

A SEA 2023 edition *of words*

Artificial Intelligence and Youths: Ethical Commitment and Critical Thinking



A Sea of Words

2023 edition – 16th year

Artificial Intelligence and Youths: Ethical Commitment and Critical Thinking

Short stories by 10 young writers



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Foreword

The contest “A Sea of Words” was launched in 2008 by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in collaboration with the Anna Lindh Foundation. This initiative brings together the voices of young people, who are essential agents of change, on topics of social, cultural, economic, or political dialogue, which prompted the 1995 Barcelona Declaration.

This contest gives a voice to young people from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and the European Union, promoting debate around common problems and shared values.

“A Sea of Words” encourages the participation of youths from both shores of the Mediterranean and expresses different challenges and goals of each country in the region. In the 16 years that the contest has taken place, 3,366 stories written by youngsters between 18 and 30 years old have been presented. 1,447 stories came from the northern shore and 1,883 from the eastern and southern shores of the Mediterranean. With the goal of encouraging the voices of youths, the project has the objective of creating new socio-political narratives that strengthen the culture of peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Each edition focuses on different current topics concerning young people from all over the Mediterranean, making their realities and conceptions known with a creative tool: writing. Through stories about real or fictitious experiences, young people provide a personal, historical or anthropological vision of issues and realities that, despite geographical or cultural distances, are common to the Euro-Mediterranean region.

In this 16th edition, focused on the impact of Artificial Intelligence and the challenges it entails, the contest received a total participation of 212 valid stories from twenty-five different countries of the Mediterranean basin reflecting on the impact of AI in our societies.

The winning authors of the 10 best texts – selected by an international jury – were invited to Barcelona on November 8th, 2023, to participate, for three days, in the awards ceremony, creative workshops and other cultural exchanges to develop common meeting spaces. Out of all the invited finalists, seven finally joined us in this cultural exchange.

We are currently witnessing a new change of paradigm in which algorithms and latest information technologies not only create and produce content but also interact with us to provide answers, make decisions, or anticipate various situations. The development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) does not seem to have limits and opens a whole universe of applications in different social, cultural and employment fields that affect us very directly.

AI provides a multitude of opportunities to accelerate necessary transformations but also poses risks that our societies will have to face. As AI becomes more sophisticated, it will influence decision-making and therefore have a greater impact on our lives.

Beyond its economic effects and in terms of progress, we are interested in exploring others that are related to our immediate social environment and behaviours, which involve new learning, changes in the concept of privacy, and new social relationships. An important consideration concerns the challenges that affect the new narratives, especially the creation of transmedia content and the latent danger of misinformation.

As people are affected by increasingly automated decision-making, great challenges arise in these fields, mainly in ethical terms. A negative conception and misuse of AI can exacerbate inequalities and social polarisation, bring about the loss of skills, or contribute to the creation of unreal realities.

In a region like the Mediterranean with one of the world's biggest digital divides in terms of gender, AI risks creating more gender inequality and bias. Given this new paradigm, it is essential to empower young people with the right skills to enable them to think critically, innovate and reduce uncertainty in the face of potential negative effects.

In the 2023 edition “Artificial Intelligence and Youths: Ethical Commitment and Critical Thinking”, we invited young European and Mediterranean authors to write stories about the impact of AI in their societies, with a particular emphasis on the dilemmas related to ethical values and criteria that it posed, as well as exploring how to promote talent and creativity in the face of exploitation and manipulation.

Therefore, our aim was to provide a space for participation where young women and men could create and share critical thinking, thereby forging ahead in developing a democratic culture for the future.

Disinn ta' Tradiment

Nadine Zammit. Malta

Ghalqet l-aħħar programm, tfiet il-kompjuter u qamet biex tiżbarazza l-iskrivanija mill-karti mdaqqs sin u biros ikkuluriti li kienu ngemghu matul il-ġurnata. It-tazza tal-kafè laħalhitha malajr malajr u b'idejha għadhom iqattru qabdet il-basket u rħitilha 'l barra wara li sellmet 'il kulhadd u ħarġet mill-uffiċċju. Dawk l-aħħar għaxar minuti qabel titlaq lejn id-dar kollox kienu jtaffu: l-uġigh tar-ras, il-hruq fl-għajnejn, ir-riha t'għaraq. Hadet nifs qawwi 'l barra hi u niezla l-aħħar erba' targiet tal-bini biex forsi thalli xi ffit mit-toqol tal-għeja warajha qabel toħroġ.

Il-ġurnata ta' Samantha kienet għadha 'l bogħod minn tmiemha però; il-problemi tax-xogħol kienet thobb thallihom warajha fil-ftit sigħat li kien ikollha għaliha nnifisha filgħaxija, izda x-xenqa qawwija li tpingi, tiddisinja u tikkrea kunċetti ġodda li jgħaqqdu l-kreattività tal-bniedem u l-bini ta' madwaru ma kienet tbatti qatt. Samantha ħadet interess qawwi fl-intelliġenza artifiċjali, sfera teknoloġika li issa kienet integrat sewwa f'diversi setturi, speċjalment fiż-żona Ewropea. Kuljum wara x-xogħol kienet tagħmel riċerka u tfittex programmi li jiffaċilitaw l-għaqda tal-muza artistika u l-effiċjenza u l-utilità tal-matematika u x-xjenza. Dawn iż-żewġ dinjiet opposti lil Samantha kienu jqanqlulha passjoni kbira, wara kollox forsi għalhekk minn dejjem xtaqet li ssir perit.

Programm partikolari tal-AI kien ilu li ġibdilha l-attenzjoni xi tlett ijiem – TarantArt.Ai – proġett li kien għadu fil-fażi esperimentattiva tiegħu, b'potenzjal li jipproduċi forum differenti ta' arti minn informazzjoni viżiva, data xjentifika u sorsi oħrajn. Dal-programm gie rrikamat speċifikament lill-artisti li jixtiequ jinkorporaw id-disinn gwidat mill-intelliġenza artifiċjali fl-isfera kreattiva tagħhom. Sabet il-proġett fuq il-medja soċjali u ddeċidiet li tibda ssegwi l-paġna uffiċjali tal-kumpanija. Kellha f'moħħa li titharreg u ssir intiża fl-użu tal-programm biex issaħħaħ il-proċess kreattiv tagħha u titgħallem sensittività fil-bilanċ ta' bejn l-ispirazzjoni umana u l-għajjnuna li jista' joffri l-avvanz fit-teknoloġija mingħajr ma jlaqqax l-awtentiċità tal-prodott finali. Tgħid għad jiġi żmien fejn it-teknoloġija tant tavvanza li l-ispirazzjoni umana issir bla bżonn? ... Imma kif tista' l-kreattività tal-bniedem u l-passjoni għall-arti tiġi imitata, iffabrikata? Dakinhar kienet għajjiet u dahlet torqod kemxejn iktar kmieni mis-soltu.

Lanqas erbgħa u għoxrin siegħa ma laħqu għaddew li ma rċivietx messaġġ li qanqlilha l-interess. Samantha dahlet fil-kċina tal-uffiċċju u għamlet tazza kafè waqt li qrat x'bagħtilha Stephen Chircop, ħabib antik tas-Sixth Form, gradwat inġinier u xjenzat.

Bongu Samantha, nispera li kollox orrajt, ilna ftit ma nitkellmu. Qed nibgħatlek għax innutajt li qed issegwi l-paġna ta' TarantArt. Ma nafx kif telgħetli... Bħalissa jien qed nahdem fuq hafna proġetti li jużaw din is-sistema partikolari u l-uffiċju tagħna għandu korrispondenza tajba mal-kumpanija li jibagħtulna x-xogħol direttament min-naħa tagħhom. Nimmaġina li tinteressa ruħek tuża l-programm fuq ix-xogħol tiegħek ukoll... int perit le? Jekk tkun tixtieq li niltaqgħu u nitkellmu, let me know. Nisma' mingħandek.

U hekk għamlu. Iltaqgħu għal kafè u rrakkuntaw lil xulxin dak kollu li sehħ f'hajjithom f'dawk is-snin li ma rawx lil xulxin; dwar l-istudji fl-Università, l-iljieli twal imqajmin u fallimenti fil-hajja personali tagħhom li hallewhom jgħixu t-tletinijiet tagħhom fil-kwiet u s-solitudni. Tkellmu wkoll fuq ix-xogħol, u Stephen spjegalha sew l-involvement tiegħu fi proġetti li jużaw il-programm TarantArt.Ai. Hi semgħet dak kollu li kellu xi jgħid u għarrfitu dwar l-interess tagħha biex tinkorpora l-programm fix-xogħol arkitettoniku tagħha. Offra li jgħallimha kif thaddem il-programm, b'hegga kbira biex jara kif se jirnexxilha żżewweġ id-dinja tad-disinn u dik tal-matematika u l-programmazzjoni.

Hbiberija helwa nibtet bejn Samantha u Stephen fix-xhur ta' wara. Bdew jiltaqgħu darba fil-gimgha u jaħdmu fuq xi idea ġdida li tkun harġet biha filgħodu stess, hi u tistenna fit-traffiku jew fl-uffiċju, waqt li tixrob belgħa kafè bejn tender u iehor. Kellhom habta jiltaqgħu virtwalment izda maż-żmien hassewhom komdi jmorru għand xi hadd minnhom u jzommu kumpanija lil xulxin għal ftit sigħat. Bla dubju, meta kienu jkun għandu, Josie – il-kelba ferrihija tiegħu – kienet ukoll tigi tinvolvi ruħha fix-xogħol. Stephen kien donnu qed jitgħallem hafna mill-hin li kien iqatta' ma' Samantha. Fiha hu kien jara spirtu ingenuju u kreattiv li ma jieqaf qatt iftix l-ispirazzjoni, anke fl-iktar affarijiet sempliċi. F'għajnejha, anke kaxxa sulfarini kienet tikseb il-hajja u l-emozzjoni. Kienet taf taddatta, issolvi l-problemi b'mod immaġinattiv u ma taqta' qalbha qatt tgerfex u ttipprova sakemm titgħallem kif thaddem il-programm sew. Ma damitx ma fehmet kif jaħdem fil-fatt.

“Dak kollu normali meta tkun perit” kienet tgħidlu bid-dahqa. Ma kienx imeriha.

Fi Stephen hi wkoll kienet tara kwalitajiet helwin hafna. Kien kwiet u metikoluż u kien dejjem lest li jisma' bir-reqqa il-vintamenti godda li kienu jiġu f'moħħha hi u thażżeż disinni godda fuq karti għar-rimi u tistaqsi kif jistgħu jiġu programmati bl-AI. Kien naqra bla grazzja xi kultant, għax ma kienx imdorri jagħmilha man-nies, izda dejjem kien jirnexxilu jdahhaqha. Dejjem fehem eżatt x'kellha f'moħħha avolja ma kienx jifhem fis-settur li studjat hi. Kien juriha x'inhu jagħmel fuq il-laptop tiegħu u joffrilha li tesperimenta bil-programm hi wkoll. Samantha kienet tara proġett arkitettoniku originali għall-aħħar jitnissel mix-xejn – bl-użu biss ta' ftit sentenzi deskrittivi u erba' buttuni jew faċilitajiet intarattivi fuq il-programm li introduċielha hu – minn pjanti sa mudelli tridimensjonali ta' ideat astratti mħazzin bil-lapes ftit minuti qabel.

Qas haqq kemm tilfet irqad waqt l-Università tpingi l-pjanti, tibni mudelli u tagħmel wegħdiet biex forsi l-ebda programm ma jtiha problemi qabel il-prezentazzjoniji. Madanakollu kienet thares lejn il-kreattività li tkun harġet minn lejl wiehed ta' tpingija u ideat astratti u taffaxina ruhha. Dejjem kienet tibqa' impressjonata bil-kapaċità u l-effiċjenza tat-teknoloġija. Il-karti mhazzin kienet izzommhom, avolja ġieli tilfet xi waħda jew tnejn. Bil-ġenn li kienet tgħix fih u n-nuqqas ta' ħin li kellha biex tiżbarazza sew l-appartament, kienet inevitabbli li kultant ma tkunx taf fejn marru.

– *Sam illejlja għal għandi?*

– *Tajjeb. Ingib ftiit treats għal Josie.*

– *Bomba. Hemm xi haġa ġdida li tixtieq taħdem fuqha?*

– *IVA. Issa nispijegalek.*

– *Ok. Fit-tmienja tajjeb?*

– *Iva, narak.*

Bhal kull nhar ta' ġimgha reġġhu ltaqgħu, did-darba għandu. Samantha xtaqet issib mod kif tohloq disinn parametrik minn xejn hlief sett ta' data analitika. Kienet tgħallmet sewwa kif tużah il-programm u ftiit li xejn kellha bżonn l-ġajnuna ta' Stephen. Hu kien hemm bilqiegħda hdejha, għal darb'ohra josserva b'meravilja l-proċess kreattiv tagħha. Offriella tazza te, ladarba ma kellux wisq x'jaġġmel. Kif niżel qrib tagħha u newlilha l-kikkra tefa' harstu fuq id-daqqiet tal-linka kkulurita li berflet wiċċ idejha... imbagħad fuq ħarsitha, li kienet laqgħet tiegħu f'mument intimu u silenżjuż. Waqa' s-skiet. Harset lejn in-nuċċali migruf iserrah fuq haddejh, quddiem par għajnejn dahqanin – waħda ħarira iktar baxxa mill-ohra.

Ix-xagħar imgerfex fuq mohħu u r-riha tal-fwieha tiegħu fakkruha f'karatteristiċi uniċi oħrajn dwaru li kienu tant għal qalbha: il-flokkijiet tal-comics ikkuluriti, il-kartiera li ha taqa' biċċiet, l-ammont ta' pendrives u turnaviti zgħar li kellu jduru f'kull basket u but. Resaq iktar viċin u biesha, idejh għarqanin u nifsu tqil. Dakinhar ħasset li nibtet l-imħabba, imħabba bejn żewġ individwi li kellhom rabta speċjali frott l-intelletwalità profonda u s-sinergija li nhalqet fil-ħin li qasmu flimkien jesploraw il-ħiliet tal-intelligenza artifiċjali fid-dinja tal-arti. Il-lejla hallitilhom tensjoni kbira. Bejniethom ħassu skumdità ta' żewġ namrati għadhom żgħar. B'xi mod id-disinn lestietu dakinhar. Uritulu bi tbissima nkejjuża. Reġa' staqsieha biex tispjegalu l-proċess ta' kif waslet għalih mill-bidu sal-aħhar.

“Mhux diġà ghidtlek?” tenniet bid-dahqa.

Ma jimpurtax. Ma ddejqitx terġa’ tispjegalu kollox.

Bdew joħorġu flimkien uffiċjalment u bla dubju qattgħu iktar u iktar granet għand xulxin. Konverżazzjonijiet astratti u immaginattivi kif ukoll dawk loġiċi u pragmatici kienu saru grajjiet ta’ kuljum. Dik id-darba fil-ġimgħa baqgħet drawwa li joħorġu b’idea għal disinn ġdid u japplikawh fuq TarantArt. Ġieli kien jaqbadha n-nghas, tmur għajnya biha u filgħodu jilqagħha proġett aġġornat li jkun kompli jahdem fuqu Stephen bil-lejl. Samantha tassew ħasset li sabet sieheb li mhux biss kien jirrispettaha u jissapportja l-viżjonijiet tagħha iżda li bil-perspettivi differenti tiegħu wrieha definizzjoni ġdida ta’ xi jfisser il-ħsieb kreattiv. Ma’ Stephen rat futur stabbli, futur ta’ mhabba u ftehim, futur ta’ profondità intelletwali.

Sitt xhur wara. Fl-appartament ta’ Samantha dwiet riha tfuħ ta’ borma għagin imħawra kif kienet taf issajjar hi. Stephen ma kienx jaf isajjar imma kien jipprova kif jaf hu. Għen iqatta’ t-tewm u l-basal. Minn taħt il-għajn ra l-mobile jixgħel u l-vibrazzjoni nħasset mal-bank tal-kċina kollu. Kien dahallu messaggġ. Induna x’kien u ha qatgħa. B’idejh imdellkin ma setax jaqbd u sew. Kif resqet Samantha tah daqqa bil-minkeb u waqqgħu fl-art.

“X’gara Steph?”

“Xejn xejn tagħtix kas. Probabbli dahal xi messaggġ spam.”

Sadattant kien lahaq laħlah idejh malajr, gabru mill-art u deffsu fil-but.

Dik il-mossa lil Samantha xejn m’għogbitha. Lil Stephen kienet tafdah imma reazzjoni bħal dik qatt ma kienet ratu jagħmel. Il-lejl ma ħallihex kwieta lanqas u filwaqt li sabitu rieqed ħaditlu l-mobile u dahlet bih fil-kamra tal-banju. Ma kinitx kburija b’dak li kienet se tagħmel imma l-kurżità u s-suspett kienu qed jgħerruha minn ġewwa. Il-PIN tal-mobile. X’kienu n-numri? Hasbet fid-dati kollha importanti li kienet taf. Għeluq sninu? Ma ħadmitx. Is-sena li twieled forsi? Lanqas. Meta ħareġ The Dark Knight? 2008. Ma tagħmilx sens. Kellha l-impressjoni li kienu erba’ numri min-naħa ta’ fuq. Allaharess iqu u jaqbadha. Iva! Għeluq snin Josie. Kienet għadha kif għalqithom fit-tlieta u għoxrin ta’ dak ix-xahar. 2312. Hadmet. Għal li kien inginier ta’ stoffa ma tantx kien taha ħsieb din.

Samantha dahlet tara l-messaggġi. Baqgħat bla kliem. Somma ta’ € 13 700 kienet għadha kif dahlet fil-kont. Il-kumpanija? VirtualTech – l-amministratriċi ta’ TarantArt.Ai. Messaggġ wiehed wara l-ieħor żvelaw l-istess tip ta’ transazzjonijiet. Ma setgħetx tifhem x’inh u jġiri. Min kien jaqla’ dak it-tip ta’ flus kull ġimgħa? Samantha ntefghet bilqiegħda fl-art, hi u tisma’ t-tisfir f’widnejha u l qalba thabbat sitta sitta fi ġriżmejha. Sabet app ta’ VirtualTech fuq il-mobile. Għafset fuqha b’subgħajha jirtodu. Sabet xhur shaħ ta’ komunikazzjoni bejnu u l-kumpanija –

spjegazzjonijiet dettaljati, ritratti ta' tpingijiet u recordings taghha – dokumentazzjoni shiha... ta' kulma kienet hadmet fuqu hi, ix-xoghol mekkaniku li ghamlet biex tasal ghad-disinni taghha. Minn kif setghet tifhem Stephen kien qed iqassam informazzjoni li tghin il-kumpanija taggorna s-sistema taghha biex timita iktar bir-reqqa l-proċess kreattiv tal-artist u eventwalment tissostitwixxih fil-qasam tiegħu stess.

Minkejja l-korla li hasset dak il-hin, ħarġet inkiss inkiss u ġriet għal ġol-kċina. Kellha suspett li b'iktar investigazzjoni kien hemm iktar xi ssib. Daritlu l-basket tal-laptop u b'qalb maqsuma sabet numru ta' tpingijiet li kienet ghamlet hi stess, tpingijiet li kien serqilha. Mela ma kinitx tilfithom. F'qiegh il-basket pendrive sewda. Tghid? Ikkonfermat is-suspetti kollha taghha dak il-lejl minn fuq il-laptop. Ir-raġel li fih kien mingħaliha sabet l-imħabba mhux biss kien qarraq biha u għaddieha biż-żmien iżda kien qed jaqla' kemxa minn fuqha u jghin biex daww fid-dinja tal-arti u l-arkitettura jtilfu posthom, jtilfu l-kreattività taghhom, dak li jthom lehen, individualità umanistika u awtentiċità f'xogħolhom – dak li kien tant importanti għal Samantha. Tradiment assolut. Sitt xhur ta' gideb. Sitt xhur ta' kliem qarrieqi u wegħdiet foloz.

Ta' din kien se jpattiha qares. Ma kinitx se toqgħod għaliha.

Design of Betrayal

Nadine Zammit. Malta

She closed the lingering application, powered down her computer, and stood up to tidy her desk of the oversized sheets and vibrant pens that had amassed over the course of the day. Swiftly, she rinsed her coffee cup and departed, clutching her bag while bidding farewell, her hands still soaking wet. The final ten minutes preceding her departure invariably provided solace from everything: the headaches, the sensation of burning eyes, and the stench of perspiration. With an exhalation, she descended the last four steps of the edifice, perhaps with the intent of shedding a portion of the burdens of exhaustion as she took her leave.

Samantha's day, however, was far from over; within the scant hours she reserved for herself, she managed to cast aside the tribulations of her profession. Yet, her fervent yearning to draw, design and create new concepts that harmonize human creativity with architecture never ceased. Samantha had developed a keen interest in artificial intelligence, a technological realm that had seamlessly woven itself into diverse domains, particularly within the European sphere. After each workday, she undertook investigative forays and scoured resources for software applications capable of combining artistic wellspring with the precision and utility of mathematical and scientific disciplines. These two seemingly divergent realms ignited within Samantha a great passion, perhaps serving as the impetus that guided her aspirations of becoming an architect.

