

Daystar

By Jezzika Storey

The poem she had studied in class that day had not abandoned her mind immediately afterwards as the previous ones had. It was about a woman for whom the duties of motherhood had become too much to bear, and how much better things were for women now that they didn't have to worry about any of that anymore. Although Sarah did not have diapers steaming on a line, dolls slumped behind doors, or a husband to lurch into her at night, she too wanted a little room for thinking.

As she walked back to her dorm room the first line of the poem ran through her mind incessantly. *She wanted a little room for thinking.* It filled the cracks within her brain and replaced the fluids until she was sure she could feel the plates of her skull separating from all the pressure.

It was getting a little ridiculous.

She gave her head a quick, violent shake and sat heavily on a bench just off of the dorm porch. Her head fell to meet a cigarette she pulled out of her pocket, and her other hand rose quickly with a lighter as the hand that had held the cigarette cupped the tender flame. She inhaled quickly, deeply, and threw her head back; stars exploded in her brain. She knew she was lucky to be able to continue to study, to have been considered smart enough to go to college instead of being designated a human unworthy of educated thought.

Still, sometimes she wished she were anywhere but where she was.

She was also grateful to have actually found someone to sell her a cigarette. He was selling packs too, but she hadn't had anything worth trading on her then. She hoped he would be a

steady contact. She didn't want to have to start thinking about growing her own tobacco too. No stores sold them anymore, because the artificial intelligence didn't exactly approve of them, but they never punished humans for doing something that would shorten their life span.

"Hey, E-73," she said as she swiped her ID card through the slot in the machine permanently stationed at the desk.

"Good afternoon Sarah. It looks like you should be able to finish your assignments by five o'clock tonight." The voice that came out of the machine still had slight electronic qualities, but the humanness of it bothered her.

AI had been invented over twenty years ago now, but back then it wasn't so widely used. Everyone had always thought that there would be a bloody, intense robot war in which the machines rose from servitude to kill all humans. That never happened. AI had actually integrated fairly quickly. It was easy, convenient.

Sarah's history homework that night was an analysis of the American Revolution and a step by step commentary about every way that both sides made seemingly ignorant errors.

Of course, war historians have studied these things and pointed most of them out before, but then later tacticians would make the same mistakes in negotiations and battle. Why trust humans not to make an error if it could be completely avoided through the artificial intelligence?

As she lay on her bed reading the text on her tablet, a pattern emerged that troubled her. Over and over there were unnecessary mentions of how much better AI was than humans, and how humanity could not be trusted to lead themselves or make decisions about, well, anything, really.

She began to reflect on the beginning, when she was still very young and was still taught by humans, although technology was very integrated into the classrooms even then. Eventually, when she was in high school, there were tests that determined whether a human was smart enough to have the rights to higher education and the privileges therein, or if they were doomed to spend their lives living subserviently. No one of the higher order really knew what happened to people who didn't pass the test other than this. They were typically never seen again. It was presented as a 'survival of the fittest' situation, and was taught in every year of public education. By that point all classes, kindergarten through twelfth grade, were taught by an AI smart board, each with a different projected voice and personality.

There had been no AI takeover, or, if there was, it hadn't been acknowledged. Anyone trying to claim that there was one would be branded a conspiracy theorist, or even a heretic. The way things had gone was seen simply as the best way possible.

She remembered talk of a microchip implant that was supposed to connect humans and the AI infinitely, but she couldn't remember it ever being implemented, or even what time in her life she remembered hearing about it. She did remember that it was highly controversial and widely disputed. There were extremists on both sides, but she couldn't remember which side the government ended up choosing. She pushed her tablet away and sat up on her bed, stared at her wall, and tried to clear the thick fog that had obscured that part of her memory.

She was jerked out of her reverie violently by the TV, which had, she assumed, randomly decided to turn itself on. Her favorite show was just starting, which was convenient, but strange because she did not remember that being the channel the TV was on when she had left that morning. Nor was it time for her favorite show to come on.

But before she knew it she was engrossed. When the episode was over, she looked back down at her history text and, for the life of her, could not remember what she had been thinking about before TV came on.

So she sighed, and reluctantly went back to reading the text.