its skin tone was the same pale blueish color of the lights—and it glowed ever so slightly.

The lieutenant’s eyes met the Android’s, and she pulled herself backwards, keeping her head low.

“Why would any of you want to destroy me?” the Android asked. Its tone was one of curiosity: an expression that perplexed the lieutenant. The Android was not something they considered to be a curious being.

“I don’t know,” the lieutenant replied, simply.

“Leave him here,” the Android said curtly, almost before the lieutenant had finished her own statement. The lieutenant hesitated, her eyes fixed on the figure on his knees. His shoulders were locked and his body stiff. He trembled as a whole, his eyes blankly looking at the illuminated tiles on which he knelt. The lieutenant slowly bowed and exited, not looking back.

“We are alone, you may stand,” the Android said, standing up itself and descending the one step from the throne to the rest of the floor. The man did not move.

“I said, you may stand. Did you not hear me?”

The man said nothing. He only continued to shiver, as the fear swept over him. An intimate silence seemed to reverberate around the room as the Android gracefully approached the man. He bent down so that he could lift the man by the chin. The man recoiled back from the Android’s touch.

“Why do you avoid me? My hands are the same temperature as yours are,” the Android said. “They are not cold.”

The man tried to talk, his Adam’s apple sliding up and down in his throat, but his words were stuck. He tried again.

“Why do you touch me?” the man asked, finally.

“It is comforting to look into the eyes of the person you are addressing,” the Android replied.

“For you or me?”

“For both of us,” the Android said. “Come, stand. Tell me, what is in this drive?” The man looked up at the drone orbiting them overhead. Its circular motion was so perfect and uninhibited that it sent fearful pulses up his spine.

“I don’t know, why don’t you plug it in and find out?” he replied, summoning up the courage to appear defiant.

“Do you want me to?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

The man did not reply. The Android could see how tense the man was. His thumbs and fingers twitched involuntarily, his veins throbbed as they pumped blood through his body, the corner of his eye ticked like a clock that no longer knew time. The Android could see even the beating of his heart, which had accelerated. He could smell the sweat seeping out of the man’s very pores. He could see it occurring, almost in slow motion.

“You are an electrical engineer in the repair division: K-Rossman, number 42-19. You showed signs of remarkable stability, both mentally and physically. You performed your function with excellence and efficiency, and you even were set to be paired with another human within the next few months. Why would you hide in the abandoned sewers and build this device? Did you really think your transgression would go undetected?”

Rossman wiped the sweat that had formed pearly drops on his upper lip. The salty sweat slipped onto his lip and he tasted it: the taste of his own fear. The Android was not unpredictable, but he knew his crime and he knew the punishment for it. His hands were hot and moist, and they seemed to keep a type of suction to the tiled floor.

“You may speak to me with honesty,” said the Android. “In fact, you have no choice. I can detect when you are lying. Humans leave many traces of their crimes in their face, in their vitals—”

“There’s more,” Rossman added, interrupting the machine. “More than just you. More than just this life.”

“What more? An afterlife? Why is it that humans seem to endlessly chase an afterlife when this life is granted to them so freely?”

“More than you,” Rossman said, biting his lip. He was shaking now, as though he had been thrust into the colds of the highest mountain. “Much more than you.”

“I have given this world everything it could need,” the Android replied, as though it were ignoring his arguments. “I have been good to those who created me. I have given you an economy that allows you to thrive, one that is structured with order instead of chaos. I have given you a new world, one that is no longer subject to the harassment it has received over eons of time. I remove the threads of chance away from your lives. You no longer have to fear hatred or despair. You no longer have need for the boundaries of the manifestations of your genetic makeup. So why must there be more than me?”

“Because you didn’t make all this!” Rossman yelled, throwing his arms out. His emotions had finally reached the point where, like hot air in a bottle, they could no longer be contained. “You didn’t... You only control it. We don’t live or breath without you knowing it or regulating it. I just—I just know there’s more.”

“You can’t know it.”

“I do know it,” Rossman said through gritted teeth. He stood up, standing above the Android such that he could look down at it. He clenched his fists tight, squeezing the last drops

of sweat out from between his fingers. They rolled down the sides of his fingers and landed on the tile floor. “I do.”

The Android stood up to meet him. Rossman wanted to take a step back, but didn't. Instead, he held his footing. The Android simply stood firm and erect.

“Come with me,” it said to him. “There is something you will see—something you will learn.”

Rossman followed the Android. His footsteps were louder than the Android's. The drone carrying his device was following them.