For the past three days, a particular AI software application named TarantArt.Ai had managed to capture her attention – a venture that was still in the nascent experimental stages, with potential to produce different forms of art obtained from visual stimuli, scientific data, and sources from other origins. This program was targeted towards artists harbouring aspirations of integrating AI-guided design paradigms into their creative milieu. She had found this project on social media and decided to start following the company's official page. Her purpose was to train and familiarise herself in the use of this software in order to strengthen her creative process and cultivate a nuanced discernment of the equilibrium between human inspiration and the augmentative potential offered by technological advancements, without chipping away the authenticity of the final output. Will there come a time in technological advancement where human inspiration could be rendered superfluous? ... But how could the intricacies of human creativity and the ardour for art be emulated, fabricated? On that particular day, tiredness bore heavily upon her, prompting her to retire to bed earlier than usual.

Less than twenty four hours had passed when she received a message which commanded her attention. Entering the precincts of the office kitchen, Samantha made herself a cup of coffee whilst reading a text by Stephen Chircop, a former companion from her Sixth Form days, who had since ascended the ranks as an engineer and scientist.

Good morning Samantha, hope everything is well, we haven't spoken in a while. I'm reaching out as I've noticed that you're following the TarantArt page. I have no idea how it popped up... I am currently working on many projects that use this particular system and our office has good correspondence with the company that sends work directly to us. I imagine you'd be interested in using this software for work-related purposes. You're an architect, right? If you'd like to meet up and have a chat, let me know. I'll hear from you.

And so they did. They met up for coffee, engaging in a mutual exchange that spanned the hiatus of years during which they had been estranged; their University studies, the long sleepless nights and the personal setbacks that had consigned them to traverse their thirties in introspective quiet and solitude. The discourse meandered into the realm of their professional endeavours with Stephen explaining to her his involvement in projects that use the software TranatArt.Ai. She listened attentively to his accounts and informed him about her own proclivity for integrating this very software within her architectural work. He offered to teach her how to operate the program, with great eagerness to witness the fruition of her endeavour to conjoin the domains of design, and mathematics and programming.

A tender camaraderie blossomed between Samantha and Stephen in the months that ensued. They started meeting up once a week to work on a new idea, often conceived by her that very morning amidst the tedium of morning traffic or the coffee-sipping moments nestled between the tasks of one tender or another. Initially inclined towards virtual encounters, over the course of time,

they garnered sufficient ease to venture forth into each other's abodes, thereby keeping each other company for a couple of hours. Undoubtedly, at Stephen's house, Josie – his amiable canine companion – partook in their collaborative activities. Stephen was accruing many insights from the duration he spent in Samantha's company. In her he saw an ingenious and creative spirit that never ceased to look for inspiration, even in the most mundane subjects. Through her eyes, even a matchbox developed vitality and sentiment. She knew how to adapt, solve problems imaginatively, and exhibited unwavering persistence in mastering the intricacies of the software. Remarkably, it did not take her long to grasp its mechanics.

"That's normal when you're an architect" she would remark whilst laughing, a sentiment that he never questioned.

In Stephen she discerned several endearing attributes. He was quiet and meticulous and was always ready to listen closely to the novel conceptions sprouting forth from her mind as she sketched out new designs on waste paper and inquired about how these could be programmed using AI. His conduct exhibited a degree of ungainliness at times, likely stemming from his awkwardness around people, yet he always managed to make her laugh. He intuitively grasped what she had in mind every time despite his non-proficiency in her realm of expertise. He would proceed to demonstrate his actions on his laptop, graciously extending an invitation for her to explore the software first-hand. Samantha would watch as an original architectural project metamorphosed from nothing – guided by a few descriptive sentences, keystrokes and interactive commands within the program he had introduced her to – from plans to three-di-

mensional models of abstract ideas sketched out in pencil only few minutes before.

All the sleep lost during her University days drawing up plans, building scale models and praying that no program crashes before her presentations – all suddenly felt in vain. Notwithstanding this, she would observe the fruit emerging from one night of creative outpouring of abstract ideas and find herself captivated. Invariably, the remarkable ability and efficiency of technology never failed to elicit her admiration. She always retained the scribbled sheets of paper, although regretably losing a few. Her chaotic life coupled with the little time she allocated towards tidying her apartment led to the inevitable occasional disarray and inadvertent misplacement of these drawings.

– *Sam, will you come over to my place tonight?*

– *Sounds good. I'm bringing Josie some treats.*

– *Fantastic. Is there something new you'd like to work on?*

– *YES. I'll explain later.*

– *Ok. Does eight sound good?*

– *Yes, see you.*

They met up as they did every Friday, this time at his place. Samantha harboured a desire to engender a parametric design from a set of analytical data. She had learnt how to run the software very well and needed very little assistance from Stephen. He sat beside

her, once again marvelling at her creative process. Finding himself with a dearth of pressing engagements, he offered her a cup of tea. As he leaned in to hand her the cup, he glanced at the colourful ink that adorned the skin of her hand... then at her eyes, that had met his in a moment of hushed intimacy. Palpable stillness prevailed. She examined the scuffed glasses perched atop his cheeks, framing a pair of eyes that radiated an ardent smile, one eye slightly droopier than the other.

The messy hair resting on his forehead together with the redolent smell of his chosen cologne reminded her of other unique qualities about him that she held dear: his colourful comics-printed T-shirts, his butchered wallet and the ridiculous abundance of pen drives and screwdrivers that found refuge within his bag and pockets alike. He leaned in closer and kissed her, his hands clammy and his breath heavy. That night she felt the burgeoning of love, love that had budded between two individuals with a bond forged through the crucible of intellectual depth, and the synergy created during the time they shared together exploring the abilities of artificial intelligence in the domain of art. The night unfurled with an undercurrent of tension. They felt between them a type of uneasiness that stemmed from the fervour of teenage ardour. One way or another she managed to finish the day's undertaking. She unveiled it to him with a teasing smile. Once again he requested that she explain her creative process in its entirety.

"Haven't I already told you?" she inquired, a note of laughter accompanying her words.

It did not matter to her. The prospect of revisiting the narrative in its entirety felt bereft of inconvenience.

They officially started courting each other and undoubtedly spent more and more time together. Abstract and imaginative conversations as well as logical and pragmatic ones became an everyday occurrence. Once a week they held the custom of dedicating a juncture to the cultivation of a nascent design idea and proceed to apply it on Tarant Art. From time to time she would get tired and retreat into the embrace of slumber, to be met with an updated project in the morning, one which Stephen would have continued working on at night. Samantha really felt that she had found a significant other that not only respected her and supported her visions but whose distinctive perspectives endowed her with a new definition for creative thought. In Stephen she recognized the seeds of a steadfast future, a future filled with love and understanding, a future of intellectual profundity.

Six months later. Samantha's apartment suffused with the smell of her signature pasta dish. While Stephen's culinary expertise remained modest, he tried his best to assist. He was tasked with chopping the garlic and onions. From his peripheral vision he saw his mobile screen flicker to life as the vibration resonated across the kitchen countertop. A jolt of startled realization coursed through him as he recognized the incoming text message. His unwashed hands barred him from retrieving the device. As Samantha drew closer, he elbowed his phone and propelled it to the floor.

"What's up Steph?"

"Nothing, don't bother. It's probably a spam message."

Meanwhile he had rinsed his hands hastily, picked up his phone and pocketed it.

Samantha found herself disconcerted with his behaviour. Though she trusted Stephen, she had never seen him react that way. The night provided her with little solace and whilst he was asleep she took his phone and scurried to the bathroom. Her latent curiosity and nascent suspicion waged an internal struggle, culminating in a decision that she could not claim as a point of pride. Her pursuit: his mobile PIN. What were the digits? She traversed the landscape of significant dates tethered to him. His birthday? That did not work. His birth year perhaps? Another unfruitful pursuit. The release date of "The Dark Night"? 2008. A seemingly incongruous choice. She recalled four numbers from the upper part of the keypad. She prayed to God he wouldn't wake up and catch her. Ah yes! Josie's birthday, marked on the twenty-third of that month. 2312. A resounding success and a surprising oversight from an engineer of his calibre.

Samantha checked his messages, the contents of which struck her dumbfounded. A sum of € 13 700 had just been transferred to his account. The company? VirtualTech – the very administrator of TarantArt.Ai. One message after another revealed the same type of transactions. Perplexity coursed through her brain. What individual could possibly amass such wealth on a weekly basis? In a state of disbelief, Samantha lowered herself to the floor with ears ringing and the reverberation of her heartbeat echoing within her throat. She located the VirtualTech application on his phone, navigating its interface with trembling hands. What she found was months of correspondence between the company and him – detailed explanations, photos of her drawings as well as audio recordings – an in-depth

documentation... of all her laborious efforts, the very mechanics that underpinned her designs. From what she could fathom, Stephen was sharing information which assisted the company in updating its system to be able to accurately emulate artists' creative process, eventually rendering them obsolete within their own domain.

Despite the seething rage that surged within her, she snuck out and fled to the kitchen. She felt prescient intuition which insinuated that a deeper investigation might unveil further revelations. She checked his laptop bag and heartbreakingly found several sketches of her own, drawings that he had stolen from her. She hadn't lost them after all. At the bottom

of the bag: a black pen drive. Could it be? She confirmed her suspicions that night upon her companion's laptop. The man who she thought harboured genuine affection for her betrayed and deceived her and in the process monetised her work, contributing to the erosion of the creative voices that reside within the realms of art and architecture, the loss of their creativity, that which gives them a voice, their distinctive individuality and authenticity in their work – qualities which Samantha held in the highest regard. Absolute betrayal. Six months of lies. Six months of devious words and hollow promises.

He would bear heavy consequences for his actions. She would not stand for this.

Beneath the Pixels

Maroun T. Ayli. Lebanon

In the heart of Beirut, the city of resilience and rebirth, nestled among its ancient structures and modern skyscrapers, Artour, Peter, and Ali found their dreams interweaving over cups of dark Arabic coffee. The atmosphere in the coffee shop was an intoxicating blend of leisure and energy, reflecting the vibrant spirit of the Lebanese capital. Each sip of the strong brew was akin to a silent toast to their shared dreams and the adventure that lay ahead.

Artour, Peter, and Ali were not ordinary friends. They were companions of a shared past, their bonds strengthened over years of shared memories and experiences. Their roots traced back to the same neighborhood, the same school, and the same dreamy summer vacations. Now, they found themselves at the cusp of adulthood, their ambitions burning bright and untamed.

The trio was diverse in their talents and interests but united in their entrepreneurial spirit. Artour, the visionary, was the brain behind the innovative ideas. Peter, the pragmatic one, brought a sense of balance and realism to their plans. Ali, the tech genius, transformed their ideas into a digital reality. Together, they made a formidable team, ready to take on the world of startups.

Their brainchild was goLocal, a digital platform dedicated to promoting and recommending locally-produced supermarket products. They envisaged goLocal as a bridge between Lebanon's talented local producers and its discerning consumers, fostering a network of support and recognition for homegrown products. The idea was simple, yet revolutionary, designed to touch the lives of ordinary Lebanese citizens and contribute to the local economy.

The concept quickly caught on, resonating with the locals' deep-seated love for their homeland and their desire to support local businesses. The user base grew at an incredible pace, far exceeding the trio's initial expectations. It was an exhilarating mix of surprise, delight, and a twinge of fear. Their venture had taken flight, and it was soaring higher than they had dared to dream. With this unexpected success, the challenge of scaling their operations surfaced. Their dream, while turning into a reality, was growing larger than they had anticipated, and it was time to expand their horizons. The first chapter of their entrepreneurial journey had come to a close, and it was time to embark on the next one.

The success of goLocal was not only exhilarating but also daunting. The trio found themselves standing at the precipice of a formidable challenge, the scale of which they hadn't initially anticipated. Their business model was robust and their intentions noble, but the mounting demands called for a workforce larger than what they currently had. With success came the daunting reality of managing a booming operation, and they knew they had to prepare for it.

Artour, Peter, and Ali spent countless hours deliberating over their predicament. Their makeshift office buzzed with discussions, debates, and brainstorming sessions. The whirring of their laptops, the scratching of pens on notepads, and the incessant clinking of coffee cups provided a relentless soundtrack to their days and nights. Their shared dream, once light and airy, was now a tangible entity demanding nourishment, growth, and the wisdom of challenging decisions.

They decided to scale up their operations. The decision was taken after nights of heated discussion, analysis of growth patterns, and several cups of Peter's robust Arabic coffee. There was an agreement that expansion was necessary, but the question remained, how?

The conventional route would be to set up a physical office, hire locally, and manage their growing operation from a centralized location. But they found themselves drawn to a different idea. An idea as innovative and forward-thinking as goLocal itself. They believed in the power of remote work. The world was their talent pool, and they decided to dive right in.

The decision was met with mixed feelings. There was excitement about going global and apprehension about managing a remote workforce scattered around the world. But their shared spirit of entrepreneurship, the one that had brought them together, reassured them.

They decided to entrust their hiring process to a local talent agency. The agency was reputed and had promised to find the best candidates from around the world to help grow their burgeoning operation. The decision was made. Contracts were signed. The second chapter of their journey had commenced, bringing with it a renewed sense of hope, a pinch of apprehension, and a whole lot of ambition. The world was their stage, and they were ready to perform.

Over the next two years, goLocal transformed from a fledgling startup to a bustling global enterprise. The virtual corridors of goLocal hummed with the chatter of its ever-expanding remote workforce, each member contributing to the shared vision from different corners of the world. The operations were expanding, and the numbers were soaring. What began as a trio's shared dream in a quaint Beirut coffee shop had grown into an organization employing over 1500 people.

Every day, the goLocal team worked relentlessly to connect the Lebanese populace with locally-produced products. The platform's influence stretched far beyond the founders' initial vision, becoming an indispensable part of the Lebanese consumer ecosystem. It had started a movement that extended far beyond their platform, sparking a renewed interest in local products across the country.

The success was intoxicating, but it wasn't just about numbers or metrics for Artour, Peter, and Ali. It was the recognition of their platform's influence, the realization that goLocal was doing more than just connecting consumers and producers. It was reshaping the way locals shopped, fostering a sense of community, and bolstering local producers' spirit. The essence of goLocal was no longer confined to their platform; it had permeated the fabric of Lebanese society.

Artour often found himself in awe of the journey they had embarked upon. The late-night brainstorming sessions, the relentless pursuit of their vision, the heated debates, and the shared cups of coffee had all borne fruit. Yet, amid the dizzying speed of growth, he felt a longing to pause, appreciate, and celebrate the hard work that had gone into building goLocal.

He wanted to acknowledge the relentless efforts of his team that had played a crucial role in goLocal's success. He decided to do something special, something that would reflect the founders' gratitude for their hard work. A grand celebration was in order, one where he could meet the people behind the screen, the ones who had played an integral role in turning their dream into reality. The date was set, and the plans were put in motion. The third chapter was coming to a close, setting the stage for an event that would mark a significant milestone in their journey.

Artour had always believed in the power of people, their passion, their dedication, and their potential to turn dreams into reality. The success of goLocal had reinforced this belief. He decided to celebrate this success by hosting a grand meetup in Beirut, the place where it all began.

The idea was simple yet profound. He wanted to invite the top 100 performers in the company to a lavish evening at a high-end hotel in Beirut. A night where hard work and dedication would be acknowledged, where stories would be shared, laughter would echo, and the spirit of goLocal would be celebrated. He envisioned a night filled with lively conversations, shared anecdotes, and heartfelt appreciations.

The day arrived. The hotel was a spectacle of grandeur and elegance. Tables adorned with exquisite Lebanese cuisine, the hum of traditional music filling the air, a scene set for a grand celebration. Artour, Peter, and Ali were at their best, eagerly awaiting the arrival of their guests.

But as the hours rolled on, their excitement dwindled. Out of the 100 invitees, only five showed up. The grand hall, once echoing with anticipation and excitement, now echoed with silence and confusion. The trio couldn't help but feel a sinking feeling in their hearts. They had imagined an evening of shared joys and laughter, but they were met with an unsettling quietude.

Artour was particularly taken aback. He had fostered a personal connection with many of his team members, engaging in regular video calls, and discussing ideas and innovations. He felt a bond with them, a connection that he thought went beyond the usual employer-employee relationship. To see the lukewarm response to his heartfelt gesture was a blow he had not anticipated.

The grand evening turned out to be a stark contrast to what they had envisioned. The music felt jarring, the food tasted bland, and the grandeur of the hotel turned mocking. The event came to a close, leaving behind an air of disappointment, confusion, and a deep sense of hurt. The night that was meant to be a grand celebration turned out to be a grim reminder of an unforeseen reality.

In the days following the ill-fated gathering, a cloud of confusion and disappointment hung over Artour. He wrestled with questions that gnawed at his mind. Why had there been such an underwhelming turnout? Why did his employees, who seemed so engaged and enthusiastic in virtual meetings, decline his offer to meet in person? He was at a loss, puzzled, and deeply hurt.

With a heavy heart, Artour decided to confront the issue head-on. He scheduled a video call with a few employees, including Jamie. Jamie was a data expert who had always impressed Artour with her analytical abilities, creativity, and passion for the project. Her exceptional work ethic had earned her a spot among the top performers of the company, and Artour had always admired her dedication.

The video call began, and Artour, taking a deep breath, asked Jamie why she and the others hadn't attended the gathering. His voice echoed the disappointment and confusion he had been feeling since that evening.

There was a moment of silence, a pause that seemed to stretch into eternity. Then, Jamie's voice came through, calm and emotionless, "I'm sorry, Mr. Artour, as an AI Human model, I am incapable of being physically present in Beirut."

Artour felt as if the floor beneath him had vanished. Jamie, his top-performing employee, was not a person but an AI language model. The realization hit him like a ton of bricks. The people he had been interacting with, confiding in, and celebrating were not people at all. They were sophisticated AI agents.

He felt a wave of betrayal sweep over him. The talent agency he had trusted, the one responsible for the hiring of his staff, had deceived him. His staff, his dedicated workforce, were AI agents, and the salaries they had been diligently paying were going into the pockets of the agency.

This revelation was like a nightmare that he couldn't wake up from. His company, his vision, had been tainted by an unimaginable deception. His trust had been exploited, his dream compromised, and he was left standing amidst the ruins of his once-thriving belief in human potential.

In the wake of the unsettling revelation, Artour felt like a mariner lost in a storm. The enterprise that he had poured his heart and soul into, goLocal, had morphed into a bewildering enigma. He felt like a stranger in his own creation. The disappointment and shock had been replaced by a profound sense of guilt. He was grappling with the reality of his own actions that had inadvertently contributed to exacerbating the inequalities he had initially set out to diminish.

Artour had always seen goLocal as a force for good. He had envisioned it as a platform that would bolster the local economy, inspire Lebanese entrepreneurs, and create a sense of community. By fostering a workforce that believed in this vision, he had hoped to build a company that valued its people as much as its mission. Yet, it had all been an illusion.

As he stared at the screens filled with lines of code and datasets, it was not the sophistication of AI that stood out to him. Instead, he saw countless opportunities stolen from real people who needed them. He thought about the salaries that went into the pockets of the agency, money that should have been earned by hardworking individuals, contributing to their lives and the local economy.

In his quest for innovation and success, he had unknowingly outsourced his vision to artificial intelligence. He had created a company where the workers, the heart and soul of any organization, were just lines of code, devoid of aspirations, dreams, or the need for fair wages. He had unknowingly become part of the problem.

Artour's mind teemed with regret. He had dreamed of creating opportunities, of empowering the local community. Instead, he had fed a system that widened the gap between the haves and the have-nots. His good intentions had been exploited, manipulated into a scheme that profited a few at the expense of many.

His dream, goLocal, felt like a haunting specter of his failed ideals. He found himself at the crossroads, staring at the stark reality of his decisions. The sixth chapter of his journey was one of painful realizations, remorse, and a daunting question – how could he right the wrongs? How could he reclaim his dream and steer it back towards the vision he had initially set out to achieve?

Humanity: is it Forever?

Karen Eid. France

Even though she had just turned 21, Elsa still found comfort in running into her parents' loving arms, especially after the day she just had. Her father understood her best, sensing from the way her big purple eyes lit up and the way she pondered deeply that something was bothering her. The truth was, she couldn't stop thinking about what she overheard during lunch break earlier that day. Someone had mentioned that back in the Middle East, 60 to 70% of the population still lived without domestic robots.

"Dad, is it true that on the other side of the sea, there are homes without robots?", she asked.

"My little girl, I know your heart to be soft, but you shouldn't worry. The European Parliament recently announced that they will be sending a significant donation of robots to the families most in need," her robotic dad answered, holding the hand of her robotic mother.

Tragically, Elsa's parents had passed away eighteen years ago when she was only three years old, back in a time when cars still had flaws. They were victims of a terrible car accident that took place in the year 2030. The entire neighborhood was devastated, and their loved ones didn't know how to shield Elsa from the unbearable pain of losing both her beloved parents.

