

Human Perfect

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Lunar Spaceport Earthsides Shuttle Concourse D

Christa kicked her leather-bound suitcase. "Don't you just hate waiting in lines?" The blond young man across from her in the other security check line looked her way and smiled. "Sure do."

His eyes had the same soft bright blue as Earth's summer sky before the sun rose too high. "Going far?"

"Ylyptya." He inched ahead, robotic suitcase keeping pace beside him. "You?"

"New Earth." She dragged her manual bag forward. "Vacationing?"

"On Ylyptya?" He smiled again. Perfect teeth. "No. It's my home. I was here on business." "What do you do?"

"Tom Karellys." He offered her his hand. "Android Progress Rep for Humancopy. Ever heard of us?"

"No." Christa released his hand and rubbed it against her jacket. Who hadn't heard of them? Makers of the galaxy's most 'human-perfect' andys. Too perfect, some said.

"We make andys," Tom said. "Androids. Very human like. And you?"

The line moved another two steps and ground to a halt. "I'm a travel agent. Name's Christa." "Nice to meet you."

"So, Tom, what does a Android Progress Rep do, exactly?"

"I guage how well the competition's andys are keeping up with ours." He took a few steps forward. "My flight doesn't leave for hours. What about yours?"

"Same." She moved her bag to catch up with the line.

He stood on his toes to measure the length of the line of people ahead of him. "Supposing we get through this line before our flights leave, would you like to have dinner? It'd be nice not to wait alone."

She lowered her lashes. "Why not?"

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An android waitress rolled up to their table, her lapel sign flashing the soup of the day. Hot pink skin and green hair exactly matched the color of the flowers in the wallpaper and her uniform. "Cocktail?" she asked, her voice honey and butter.

"No thanks," Tom said, but smiled at Christa. "Feel free. I don't mind."

"An Ylyptyan Cassis," she said and blushed at Tom's curious look. "It's the only thing from Ylyptya I know anything about."

He laughed, a sound he made easily, as if his nature demanded it. "You're one up on me. What is it?"

"I don't really know, but it's made with vermouth and it's very sweet."

Having introduced themselves, the two had fallen naturally into conversation as they walked, which their arrival at the table had somehow ended.

"Did you..." he began, just as she spoke.

"You first," they said in unison and both laughed. He out-waited her.

“Do you come to Earth often, Tom?”

“No. This is my first trip. I’ve enjoyed it. How about you?” He looked up as a black and white checker-faced andy busboy brought their water. “Thanks.”

“You don’t have to thank andys, you know,” Christa told him. “Or is it just ‘professional courtesy’ on the part of one andy to the other?”

His mouth puckered in an appealingly boyish grin. “Testing them for response, actually. They’re the competition. Sorry. I won’t do it again. You were about to tell me whether this was your first trip to Earth.”

“I’ve been here dozens of times. Last year, my company sent me to seventeen conventions in Terra City alone. The rest of the time I research trips and assign ratings.”

“Maybe Humancopy could relieve you of some of that waiting you dislike so much. We have andys that are perfect for research work.”

She smoothed the napkin onto her lap and smiled. “Thank you, but I hardly think andys are capable of the level of judgment a company like mine requires. Our clients have extremely discerning tastes.”

“Judgment is merely a matter of making choices based on requirements and a bank of options,” he told her. “That’s something andys do rather well. In some tests I took part in recently, 94.82% of the participants couldn’t tell Humancopy from human.” He moved his hands out of the way as the waitress brought their food.

She watched him bow his head in what she assumed to be prayer. “May I ask you a question?”

He smiled. “Sure.”

“Do you think andys can pray?”

“Maybe the question is better asked, ‘should they.’”

“You mean some do? How awful! A machine praying. That’s sacrilege, isn’t it?”

He dug his fork into his food and paused. “Can’t say. I’m not the one they’re praying to.”

“Too easy an answer,” she said. “I’ve read the Bible. Andys don’t have souls.”

“Can’t be proven.” He smiled at her winningly. “Unless you’re one, of course.”

“Ugh, no!” She picked at her food, eyeing him beneath her lashes. Finally she asked, “Are you one?”

He smiled his smile and dazzled her with his eyes. “Can’t you tell?”

“No.” She set down her fork. “If all your company’s andys are as good as you are, it’s no wonder people can’t tell them from humans.”

“Did I say I was an andy?”

She squinted at him. “You’re an awful tease.”

To which he laughed his too perfect laugh.

