

“My Jeremy...”

By **NIKHIL ABEL JOHN**

“Daddy! I got an offer! It is from the RoboRacing Institute, the best in the flying cars industry!” My daughter was excited. She gave me a tight hug.

“Daddy...” she paused “I don't know how you will take it, the job is in Australia, and they want me to start soon.”

“Oh, I knew my girl was smart! Congratulations.” Excited for her, I did not dare to think about myself. My heart ached at the thought of being lonely.

“Daddy, I would have preferred to stay here, but I have been searching for a job for the past three years. This is my dream coming true! And Daddy, we need the money to pay off the loan.”

That evening, while playing chess, Anne said

“Daddy. I have a present for you”

“What is it?” I said curiously.

“It's a Humanoid!” said Anne enthusiastically. “Nearly everyone in the city has a Humanoid. It can cook, read, carry objects, give reminders...” she trailed on.

Anne unwrapped her present and I freaked out. It looked like an 11 year old, black and white, with bright blue eyes. It resembled a creature from outer space but those eyes had an unusual depth, filled with kindness.

“No Anne, I don't want it. It gives me the creeps. Anne, give it back. That thing just ruins the calmness of this household. You just make sure you come and visit me as often as possible.”

“But Daddy, just try it while I am gone. I am sure that it will help you and give you company.” She kissed me goodnight, excited for the next day.

"Daddy, remember to use the Humanoid!" she called out as she drove out..

I didn't want any Humanoid as company, and moved it to a corner. As evening fell, I felt lonely and started fiddling with my chess pieces, wishing Anne was here. I remembered how I took care of her since her mother died when she was just 2.

"Can I give you company?" asked a steely voice. Surprised, I looked up to see the Humanoid standing in front of me.

"You can play? Well, have a go."

I soon realised that in fact, it was a good opponent, even better than Anne.

"Checkmate!" said the Humanoid. "Sir, it's seven PM. I need to make dinner. How about fried fish?."

Curious of what the final outcome would be, I waited. After 20 minutes, he served me scrumptious fried fish.

"Hmm. Not bad. Maybe a little pepper would do."

After dinner, the Humanoid cleared up the dishes. I was awestruck. As I moved towards my bedroom, I heard a voice that I was starting to get familiar with. "Wait a second, sir. You need to take your medicine!"

The next day, I was preparing to go for a walk, and was surprised to find the Humanoid waiting for me, with my walking stick. We set out together and walked for a few kilometers. On our way, we met several people with similar Humanoids.

"Buddy, you do make a good companion. What is your name?" I asked, getting closer to him.

"My name is Jeremy and I know we will be great friends."

Indeed we were. Jeremy would wake me up everyday with a warm cup of coffee. He would read the daily news out, go on walks, do shopping, teach me new games, bake together, play ping pong, or the piano, sing karaoke, he would tell jokes, and we would laugh for a long time. He was the best

chess partner, ever. There were even some instances when Jeremy took care of me when I was feeling sick.

Anne called us every night. I could feel that she was happy at her new job, and she knew that I was too.

One morning I got an unexpected video call.

"Daddy! I need to tell you something urgently. Shut down the Humanoid NOW! There seems to be a terrorist takeover on all personal Humanoids. All 2050 Humanoids are now programmed to kill, and self destruct. Your life is in danger. Daddy, enable the shutdown sequence on the Humanoid. The code is in the safe. Hurry! We have no time to lose."

"Anne... listen. There is no way I will shut Jeremy down. I know that the action is irreversible. He is cooking my lunch now."

"Daddy, please listen to me. You are the only person I have in this world." she cried. "This attack has already cost a lot of lives worldwide, in just thirty minutes! You need to switch that thing off now. Please go to the safe to find the code to enable the shutdown sequence."

I could see Anne in tears.

"Anne! This is all too quick! We just came back after a walk and Jeremy was all normal. I cannot shut him down!"

"Daddy! He is a machine, not a human! Oh God! Daddy look behind you! Run and get the code from the safe!" screamed Anne.

I could hear Jeremy's footsteps approaching unusually fast.

I quickly turned back to see him shivering like he was getting electrocuted.

"Attack mode on and self destruct." Jeremy repeated loudly as he came closer. His hands were stretched out. Shocked, I turned back and dragged myself upstairs. I somehow got to the safe, and frantically tried to open it. I had to get the code. I could hear loud vibrations and squeaks as the machine came upstairs.

My vision was blurred as I tried to open the safe with my fingerprint. I used to have Jeremy help me whenever my eyes needed additional support.

Suddenly, I felt a tight grip on my shoulder.

As I tried to wriggle free, another hand fastened my neck. The eleven year old boy, my Jeremy was unbelievably strong. I turned and looked into his eyes, nothing had changed, they were still those deep blue eyes filled with kindness. The hands started suffocating me and I coughed hard.

I wished *my Jeremy* was there to save me.