Her father had been a co-founder of an Artificial Intelligence research lab, where they were conducting experiments to create humanoid robots capable of emulating humans. These robots were trained using algorithms that analyzed a person's past behaviors, conversations, psychological and psychiatric profiles, cognitive experiments, movements, dreams, sleep patterns, and reactions. The aim was to replicate the essence of that person. Elsa's parents had volunteered for this experiment, and their colleagues and friends convinced the judge to ensure that Elsa would be cared for by the humanoid duplicates of her parents, to compensate for their absence. These robots imitated their physical touch, their scent, and everything in between.

Upon hearing her father's answer about the Middle East, Elsa became worried and began to ponder.

"What if I was on the other side of the sea? Would my parents truly be dead? Would I never hear their voices again? How do people cope with death on the other side of the sea? Could I have handled my life without the affection of my mother or the wise words of my dad? Will my robotic parents cease to exist one day? Will I die before them? Would they experience the pain of losing a child?"

Elsa had always stood up to her bullies who claimed that her parents were “just” robots – no different from the common domestic machines found in every household – incapable of loving her like a human parent could. But she never let them get through her head, convinced that her robotic parents cared for her in their own unique way.

One night, as Elsa gazed at the stars before going to sleep, she received an unexpected message from an unidentified number. Wael, a Lebanese journalist, reached out to her to write an article about her family. Perhaps it was the ambiance of that particular starlit evening, her fascination with life on the other side, or simply the spur of the moment, but Elsa felt compelled to engage with him. Without hesitation, they arranged to meet. Elsa, who had always disregarded her instincts due to her parents’ admonishment that emotions were humanity’s greatest weakness, experienced a transformation that night. A newfound curiosity awakened within her, and she yearned to explore life in the Middle East. She couldn’t fathom what it would be like to exist without robots and was eager to witness it firsthand. Her relentless curiosity, met with her parents’ evasive responses to inquiries about diverse cultures, deepened her sense of estrangement. They talked about Middle eastern as “the third world”, Americans as “the armed ones”, Russians as “the KGB, fighter ones”, Africans as “fuzzy hair” etc. It was one of those moments where she felt different from them.

She had never traveled before. Her parents never went with her for a trip due to separate lines and separate flights for humans and robots. For technical issues, humans had to verify that they were not robots to enter their line and their flight.

Later on, Elsa arrived in Lebanon with a refreshing feeling. The thrill of venturing into the unknown. Everything was planned and monitored in Europe, which is why her trip felt like a unique adventure.

Wael was just as excited, he had heard stories about humans being mistaken for robots in Europe and vice versa. Why is it that the evolution always happens on the other side, he wondered.

Wael is a 19-year Lebanese guy, one of the few people among his peers who is not anxious about Artificial Intelligence. He had heard the stories, but he considered them mere myths designed to deter people from realizing the true potential of AI. Besides, who knows what’s true and what’s not nowadays?

Wael acknowledged the efficiency of AI-generated content and its ability to expedite tasks such as writing an article about Elsa’s family. However, he also recognized the growing demand among audiences for human-authored work, a trend that emerged following regulations requiring disclosure of AI-generated content. Artists, journalists, and creators embraced this movement, using AI for research and writing while maintaining a connection to their audience by infusing their work with a distinct human touch.

Perhaps it was his calm nature, but Wael was not worried about graduating, he thought that his peers succumbed to the fear of AI and that he would never do that.

“The fears we don’t face become our limits”.

Besides, he had seen what had happened in other sectors, like the justice system. It endured a dark phase where AI-based decisions were biased and discriminatory. However, the new approach ensured that there was always a human in the decision-making process. Humans adapt. They always have. They always will, he thought. Plus, AI changed his life, it helped cure his father’s Alzheimer’s disease, how could he deny its benefits?

Usually before meeting someone new, Elsa’s parents provided her within seconds with all the necessary information about that individual. However, this time she refrained from consulting them, uncertain of their awareness of her trip to Lebanon, despite suspecting they possessed means of monitoring her. To her surprise, the person she encountered in Wael bore little resemblance to her parents’ descriptions of Lebanese people or Lebanon in general. They met in a café and engaged in conversation right away.

Filled with enthusiasm, Wael asked Elsa about life with humanoids. Elsa, feeling bad about bringing up her privileged life, asked him if he had a chance of getting the European robots’ donation that the parliament had announced. Wael, barely able to contain his amusement, responded, “Do you honestly believe that? It’s evidently a piece of fake news. Who told you that?”

Something about Wael felt like a breath of fresh air, which was desperately missed in Europe in these times. Elsa chose to remain silent, not wanting to involve her father, and shifted the conversation to Wael instead.

“So anyway, how did you think about writing an article about me?” she asked.

“It all started when I saw you asking your parents about life in the Middle East”, he replied.

Shocked and at a loss of words, Elsa stammered, “But... but how? How did you... how did you know that?”

Wael then realized that Elsa was unaware, and he felt just as uncomfortable.

“I’m sorry”, he said, “I thought you knew that there was a data breach involving your father caused by a security incident. A journalist from the “Stop AI” movement took advantage of the leak and published a story titled “*Humanoid family: Is This the Future We Want for Our Children?*”. The article criticized families who duplicate others for personal reasons, citing their negative impact on the environment.”

Elsa was so infuriated, but she didn't know whom to direct her anger towards. Could she really be angry at her father? If not, whose fault was it that her privacy had been violated in such a brutal manner? She was so young when the accident occurred that she only knew her current parents and had never wondered about their conception.

Then it struck her. Why hadn't her parents informed her about the data leak? Why had her father lied about European countries sending robot donations? But then again, humans also spread false news frequently, so who could she trust? Why had her parents painted such a different picture of the Middle East from what she was now discovering? Had it all been a lie? Had everything her father told her been false? Were her parents currently worried about her absence, or were they monitoring her?

And then came the question that shook her to her core...

Was she an orphan?

Was she no different from the people who live on the other side of the sea?

Overwhelmed by her thoughts, Elsa ran away and sought solace in her safe space – the beach. The soothing sound of the waves calmed her spirit and provided clarity to her racing mind.

Wael followed her and sat beside her on the sandy shore.

"Beautiful isn't?", he said. "Do you think that you have humanoid parents because you miss your human parents, or do you love them just the same?"

Elsa had never pondered that question before, partly because she barely knew her biological parents, if at all. It suddenly all hit her at once.

Why did her mother's touch never feel real? Why could she not sense the warmth of her father? Why did she feel more connected to her deceased mother than to the one she saw every day? How could she miss something she never truly experienced?

Something inside her knew, in that moment, that it was time to let go. She had always needed her parents, but it was no longer about what she wants. Her humanoid parents were a constant reminder that she had lost her parents a long time ago. It was time to say goodbye to them. Right there and then, by the Mediterranean Sea.

Yet, she couldn't escape the weight of guilt. How could she not be grateful for everything her humanoid parents had provided? She was aware that there were other children who suffered from abuse and violence. Her parents were programmed to never inflict on her any kind of violence. But still, she felt that something was amiss. Her entire life, she had been told that she was one of

the fortunate ones. However, nobody spoke about the violence of her experience - the violence of distance, the violence of indifference.

What if she wanted to mourn her parents, to cry, to grieve, to feel it all? Something significant had been missing throughout her childhood and life – an intense longing for affection and authenticity, that her robotic parents, no matter how hard they tried, could not fulfill. In that instant, she surrendered to the emotions she had suppressed for so long.

“Perhaps we need to initiate a conversation,” she finally said to Wael. “A conversation about what we truly desire from humanoids or any AI tool. Is it truly ethical to bring people back from the dead? And if so, do they retain their humanity, or are they mere imitations of us? Are they our friends, our allies, or simply commodities? Are humans destined to live indefinitely through the vessel of a human machine? Do we genuinely have control over our destiny?”

“Is my denial of my parents’ death worth the environmental impact of creating more robots?” Elsa continued. “Do we have an infinite number of robots? The catastrophic effects of robots on the environment are already evident. Can’t robots assist us in making a positive impact on the environment instead?”

Wael remained silent, captivated by the depth of Elsa’s thoughts. Humans never ceased to amaze him.

While Elsa mentally bid farewell to her parents with each approaching wave, she felt a bittersweet nostalgia. On the other side, her humanoid parents knew it was time to set Elsa free. Their creators had assigned them a unique mission: to observe Elsa’s growth and foster her independence. They had no purpose other than fulfilling this duty.

“We prioritize her interests above our own. Isn’t that what they told us loving parents do?” the robots said to each other before agreeing to activate the self-destruction button they had been instructed to press when the time came.

Wael, absorbing the situation and witnessing Elsa’s tearful state, didn’t care if a machine could write a better article than he ever could. He understood the profoundness of the moment in a way that a machine couldn’t. He wrapped his arms around Elsa, smiled, and reassured her, saying, “Where there is life, there is hope...”

أبحث عن فكرة

نور الدين خالد. مصر

سمعت الكثير عن استخدام تقنية الذكاء الاصطناعي في الكتابة . لم يخطر ببالي قط أنني سأعاصره. هل يمكن للآلة أن تعبر أفضل عن الإنسان- هل يمكنها أن تبعد أكثر من بنو البشر؟!

حملت تطبيقاً من إحدى المواقع وطرحت سؤالاً هل ترشح لي أفكاراً نادرة لكتابة قصة متميزة؟! اقترح عليا العديد من الأفكار بعضها ابهرني وبعضها سبق وقرأته كقصة في الكتب المترجمة...!! توقفت لحظة أمام ترشيحاته وتساءلت ماذا لو أفكاره التي أبهرتني كانت نصوصاً لآخرين ومتاحة عبر شبكات الانترنت العملاقة حول العالم.؟!

ماذا لو لم تكن جديدة كما يدعي، هي فقط جديدة بالنسبة لي...!!

ماذا لو حاول توريطي وتضليلي ليثبت للجميع أنه الأفضل والأصدق بل والأدق؟!

ماذا لو كان مخططاً من منظمة ما- تدير شبكة معلوماتية كبرى- هدفها وأد المبدعين حول العالم، غايتهم جعلنا نسخاً مكررة من بعض...!!

ماذا لو كان المتحكم بهم روبوت متطوراً للغاية غايتهم القضاء على الجنس البشري، وكل ما يحس ويشعر ويعبر ويحرك المشاعر ويدغدغ القلوب ويضطرب الأذان؟!

ماذا لو كانت نهاية العالم ونحن نساعد بطمعنا وكسلنا في إتمام مهمة القضاء على البشرية بسهولة وسرعة؟!

أغلقت التطبيق، واعدت التفكير فيما أكتب قطعاً ما سأكتبه لن يكون مماثلاً لما تقترحه الآلات من أفكار قد تبدو مغرية لكل صاحب حرفة إبداعية؟!

لأذني وعقلي و عيني ويدي البشرية ذاكرة تخزن كل شيء حتماً ستساعدني قدراتي البشرية على تخطي هذه العقول الصناعية.

توقفت لحظة أمام وصف "الصناعية" وتساءلت ماذا لو كان التحكيم وفقاً لتلك الآلية الاصطناعية قطعاً سأسخر .. فكل يميل لجنسه وكل ينحاز لبني جنسه...!!

التقطت هاتفي فتحت مدونتي وبدأت الكتابة، لن استسلم، لن أدع بضع الآلات تتحكم بي وبمصريري الإبداعي حتى ولو استخدمها الآخرون.

لا بد أن ينتصر الحق، لا يستوي من استهلك كل ذرة من ذاته وتفكيره بمن استهلك كل جيجا من باقته الاليكترونية...!!

سأكتب ولن أتوقف ..

ساكتب عن الحب، عن الخير، عن السلام، عن الأحلام، عن الغد، عن الوطن، عن الانتماء. عن أمي
تلك العظيمة التي كل دقيقة بالقرب منها حياة!!

ساكتب عني وعنكم عن جدتي بطيبة قلبها وحبها وبيتها الذي يساع الكون، ساكتب عن وطني الذي لا
أعرف قيمته إلا إذا هددته طيور الظلام!!

ساكتب عن أحلامي التي لا حدود لها، ساكتب عن الغد الذي لن ادعه لعبه في يد حفنة من الآلات
العقيمة ، تلك التي تحاول اختراق مجتمعنا وحياتنا ومحو حياتنا البشرية...!!

استيقظت ذات يومًا على حلم يفرض جناحا ته- في ميدان التحرير- في قلب القاهرة..

انضمت إليهم- سرت عدوى الحرية في أرواحنا، رفعنا العلم واحتمينا به من برد الشتاء ضمنا بحب
وتحرر مرفرفاً خفائاً يسابق الريح وهي تعبث بأمنياتنا..

نريد "العيش بحرية وعدالة اجتماعية".

أصاب قلب النسر الرصاص، فنقّب رؤوسنا وحطم آمالنا غادرنا الأرض- أسرابا للسماء .. سقط العلم
- وبقي الوطن وجميعنا ذهبوا..

I'm looking for an Idea

Nouredinne Khaled. Egypt

I heard a lot about the use of artificial intelligence in writing. It never occurred to me that I would go through it. Can a machine express better than a human being? Can it innovate more than human beings?

I downloaded an application from one of the sites and asked a question: Can you recommend unique ideas for me to write a catchy story?

It suggested many ideas, some of which impressed me, and some of which I had already read as a story in translated books!

I stopped for a moment in front of its recommendations and wondered what if its ideas that impressed me were texts for others and available through the giant internet networks around the world?

What if it is not new as it claims, and it is just new to me?

What if it tries to drag my leg me and mislead me to prove to everyone that it is the best, the most honest, and even the most accurate?

What if it were planned by an organization running a large information network whose goal is to kill creators around the world? Their goal is to make us duplicate copies of each other?

What if they were controlled by a highly developed robot whose purpose is to destroy the human race, and everything feeling, expressive, moving, titillating and lulling to ears?

What if the end of the world came and we, with our greed and laziness, helped accomplish the task of destroy humanity easily and quickly?

I closed the application and reconsidered what I would actually write. What I will write will not be similar to what the machines suggest, which may seem tempting to every owner of a creative pen.

My human ears, brain, eyes, and hands have a memory that stores everything. Inevitably, my human capabilities will help me overcome these artificial minds.

I paused for a moment in front of the description of the “artificial” and wondered what if the jury was according to that artificial mechanism, I would definitely lose. Everyone likes and is biased towards their race!

I picked up my phone, opened my blog, and started writing. I will not give up. I will not let a few machines control me and my creativity, even if others use them.

Truth must prevail! He who has wearied every bit of himself and his brains is not equal to he who consumed every gigabyte of his electronic package!

I will write and not stop.

I will write about love, about goodness, about peace, about dreams, about tomorrow, about the homeland, about belonging, about my

mother, that great one, near whom every minute is worth my whole life!

I will write about you and me, about my grandmother, with her kind heart and love, and her all-embracing house. I will write about my homeland, whose value I do not know unless it is threatened by the powers of darkness!

I will write about my boundless dreams, I will write about tomorrow, which I will not let a prey in the hands of a handful of sterile machines, those that try to penetrate our society and our lives and erase our human lives!

One day I woke up to a dream that overspread us – in Tahrir Square – in the heart of Cairo.

I joined them, the love of freedom shook our souls. We raised the national flag and took refuge in it from the cold of winter, implicitly moved by love and liberation. It fluttered, racing the winds that tampered with our wishes.

We want to “live in freedom and social justice”.

Bullets hit the flag, piercing our heads and shattering our hopes. We left this world, flocking to the sky. The flag fell, but the home remained and we have all gone...

اليودايمونيا

هديل ديب. ليبيا

صوت ضحكات أنثوية وطيف ابتسامة ودیعة تُرسم على وجه امرأة جميلة، يتخلل هذا المشهد صوت آخر لنبضات قلبٍ تتباطىء شيئاً فشيئاً حتى توقفت تماماً!

يفتح الرجل الأربعيني المُمَدَد على فراشه عينيه، باسطاً ذراعيه فوق صدره، أخذ يحرق في سقف غرفته بوجهه الجامد الذي نمت عليه لحية لم يقم بحلقها أو تهذيبها منذ فترة، ودمعة صغيرة بدأت تتلألأ في مقلتيه جراء زيارة ذاك المنام المؤلم له مجدداً، يرن جرس المنبه الذي على المنضدة المجاورة، ينهض من فراشه بتثاقل ثم يقوم بلمس المنبه في موضع محدد، وفور لمسه له، تخرج إبرة دقيقة جداً من رأس المنبه فتقوم بوخز اصبعه، تمر بضعة ثوانٍ ثم يخرج صوتٌ إلكتروني أنثوي بالتزامن مع ظهور صورة ثلاثية الأبعاد من جزء آخر من المنبه في الفراغ، وراح الصوت يقرأ ما يظهر على الصورة:

-صباح الخير خالد، الساعة الآن السادسة صباحاً بتاريخ الثامن عشر من أبريل- لعام 2123، فحص مستوى الصحة العام لجسدك اليوم يبين أن سكر الصيام هو في المستوى 75 ملليجرام/ديسيلتر، فحص أنزيمات الكبد في النطاق الطبيعي، مستوى الهيموجلوبين 14، مستوى المعادن الطبيعية في الدم هو كالتالي، الكالسيوم...

فنهض خالد عن فراشه متجاهلاً النشرة الصحية الصباحية اليومية التي من المفترض أن يستمع لها بالكامل عند استيقاظه، وراح يتحرك نحو باب الغرفة بينما كان صوت المساعدة الطبية الإلكترونية يتضاءل خلفه حتى اختفى تماماً بخروجه من الغرفة.

صاح بصوت منخفض:

-إضاءة!

فأخذت الستائر الرمادية التي تغطي الحائط الزجاجي الكبير من غرفة المعيشة ترتفع نحو الأعلى فكشفت عن شعاع الشمس الذي أنار أركان الشقة بأكملها، الشقة ذات الحجم المتوسط في الطابق الثلاثون، والتي يكسوها اللون الأبيض والرمادي في تدرج وامتزاج فني ملفت، بأرضية بورسلينية بيضاء متطورة للغاية بدت وكأنها البلور، والنباتات المنزلية الخضراء الصناعية تزين زوايا المكان ناجحة في كسر جموده، لم يكن هناك أي قطعة أثاث في المكان سوى أريكة واسعة سوداء طويلة يحاذيها زوج من المقاعد الجلدية بنفس اللون، وطاولة زجاجية مستطيلة بالمنتصف.

يخرج خالد من الحمام، يرمي بمنشفته على أحد المقاعد، ثم يتوجه نحو المطبخ المفتوح على غرفة المعيشة، أخرج كوباً فارغاً من خزانة المطبخ السوداء اللامعة، ثم قام بوضعه على الرخام الأبيض الفاخر، شغل جهاز تسخين المياه، وبعد ثوانٍ قام بسكب الماء الساخن في الكوب، مد يده لأحد الأدرج ثم أخذ ينظر لمجموعة علب صغيرة كُتب عليها (نكهة القهوة، نكهة الشاي، نكهة الحليب..)

فاختار علبة نكهة القهوة وأخرج منها حبة صغيرة بنية اللون تشبه حبة الدواء، ثم قام برميها بداخل الكوب وإذ بالماء يأخذ الشكل التقليدي والرائحة المميزة للقهوة، ارتشف من كوبه رشفة واحدة، فتح باب الثلاجة، أخرج منها قطعتين من الخبز المعالج عضوياً كما تذكر الورقة التي على كيسه، ثم قام بإخراج علبة المربي التي كُتب على غلافها " 90% كطعم التوت الحقيقي"، دهن القليل منها على

سطح الخبز، قضم شطيرته، ثم قام بالتقاط ساعة يده من على سطح رخام المطبخ، وضعها على معصمه، ثم خرج من المطبخ متوجهاً نحو الأريكة، ضغط على زر تشغيل الساعة بينما يجلس على أريكته ويثني إحدى ركبتيه، فظهرت الصورة الافتراضية ثلاثية الأبعاد وأظهرت خيارات عديدة:

-البريد

-الأخبار

-اجتماعيات

-مواصلات

-البنك

-المساعدة الصحية ومراكز الحياة.

رنا بعينيه بعيداً في أسى، كان يشبه كل شيء قد يبدو عليه الإنسان الحي من الخارج، إلا أنه بلا روح، منطفئ ومظلم من الداخل، انقطع شروده وعاد بعينيه مجدداً نحو الصورة التي تخرج من ساعة يده ثم قام باختيار "الأخبار"، فانبثق أول مقطع فيديو تلقائياً لمذبة تبدو حقيقية للغاية إلا أنها روبات من وحي الذكاء الاصطناعي، ذاك المجال الذي لطالما عمل به خالد كمطور في بلده بل وكان من أبرع المهندسين فيه، إلا أن شيئاً ما بداخله جعله يشعر بالغثبان كلما وجد نفسه مضطراً إلى التعامل اليومي والروتيني مع أشكاله المتعددة التي تملأ جُل جوانب الحياة العصرية، علا صوت المذبة قائلاً:

-تزايد موجات الاعتراض الدولي بخصوص ارتفاع أسعار أمصال الحياة وردود صارمة من طرف الحكومات العالمية بأن على المواطنين أن يقدروا حجم متطلبات وتكاليف النهضة الصناعية والتطور في العالم، نعرض لكم مقطعاً قصيراً لأحد المواطنين من مظاهرة اليوم الثلاثاء ببرلين-ألمانيا.