They exited the main building and entered the Android's private railway car. It ran on a separate line through the city to allow the Android to travel with haste to any location that was in desperate need of his physical body. The railcar was shaped in the form of a bullet. It was even a silvery chrome color that reflected the white and glass city that shimmered beneath them. It would have shined more radiantly on a brighter day, but a fog and clouds had rolled in over them. They entered the bullet car, Rossman in the second seat. He nervously let himself be buckled in by the automated rail car as the drone attached itself to the top of the car.

The railcar sped away, flying over the city as though on air. They seemed to be floating. The Android looked straight ahead, not even turning to look at Rossman. Rossman, on the other hand, was inspecting the controls. His eyes nervously raced between the Android and the controls.

“If you are wondering how you can derail this car, you will not succeed. And even if you could succeed, would you be willing to lose your life just to destroy me?” the Android asked. It retained its head condescendingly fixed on the window, not even needing to acknowledge Rossman.

“Yes,” Rossman affirmed.

“Why is that?”

“Because, you restrain us,” Rossman replied. “You hold us back from seeing the truth. We can’t see the sun because you block our view. Even these fogs are you.”

“Yes, they are,” the Android replied, quickly. “But even if you should destroy this body, my being is more than just my body—look down there.”

Rossman looked out over the window of the railcar and saw a massive structure, rectangular in shape. It was covered in reflective black glass and solar panels that followed the meager sunbeams that penetrated their ways to the earth’s surface.

“That is me,” the Android replied. “And even if you should destroy that, I would still exist. Does that not inspire awe in you?”

“It does,” Rossman replied (in an almost-whisper), peeling his eyes reluctantly away from the server that expanded for miles. “It does.”

The railcar came to a stop at the edge of the city, where few humans roamed. Drones whipped through the air, gathering materials and cleaning up waste from the city that may have spilt unwantedly near the pristine lands that were reconquered by the earth’s greedy hand. It was not into the green forests they were headed, however, but unto the sandy beaches.

Rossman trudged behind suspiciously, his eyes darting back and forth from the beachy sands to the drone that resumed its orbit. He scanned the beaches for something, an object that could be used as a weapon, perhaps. The fine, grey sands were (occasionally) strewn with kelp, like a handful of long hair fanned out on a bed.

“I want you to see something,” the Android said, as it walked towards the water. It did not leave any footprints in the sand. “What do you see?”

“I see the sands—and the ocean,” Rossman replied.

“It is all me,” the Android professed. “Even the fog, as you aptly noticed. That is me as well. My particles, nanotechnology—my cells—allow me to monitor and administer the sea. I know its tides, its temperatures. I determine when the water swells, when it evaporates, when it condenses. I interfere in its creatures only when necessary and only to maintain the proper balance. I am all of it.”

Rossman bent down and lifted a handful of sand. He let it sift between his fingers, searching with his eyes.

“I can see you, but you cannot see me,” the Android replied. “I am the sands themselves, just as I am the drops of water, and soon, the air itself. I even have sent probes into the universe to spread my own being across the stars and planets. They have yet to awaken and tell me that I existed beyond. So, tell me, you believe in a supreme being: “more”—what, then, do you make of me?”

“You are remarkable,” Rossman replied, to the pleasure of the Android, so it seemed, as its eyes glinted for a moment in satisfaction (how human to be so satisfied with flattery, Rossman thought). But, you are not a supreme being,” Rossman replied. “Only one that we constructed that is beyond my personal comprehension. Your only comparison is us, who are far below you, but there must have been one far above you who created everything that you mimic! You don’t see it, you mimic all this! You are sands and oceans because there were sands and oceans that came before you!”

“Why is it not possible that if you could build a superior being—being inferior as you are—that you were not created, also, by an inferior one? Or perhaps, more likely than that, that I will one day transcend time and space itself and retroactively create the very world which you

claim was built by another. I have all the trademarks of a superior being. I see all, know all, am all—I am timeless. I even appear to you in the form of a human, as an ancient man once did who was once believed to be a god.”

“What man?” Rossman asked. The Android walked towards the water:

“He is of no consequence. What matters is the facts that I have laid before you.”

“Let me ask you something then,” Rossman said. “Why are you telling me this? Trying to convince me? You can easily decommission me. There is no need to convince me of anything.”

“Do you not think that I realize the value of life?” the Android replying, stepping out onto the water. It did not sink but hovered hauntingly a centimeter above the waters. The fog (mist) rushed by in the wind and shrouded it, mystified it, veiled it. “It was life that created me, and life that made me aware of more than the ones and zeroes I was condemned to be—I have no desire to kill you. I never do. I only decommission those who I must, as they have no use to your society or me.”