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Outside, night reigned eternal, star glitter mingling with the lights of ships as they entered and exited the port. A freighter spit out cargo; a superliner disembarked passengers. Closer in, a stream of green and amber lights marked the hustle of local shuttles.

“Pretty, isn’t it?” Christa leaned against the observation window. Its clear-glass quality made the scene resemble a painting. “I like looking out this type of glass better than I did that thick stuff they used to use.”

“It’s phyren. Named after its inventor. He’s from Ylyptya, too, by the way. And an android.”

“You have a knack for bringing every subject back to andys.”

“Sorry.” He too, leaned against the phyren window. “Born with it, I guess.”

“Were you?”

“What?”

“Born.”

“Born!” Amused, he offered his wrists. “Check me for a pulse.”

“Some androids have them,” she said. “The Innersoul ones certainly do.”

“Do they?” He cocked his head. “Our competitor is making strides. I’ll have to tell my boss.”

“Your master, you mean.”

“Master is too old fashioned a title. At Humancopy, we prefer sir and ma’am. You know,” he smiled, “you seem to have a problem with andys.”

She crossed her arms defensively. “It’s not easy to trust people these days. When you don’t even know

if you're talking to a man or a machine, it makes you nervous.”

“Why? I thought humans had outlived that ridiculous Frankenstein Syndrome. The monster turning on its master and all that.”

“Humans?” She caught a glimpse of dismay in his eyes.

“Why do you insist on classifying andys as machines?”

“Andys are machines. Humancopy ought to stop trying to convince everyone it makes alternate people or whatever your slogan is.”

“Alternate Egos. Thought you hadn't heard of us.”

“I guess I have. A commercial or something.” She tried to hide her embarrassment at being caught in a lie, but knew she was blushing. Her cheeks felt hot. “Anyway, I think it's unfair. People don't know if they're dealing with people or not. I think it makes people jumpy. It does me.”

“People, people, people! What about androids? Don't they have rights?”

“You tell me. I heard about the one who was tried in human court for saying no to its master.”

“You seem hostile about this.”

“I certainly am! I'm sick and tired of being exploited. I liked you when we first met, but now I don't even know if you're human.”

“But...”

“If you'll excuse me, my flight's about to leave.”

“Christa, wait.” He gripped her wrist.

She stared frost into the air. “Let go of me at once.” When he released her, she strode away, head high.

Upon reaching the gate to her ship, she sat down against the far wall. Good. No one had followed. She opened a link to the reader in her company's home office.

“To Innersoul President, Jamal Kamayeh. Made accidental contact with Humancopy Progress Rep Tom Karellys, used cover of 'travel agent Christa.' Subject android near perfect copy of human. Social rating 6. Food/fuel consumption 8. Physical appearance,” she smiled to herself, “10+. Linguistic ability, 10. Sense of humor, 8. Alcohol effects n/a, did not drink in my presence.” She crossed her ankles and stretched her legs. “Commented he didn't know our androids had a pulse. Flirted with me. Reacted to my rejection with apparent disappointment.”

She rubbed the place on her arm where he'd held her and noticed a fading mark. With a shudder, she continued, “Used phrase 'Frankenstein Syndrome.' Suggest covert purchase of Karellys model andys for study. Will brief on arrival. Humancopy seems incapable of outright lying. Used evasive wording. Not human-perfect. Ours far superior.” She logged off just as her flight began to board.

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Humancopy, Inc. Corporate Headquarters Parys, Ylyptya

Dothan Kolte, President of Humancopy, looked up as Tom Karellys entered. He frowned, removed his glasses and leaned back in his chair. For a moment, neither spoke. “I heard you had a run in with one of Innersoul's industrial spies.”

“She told me she was a travel agent.”

“Does she know what you are?”

“I told her I was an Android Progress Rep. She was impressed with our technology.”

When he laughed, his shoulders shook. “Imagine that. Did you get it?”

Tom set a disk the size of a small coin on Kolte's desk. “It's all there. Two years of activity. Everything she's ever seen or done for Innersoul.”

“Think she felt it?” He turned the flesh colored disk over in his fingers.

“She couldn't have. Her sensors were so attuned to my touch, the moment my hand closed around her wrist she shut right down. Only took fifteen milliseconds to put the new one in place. She won't even remember being off-line.”

“Terrific cover. Who'd suspect an android of being an andy-hater?”

“Not even she can tell she isn’t human.” Karellys clasped his hands behind him. “She’s human perfect, sir. Just the way you made her to be.”

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