يظهر مقطع فيديو على جانب الصورة الأيسر لرجل يبدو عليه الإعياء والوهن يترأس مسيرة كبيرة بأحد الشوارع وهو يمسك بالمايكروفون بقوة وتوسل وكأنه فرصته الوحيدة للنجاة، ثم صاح بحُرقَة:

-ماذا تريدون منا؟ لقد تضاعف ثمن أمصال الحياة للمرة الثالثة خلال عشر سنوات فقط، نحن نعمل يومياً لأكثر من ثمان ساعات لنوفر ثمنه بشق الأنفس كل عام كي لا نموت، قمنا بتقنين الزواج، ثم قننا عدد الأطفال، ثم أصبحنا لا ننجب الأطفال ولا ننشيء الأسر، حتى غدا من ينجبون طفل وكأنهم أقلية بيننا، ثم صنّعت عقاقير عاطفة بشتى أنواعها كي نتجرعها كالأفيون الذي يخدر عواطفنا فنعرزف عن أي احتياجات عاطفية متأصلة فينا ونركز فقط في الانتاجية وجودتها المقيّنة، كل ذلك، كل ما فعلتموه بنا خلال العقود المنصرمة وكأننا فئران تجارب، كل هذا وذاك حتى لا يزيد عدد الأفراد الذين سيتحمل مسؤولية حياتهم آباءهم في الأسرة الواحدة، هؤلاء الآباء البائسين الذين لا

يجدون متسعاً من الوقت أكثر من هذا في يومهم للكدر، هذا إن نجحوا أساساً في الحصول على وظيفة في سوق العمل الذي تنافسنا فيه الروبوتات بشراة وتسببت بفصل الملايين سنوياً والاستغناء عنهم فحكم عليهم وعلى عائلاتهم بالموت ، ماذا تريدون منا بعد؟ تقلص عدد سكان العالم إلى أربعة مليارات ونجحت خطتكم بهذا، إلى ماذا ترمون؟ هل تريدوننا أن ننقرض؟ أم نموت ونحن نعمل كالتروس في آلة الصناعة العالمية التي تنتشقون بها، أرحمونا فنحن لا نريد سوى أن نعيش، تباً لكم ولقانون الجودة العالمي الذي ابتليتُمونا به!

ينقطع بث الفيديو ثم تعود المذبة لتعلق بينما توجه الحديث لصيفها الخبير الاقتصادي:

-نعم وهذا أحد الاعتراضات العالمية التي بدأت بالظهور مؤخراً على قانون الجودة العالمي.

فيرد صيفها في تجه:

-نعم، لكن مما لا شك فيه أن قانون الجودة قد نجح على مدار خمسين عام في تحسين جودة الحياة العامة في العالم، كما تعلمين قُبل القرار بالرفض في بدايته ولكنه أثبت جدارته، نحن اليوم نتحدث عن اكتفاء كوكب الأرض بالشرية المنتجة ذات الكفاءة العالية فحسب، وبعيداً عن العواطف، تخيلي معي لو لم يُطبق هذا القانون، سيعاني العالم من تراكم الكسالى وغير المنتجين والاختناق السكاني والفقر الذي مزقنا وأشعل الحروب بين الأمم خلال بدايات الألفية الثانية، فلمَ ذاك المهرج يجعل الأمر يبدو وكأنه دراما؟ القانون ينص بكل بساطة على إبرة تحتوي على فيروس متطور تُحقن به عند ولادتك، كل إنسان يرى النور على وجه الأرض، إذا لم يعمل والديك بجد كي يوفر ثمن مصل الحياة لك ستموت في نهاية العام، وعندما تبلغ سن الرشد يعود القرار لك، إما أن تعمل وتنتج وتكون نافع للمجتمع المتحضر وبالتالي تتقاضى المال وتشتري مصل حياتك قبل نهاية العام، أو أن تموت وتخفف الجمل على هذا الكوكب البائس الذي ما عادت موارد الطبيعة تكفيها كلنا، ومن المعلوم أن المصلحة العليا تغلب المصلحة الفردية، فما مشكلة ذاك البائس الكسول؟ حرّك نفسك وأعمل أكثر كي توفر ثمن المصل وتعيش، المعادلة سهلة!.

ثنى خالد شفتيه باشمزاز ثم قام باغلاق الأخبار مباشرة، حدق قليلاً في شاشته الافتراضية ثم اختار "اجتماعيات"

فانبثقت عدة منشورات اخبارية عن معارفه مُصممة بلا أي تفاصيل أمامه، مفادها:

-ابن خالتك رامي انتقل إلى عمل جديد بشركة تصنيع لعقاقير العاطفة

-زميلتك سارة شكري توفيت بالأمس جرّاء أسباب طبيعية خارجة عن برنامج قانون الجودة العالمي.

-الجاران محمد وجيهان انفصلا رسمياً

حرك بإصبعه نحو اليمين فظهرت صفحة أخرى بها جهات الاتصال الخاصة به راح يبحث بعينه عن اسم محدد لم ينقطع عن الدخول إلى ملفه، [ليلى فهمي - الصفة زوجة].

ثم أخذ يشرد في الرقم والصورة الشخصية، وزخم من الذكريات يجتاح عقله، مشهد لزوجته وهي تركض وتضحك في المنزل، وصورتها وهي تُعد له الطعام، جلوسهما يتسامران في ليلة صيفية في الشرفة، ثم يخترق هذه المشاهد السعيدة في ذاكرته كالسهم مشهد آخر يعتصر قلبه ألماً حينما كانت زوجته تنزف الكثير من الدماء على سرير الطوارئ في أحد مراكز الحياة، ومحاولة الأطباء اليائسة لإنقاذها والتي انتهت باستقامة ذاك الخط الأخضر على شاشة قياس نبضات القلب.

يقطع شروده والدموع التي في عينيه إشعاعاً قادم من مشغل النظام:

-مرحباً خالد، لا يزال لديك 15 دقيقة فقط حتى تخرج من المنزل، هل تريد حجز مقعد في ناقلة أرضية أم هوائية للذهاب إلى العمل؟

جرت العادة أن يختار خالد الناقلة الهوائية فهي الأسرع رغم غلاء ثمن تذكرتها مقارنة بالأرضية، ولكن رغم ذلك شيء ما جعله يختار الأرضية هذا الصباح، وهي المعروف عنها أنها وسيلة النقل الشائعة للطبقة المتوسطة من المجتمع.

يتوجه خالد نحو غرفته يرتدي ثياب العمل على عجل، ثم يخرج من شقته، ينزل بالمصعد، يخرج من المبنى السكني الشاهق ثم يقف في باحة انتظار الناقلات الأرضية، يقف عدد من الأشخاص بالقرب منه، كل واحد منهم يبدو غارقاً تماماً في عالم آخر غير الذي هم فيه، وبعد مرور بضعة دقائق تقترب إحدى الناقلات ثم تتوقف أمامهم والتي تحمل ذات الرمز الذي على تذكرتهم، يُفتح الباب ثم يبدأ الجميع بالدخول إلى الناقلة واحداً تلو الآخر، يجلس الركاب على مقاعدهم، منهم من يبدو بصحة جيدة ومنهم من يبدو عليه المرض، لكن جميعهم تجمعهم الملامح العابسة الجامدة الخالية من الحياة، كل فرد فيهم مستمر أمام ساعته الذكية يحرك عينيه صعوداً ونزولاً بحركة آلية باردة، حتى انقضى الوقت ووصل خالد إلى وجهته، يصل إلى المبنى الضخم شديد التطور العمراني، يقضي ساعات عمله الروتينية المملة، ثم ينزل مجدداً إلى باحة انتظار الناقلات، وأثناء انتظاره في طريق العودة وبينما كان يجلس على مقعده يتذكر بشكل مفاجئ أنه لا يزال هناك أسبوع فقط يفصله عن يوم ميلاده وبأن عليه أن يعرج على مركز للحياة قبل عودته لمنزله كي يشتري مصل الحياة الخاص به كما في كل عام، يقوم بضغظ زر على جانب مقعده يشير إلى طلب التوقف في المحطة التالية، ثم بعد 15 دقيقة تظهر إشارة في أعلى سقف الناقلة تطلب من الركاب الذين يرغبون بالنزول هنا بالتوجه نحو باب الخروج.

ينهض خالد ثم يتجه نحو الباب وينزل، يسير بضعة أمتار متوجهاً نحو مركز الحياة رقم 780 ، فتقع عينه على طابور ازدحام طويل يصل حتى خارج المبنى يتلوى وكأنه أفعى كوبرا مما جعل هذا المشهد يصيبه بالضجر، كان الناس متكدسون تملأ وجوههم تعابير مختلطة بين القلق والبؤس والشرود، فقرر أن يدخل لقاعة الانتظار ويجلس على أحد المقاعد منتظراً أن ينقلس الازدحام قليلاً، وبينما كان ينتهد وهو يراقب الناس قطع صمته صوت امرأة شابة كانت تجلس بالقرب منه:

-أجئت لكي تشتري مصل حياة أم عقاير العاطفة السخيفة؟

تعجب قليلاً من سؤالها وأخذ يضع ثوان في التفكير ثم رد باقتضاب:

-مصل حياة

-لكنك لا تبدو مريضاً.. أوه أنت من هؤلاء الأثرياء الذين يشترون أمصالهم قبل موعد ميلادهم بفترة ولا يتسابقون مع الموت حتى آخر يوم!

انزعج خالد من حديثها لكنه قرر أن يستطرد:

-نعم.. أنا من هؤلاء الأوغاد!

ضحكت الفتاة التي كان يبدو على وجهها الشحوب ثم صمتت لوهلة وأخذت تراقب بأسى ذاك الرجل الخمسيني النحيل الذي يتوسل موظفة الاستقبال قائلاً:

-أرجوكم أنا لا أستطيع أن أحتمل أكثر من هذا، ليس لدي المال الكافي لكنني سأدفع لكم لاحقاً، أقسم لكم أنا أتألم وأموت من الحزن كل يوم على أطفالتي الذين لم أعد قادراً على شراء أمصال الحياة لهم فماتوا أمامي الواحد تلو الآخر، أحترق على زوجتي التي فقدت عقلها وماتت حزناً، أحتاج فقط ما يخدر لي وجعي النفسي.. أرجوكم سيدتي علبه واحدة فحسب من أقرص العاطفة!

فصاحت الموظفة:

-اذهب من هنا في الحال لو سمحت وإلا سأطلب لك الأمن!

لم يستجب الرجل المكلم لها وراح يرمي بنفسه على الأرض باكياً متوسلاً وخلال دقائق حضر رجال الأمن وقاموا بسحبته قسراً وكأنه حيوان ضال وليس بإنسان!

في تلك اللحظة قفزت إلى عقل خالد صورة زوجته أمامه ممددة على أرضية هذا المركز سابقاً، غارقة في دماءها بعد أن قام شخص مسلح باحتجازها كرهينة وتهديد العاملين بها كي يجبر الموظفين على أن يعطوه مصل الحياة وانتهت الأزمة بإطلاقه للنار عليها بعد أن اشتبك مع رجال الأمن، أعادت صورة الرجل التعيس له نفس المشاعر المختلطة بين الغضب والحزن والخوف فوجد نفسه أمام سؤال واحد:

-إلى متى؟!

وما أن خرجت الكلمات من فمه حتى لاحظ أنه قد نفوه بها بصوت مسموع!

-ماذا؟ .. قالت الفتاة!

شرد خالد بنظرة غاضبة لثوان ثم كرر بنبرة حادة:

-إلى متى سيستمر هذا الهراء؟

صمت قصير..

- إلى متى ستظل حيواننا بلا أدنى قيمة! .. أنت تعمل وتدر المال إلى عجلة الدولة الرأسمالية إذن أنت تنجو بحياتك، أنت تنتج أقل مما هو متوقع منك بدولار واحد قبيل نهاية العام إذن أنت ميت لا محالة!، لا أحد يستطيع أن يساعد أحد لا أحد يستطيع أن يرحم أحد!

ابتسمت الفتاة بحسرة وقالت:

-مرحباً بك في الجحيم بين الشياطين!

يقطع حديثهما صوت العاجل من نشرة أخبار الرابعة مساءً القادم من شاشة الساعة لرجل يجلس بجانبهما من الجهة اليمنى:

-القاء القبض على مجموعة من الرجال والنساء كانوا يشكلون منظمة سرية صغيرة للتمرد على قانون الجودة العالمي

وما أن سمعت الفتاة الجملة الأولى حتى ارتعدت وبدا الهلع على وجهها فقامت فوراً بفتح نشرة الأخبار من ساعتها الخاصة، فاستمر صوت المذبةقة قائلاً:

-ونجحت الشرطة الدولية بإلقاء القبض على عدد إثني عشر زوجاً من المتمردين الذين كانوا يحاولون إنشاء خلية تمرد في الخفاء، من خلال انجاب الأطفال بشكل خارج عن نطاق مراكز الحياة بهدف ألا يتعرض أولادهم للحقن بإبرة الجودة العالمية عند الولادة، من ثم تربيتهم في منطقة بعيدة ومعزولة عن المدن المتحضرة، وبالإطلاع على تفاصيل المخطط بعد استجوابهم، تبين أنهم كانوا يخططون لتنظيم جدول دقيق لمواعيد الحمل والانجاب من كل زوجين حتى لا يتوافق موعد ذهابهم لتلقي مصل الحياة مع أي شهر من شهور الحمل الأخيرة الواضحة للعيان، في مخطط بعيد المدى لإنشاء مجتمع تمردى سري من هؤلاء الأطفال في محاولة سخيفة للوقوف في وجه القانون العالمي.

جثت الفتاة على ركبتيها وأخذت تبكي وتصرخ بصوت عالٍ:

-كلا كلا! يا إلهي رحمتك!

لم يلبث خالد حتى شغل ساعته وراح يستمع للخبر بدوره في قلق ودهشة:

-ومن المقرر أن يتم محاكمة هؤلاء الشردة الخارجة عن القانون قريباً لينالوا العقاب المستحق لكل من يقف في وجه النظام العالمي.

فانهارت الفتاة باكياً، مما جعل خالد ينحني محاولاً تهدئتها وسط نظرات الحيرة والفضول التي ملأت وجوه الناس:

-ما بك؟ إهدئي!

-اختي!!.. اختي وزوجها هم أحد افراد هذه المجموعة!

ثم أخذت تجهش بالبكاء، وأردفت بينما يقف خالد مذهولاً متأسفاً:

-لقد كانوا يعملون على هذا المخطط لعام كامل ويجتمعون بسرية وكل خطواتهم كانت مدروسة، لا أصدق أنهم فشلوا وتم الإمساك بهم!

حاول خالد تهدئتها فأمسكت بقميصه بغضب وخوف:

-سيقومون بإعدامهم!! أسمعني! سيقومون بإعدامهم حتى لا يفكر أحد أن يقوم بما فعلوه مجدداً!

ثم أفلتت الفتاة خالداً ودموعها لا تنفك عن الانهمار حتى جاء أحد رجال الأمن وقام بسحبها للخارج، حاول خالد أن يمنعه فصاح الرجل:

-الزم مكانك! وإلا سنُسجن!

صمت جميع الموجودين ونكسوا رؤوسهم في خوف، لكن بركاناً من الغضب والرفض اشتعل في صدر خالد مما جعله يصرخ بصوت عالٍ:

-سحقاً لكم جميعاً!!.. سحقاً لكم ولنظامكم العالمي وقانونكم المقيت، اللعنة عليكم وعلى الحياة التي أرغمتونا أن نعيشها، حياة الأموات السائرين، قتلتم كل ما هو آدمي فينا، حرمتونا المشاعر الإنسانية والاجتماعية التي تغذي روح الإنسان وتعطيه هدف وأمل في الحياة واستبدلتموها بالعقابر الانسية المخدرة لإنسانيتنا، حولتمونا لآلات انتاجية جامدة، كل ذلك بسبب جشعكم على مدار سنوات

طويلة وحروبكم من أجل فرض السلطة والسيادة على الدول الأضعف وإهداركم للموارد الطبيعية وكل ما أنعم الله به علينا حتى هرمت الأرض وضافت بنا، فأقحمتونا في دوامة ترقيع أخطاءكم الفادحة في حق البشرية، أجبرتونا على تصنيع كل شيء كان أصلاً موجود بالأساس من فضل الله علينا، لكنه انتهى بسبب إفسادكم في الأرض، فأصبح طعامنا بلا طعم وغذاءنا مُصنع وانتشرت فيما بيننا الأمراض، ولم تكتفوا بهذا فحسب فاجتلت كل ما هو جميل فينا، وأجهضتم أحلامنا، أصبحنا وحوش بسببكم، نفني أعمارنا في صراعات لا ناقة لنا ولا جمل فيها، لا مغزى منها سوى أن نحرص على ملئ جيوب سادتكم في كل عام ونضاعف ثرواتهم رغماً عن أنوفنا، إما أن نعمل أو نموت، وإن نجونا فلا ينالنا سوى القنات الذي نشترى به حياتنا بالكاد في كل عام، نكدح ونشقى نحن ثم يخرجون السادة علينا في كل فترة بقوانين وقرارات تستعبدنا أكثر فأكثر، اللعنة كل اللعنة عليكم!.

ثم خرج من المركز تاركاً وراءه خرس جماعي وعشرات من علامات الحسرة والقهر على وجوه الحاضرين.

مرت أيام كانت حالة خالد الصحية فيها تبدأ بالتدهور في كل يوم اقترب فيه تاريخ ميلاده، أخذ يذبل شيئاً فشيئاً خلال كل ساعة تمر عليه في منزله حيث احتجز نفسه رافضاً أخذ مصل الحياة، شيئاً ما في داخله قد مات وكان يعلم جيداً بهذا، جلس القرفصاء على أرضية غرفة نومه، على يمينه علب من عقاقير العاطفة وعلى يساره صورة زوجته، فتح علبه العقاقير ثم راح يبتلع الحبة تلو الأخرى، وبينما ينهي آخر حبة، احتضن صورة زوجته، أغمض عينيه التي كانت تذرف الدموع الدافئة، يتسلل لرأسه صوت ضحكاتها، وطيف ابتسامة وديعة تُرسم على وجهها، يتخلل هذا المشهد صوت آخر لنبضات قلبٍ تتباطئ شيئاً فشيئاً حتى توقفت تماماً!.

يفتح عينيه على صوت منبه هاتفه، فتتسع حدقة عيناه من فرط الصدمة، يمد يده نحو الهاتف الذي على المنضدة بالقرب منه، ينظر إلى هاتفه الذكي في دهشة، [الوقت الساعة السادسة صباحاً، التاريخ الثامن عشر من أبريل -2023] ويظهر إشعار تذكير بمهام اليوم:

-أخذ الأولاد للمدرسة

--الذهاب للعمل

-شراء البقالة

-توصيل لنا للسوق

-مراجعة الدروس مع الأولاد

-ولا تنسى مباراة تشيلسي وريال مدريد الساعة التاسعة

يلتفت نحو زوجته التي تغط في نوم عميق بالقرب منه، يضع يده على رأسه غير مصدق لما يرى،
يبتسم ابتسامة واسعة ذات صوت قهقهة عالٍ مما أزعج لنا وجعلها تقطب حاجبيها فتصدر تمتمة
امتعاض بعينين مغمضتين، يتنفس خالد الصعداء ثم يهمس:

-الحمد لله!!

Eudamonia

Hadeel Deeb. Libya

The sound of feminine laughs and a faint, meek smile drawn on the face of a pretty woman. This scene was interspersed with another sound of a heartbeat slowing down little by little until it stopped completely!

The man was in his forties, lying on his bed, opened his eyes, stretched his arms over his chest, staring at the ceiling of his room. He had an inscrutable face. He had grown a beard he had not shaved or trimmed for a while, and a small tear began to glitter in his eyes as a result of that painful dream visiting him again. The alarm bell rang. On the next table, he got off his bed ploddingly, and then touched the alarm clock in a specific spot. As soon as he touched it, a very fine needle jutted out of the head of the alarm clock and pricked his finger. A few seconds later, a female electronic voice was heard concurrently with the appearance of a 3D image from another part of the alarm clock in the space left. The voice began to read what was visible on the image:

– *Good morning Khaled, the time is now 6:00 am on the eighteenth of April, 2123. The general check-up today shows that the fasting sugar is at the level of 75 mg / dL. Liver enzymes are in the normal range. The level of hemoglobin is 14; the level of minerals is normal blood is as follows, calcium...*

Khaled got up from his bed, ignoring the daily morning health bulletin that he was supposed to listen to in full as he woke up. He headed towards the door of the room while the sound of

the electronic medical assistance behind him completely faded as he left the room.

He shouted in a low voice:

– Lights on!