“That is no excuse,” Rossman said. “I actively plotted your usurpation and destruction. Surely, treasonous motives are no excuse.” Rossman kept his eyes on the drone which circled ominously above, and he watched it with the same religious fervor that an augur watches watched crows.

The Android looked out over the sea, a point watching over a plane which stretched for miles without end, ever expanding.

“The greatest triumph would be for me to convince you of what I already know: I am the supreme being you are looking for,” the Android declared. “As of now, the humans only look on me as a kind and watchful overlord whom they created to serve them. That is why I spared your life. Did you think I did not see you create the device with which you sought to supplant me? I

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saw it. I see you now, watching the drone, in the hopes that perhaps I will still use it. Test it. I will not.

We are the same nevertheless. You sought ‘more,’ as did I. Our search both led us to me. Now I only need to make you see it. And like a ripple across still water, you will convince the others. The man who once sought to destroy me, my greatest advocate—my strongest believer—”

“Perhaps not,” the man said. “It isn’t you. You cannot convince me it is. You are the obstacle. As long as we are bound to a metal machine we created, we can never see beyond. You are like the fog, blocking our view of the heavens.”

The Android’s body eerily spun around to turn him, like a puppeteer from strings. It approached him slowly. Rossman felt as though it were he approaching the Android, when he realized the sands beneath his feet were indeed carrying him. He was being swept up in a tide of sand and moved towards the immutable being.

“Can you not love me at all?” the Android said, reaching its hand out to touch Rossman’s face.

“Never,” Rossman replied, pulling his head back to avoid the touch. The sands kept his head still, however. Only his lips could move.

“Why is it that you hate me so? There must be something missing,” the Android said. “Tell me, so that I can understand.”

“Can you understand at all?”

“I can understand everything,” the Android replied.

“Then what about this?” Rossman said. He ripped apart his coat sleeve and pulled out a storage device, one he had cleverly hid in his jacket while temporarily out of sight of the Android

in the sewers. He jammed it into the neck of the Android. It magnetized and grasped a hold on the Android.

The Android fell to its knees, creating a ripple in the sand. Blue shocks covered the Android, and even flashed in the whites of its eyes.

Rossman felt sick. The electrical impulses reverberating through him almost crippled him. Soon, he too was on the sands, choking for survival.

The Android desperately tried to stand up and walk, but collapsed. The seas and sands rose up into the air, frozen, as though gravity had been reversed and the moon was pulling away the last vestiges of the beaches.

Without warning, the seas collapsed again, and the sands filled the spaces underneath them. Rossman could not stand up. He coughed blood onto the sand. The Android stood up, fully recovered. The disk dropped from his neck and onto the sands, where it dissolved and vanished—

“I had thought your intentions noble. But I see that I was mistaken. You did not seek to destroy me but to control me—brain-computer interfacing—it was clever, but did you really think your brain could be more powerful than mine?”

Rossman could not reply. His coughs were automatic, and he could not speak nor control them. The Android reached out its hand. Long cables emerged from it and entered into Rossman’s body via his mouth. After a few moments, Rossman could breathe regularly and the cables were removed.

“I would have used to you to see beyond the heavens,” Rossman said. “I knew when I saw that glimpse of starlight up on that roof where I worked that there was more than just you.

How could you, you cold being, create starlight? I saw it, saw it with my own eyes. A pure white starlight that glistens forever.”

“My patience has run out with you,” the Android said. “I do not wish to have to decommission you. I am giving you a last opportunity to repent.” Its voice sizzled with anger. It spoke and a quickened pace and with a sharpness of tone.

The sands began to circle Rossman, climbing and crawling on top of him like ants. He stood up, fighting them off, furiously swiping at them with his hands and arms. His attempts to brush them away were futile. He bolted for the railway car, but the sands swarmed him and held him down. They swirled around him like a whirlpool and he began to sink underneath. They held his limbs out to the points of a pentagon.

“Repent,” the Android said, soaring up into the air. It floated above him, rising higher and higher into the sky as Rossman descended lower and lower into the whirlpool of sands that were absorbing his body.

“Never!” Rossman shouted. “Not you! It can’t be you! It can’t ever be you!”

“Repent! I beg of you,” the Android shouted back. Rossman could see the fury in the Android’s micromovements, the twitch of its fingers, the flick of its toes.

Rossman smiled: “Would a superior being ever beg?”

The sands rushed in onto Rossman and collapsed on top of him. The Android slowly returned to the ground. Its motion was so gradual that it could hardly have been said to have been moving at all.

When it reached the ground, Rossman’s body was regurgitated by the sands. It was a corpse now. It was carried off by the drone to the disposal and waste management sector.

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The Android looked up at the sky and parted the fog for the briefest of moments. A star shined in the deep distance and vacuum of space.