

Humanity: Is It Forever?

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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 sixty to seventy percent 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 haired", 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 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..."