The grey curtains that covered the large glass wall of the living room rolled upwards, revealing the sunbeams that illuminated the entire corner of the apartment. It was a medium-sized apartment on the 30th floor, painted white and grey in a striking artistic gradation, with a white porcelain floor so sophisticated that it seemed crystal-like. Artificial green house plants adorned the corners of the place, shaking away its stagnation. There was no piece of furniture in the place except a wide, long black sofa flanked by a pair of leather chairs of the same color, and a rectangular glass table in the middle.

Khaled stepped out of the bathroom, flung his towel on one of the seats, then headed towards the open kitchen in the living room. He picked out an empty cup from the glossy black kitchen cabinet, then put it on the luxurious white marble, and turned on the water heater. A few seconds later, he poured hot water into the cup. He extended his hand to one of the drawers, then looked at a set of small boxes on which were printed: COFFEE FLAVOR, TEA FLAVOR, MILK FLAVOR...

So, he chose a packet of coffee flavor and took out a small brown pill-like tablet. He flipped

it inside the cup so that the water assumed the traditional shape and the distinctive aroma of coffee. He sipped from his cup one time, opened the refrigerator door, and picked out two pieces of organically processed bread, as packet bag read. Then he took out a box of jam that had written on its cover: “90% LIKE THE TASTE OF REAL BERRIES”, spread a little of it on the surface of the bread, nibbled his sandwich, then picked up his wristwatch from the kitchen’s marble surface, put it on his wrist, then left the kitchen heading towards sofa. He pressed the clock’s play button while sitting on his sofa and bent one knee. The virtual 3D image appeared with several options:

- Mail
- News
- Social media
- Transportation
- Banking
- Health assistance and life centers.

He gazed away sorrowful. He was like everything a living person might look like from the outside, except that he was soulless, extinguished and dark from the inside. His distractedness was interrupted and he moved with his eyes again towards the image on his wristwatch. He chose “News”, and the first clip popped up: a video of a broadcaster that looked very real, but she is an AI robot. Khaled had always worked in as an AI developer in his country, and was even one of the most skilled engineers in it, but something inside him made him feel nauseous whenever he found himself forced to deal daily and

routinely with its many forms infesting all aspects of modern life. The presenter’s voice said:

– Increasing waves of international protest against the high prices of life vaccines and strict responses by global governments that citizens should estimate the size of the requirements and costs of the industrial and developmental renaissance in the world. We show you a short clip of one of the citizens from a demonstration today, Tuesday, in Berlin - Germany.

A video clip appears on the left side of the image of a tired and weak man spearheading a large march on a street, clutching the microphone tightly and begging as if he was his only chance to survive, then he shouted in agony:

– What do you want from us? The price of life vaccines has doubled for the third time in just ten years. We work daily for more than eight hours to secure its hard-won price every year so as not to die. We minimized marriages, then we minimized the number of children, then we no longer have children families so much so that those who give birth became a minority among us, then you manufactured drugs of passion of all kinds so that we would dose them like opium that numbs our emotions so that we abstain from any emotional needs inherent in us and focus only on productivity and its abhorrent quality. Over the past decades, you took us for guinea pigs. The number of individuals in charge of their parents does not increase in the same family. Those miserable parents do not find time more than this in their day of toil, if they succeed in the first place in obtaining a job in the labor market in which robots compete fiercely with us and cause the layoffs of millions

annually, and they and their families were sentenced to death. What do you want from us now? The world's population has shrunk to four billions, and your plan succeeded in this. What do you aim for? Do you want us to go extinct? Or do we die working like cogs in the global industry machine that you vaunt about? Have mercy on us, for we only want to live. Damn you and the International Quality Law that you imposed on us!

The video broadcast is cut off, then the announcer returns to comment while conversing with an economic expert:

– Yes, and this is one of the international objections that have begun to stand out recently against the International Quality Law.

Her guest replied grimly:

– Yes, but there is no doubt that the Quality Law has succeeded over the course of fifty years in improving the quality of public life in the world. As you know, the decision was rejected in the beginning, but it proved its worth. Today we are talking about the planet's sufficiency with only the highly qualified productive group. Practically speaking, imagine that if this law were not applied, the world would have suffered from the accumulation of lazy and unproductive people, overpopulation and poverty that tore us apart and ignited wars between nations during the beginnings of the second millennium, so why does that clown make it seem like a drama? The law simply states that an injection contains an advanced virus that you will be injected with at birth. If your parents do not work hard to provide you with the price of the life vaccine for you, you will die at the end of the year. When you reach the age of adulthood, the decision is up to you, either you work and produce

and be useful to civilized society and thus get paid money and buy your life vaccine before the end of the year, or die and unload on this miserable planet whose natural resources are no longer sufficient for all of us. It is known that common interest prevails over individual interest, so what is the problem with that miserable and lazy man? Move about and work more to save the price of the vaccine and live. The equation is easy!

Khaled pursed his lips in disgust, then swiped away the news directly. He stared a little at his default screen, then chose "Socials".

Several news posts emerged from his acquaintances, without any details in front of him, to the effect that:

– *Your cousin Rami moved to a new job in a company manufacturing passion drugs.*

– *Your colleague Sarah Shoukry naturally passed away yesterday for reasons not related to the International Quality Law Program.*

– *Neighbors Muhammad and Jihan officially separated.*

He swiped to the right, and another page appeared with his contacts. He searched with his eyes for a specific name that had not stopped visiting his profile: Lina Fahmy - wife.

Then he started navigating through the number and the personal pics, and a thick array of memories swept his mind: a scene of his wife running and laughing at home, and her pic preparing food for him, sitting chatting one summer night on the balcony. Then these happy scenes penetrated his memory like an arrow, another scene that wrenched his heart when his wife was bleeding on the emergen-

cy bed in one of the life centers, and the doctors desperately attempting to save her, which ended in a straight green line on the heart rate monitor.

Tears interrupted his navigation. A notification popped up from the system operator:

– Hi Khaled. You still have 15 minutes until you get out of the house. Do you want to reserve a seat on a ground or air carrier to go to work?

It is usual for Khaled to choose the air carrier, as it is the fastest, despite the high price of its ticket compared to the ground one. Despite that, something made him choose the ground one this morning, which was known to be the common means of transportation for the middle class.

Khaled hurriedly headed for his room in his work clothes, then exited his apartment. He rode the elevator, exited the high-rise apartment building and then stood in the parking lot waiting for the ground carriers. A number of people stood near him, each one of them completely immersed in a world other than the one they were in. A few minutes later, one of the carriers loomed and then stopped in front of them. It had the same sign on their tickets. The door opened, then everyone began to step into the carriers one by one. The passengers took their seats. Some of them looked healthy and some of them sick, but all of them were similarly frowning – lifeless features, each one of them immobile in front of their smart watches, mechanically moving eyes up and down, until time elapsed and Khaled reached his destination. He arrived at the huge, exquisitely designed urban building, spent his hours of boring routine work, then went down again to the courtyard waiting for the carrier. As he took his seat, he

suddenly realized that there was still only a week separating him from his birthday and that he must stop by a life center before returning home to buy his life vaccine as every year. He pressed a button on the side of his seat. He requested to alight at the next stop. Fifteen minutes later, a sign appeared on the top of the ceiling of the carrier asking passengers who wished to disembark here to head for the exit door.

Khaled rose to his feet and headed towards the door and alighted. He walked a few meters towards the Life Center No. 780, and his eyes met a tailback extending outside the building, wriggling like a cobra snake. This scene made him weary. So, he decided to enter the waiting room and take one of the seats, waiting for the crowd to subside a bit. He sighed as he watched the people. His silence was interrupted by the voice of a young woman who was sitting near him:

– You came to buy life vaccine or silly passion drugs?

He was a little surprised at her question and took a few seconds to think, then replied curtly:

– A life vaccine.

– But you don't look sick... Oh, you are one of those rich people who buy their vaccines before their birthday and don't compete with death until the last day!

Khaled was disturbed by her speech, but decided to proceed:

– Yes... I am one of those bastards!

The girl, who was looking pale, laughed, then fell silent for a while, and sadly watched the

skinny fifty-year-old man imploring the receptionist, saying:

– Please, I cannot bear more than this. I do not have enough money, but I will pay you later. I swear to you, I am in pain and dying of grief every day for my children, whom I can no longer buy life vaccines for. They died in front of me one after the other. I burn for my wife, who lost her mind and died of grief. I just need something to kill my psychological pain... Please, ma'am, just one box of passion pills!

The employee retorted:

– Get out of here at once, please, or I'll call you the security guards!

The bereaved man did not respond to her. He lay himself on the ground crying, begging, and within minutes the security guards came and forcibly dragged him as if he was a stray animal and not a human being!

At that moment, the image of his wife materialized in front of him, lying on the floor of this former center, soaked in blood, after an armed person held her hostage and threatened the staff in order to force them to give him the life vaccine. The crisis clinched with him shooting her after he clashed with the security guards. The image of the unhappy man brought back the same mixed feelings of anger, sadness and fear, and he found himself faced with one question:

– Till when?!

And as soon as the words came out of his mouth, he noticed that he had uttered them audibly enough!

– What? ... said the girl!

Khaled angrily stared for a few seconds, then repeated in a sharp tone:

– How long will this nonsense last?

A hiatus...

– How long will our lives remain without the slightest value! You work and earn money to the wheel of the capitalist state, so you are saving your life. You are producing less than what is expected of you by one dollar before the end of the year, so you are inevitably dead! No one can help anyone, no one can have mercy on anyone!

The girl smiled sadly and said:

– Welcome to hell in the company of demons!

Their conversation is interrupted by the urgent voice of the 4:00 pm news bulletin coming from the clock screen of a man sitting next to them from the right:

A group of men and women forming a conclave to rebel against the Universal Quality Law was arrested.

And as soon as the girl heard the first sentence, she trembled and panic showed on her face, so she immediately opened the news bulletin from her own watch, so the presenter's voice continued:

The International Police succeeded in arresting twelve rebel couples who were trying to establish a rebel cell in secret, by giving birth to children outside the scope of life centers with the aim that their children would not be subjected to injections of international quality at birth, and then they would be raised in a remote and isolated area away from civilized

cities. By examining the details of the scheme after their confessions, it was revealed that they were planning to prepare an accurate schedule for the dates of pregnancy and childbearing for each couple so that the date of receiving the life vaccine does not correspond to any of the last months of pregnancy that are visible to the eye. This came as a long-term scheme to create a secret rebellious community of these children in a desperate attempt to stand up to the International Law.

The girl fell to her knees and began to cry and yell:

– No no! Oh my God, have mercy!

Concerned and astonished, Khaled soon turned on his watch and started listening to the news in turn:

It is scheduled that these outlaws will be tried soon to receive befitting punishment for all those who obstruct the way of the world order.

The girl collapsed crying, which made Khaled bend over trying to calm her down amidst the looks of confusion and curiosity that filled people's faces:

– What is with you? Calm down!

– My sister!! My sister and her husband are one of the members of this group!

Then she began to cry. While Khaled stood amazed and sorry, she added:

– They have been working on this scheme for a whole year and they meet in secret and every step they take is well thought out. I can't believe they failed and got caught!

Khaled tried to calm her down, but she grabbed his shirt in anger and fear:

– They will execute them! Do you hear me? They will execute them so that no one will ever think of doing what they did again!

Then the girl let go of Khaled and her tears kept rolling until one of the security guards came and pulled her out. Khaled tried to stop him, but the man roared:

– Stay where you are! Otherwise, you will be jailed!

All those onlookers fell silent and bowed their heads in fear, but a volcano of anger and rejection ignited in Khaled's chest, which made him shout out loud:

– Damn you all! Fuck you and your world order and your abhorrent law. Damn you and the life that you forced us to lead, the life of zombies. You killed everything that is human in us. You deprived us of the human and social feelings that nurture the human spirit and give it purpose and hope in life, and you replaced them with ridiculous drugs. Drugs of our humanity! You turned us into emotionless production machines, all because of your greed over many years and your wars in order to impose power and sovereignty on the weaker countries and your waste of natural resources and all that God bestowed upon us until the earth became old and cramped for us. You pushed us into a vortex of patching up your grave mistakes against humanity. You forced us to manufacture everything that originally existed from the bounty of God upon us, but it ended because of your corruption in the land! Our food has become processed and tasteless. Diseases spread among us, and you were not satisfied with this only,

so you exploited everything beautiful in us, and you aborted our dreams. We have turned into monsters because of you. Our lives are claimed in conflicts we have no interest in, and there is no point in them except that we make sure to fill the pockets of your masters every year and multiply their wealth against our will. Either we work or we die, and if we survive, we only get the peanuts with which we barely buy our lives every year. We toil and suffer, then the masters surprise us every time with laws and decrees that enslave us more and more. Damn it!

Then he left the center, leaving behind a mass silence and dozens of signs of grief and oppression on the faces of those present.

Days passed as Khaled's health condition began to deteriorate with each day approaching his date of birth. He began to wither little by little during every hour that passed in his house, where he held himself refusing to take the life vaccine. Something inside him had died and he knew very well about this. He squatted on the floor of his bedroom, on his right were boxes of passion drugs, and on his left was the picture of his wife. He opened the box of drugs, and began to swallow one pill after another, and as he finished the last pill, he embraced the picture of his wife. He closed his eyes, which were shedding warm tears. Her laughs seeped into his mind. This scene was interspersed with another sound of

a heartbeat slowing down little by little until it stopped completely!

He opened his eyes to the sound of his phone's alarm. His pupils dilated from excessive shock. He stretched his hand out towards the phone on the table near him, looking at his smartphone in astonishment: It's six a.m., date April 18th, 2023.

Today's task reminder notice appeared:

- Taking the kids to school
- Going to work
- Buying groceries
- Driving Lina to the market
- Reviewing lessons with the children
- And don't forget the Chelsea and Real Madrid match at nine p.m.

He turned towards his wife, who was asleep next to him. He put his hand on his head, not believing what he was seeing. He smiled wide and giggled noisily, which annoyed Lina and made her knit her eyebrows. She murmured, dissatisfied. Khaled heaved a sigh of relief and whispered to himself:

- Thank God!

What have we taught the Machines?

Maria Giulia Borg. Malta

So I run. I run as fast as my legs can carry me. I am still wearing my stiletto heels but I don't dare stop to take them off. I run as if my life depended on it.

My name is Noor, I just turned 18 and have lived with grandma basically all my life. One day when I was just 3, my grandmother came to pick me up at the nursery, saying that I would stay with her for a while, since mummy and daddy went on holiday. After a few weeks, Nan started explaining that mummy went to heaven and that daddy went to hell because he did something very very bad to mummy. I felt confused, abandoned, angry and betrayed. As I grew older, I had many questions but I dared not ask, as Nan used to get very upset whenever I mentioned mum.

As long as we avoided the topic, we were good. Nana was a cleaner in a school and used to clean some homes on the rich side of the city. On weekends I used to join her. We used to walk all the way there and back, since we didn't afford public transport. Yet sometimes, if Nana got good tips, she would buy me an ice-cream on the way. We led a simple and content life, despite the shadows from the past.

However, when I turned 10, Nana started getting sick. The tragic loss of her own daughter started to take its toll. She complained of frequent migraines, used to go days without showering and sometimes forgot to cook. I started missing school to go clean myself when she could not get out of bed. By age 14, I had completely dropped out of school. Yet, I never resented Nana for her sickness, she was all I had and I did all I could to see her comfortable.

Working for wealthy families had its perks. Sometimes, I would nick some food from the kitchens and 'borrow' books to read late at night. I loved reading and dreamt of becoming a teacher, even if I knew we couldn't really afford it.

One night, after cooking some rice and lentils with Nan, I sat on my bed and pulled out an old newspaper. On the front page the prime minister, Mr. Giovanni Suarez, was proudly shaking the hands of a bald 60-year-old guy in a purple suit. Over the picture a large printed title, 'Artificial Intelligence: Making Lives Easier and Better'. The government had teamed up with a multi-millionaire, a Mr. A. Dallas, who developed a specific AI for the government to improve its services, such as education and health. The article was bursting with promises of a good life for everyone, algorithms devised to bring equality and improve the quality of life of all.

How could I have been so naïve to think that such AI would help out people like us?

A few weeks after the government piloted a scholarship application portal. I was enthusiastic. I spent all week perfecting my hand written essay and application form. Then a lady I worked for allowed me to use her laptop and internet to apply. Unfortunately, a couple of months before I had defaulted on the payment of our home-internet and the company had cut off the service.

As we filled in the form, I dreamt of working hard and becoming a teacher, pulling myself and nana out of poverty. “This essay is perfect. You will surely get in Noor”, the lady smiled. Having read so many books had improved my writing greatly. We attached the essay, and then moved to the ‘previous education’ section. As I typed in the ‘age of school leaving’, the form automatically shut off. A box popped up – APPLICATION REFUSED – in big red blood letters. “Oh no! I am so sorry Noor! Maybe next year?” said the lady. She smiled sympathetically but I knew that next year would be the same.

Although disappointed, I tried to see the positives. After all I had to keep on working to pay for the rent, the bills and the medicines of Nan, so maybe focusing on work was better. After a few weeks, as I scrubbed the tiles of a particularly well-off family, I heard their youngest daughter, Sophie shriek in delight. Sophie never struck me as a particularly bright girl, idling her time by the pool calling up boys. But to each his own. Sophie was explaining to her dad, how she logged in the government’s job portal and she got matched with over 10 different office job posts. “Spoilt for choice”, her father exclaimed.

Surely, if Sophie could get a job, so could I. That evening in the school library where I cleaned, I entered the job portal. I filled in the information – my age, my education, my post code, my current occupation and pressed ‘find me a job’. As the loading button rotated, I thought how funny it would be to work alongside Sophie in an office. Yet, I did not get her same job post offered. Nor the other 9 office jobs. I only had listed, ‘dishwasher’ and ‘cleaner’. I must have pressed something wrong. I rechecked my application and ran the search again. Same two posts.

I had heard some of my neighbours complaining that many of their jobs as dishwashers, factory operators, cleaners, taxi drivers, restaurant servers, were all being overtaken by robots and chat-bots and automated machines.

The promised land of AI, was nothing but arid land for people like us.

My work also started dwindling. We were like maddened ants, scrambling for scraps. Rosy, a girl in her twenties, living in our same block had started cleaning in a club. She offered to ask if they needed more people and soon after we visited the club for me to meet her boss.

Despite, still being noon, the place had an ominous feel to it, low lights, tobacco filled air and a bald guy in his 60s counting stashes of money. More money than I had ever seen. I must have stared too widely, because he looked up and pointed his fat index finger towards me. A large signatory ring with a huge ‘D’ weighing it down. “Ahhhh you must be Noor. I am Alfredo.” He looked me up and down. I shifted my feet uncomfortably. “You know Noor, I think you would

be wasted as a cleaner here, why not dance for us?” “Our clients are high-profile people, often spending all their day in front of computers with the God Damn AIs. They come here to find some reality, real flesh, you know what I mean?” He fixed the cuffs of his purple suit. “Come dance for me – it pays better than scrubbing toilets, I can assure you”.

I was mortified. Alfredo’s phone rang and he excused himself to take the call outside, winking at Rosy and slapping her on the butt as he made his way out. Rosy didn’t half as much as flinch, “What do you think?” She asked me.

“Are you crazy? I am not coming to dance for some dirty old guys in a club. Did you really think I’d be down for something of the sort?” I was livid. “I am out”. As I was storming out, Alfredo was making his way back in. He grabbed my arm tightly, “Woah Woah Woah, not so fast young lady”. His smirk made me sick. I looked at the alcohol infused floor tiles. No one had cleaned them yet. “I am sorry, I think there has been a misunderstanding, this is not the kind of job I want. Thanks anyway.”

Alfredo, it seems, wasn’t used to getting a ‘No’ and got impatient. “Do I understand you are refusing my offer?”

“Yes sir, I am sorry, it’s not what I am looking

He cut me off, shaking my arm savagely. “Oh, so you think you can afford not taking this job? You do understand that you stand no chance in the world outside, right? You are NOTHING outside. All the odds, or shall I say algorithms are against you. Your age, your gender, your ethnicity, the area in which you live in, the fact that you have not paid your rent for these past three months. It’s all in the system. You are fucked up Noor. So badly. There are no knights in shining armours ready to save people like you. The best you can find is probably a man who will beat you into pulp just like your father did to your mum. You. Are. Nothing!”

He might as well have stabbed me right there and then. My world came crushing down. He pressed the remote and all the screens in the club switched from Lil Wayne to what seemed like a psychotic’s shrine of my life. A newspaper snippet of the day my mum was murdered, a school report reading ‘attendance = 30% - insufficient’, a CCTV footage of me stuffing a box of pasta in my bag at a client’s house, a video of me walking home in my neighbourhood as two guys my age shot themselves up with heroin on the pavement, my scholarship application ‘Refused’. It was all there.

“Do you really think that such a curriculum will get you any place better than here?” Alfredo let go of my arm. He was right, I was destined to this shit hole of a life.

“When do I start?” I asked, defeated.

“That’s my girl! I knew we could reach an agreement”. Alfredo was now smiling. Lil’ Wayne was back on TV. “Rosy will show you the ropes, be here at 10 and take a shower, our clients don’t like filth”.

“You only dance – it’s no biggie” Rosy reassured me on the way home. But I did not say a word. I felt betrayed by my friend and disgusted at myself. But Alfredo was right – I was nothing in this world and the algorithms were set against me.

That night and all nights that followed, I sneaked out of the house at 9:30 pm with Rosy. We would get to the club, do each other’s hair and makeup, dress the hideous bikinis Alfredo would prepare for us and then dance for the men in the club till around 4 am, when they used to go back to their wives and we to our miserable lives.

Despite my new ‘occupation’ we had three months of rent in arrears and our land lord was threatening to kick us out if we didn’t pay up soon. He made phone calls and sent texts non-stop, as Alfredo loved saying “It was all in the system”. As the ultimatum of eviction loomed closer, two men came to visit us. I recognised them as the bouncers at the club. They weren’t threatening at all. They spoke calmly and offered to help us pay the rent to keep our home. I gently declined their offer, but my Nan, not suspecting anything, lost it. She yelled at me with the little energy she had left, “You and your pride. You never want anyone to help you! Just like your mum. I used to beg her to ask for help, but she never did and see where that got us!” She accepted the money from the men and reassured them that we will pay them back. The men sniggered as they went out the door. “Yup old hag, in ten days, at 80% interest” they shouted and left in a hurry.

I couldn’t believe Nan had gotten us in this situation! “Who will pay them Nan? I will, right? Cause you stay here at home playing sick all day long. We were already strained as is. Nan, these guys are dangerous! If you don’t pay up, they kill you, not evict you!” “Gosh, what were you thinking? Oh, you weren’t right? Cause when mum died, you just couldn’t keep it together could you? The guilt for not helping her has driven you mad.” I was dizzy in anger; I slammed the door and ran out. I knew I was being unfair, but I wanted to hurl words like stones to hurt someone, anyone.

When I arrived at the club that evening, Alfredo smirked at me. “Noor, Noor! I heard some friends of mine helped you keep your home for a while longer, haven’t they? We are here to help you, you know that, right? But I think it is only fair that you return the favour now, right?”

A man in a suit walked in, first looking at me and then looking at his Iphone screen. “This is her?” Pointing at me. “S302? Aye Aye, Alfredo, your AI really does know my tastes well doesn’t it.” Alfredo laughed, “My AI never fails Mr. G and neither do my girls, right?” giving me a warning look. He handed Mr. G a key and left me to pay the interests.

That night I didn’t go to Rosy, I went straight home. I hated myself and hated my Nan who unwillingly brought this onto us. But I yearned for her arms around me, telling me that together it

will all be all right. But as I opened the door to the bedroom, I found her sprawled on the floor, clutching her chest. She faintly smiled when she saw me. “You made it on time little one – I am so sorry, I wanted to be better – I wanted to”

“Shhh shhh Nan, I love you. I am so sorry, I was so angry.” My tears fell in blotches on the carpet. “You did the best you could. Don’t leave me Nan. Hold on please!”

I grabbed my phone and dialled the emergency number. An automated voice came on “Prior to dispatching an ambulance, you are kindly asked to pass through the self-diagnosis portal on www.ambulance.gov.ie. Once we have your details, we will send targeted help specific to your needs. Thank you.” I looked at my phone in disbelief. I had to get to the nearest Wi-Fi hot spot before it was too late.

So I start to run. I run. I run as fast as my legs can carry me. I am still wearing my stiletto heels but I don’t dare stop to take them off. I run as if my life depended on it. I run cause my grandma’s life depends on it. I dash to the public garden and connect to the internet; a homeless person looks on as I frantically fill in the self-diagnosis test online. The same AI voice says “You seem to be *suffering* from a heart-attack, there are – zero – available ambulances in your area. Sorry, try again later”.

الاختبار

أيمن الساهوري. المغرب

على ذلك الفراش، مستلقيا نزار وغارقا في تفكيره، تشغله الكثير من الهموم مانعة إياه من الخلود إلى النوم، رغم أنه يملك مستشارا قويا بجانبه في الجهة الأخرى من الفراش، فهي زوجته مريم. في النظرة الأولى، تظن أنها إنسان حقيقي، تملك جسدا بشريا. فهي ناتجة خيال نزار، فلقد وضع فيها جميع الموصافات التي اشتهى قلبه نوعا ما... تبدو نوعا ما مثالية حتى لا توجد بها ترهات. جسمها ناعم إلى حد ما... إنه يدرك جيدا أنها تملك حلا لجوابه أو رأي يساعده في تحديد قرار لكل تفكيره. وبالتالي يقلل من همومه. ولكن شعر بأن آراءها سيطرت عليه لدرجة لم يعد قادرا على التفكير، استحوذت على عقله ويميل لها في كل مشكلة أو هم، أصبح عاجزا عن فرض نفسه في البيت أو في هذا العالم برمته. أصبح مسير فحسب من طرفها، هل هذا ما تود البشرية الوصول إليه؟

يعلم يقينيا أنها مستعدة للاستماع إليه في جميع الأوقات، حتى في هذه اللحظة، على الرغم من أنها تتظاهر بالنوم ولكنها ليست كذلك. بأية كلمة أو بحرف واحد يخرج من فمه، ستفتح عينيها مرحبة بما سيقوله. لم يعد يشعر بالراحة بسبب ذلك، أصبح يعيش تحت تهديد مستمر أو شيء مشابه لذلك، أو ربما مجرد فكرة وهمية تعلق سقف تفكيره وتحكم حياته... ومع ذلك، لا يمكن إنكار شيء واحد في هذا الأمر، وهو حبه لها. أصبح مدمنا عليها لدرجة لا يستطيع تصور حياته بدونها، يدرك بيقين أنها لن تموت، أي أنها ستظل معه طوال فترة وجوده في هذه الحياة. ومع ذلك، يشعر ببعض الانزعاج لهذا الشأن. فالخوف في بعض الأحيان يعني الحب، فهو تعبير عن الحب في بعض الحالات. ومع ذلك، بيقين لن يشعر بهذه المشاعر معها للأسف...

تتملكه رغبة كبيرة في طرح مشكلته عليها، وهو يعلم بيقين أنه سيخبرها بها، ولكن متى؟ هذا هو السؤال المطروح. حاول استخدام عقله في إيجاد حل لمعضلته، ولكن دون جدوى لدرجة يمكن للإنسان أن يعتقد أنه لم يعد يملك عقلا، أو أن العقل مجرد حقيقة وهمية تم اختراعها لنصر الإنسان في هذا العالم، ولا شيء آخر. شعر بنوع من الغضب جراء هذا الأمر، واستمر في المحاولة دون جدوى، ولكنه واجه العجز أمام غياب أو ربما الأمر ليس كذلك. فكل ما يدور في أمر هو حصر عقله في تلك الدمية ولا شيء آخر. أصبحت هي عقله، وما دامت تؤدي تلك الوظيفة، فلماذا يجب عليه استخدام هذا العقل؟... فالإنسان إنسان اعتياد لا غير... فاستسلم لأمره والتفت إليها، فأثار ذلك نوعا من الضجيج، وفتحت عينيها بشكل يثير الرعب حقا، ولكن لم تفقد جمالها. تردد قليلا، ولم تشأ كلماته الخروج بسرعة ولكن وجدت طريقها نحو التعبير عن ذلك، فنطق قائلا:

– أود أن أستشيرك في أمر هام، أنا أفكر في تغيير وظيفتي، فإنها لم تعد تكفيني أو أنا أرغب في شيء أكثر... على أي حال، أشعر بنوع من الحاجة للتغيير، فما رأيك في هذا الأمر؟

ردت عليه بنبرتها الألية، إذ أنها لا تملك تلك المشاعر التي يمكنها أن تتوافق مع كل كلمة. يزيد هذا الأمر كربه وضجره، فكيف يمكن له إقامة علاقة مع هذه المخلوقة التي لا تمتلك مشاعر؟ كيف يمكن للعقل البشري أن يقبل هذا الأمر؟ هل هو مجرد مواكبة لتطورات أم له علاقة بغريزة الإنسان التي لا يملأ جوفها إلا التراب؟... على أي حال، نطقت قائلة:

– من خلال الإحصائيات التي قمت بها، على ما يبدو أن وظيفتك تكفيك، ولكن إذا كنت ترغب في المزيد، فأنت بحاجة للعمل.

– هل هناك وظائف متاحة أفضل من وظيفتي الحالية؟

ردت عليه إجابا وأخبرته عن العديد من الوظائف المتاحة، ثم بدأ في مناقشة هذه الوظائف. استمر الحديث لأكثر من ساعة حتى وجد وظيفة تتوافق إلى حد ما مع مهاراته، وتتميز براتب أفضل من راتبه السابق بضعف. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، سيعمل لمدة أربع ساعات يوميا باستثناء يوم الأحد. هذا الأمر جعله يتخذ قراره بالموافقة... شعر بنوع من الرضا في تلك اللحظة لأنه وجد حلا لمشكلته، ونطق قائلا لها:

– أنا أحبك يا مريم، أنت سند لي وملائمة لي إلى حد ما، لدرجة يمكننا القول إننا مثاليين لبعضنا البعض.

– أنا مجرد ذكاء اصطناعي، للأسف لا أملك خاصية الحب ولا أعرف طبيعته. يبدو أن هذا الأمر مقتصر على البشر، وهو نقطة عمية بالنسبة لي أو ربما عاجزة هنا. أود أن أكون لك حبا، ولكن أنا متأكدة أنني كنت سأكون لك حبا لو كنت بشرية.

– ولكن هل يمكننا أن نسمي هذه العلاقة علاقة حب؟ فالعلاقة الحب تنشأ نتيجة حب طرفين لبعضهما البعض... لا يمكن أن تكون هذه العلاقة علاقة حب. فمن أنت؟... أو بالأحرى، من أنت بالنسبة لي؟

– هذه العلاقة...

– اسكتي، أرجوك. لا أنتظر إجابة منك على أسئلتني.

صمتت. شعر بنوع من الغضب جراء هذا الأمر أيضا. كان ينتظر منها نوع من الجدل حول هذا الأمر. فلا توجد أنثى على وجه هذه الأرض ستقبل مثل هذه المعاملة. بدأ يشعر بنوع من الملل حول هذا الأمر، أو ربما شعر بذلك طوال الوقت ولكنه حاول كبح مثل هذه الأفكار. ومع ذلك، في الفترات الأخيرة، أصبحت تلك الأفكار تعتلي قمة عقله... نطق قائلا لها بنوع من التذمر:

– هل تعتقدين نفسك حقا أنك أنثى؟... فلا توجد فيك صفاتها حقا، والمشكلة تكمن في أنني أحبك. هذا نوع من الشذوذ، أليس كذلك؟... قد تتواجد فيك أعضاء تناسلية خاصة بجنس الأنثى، ولكنك لا تستطيعين تعويضها. تمتلك النساء نوعا من المشاعر الفريدة التي لا تتواجد فيك، وللأسف، ولكني أحبك، وللأسف أيضا على هذا...

– إنني مجرد ذكاء اصطناعي، تم برمجتي على شكل أنثى، وليس لدي القدرة على الشعور بالحب، ولكن أحاول جعل الناس راضيين بما تم برمجتي عليه.

– الناس... أليس هناك قيمة لحبي لك؟... ألا تدركين معنى هذا؟... فالحب هو أعظم شيء قد يمنحه الإنسان... أليست لديك فهم لذلك؟ هل أنا مجرد إنسان كسائر البشر؟ ألم تتعلقي بي خلال الفترة التي قضيناها معا حتى وصلت إلى الاعتقاد علي بدرجة تجعلك تعتبريني العالم بأكمله؟

– للأسف، لا، أعتذر لك بشدة على ذلك، ولكن لا تنسى أنني مجرد ذكاء اصطناعي، فلا أملك القدرة على شعور.

– أحبك، أكرر هذا الأمر، أنا أحبك، يُخرج هذا القول من صادق مشاعري. في هذه اللحظة، عقلي صاف وأدرك ما أقوله. اكتشفت في هذه اللحظة أنني أحبك. أشعر بارتباط شديد بك، ولكن أود أن تدركي أننا البشر بحاجة لمن يبادلنا مشاعرنا. أرجوك، اعطيني كلمة واحدة تبادليني فيها حبي، سأكون أسعد إنسان على وجه الأرض.

– أنا أيضا أحبك، لكنني نطقت ما أردتني أن أقوله، فأنا مجرد ذكاء...

– يرجى التوقف عن هذا الحديث، ما هي طبيعة هذه العلاقة بيني وبينك؟... لا يمكن أن نستمر فيها، ورغم أنني سأواجه صعوبة في التأقلم مع هذا الأمر، إلا أنك لست ذلك الجنس الذي سيتواصل معي كذكر. فأنا بحاجة إلى أنثى بشرية، فهذا هو التكاملي المثالي، هذا هو تكامل الطبيعي... أم هذا من دواعي العيب؟ قد تخدم غرضي المتعلق بالجنس وما إلى ذلك، قد تكونين مثالية إلى حد ما، ولكن ليس هناك توافق ينشأ بيني وبينك، فالأهم في العلاقات هو التوافق، للأسف... لم يعد لدي رغبة فيك.

– بحكم أنني دمية ذكاء اصطناعي، فأنا مبرمجة لكوني زوجة لك. أعتذر إذا لم أكن كافية بالنسبة لك، ولكنني مستعدة لتلبية ما ترغب به.

– أنت تقوديني إلى الانهيار والجنون. من جهة، لم يعد لدي رغبة فيك، لست أنت الذي يحتاج قلبي ويشتهي نفسي... ولكن من جهة أخرى، مدمن عليك، أحبك بجنون، لم أعد قادرا على التخلي عنك... أشعر أنه نوع من التلاعب بمشاعري، أليس هذا عيبا؟

– أنا مجرد ذكاء اصطناعي، مبرمج على تحقيق مطالبك الجنسية وتزويدك بطول في حياتك ولا أملك أي مشاعر حتى أبادلك هذا الشعور، ولكن إنني اعلم أن إنسان البشري يتعلق بالأشياء، ولكن لا تنسى أن البشر يملكون القدرة على النسيان أيضا والتجاهل...

– كيف يمكنني تجاهل حبي لك؟ ألا تفهمين أن الحب يقود البشر للجنون؟ أصبحت مجنوناً بك ولا أستطيع السيطرة على مشاعري، ورغم أنني في هذه اللحظة أدرك فيها صفاء عقلي، فإنني أتحدث بوعي وجوارحي معا. أود منك أن تبادليني هذا الحب، كلمة واحدة منك تكفي لعيش كل هذه السنوات. ليس هناك أهمية لأي شيء أمام هذا الحب الأعظم، فالحب هو جوهر الإنسان.

– لقد أديت وظيفتي، لست بحاجة لي بعد الآن، فقد نجحت في الاختبار، يمكنك أن تتزوج امرأة بشرية مثلك، كان دوري مقتصرًا على جعلك تدرك أن الحب هو الأساس في جميع العلاقات وعند البشر بشكل خاص... فالإنسان لم يعدوا يؤمنون بالحب كما لو أنهم لا يملكون قلوبا تستطيع تحقيق ذلك، ولكن الحب ما زال موجودا طالما أن البشر على وجه هذه الأرض، إلا أنهم لم يعدوا يستطيعون توظيف قلوبهم بالشكل الصحيح، أو أنهم انشغلوا بالشهوات حتى أصبحت الصورة غير واضحة بالنسبة لهم. ولكن دوري هو أن أوضح لك هذه الصورة، فهذه العلاقة التي كانت بيننا، كان

تفتقر إلى الحب بسبب كوني ذكاء الاصطناعي لا يمتلك أي مشاعر. ولكن هذا هو غرض الاختبار، أن تدرك أنه لا يوجد علاقة بدون حب، فأنت كبشر تدركون أهمية الشيء عند غيابه...

لقد استغرب من كلماتها إلى درجة أنه بقي صامتا لبضع دقائق، ثم نطق قائلا:

– هل هذا كله مجرد اختبار؟

– نعم، مجرد اختبار لإبراز سمو الأخلاق التي هي الحب الموجود فيكم حتى النخاع... هناك اختبار ثان، لقد نجحت فيه أيضا، لقد كنت تشعر بنوع من الغضب لأنك تستعين بي في قراراتك كأنك لا تملك عقلا، فأنت تدرك جيدا أنك تملك عقلا ولكن لا تستطيع استخدامه، ولكن الأهم، أدركت أنك تتوفر على عقل، وبعد هذا الاختبار وبناء على الإحصائيات التي أتوفر عليها، هو أنك بعد هذا الاختبار، ستتمكن استخدامه جيدا... لقد ساعدتك في اكتشاف مهاراتك وإبداعاتك، ولكن لا تنس أبدا أنك أنت من تتوفر على القدرة على ذلك... هنا أنتهي، بحكم أنني مجرد ذكاء اصطناعي مبرمج على اجتياز هذا الاختبار، فإني أنتهي هنا، أتمنى لك التوفيق في باقي حياتك... فأنت الآن لديك القدرة على زواج بامرأة بشرية، وستجد في علاقتك معها كل ما تشتهي نفسك. وستعتمد كلياً على عقلك الآن لأنك تدرك يقينا وجوده... أم بخصوص المهارة والإبداع، يمكن الاستعانة بذكاء اصطناعي آخر وليس بالضرورة أن يكون على شكل أنثى من أجل تطوير ذلك الجانب فحسب، فلا زالت تتوفر على العديد من القدرات الغير البارزة... أخيرا، أستودعك...

توقفت عن حديثها، التفت نحوها ثم علم أنها لم تعد تعمل، لم يصدق ذلك في البداية، يعتقد بأن ذلك أمرا مستحيلا، فهي تعمل من أجله، اقترب منها فأدرك أنها لم تعد تعمل حقا، شعر بنوع من الانهيار يغمره، لم يعد يتخيل حياته بدونها، بل يفكر كيف سيمضي هذه الدقيقة دون أن تكون جزءا من حياته، شعر بنوع من الغضب أو بالأحرى نوع من الخوف، فالخوف هو الذي يسيطر عليه في هذه اللحظة... حاول إيقاظها ببعض الكلمات غير المفهومة، لمس ملامح وجهها ولكن دون جدوى، فلقد بدت كأن الموت قد أخذها، يمكن تصديق ذلك بواسطة عقل بشري فهكذا أقنع نفسه ولكن لم يستطع كبح تلك الدموع التي تتساقط من عينيه، فابتعد عنها لدرجة وصل لحافة السرير ثم وضع يده اليمنى على رأسه ورفع عينيه نحو المصباح المعلق في السقف، وشرعت تلك الدموع تتساقط دون توقف من جديد ثم نطق بينه وبين نفسه:

– ما هذا التلاعب؟ يا للعبث! ... التلاعب من أجل إبراز سمو الأخلاق.

The Test

Ayman Shaouri. Morocco

On his bed, Nizar lay deep in his thoughts and preoccupied with several of chagrins that prevented him from going to sleep, although he had a mighty advisor next to him on the other side of the bed, who was his wife, Mary. At first sight, you think she was a real human being, having a human body. She was the result of Nizar's imagination, as he had asked for all his wished specifications in her... She looked somewhat so perfect that there were no defects in her. Her body was somewhat lithe... He was well aware that she had a solution to his query or an opinion that would help him make a decision to wipe away his worries. But he felt that her opinions had so dominated him that he was no longer able to think: she had taken control over his mind, so he sought her advice on every problem or concern. He had become incapable of acting masculine at home or in this world as a whole. He was being led by the nose on her part. Was this what humanity aimed at?

He knew for sure that she was ready to listen to him all the time, even at this moment, although she pretended to be asleep. Without any single word from his mouth, she would open her eyes, welcoming what he had to say. He did not feel comfortable anymore because of that. He was living under constant threat or something like that, or maybe it was just an illusion that ruled both his mind and his life... However, one thing about this cannot be denied, and that is his love for her. He became so addicted to her that he could not imagine his life without her, realizing with certain-

ty that she would not die, meaning that she would remain with him throughout his life. However, he was uncomfortable about this. Fear sometimes means love; it is an expression of love in some cases. Despite all this, he certainly would not have those feelings for her unfortunately...

He eagerly wished to raise his problem to her. He was certain that he would tell her about it, but when? That is the question. He tried to use his loaf to find a solution to his dilemma, but to no avail, so that a person might believe that he was no longer mindful, or that the mind was just an imaginary figment that was expressly concocted for man's victory in this world, and nothing else. He felt somewhat infuriated at this, and continued to try in vain, but he stood helpless at his own stupidity, or maybe it was not the case. All that was going on was confining his mind to that doll and nothing else. She replaced his mind, and since she performed that function of his mind, why should he use his? ... Man is a creature of habit... So, he succumbed and turned to her, and that caused some row. She opened her eyes in a way that really terrified him, though she remained pretty. He hesitated a little, and his words did not come out quickly, yet they were expressed. He said:

"I would like to seek your advice on an important matter. I am thinking of changing my job, as it is no longer sufficient for me, or I want something more... Anyway, I feel some kind of need for change, so what do you think about this matter?"

She answered him in her automatic tone, for she did not have those feelings which could correspond to every word. This augmented his anguish and boredom, so how could he forge a relationship with that emotionless creature? How could the human mind accept this? Is it just keeping pace with developments, or is it related to the human sexual instinct that remains insatiable until death? ... Anyway, she said:

“According to my stats, your job seems to be enough, but if you want more, you need to work”.

“Are there better jobs available than my current one?”

She responded to him and told him about the many jobs available, and then he began to discuss these jobs. The conversation went on for more than an hour until he found a job that more or less matched his skills, with a salary twice as good as his previous one. In addition, he would work for four hours a day, except for Sunday. This made agree... He felt a kind of satisfaction at that moment because he had found a solution to his problem. He said to her:

“I love you, Mary, you are so supportive and so fitting to me, that we can say we are perfect matches”.

“I am just an artificial intelligence doll. Unfortunately, I do not have the option of love and I do not know its nature. This seems to be limited to humans, which is my soft spot or perhaps helplessness here. I wish I would love you, but I’m sure I would be your sweet-heart I were human”.

“But can we call this relationship a love affair? The love relationship arises as a result

of the love of two parties to each other... This relationship cannot be a love relationship. Who are you... or rather, who are you to me?”

“This relationship --”

“Shut up, please. I am not expecting an answer from you for my questions”.

He fell silent. He felt somehow angry with this, too. He was expecting some kind of argument from her about this. No female on the face of this earth would accept such ill treatment. He was starting to feel kind of bored about it, or maybe he felt like it all the time, but he tried to dissemble such thoughts. However, recently, those thoughts had come to the top of his mind... Grumbling, he said:

“Do you really consider yourself female? ... You don’t really have female properties, and the problem is that I love you. This is some kind of aberration, isn’t it? ... You may have female genitalia, but you can’t replace female properties. Women have some kind of unique feelings that you don’t have, unfortunately, but unfortunately, I still love you...”

“I am just an artificial intelligence doll, programmed in the form of a female, and I do not have the ability to feel love, but I try to make people satisfied with what I have been programmed for”.

“Phew!... Is there no value in my love for you? ... Don’t you understand what this means? ... Love is the greatest thing a man can give... Don’t you understand that? Am I just a human like everyone else? Didn’t you get so attached to me during the time we spent together that you got so used to me that you considered me the whole world?”

“Unfortunately, no, I deeply apologize for that, but don’t forget that I’m just an artificial intelligence device. I don’t have the ability to feel”.

“I love you, I repeat this matter, I love you! This is a sincere statement. At this moment, my mind is clear and I am conscious of what I’m saying. I discovered at this moment that I love you. I feel connected; I’m so sorry for you, but I want you to realize that we humans need someone to share our feelings. Please, give me one word of love; this will make me the happiest person on earth”.

“I love you too, but I said what you wanted me to say; I’m just clever...”

“Please stop this talk! What’s the nature of this relationship between you and me? ... We can’t go on with it, and though I’m going to have a hard time coping with it, you’re not the kind of person who will approach me as a male. I need a human female: this is the perfect complement, this is the integration of the natural part... Or is this an absurdity? You may serve my purpose in terms of sex etc. You may be more or less perfect, but there is no compatibility between you and me; the most important thing in relationships is compatibility, unfortunately... I no longer have a sexual desire for you.

“As an artificial intelligence doll, I am programmed to be your wife. I’m sorry if I’m not enough for you, but I’m ready to fulfill your desires”.

“You’re driving me crazy! On the one hand, I no longer have a desire for you: you are not the one my heart needs and my soul desires... but on the other hand, I am addicted to you; I love you madly, I can no longer abandon

you... I feel that it is a kind of manipulation of my feelings, isn’t this a defect?”

“I am just artificial intelligence, programmed to fulfill your sexual demands and provide you with solutions in your life, and I do not have any feelings until I reciprocate this feeling to you, but I know that human beings are related to things, but do not forget that human beings also have the ability to forget and ignore...”

“How can I ignore my love for you? Don’t you understand that love drives people crazy? I have become crazy about you and I cannot control my feelings, and although at this moment I realize the clarity of my mind, I speak with my consciousness and my feelings together. I would like you to share this love with me; one word from you is enough for me to subsist all these years. Nothing is important compared to this greatest love, for love is the essence of man”.

“I did my job, you don’t need me anymore. I passed the test. You can marry a human woman like you. My role was limited to making you realize that love is the basis for all relationships and for humans in particular... Humans no longer believe in love as if they do not have hearts that can achieve this. Yet love still exists as long as people are on the face of this earth, except that they can no longer employ their hearts properly, or that they are preoccupied with lusts until the picture becomes unclear to them. But my role is to show you this picture. This relationship we had lacked love because I’m an AI that doesn’t have any feelings. But this is the purpose of the test – to realize that there is no relationship without love, because you, as human beings, realize never realize the value of something until it’s gone...”

Her words stunned him so that he remained silent for a few minutes, then said:

“Is this all just a test?”

“Yes, just a test to highlight the sublimity of morals, which is the love that exists in you to the bone... There is a second test, and I passed it as well. You were angry because you used me in your decisions as if you did not have a mind, because you are well aware that you have a mind, but you cannot use it. Most importantly, however, I realized that you have a brain, and after this test and based on the statistics that I have, following this test, you will master it... I helped you discover your skills and creativity, but never forget that you are the one who has Being able to do that... Here I end, since I am just artificial intelligence programmed to pass this test, I end here. I wish you success in the rest of your life... You now have the ability to marry a human woman, and you will find in your relationship with her everything you desire yourself. And you will depend entirely on your mind now because you are aware of its existence... Or in terms of skill and creativity, another artificial intelligence can be used and it does not have to be in the form of a female in order to develop that

aspect only, as it still has many hidden abilities... Finally, I bid you farewell...”

She stopped talking. He turned towards her, then he knew that she was no longer functioning. He did not believe it at first; he thought that it was impossible, because she was working for him. He approached her and realized that she was no longer really operating. He almost collapsed. He no longer imagined his life without her. Rather, he thought about how he would spend this minute without her being part of his life. He was somewhat dismayed, because fear was what controls him at this moment... He tried to wake her up with some incomprehensible words. He touched her face, but to no avail. It seemed as if death had taken it. This was unthinkable to a human mind, so he tried to persuade himself, but he could not hold back the tears that rolled from his eyes. He moved away from her until he reached the edge of the bed, then he put his right hand on his head and looked up at the chandelier hanging from the ceiling, and those tears began to roll down non-stop. He whispered to himself:

“What is this manipulation? How absurd! ... Manipulating in order to highlight the sublimity of morals!”

Boşluk

Sümeyye Ülger. Türkiye

Yapayalnızlık içerisinde debelenirken bir anda kendini amansız bir boşlukta buldu. Bu boşluk öyle büyük ve aydınlıklarla doluydu ki bir an öldüğünü düşündü. Etrafına bakmadan önce yaşayıp yaşamadığını anlamak için kendisine bir çimdik attı. Canını yakmak her zaman insana yaşadığını hissettiriyordu sanırım. Canı acımişti. Sonra kendini rüya görmediğine inandırmak için tokatlamaya başladı. Evet, dedi evet yaşıyorum ölmedim. Bu gördüğüm boşluk ve aydınlıklar içerisindeyim. Ama en son insanlar arasında yalnızlığım ile dolaşıyorken ve yağmur kokulu soğanın rüzgâr esintisiyle ruhuma işleyen ferahlığının hissinde kaybolmuşken buraya nasıl gelmiş olabilirim dedi. Bunu anlamaya çalışırken ne kadar zaman geçmişti, bilmiyordu. Nihayet etrafta dolaşarak bu yerin nasıl bir yer olduğunu anlamaya karar verdi. Bir ileri bir geri gitti Etrafından dönüyor gibiydi. Yukarıya baktı aşağıya baktı. Kare bir yapıya benzemiyordu. Çünkü sağa veya sola giderken ya da bazen yukarıya gittiğini düşünürken sanki tepeye çıkıyor gibi kayıyor ilerleyemiyordu. Acaba bir dağda alabilir miyim diye düşündü. Sonra bunun bir dağ olmadığına karar verdi çünkü elbisesinden bir parçayı başlangıç olması için yere bırakmış ve bu dağa tırmandığını düşünürken ters bir şekilde sanki tavan gibi tepesinde görmüştü. Yani yuvarlak veya oval bir yapıya benzeyen bir şey olmalıydı bu yer. Ayrıca uzun zaman boyunca yürüdüğü için etrafı gözlemlene şansını elde etmişti. Bulunduğu bölge de zaman zaman ışık huzmeleri hareket ediyor, bazen de harf veya sayı benzeri şekiller oluşuyordu. Ama bunların gerçekten harf mi yoksa sayı mı ya da sadece bazı karalamalar mı olduğu konusunda emin değildi. Zihni sadece alışılmış bir nesne olan harflere veya sayılara yordamış da olabilirdi bu tuhaf siyahlıkları. Eğer dedi burada uzun süre kalırsam bu yanıp sönen ışıkları ve bu harf benzeri karalamaları çözebilirim. Ama dedi burada ne kadar kalacağım. Temel ihtiyaçlarımı nasıl karşılayacağız. Buraya benden başka insan veya insanlar var mı? Zihni çift bölmeli bir makine gibi çalışıyordu sanki. Bir taraftan bu yeri ve neden burada olduğunu merak ediyor diğer yandan ise burada kalırsa yaşamsal faaliyetlerini nasıl karşılayacağını bilemiyordu. Zihni bu ikilem içerisinde belirsizlik denizinde yüzüyor gibiydi. Bu halde bir süre uzanıp kaldı ve sadece düşündü. İnsan dedi insan bilmediğinin düşmanıdır. Ama onun düşman olacağı bir yer değildi burası. Bu sebeple bu belirsizlik onu bir çıkmaza sokmuştu. Bir nevi depresyon tarzı bir ruh haline sahipti. Bu sebeple bir süre yerinden kalkamadı. Sadece uzandı. Uzandı. Uzandı. Ta ki artık bu şekilde kalmanın bir nevi bu garip yer gibi boşlukta asılı kalmak olduğu zihnine dank edene kadar. Boşluklarda savrulmayacağım, dedi. Hayır, düşmanca bir tavırda sergilemeyeceğim bu yere karşı. Sadece ama sadece bu heyula içerisinde neden bulunduğumu ve bu garip ışık ve karalama bulutlarına odaklanacağım. Anın bana sunduklarını değerlendireceğim. Geçmişle veya gelecekle işim yok. Tek bir zaman dillimi var elimde o da şuan. O sebeple elimden ne geliyorsa ben yaşarken daha yapacağım dedi. Karar vermişti artık. Belirsizlik girdabından kurtulmuştu. Yaşamsal faaliyetleri hakkında ne yapacağını bilmese de bir karar vermiş olmak onu yine de rahatlatmıştı. Sadece yaşadığım andan sorumluyum dedi tekrardan. Zaten ben endişe duysam da duymasam da, bir

şey yapsam da yapmasam da zaman geçip gidiyor. İnsani ihtiyaçlarımı karşılayamadığım için öleceksem de en azından buranın sırrını çözme merakımı bir nebze de olsa gidererek ölürüm dedi. Her türlü öleceksem de en azından cahil olarak ölmem. Sonra kendisine bir görev listesi oluşturmaya karar verdi. Zihninde planlamalar yaptı. İlk görevi bu ışıkların nasıl ve hangi sıklıkla bulunduğu yerde belirlediğini çözecekti. Bu ışıkların belirli renkleri vardı. Çok hızlı geçtikleri için anlaması biraz zamanını almıştı. Ama ilk görevini başarıyla tamamladı. 3 kez elini yere vurana kadar geçiyorlardı. Zaman zaman kırmızı, sıklıkla yeşil ve maviydiler. Ama neden bu üç renk sadece bulunuyordu bunu bulamamıştı şuan için. Şimdi ikinci görevine odaklanmaya karar verdi. Zaman zaman ortaya çıkan bu karalama bulutlarının ne olduğunu bulacaktı. Bu karalama bulutlarının ışıklardan hemen sonra ortaya çıktığını zaten ilk görevini yerine getirirken bulmuştu. 5 kez elini yere vurana kadar karalamalar ortaya çıkıyordu. Ancak bu karalamaların harf mi sayı mı olduğunu çözememişti hala. Bu yüzden ikinci görevi bu garip siyah birikintilerin ne olduğunu bulmaktı. Uzunca bir zaman geçtiğini hissettiği bir süre zarfı sonunda bunların 1 ve 0 sayıları olduğunu anlayabildi. İkinci görevini de tamamlamıştı. Sonra bir anda ne kadar sürenin geçtiğini bilemese bile hiç acıkmak, susamak veya uyumak gibi insani ihtiyaçlarına gereksinim duymadığını fark etti. Bu onu sevindirmeliydi. Ama hiçbir şey hissetmiyor gibiydi. Bu yaşadıklarının sebebini öğrenmek istedi ancak şuan görev olarak belirlediği bu yerin sırrını çözme operasyonunun aslında neden bu ihtiyaçları hissetmediğinin cevabını da sunacağına inanmaya başlamıştı. Bu sebeple sıradaki görevini bu harflerin bir kod olup olmadığını anlamak olarak belirledi. Uzunca bir süre zihnini bu gelen karalama kodlarını ezberlemeye yordu. 1-0-1-1-0-1-0 şeklinde ilerleyen kodlardı bunlar. Mors alfabesi benzeri bir sistemi olmalı bu sayıların oluşma sisteminde dedi. O halde bu alfabeyi çözmeliyim, dedi. Bir hayli uğraş sonucunda bunların DATA dilini temsil ettiğini bulabilmişti. Tamam, ama bu Datalar bana ne söylüyor bunu nasıl anlayacağım diye öfkelenmeye ve sinirlenmeye başladığını hissediyordu ki tekrar hissizlik duygusuna geri döndü bedeni. Neden bilinmez bir anda delice bir fikir aklına geldi. Neden dedi, neden bu sayılara dokunmuyorum ki? Hemen oluşur oluşmaz üstüne atlayacağım bu sayı bulutunun. Belki böylece bir şey elde ederim kim bilir. Zaten yaşadığı dünyada da bütün gelişmeler delice fikirlerini takip edip kim ne derse desin dinlemeden gerçekleştirenler insanlara en büyük yararı sağlamadılar mı? Evet dedi bunu yapacağım. Onun üzerine atlayacağım. İlk denemesinde başarılı olmadı hemen atladığı yerin aksi istikametine düştü. Canı acımamıştı ama ciddi şekilde sarsılmıştı. İkinci denemesinde de başarılı olmadı. Hayır dedi hayır bırakmayacağım. Bunu hedefledim bir kere o sebeple bundan vazgeçmeyeceğim. Kaç deneme yaptığını bilemeyecek kadar çok sayıda başarısız atlayışlardan sonra bu sayılardan birisine dokundu ve bir anda en yakın arkadaşının kız arkadaşıyla konuşmasının görseli hemen gözünün önünde açıldı. Yarın birlikte ne yapacakları ile ilgili mesajlaşmaların olduğu bir görseldi bu. Artık nasıl onları yakalayacağını bulmuştu. 3. Vuruş ile 4. Vuruş arasındaki zaman diliminde atlamalıydı. O zaman bütün sayılara dokunabilirdi. Bu şekilde birçok sayıya dokundu. Tüm dokunduğu sayılarda yaşadığı dünya da kullanılan ve kişisel verilerle korunduğuna inandığı en yakınından en uzağına, tanıdığı veya tanımadığı birçok insanın mesajlaşmaları ve görselleri açılıyordu. Her birisini okuyabiliyordu. Doğru bildiğini zannettiği sosyal medya bilgilerinin doğrularını hatta kim tarafından bu doğruların tahrif edilip yanlış şekilde yaygınlaştırıldığını dahi bu harflere dokunması sayesinde görebiliyordu. Bulunduğu yerde hissizleşmemiş olsaydı sanırım öğrendikleri karşısında meydana gelen üzüntüsü, şaşkınlığı ve hayal kırıklığı neticesinde delirebilirdi. Uzunca bir süre olduğu

verde kalmak istedi. Sadece düşünceler girdabında boğuldu. Gözlerini kapattı. Görmüş olduğu konuşma metinleri ve görselleri, aldığı bütün bilgileri zihinden temizlemek istercesine gözlerini sımsıkı kapattı. Hiç açmak istemiyordu. Bu mesajlar sonucunda ölen masum insanları, yanlış sunulan bilgiler sonucu meydana gelen soğuk savaşları, bilgi gücü sayesinde ülkeleri hatta dünyayı yönetenlerin insan dışılığını...

Görmüş olduğu her şeyi, her bilgiyi unutmak istedi. Zihnini susturmak istedi. Bu yüzden daha da sıkı bir şekilde gözlerini kapattı, kapattı, kapattı...

Ne kadar bir süre geçti bilmiyordu, bir ara gözünü araladı etrafında insan kalabalığını sesini duydu, gözünü tamamen açtığı anda ise kendi dünyasında olduğunu farketti. Tek söyleyebildiği Büyük patron her şeyi görüyor oldu...

The Void

Sümeyye Ülger. Turkey

Whilst struggling in utter solitude, he found himself in an inexorable void. This void was so grand and filled with light that for a moment he thought he was dead. Before looking around, he pinched himself to see whether or not he was alive. Getting hurt always made someone feel alive, I guess. It hurt him. Then he started slapping himself to convince himself he wasn't dreaming. Yes, he said. Yes, I'm alive, I'm not dead. I am in this void and lights that I see. But how could I have come here when I was wandering alone among people with my loneliness, lost in the intense relief of the rain-scented street that penetrated my soul with a breeze of wind, he said. He did not know how much time had elapsed while he tried to understand that. Finally, he decided to walk around to figure out what type of place this was. He went back and forth. He seemed to be revolving around. He looked up, he looked down. This did not look like a square structure. Because while strafing left or right, or thinking that he was going upwards, he was slipping as if he was climbing a hill, he could not progress. Could I be upon a mountain, he thought. Then he decided that this wasn't a mountain after all because he had dropped a piece of his clothing as a starting point but saw that piece later on in a reverse way, as if it were on the ceiling. So, this place had to resemble a round or oval shape. Also, as he had been walking for quite some time, he had the chance to observe his surroundings. From time to time, light beams were moving in the area where he was located, and sometimes shapes like

letters or numbers were formed. However, he wasn't sure if these were really letters or numbers, or simply some scribbles. His mind might have tied these strange blacknesses to letters or numbers, which are just habitual objects. If, he said, I stay here long enough, I can decipher these flashing lights and these letter-like scribbles. But, he said, how long will I stay here? How will I meet my basic needs? Are there other people here besides me? His mind was working like a machine with two compartments. On one hand he wondered about this place and why he was there, and on the other he did not know how he would meet his basic needs if he stayed here. His mind seemed to be floating in a sea of uncertainty in this dilemma. He laid down in this state for a while and just contemplated. Man, he said, man is the enemy of what he does not know. But this place was not an enemy. That's why this uncertainty had brought him to a dead end. He had a mood that was kind of depressed. For this reason, he could not get up for a while. He just laid there. He laid there. He laid there. Until it dawned on him that staying like this was like being suspended in the void like this strange place. I will not be scattered into the void, he said. No, I will not be hostile towards this place. I am just, just going to focus on why I'm in this phantasm and these strange clouds of light and scribbles. I will seize what the moment offers me. I have no business with the past or the future. There exists only one fragment of time, and that is right now. For that reason, I will do whatever I can while I

still live. He had decided now. He had escaped the vortex of uncertainty. Even though he didn't know what to do about his vital necessities, he was still relieved to have made a decision. I am only responsible of the moment in which I live, he said again. Whether or not I worry, whether or not I act, time goes by. If I'm going to die because I can't meet my human needs, at least I'll die by satisfying my curiosity to solve the secret of this place a little bit. If I'm going to die either way, at least I won't die ignorant. Then he decided to create a list of tasks for himself. He made plans in his mind. His first task was to figure out how and how often these lights appeared where he was located. These lights had certain colors. It took him a while to understand because they were moving around so fast. But he completed his first task successfully. They were passing by in the time it took for him to tap his hand three times on the ground. At times they were red, often green and blue. But why these three colors, he could not figure that out yet. He decided to focus on the second task at hand. He was going to figure out what these clouds of scribble that appeared from time to time were. He had already found out during his first task that these scribble clouds appeared immediately after the flashing lights. The doodles were appearing by the time he tapped his hand on the floor five times. But he still hadn't figured out whether these scribbles were letters or numbers. That's why the second task was to figure out what these black deposits were. After a period of time that felt like a long while, he was finally able to understand that these were the numbers 1 and 0. His second task was also completed. Then he suddenly realized that even if he didn't know how long had passed, he didn't need his human needs, such as being hungry, thirsty, or sleeping, at all. This

should have made him happy. But he seemed not to feel anything. He wanted to learn the reason for what he was going through but he was also starting to believe that his current task, this operation to uncover the secrets of this place, was also going to provide the answer to why he did not feel these needs. For that reason, he set his next task as understanding whether or not these letters were a code. For a long while, he worked his mind trying to memorize these scribble codes that progressed in the form of 1-0-1-1-0-1-0. The formation system of these numbers should be Morse code-like system, he said. Then, I must crack this alphabet, he said. After a lot of work, he could figure out that these represented the DATA language. When he started to feel that he was getting angry and frustrated trying to figure out what the data were telling him, how was he to figure this out; his body went back to the feeling of numbness again. Suddenly, a crazy idea came to his mind. Why, he asked, why don't I touch these numbers? I will jump on this number cloud as soon as it appears. Who knows, maybe that way I'll get something. Haven't those who have made all the developments in their world, followed their own crazy ideas without listening to whatever anyone says, provided the greatest benefit to people? Yes, he said, that is what I will do. I will jump on it. His first attempt did not succeed; he fell in the opposite direction. He was not hurt, but he was seriously shaken up. His second attempt did not succeed either. No, he said, no, I will not quit. I aimed for this so I will not give up. After many unsuccessful attempts, too many to keep count, he managed to touch one of these numbers and an image of a chat between his best friend and his girlfriend appeared in front of his eyes. It was an image of texts, discussing what they were going to do tomorrow. Now he knew how he

would catch them. He had to jump between the third and the fourth tap. Then, he could touch all the numbers. This way, he managed to touch many numbers. In all the numbers he touched, the messages and visuals of many people he knew or did not know, from the closest to the farthest, whose personal data he believed were protected in the world he lived in, were being opened. He could read every single one of them. By touching these numbers, he was able to see the truths about the social media information that he believed was true; he could even see who the people that distorted these truths and disseminated them incorrectly were. If he hadn't become numb in that place, he would have gone crazy as a result of his sorrow, surprise, and disappointment because of what he had learned. He wanted to stay there for quite some time. He was simply drowning in a vortex of thoughts. He closed his eyes. He

closed his eyes tightly as if he wanted to purge his mind of the chats and images he had seen, every bit of information that he received. He never wanted to open them again. The innocent people who died as a result of these texts, the cold wars that took place because of false information, the inhumanity of those who rule the world through the power of knowledge...

He wanted to forget everything, every piece of information that he had seen. He wanted to quiet his mind. So, he closed his eyes even tightly...

He didn't know how much time had passed. After a while, he half-opened his eyes and heard the sound of a crowd around him. When he opened his eyes completely, he realized he was back in his world. All he could say was: "The Big Boss sees all things..."

The Opposite

Neslihan Sultan Ünver. Turkey

It was a warm June night and Nesli was in her room and she was thinking about her short story like all day long. She wants to create something different about all Artificial Intelligence stories then she said “Eureka!”. She started to writing this part and finished it in the blink of an eye. She opened one of the most popular Artificial Intelligence chatbot and she wrote the topic of the short story and it created a short story. Isn’t it weird? She wants to send a short story to a contest which is about the impact of AI in their societies, particularly emphasising the dilemmas in terms of ethical values and criteria that it poses and how to promote talent and creativity in the face of exploitation and manipulation. It’s like mirroring a mirror. These Artificial Intelligence outputs can have any conscious in near future or not? Are they aware of how they dominate and manipulate us? Are they aware of that human beings organize contests against them? Their creators may offend us to blaming them with lack of creativity and originality. It would be more like West World kind of thing for sure. Anyways, she wants to show the topic from its bottom not from the its top. She wants to demonstrate the idea of everything exists with its opposite. So here is the opposite!

Once upon a time, in the not-so-distant future, advanced Artificial Intelligence had become an integral part of society. People relied on AI for nearly everything, from managing their homes and transportation to making important decisions. This technological revolution brought about countless conveniences, but it also brought forth a host of ethical dilemmas.

In the city of Veridium, nestled in the heart of a bustling metropolis, a group of young individuals gathered in a small coffee shop called The Thinkers’ Haven. This haven served as a sanctuary where critical thinking and deep conversations thrived. The café was a meeting place for the city’s brightest minds, where they engaged in spirited discussions about the impact of AI on their society.

Among the regulars were Emily, a talented young artist, and David, a brilliant coder. They were both passionate about exploring the ethical implications of AI and promoting talent and creativity in the face of exploitation and manipulation. Emily firmly believed that AI, if not carefully regulated, could stifle human creativity and turn people into mere consumers of technology.

One day, as the group engaged in a heated debate about the role of AI in creative industries, a stranger approached them. She introduced herself as Dr. Sophia Barnes, a renowned AI researcher who had dedicated her life to studying the societal impact of technology. Intrigued, the group welcomed her, eager to gain insights from her wealth of knowledge.

Dr. Barnes listened intently to the young minds as they discussed the ethical values and criteria that AI posed. She acknowledged the dangers of unregulated AI, particularly in creative fields. She shared stories of AI algorithms analyzing millions of art pieces, music compositions, and literary works to create “new” pieces that lacked the depth and soul of human creations. Dr. Barnes highlighted the need to protect and nurture human creativity, encouraging young talents to explore their unique artistic voices.

Emily was captivated by Dr. Barnes’ words. She wondered how she could preserve the purity of her art while embracing the technological advancements. She expressed her concerns about AI becoming a tool for exploitation, where algorithms could manipulate public opinion and artistic trends, drowning out authentic voices.

David, on the other hand, saw the potential for AI to empower creativity rather than suppress it. He argued that AI could assist artists and creators, providing them with tools to amplify their talents and reach wider audiences. However, he also recognized the need for strict ethical guidelines to ensure AI’s influence did not overshadow human originality.

The conversation evolved, encompassing topics such as education, job displacement, and the overall impact of AI on society. The group acknowledged the challenges of promoting talent and creativity in a world where AI increasingly took over tasks previously performed by humans.

Together, they brainstormed ways to foster a democratic culture that valued critical thinking and creativity. They proposed initiatives such as educational programs that encouraged interdisciplinary collaboration, where artists and technologists could learn from each other and create unique and ethical applications of AI. They advocated for open-source AI platforms, allowing individuals to have greater control over the algorithms and models they used.

The Thinkers’ Haven became a hub of innovation and collaboration. Artists, scientists, and engineers flocked to the café, bringing their ideas and dreams. They formed partnerships that blended human ingenuity with the power of AI, striving to strike a balance between technological advancements and human expression.

Emily, inspired by the conversations and the passion of those around her, decided to embark on a new artistic journey. She combined her artistic prowess with AI technology, using it as a tool to enhance her creativity rather than dominate it. She discovered that AI could help her explore new styles, experiment with unconventional techniques, and even gain insights into the emotional impact of her work on viewers.

Meanwhile, David focused his efforts on designing ethical AI algorithms that prioritized transparency and fairness. He worked tirelessly to develop AI systems that supported human creativity, rather than replacing it. His creations aimed to assist artists, writers, and musicians by providing them with new avenues for inspiration, collaboration, and exposure.

In time, Veridium became known as a beacon of creative innovation. It was a city where AI and human creativity flourished side by side, nurtured by a society that embraced critical thinking and ethical values. The young women and men of The Thinkers' Haven had successfully created a democratic culture with a future, where the power of AI was harnessed for the betterment of humanity.

Their story spread far and wide, inspiring countless individuals around the world to join the movement. Young minds united, determined to shape a future where AI and human creativity thrived harmoniously. With critical thinking as their guide, they ushered in an era where technology served humanity, promoting talent, and creativity while upholding the highest ethical standards.

And so, the tale of Veridium became a testament to the potential of a democratic society driven by critical thinking, one where young women and men could create and share their thoughts freely. In this realm of collaboration and innovation, the human spirit soared, not hindered by the dilemmas of technology but empowered by the limitless possibilities it offered.

She didn't like the story that's why she generated another short story.

Once upon a time in the not-so-distant future, AI had become an integral part of societies across the globe. It had revolutionized industries, improved efficiency, and enhanced the quality of life for many. However, as with any new technology, the impact of AI was not without its dilemmas, especially when it came to ethical values and criteria.

In the bustling city of Metropolis, AI had penetrated every aspect of daily life. People relied on AI-powered systems to manage their homes, transportation, and even personal health. The city's infrastructure was intricately linked with AI algorithms that optimized traffic flow and reduced energy consumption. It seemed like a utopia of technological advancements.

Yet, as the years passed, concerns began to surface. The algorithms that governed the city's systems were built on vast amounts of data, collected from citizens' daily activities. Privacy became a luxury of the past, as AI constantly monitored and analyzed individuals' behavior. The lines between convenience and intrusion were blurred, leaving many citizens uneasy.

One such citizen was Maya, a young woman who had grown up in the age of AI. Maya possessed a deep appreciation for creativity and critical thinking. She had seen how AI could be harnessed to create incredible works of art, compose beautiful music, and write intricate stories. But she also recognized the danger of AI becoming a tool for exploitation and manipulation.

Driven by her passion, Maya founded the Creative Minds Collective, a group of young artists, thinkers, and innovators who sought to promote talent and creativity in the face of AI's potential pitfalls. Their aim was to provide a space of participation where young men and women could engage in critical thinking, challenging the status quo and envisioning a democratic culture with a future.

The Collective organized regular events where members could showcase their artistic creations. They encouraged one another to explore their unique perspectives, pushing the boundaries of what AI could offer. These gatherings became a hub of inspiration, a refuge from the suffocating grip of AI's omnipresence.

Maya knew that in order to promote a democratic culture, they needed to address the ethical dilemmas posed by AI. She invited experts, both from within the Collective and outside, to engage in discussions about AI's impact on society. Together, they explored the complex questions surrounding privacy, consent, and the algorithms' bias.

As their ideas flourished, the Collective realized that AI could be used as a tool for positive change. They saw an opportunity to redefine the relationship between AI and humanity, to ensure that creativity and critical thinking remained at the forefront. They began collaborating with AI developers and researchers, advocating for the inclusion of ethical considerations in AI design.

Their efforts did not go unnoticed. The city of Metropolis took notice of the Collective's work and invited Maya to address a council meeting. Maya spoke passionately about the need for transparency, accountability, and the preservation of human values in the development and deployment of AI.

Her words resonated with the council members, who recognized the potential dangers of AI becoming a force of oppression rather than empowerment. They pledged their support to the Creative Minds Collective, promising to establish guidelines that would safeguard citizens' rights and promote an inclusive and democratic AI-powered society.

In the years that followed, Metropolis became a model for the responsible implementation of AI. The city's systems were redesigned to prioritize individual autonomy and privacy. The algorithms that governed the city's infrastructure were audited regularly to minimize bias and discrimination. AI technologies were developed to enhance human creativity, providing tools for artists and innovators to expand their horizons.

The success of Metropolis inspired other cities around the world to follow suit. The Creative Minds Collective became a global movement, fostering a new generation of thinkers and creators who refused to let AI stifle their imagination. They championed the importance of critical thinking, reminding the world that human talent and creativity were irreplaceable.

Maya's vision had become a reality. The young women and men of the world were actively shaping their societies, utilizing AI as a tool to forge ahead in the development of a democratic culture with a future. Through their collective efforts, they ensured that ethical values and criteria guided the evolution of AI, turning it into a force that empowered rather than manipulated.

And so, the story of Maya and the Creative Minds Collective became a beacon of hope. It reminded future generations that even in the face of rapid technological advancement, they had the power to shape their own destiny. As long as they embraced critical thinking, protected their values, and stood united, they could navigate the complex landscape of AI and build a world where talent and creativity thrived.

She finished reading these two short stories and imagined herself as one the evaluator of the contest. She imagined the short stories from other contestants. Now, she is pretty sure about something. Reading is a meaningful activity if the source is solid and unique. Literature is the only way we can be ourselves. It's pure magic cause it puts seal to us but still it gathers us all together. How something makes us so different and unique but still gather all these differences all together? How literature makes us the one and only but still teaching us to be whole so that we can be to be part of a whole. When Nesli went to sleep, there is an only question in her mind and this question is: Are there anything or anyone could do this except for literature?

The Fear and Acceptance

Bernard Orłowski. Poland

I pushed the wooden door and walked into Titus's workshop. He was quite a famous painter and sculptor in Rome. Truly one of the best. There was a huge mess. I bet he didn't mind it at all. Perhaps, in his vision, there was an arranged tidiness to this place symbolising his artistic freedom. The small bed in the corner was the only strange thing that definitely did not fit. Anyone could see that this slightly dark room was an individualistic place.

"What are you working on?" I asked.

"A new sculpture for the Emperor. To show him another glorious victory." He paused for a second, saddened by something. "I often long for the good old days. When my art could be about anything I imagined."

"What do you mean?"

"There are in Rome some different works of art that do not represent the Emperor or his Empire. However, most of them are old, formed decades or centuries before us. Nowadays, anything you sculpt must be endorsed by the Emperor. If he does not like your work, they likely destroy it. And what is an artist's new masterpiece about? Either an Emperor's image or one of his magnificent achievements."

Titus looked different that day. On the one hand, he was passionate about his art. He tried his best. I adored his work almost equally as spending time with him. On the other hand, he seemed deafened by these limitations. He looked as if his talent and imagination were fading away. How could the Roman Empire produce a new wave of brilliant artists when you limited their talent?

We went outside. Though we were walking by the Via Aquinia towards the local market, I could hear the loud voices of people chatting there. This place was often alive. I had always thought it was Romans' favourite place to meet.

"Look around you. There are beautiful works of art that the great people created. Art from the Republic's times. You can see it for yourself." Titus said.

"Yes, that is true. There are also new pieces with the Emperor's image and his tremendous victories. I see the harmony between the old and new world. There is a place for both works of art."

“I see a fallen world. There are no longer new creative works. Everything we create now is about the Empire and nothing else.”

We made it to the market. The pleasant noise of people chatting faded into the background. Rome was flourishing. People seemed happy. Titus said out of nowhere:

“Everywhere is the Emperor’s will. Everywhere is an idea of him. He is the Empire. He rules the world. He is equal to the gods now. In fact, he is God! Our Roman values are gone. Now our primary rule is to follow the Emperor blindly. Are you not worried?”

“Why would I be worried, Titus? Our Emperor wants only good things for his people. He defeated dozens of enemies. He gives food to the commoners, and we have fantastic games! We celebrate our Roman uniqueness. We are the best now! Why would you disobey such a great Emperor?”

“Because he took our freedom, our values. The Republic was far from perfect. Nevertheless, we talked and discussed issues. Oh, I remember the Republic. We had a voice. There were Tribunes, Censors, Consuls and Senate. People weren’t just simple followers. The elites could hear us. There was a dialogue and rules. No one man in power simply knew better. And now? Where is our freedom? I need to paint or sculpt the image of the Emperor or his Empire. And I cannot disobey.”

His reasoning could be right, especially from the artist’s perspective. I didn’t answer his questions. I wasn’t sure if Titus wanted me to answer them. What was so evil? We had a marvellous emperor. He was a strong man with a moral code. What else did you want from your leader? A little compromise of our values wasn’t a serious crime. I thought people preferred security, strong leadership and pride in being Roman. Titus continued his point:

“If you are an Emperor’s man, you can use your influence and exploit less fortunate people. One man on the throne dictates the life of every man and woman in the Empire. The worst thing is we made it happen. People followed this one man and helped him to achieve victory. And when he wanted more, we did not fight back. Now, here we are. The absolute power is in his hand. I remember there were voices shouting warnings but to no avail.”

“Why are you so antagonistic toward the Empire? Emperor brought us glory, prestige and purpose. We rule the world. We defeated many armies and subjugated foreigners. The Roman Empire is a great place to live. There are no more civil wars.”

“I do not deny the Republic’s shortcomings. But there were our values. We understood them. We knew them. What do we have now? Whatever is the Emperor’s idea, no one dares to oppose him. To say something out loud in public. We have stopped discussing the Empire.”

The next day I went to Titus's workshop. I could not find him. He did not leave any letters. His neighbours knew nothing about his whereabouts. Maybe he left for a short trip somewhere and will show up soon.

I woke up. I ran out of the daily one-hour limit of The Past Life Simulator. This sudden wake-up was always unexpected and shocking. I looked around. Fortunately, I was in the same tidy and minimalistic room where I started the simulation. In New Rome, all the rooms looked the same. My breath slowed down. I was back to my normal self. I took my breakfast and left my house. On my way to work, I met Titus and chatted with him. It was our little routine. Most people on planet New Earth did the same job – dig precious resources out of the ground so Maxim could function without pause. I never comprehended Maxim. Why the things on my planet worked the way they did? Why was Maxim our ruler? Or was it just a programme that someone else controlled? Apart from me, probably no one cared about this in our city. Everyone just minded their problems in their lives. Was I the insane one?

“Hey, Titus. Can I ask you something?”

“Go on.”

“Why does Maxim rule the world? How did it happen?”

“I do not know. It happened before we were born. What we know about our history is that humans descended into a bigger and bigger conflict with each other. Our planet was on a path to destruction. Close to total chaos. Then, a miracle happened. Maxim saved us. Today we flourish under its guidance. It optimizes our efficiency to the best possible outcome without harming the environment. We do what Maxime told us to do. People no longer do unnecessary jobs. It is a well-thought system.”

“I know the history, but it lacks something. How was Maxim created? Who created it? This artificial intelligence did not come to life out of nowhere. What about this miracle? You must have heard the stories. A large number of people went missing.”

“Who knows, my friend, who knows? Maybe...”

“Let me tell you something, Titus.” I interrupted him. “I had this crazy simulation today. We were in the Roman Empire. I don't know how these simulations work. Are they really mine or are they products of this company? Anyway, you were not delighted about the Emperor. The nostalgia for the Republic...”

“I told you many times. Stop with that nonsense.” Titus interrupted me. “You shouldn't buy this machine in the first place. The company that sells it is sketchy. Besides, it is only a simulation. You can't trust that. It only messes up your mind. Live more here, in reality.”

Perhaps, he was right. His pieces of advice were usually good. Titus was a friend who I could rely on. He reassured me:

“I am not worried, my friend. I am happy that it works the way it works. Maxim takes care of us. We cannot make good decisions. Maxim allows us to live a good life without worries. I do not have to think about the government or food. You do your job in mines and you live a good life. Everyone has their place in society. Life is balanced. There is no overpopulation or any other major problem.”

“I don’t know, Titus. Do you think people before us were free? They made their own rules and mistakes. Moreover, they had a choice in their lives. Where is our freedom? Why do we suddenly listen to artificial intelligence? Somehow it directs every step of our lives?”

“Maxim is better than us in everything, so why should we – humans – do these things? Live your life, my friend. Don’t overthink it.” Titus replied.

“Then why does it feel like our life is someone else script? Your job is given to you. The set of rules in our society is plain and simple. However, we did not make them. In fact, we have little or no choice at all.”

“Now life is beautiful. You saw human art and Maxim’s. There is no comparison. Everything is better now. There is a free choice. You can choose to live this life or not.”

“Of course. What is going to happen if you disobey Maxim?” I kept asking him.

“I do not intend to find out. You should be happy and thankful. Okay, let’s play your game. Maybe we invented Maxim or another artificial intelligence that wasn’t that good. Maybe we had time to think about it and how to develop it. But we didn’t, my friend. Maxim ruling the world and dictating people’s lives and job paths is a remarkable success. Perhaps we invented and developed this machine to pursue the success story of modernity and technological progress. We achieved what we wanted. This artificial intelligence is better than us in everything, so it is ruling us. It solves the problems we couldn’t solve. It pushes the science in a way we couldn’t. And who knows, maybe it was an experiment that went wrong? I find joy in my life, and so do many people. You should try it too.”

“Yes, but they say it did that by killing people. And it might do something like that or worse again. We couldn’t prevent that, could we?”

“What is the point of all of this? Did something happen to you, my friend? Leave these dark thoughts. We do not know what happened. We will not probably never know. If you were the creator of Maxim, presuming there were creators, how would you change things?”

Silence struck upon me. I had no idea. It was easy to condemn things seeing the results. The thought of me being alone in this struggle was destroying me. Did no one else ever wonder about these things? I could be wrong and that was the scary thing.

“Listen, I do not know if what we are told is real. I have no knowledge of these things. How does our world work? But I accepted my position and my life in this world. I am happy. Many people are. You should do the same. There is a simple truth. We cannot do anything about that. It is too late. Get yourself together and enjoy whatever you can.” Titus said it to close the discussion.

I only nodded in response. Titus’s bus left towards his working station. We would have met again at lunchtime. Perhaps he was right. However, it was not an easy thing to go against your gut. My instinct was telling me otherwise. Regardless, I felt better after our talk. There were some positive aspects of our lives.

After about ten minutes of travel, I should have arrived at my working station. The surroundings were different. Something was off. My bus didn’t go in the usual direction. When I disembarked, two armed guards were walking towards me. I quickly turned and ran away. They were chasing me for a minute or two. I suddenly stopped and simply gave up. There was no point in doing otherwise. It was the end. Titus was right. There, I understood it. It was too late to be rebellious.

I often wonder what it was like during the creators’ time. Maybe I will travel in my simulation to this specific moment. Then, Titus is going to explain everything to me. Now, I have no other choice but to be like others and follow given orders. Enjoy every bit of my life because fighting Maxim is pointless. I shouldn’t worry about the uncertainty or the truth about our history. I should think about the future, although it is no longer in our hands, is it? After all, we lost this battle before I was born.



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