

AI for AI

It had been two years since he had left her. The words “left her” had replaced the anger and cruel manner she once referred to his death. She didn’t think she would ever stop cursing him for taking his own life. But two years later, here she was, remembering he had “left her,” and she missed him.

How did it all begin, she asked herself. We argued, sure, but all couples argue. We had so many great times together. Touring New England for months. Island skipping in Hawaii. Hiking Mt. LeConte in Tennessee and Mount Rogers in Virginia, and seeing the wild ponies. Yellowstone and Sequoia National Park. Exploring Zion, Bryce Canyon, Canyonlands, Arches, and Capitol Reef parks in Utah. Oh my God, what amazing trips! We sometimes thought we were on another planet in some of those parks. We laughed. We had sex like rabbits. And we never once argued. Dammit. Regardless of what memory sifts into the crevices of my brain, an argument takes form like a bitter ghost or character from Dickens’ imagination.

But were they really so bad? I mean, we threw things on the floor, but never at each other. We slammed the doors and left. Called each other some hateful names, but we always came back to each other, until you didn’t. There was so much to love. Your laugh. The same interest in books and nature. The willingness to explore new foods and restaurants. The ability to talk about nothing important or being happy, silent with each other as you did your writing and I did my art. We were both going to be famous one day.

I still think if you had finished your book, you would have achieved fame. I have read it five times now and still love it even though it doesn’t have an ending. No. No. It’s not possible. Could it...could it be, because we aren’t supposed to have an ending? It is possible to bring you

back, you know. Well, you don't know, but the technology now is so sophisticated, especially after they passed The Conservation and Affordable Housing Act, requiring morgues to keep a sample of DNA.

AI can make another you. We could start over. You would be real. As real as I could imagine. At least the ads say so. Regenerations. "The end is just the beginning." Catchy, tagline, don't you think? Damn big company now. Their patented DNA replication and molecular synthesis technology is mind-boggling. Some of my friends have used them to bring back loved ones. One of my girlfriends brought back her wife, who died of cancer. They seem very happy. I can't tell Sarah is not real. I am going to call Jennifer and ask her some more questions.

"Hello, Janet. You look beautiful with red hair."

"Hello, Sam. For a hologram, you look pretty damn good too. Have you been working out?"

Sam smiled.

Oh, how I missed his smile. The Greek nose, the lips which begged to be kissed, the cerulean blue eyes.

"I can become more than a hologram, you know. Given time, and if you're so inclined, I can become more real each day. You can have your Sam back."

"Do you remember..."

"Mt. Leconte. Yes. It was April 16, your birthday. It was unseasonably warm and the trilliums were everywhere. We stayed the night and watched the sunset. Drank a bottle of

champagne with some horrible beef stew, fake mashed potatoes, green beans, and bread. The green beans and bread were not bad, but we didn't care. You told me it was a perfect birthday."

"Yes, Sam, it was."

"I see the picture of the Painted Trillium on the wall behind you. I remember you sketching it but never completing the picture. It is beautiful. It looks real."

No, you didn't see it finished. You kept telling me.... Wait. Don't go there, Janet. He's here now. Look at him. Talk to him about our trips, books, movies, anything. Let's see where this goes.

Janet talked to Sam while she entered data into the computer system, which generated the hologram. With more information in the AI system, she was essentially creating life. The interactions became the beginnings of a new relationship, and with each word she typed, a memory was forming with elements of time, detail, and feeling. And as more memories were generated, the hologram transitioned. She watched it take form as if she were making a ceramic pot from an image created by her visual cortex, frontal lobe, limbic system, and prefrontal cortex.

Six months later, Sam was no longer a hologram. He was a real person lying next to her in bed, looking into her eyes. Sex has been everything she dreamed it would be, and the smile on his face was as real as the smile on hers. He got up and fixed them both a mushroom, green chile pepper, and Monterey Jack cheese omelet. Her favorite. After eating, they got dressed and drove through the Smoky Mountains and to the Place of a Thousand Drips. They sat there and watched the water running through all the fissures in the mountain, and she slipped her arm between his and laid her head on his shoulder.

When they went back home, Janet showed Sam a new computer atop an antique roll-top caramel oak desk, with a chair complementing the desk's style and color. Janet pulled out the unfinished manuscript and handed it to Sam as he sat in the chair. He read the title, *The Lost Echo*, and looked up at Janet.

“I wrote this, didn’t I?” Sam asked.

“Yes. But you never finished it. Now you can. It’s in a Word file on the computer. Finish it, Sam. Take advantage of this second chance.”

Sam smiled and felt Janet’s fingers in his thick, ash brown colored hair and soft kisses on his neck before she left. Sam leafed through the manuscript, set it aside, and then pulled the book up onto the screen. As he read through each page, memories began popping into his brain like tiny firecrackers, and he remembered why he never finished the novel.

After several hours, he found Janet in her painting workshop and saw a picture of the waterfalls they had visited earlier with two people standing off to the side, arm in arm, looking into the falls. The anger consumed him, but he knew he must control it if he wanted the second chance Janet had referenced earlier.

“It’s beautiful, Janet. Let’s hike to Abram’s Falls tomorrow. I know it’s a long hike, but we can pack a picnic lunch. Have some champagne like Mt. LeConte. What do you think?”

“I think it sounds like a wonderful idea, Sam.”

The next day, they left at 6 a.m. to ensure they were one of the first into Cades Cove. They parked in the field on the gravel road, crossed the wooden bridge at Abrams Creek, and began the trek up the mountain toward the falls. Along the way, Janet didn’t stop talking about

all their trips and the wonderful times they had together. She never once mentioned the arguments, especially the one where she said she hated him and wanted him to die.

When Sam led the rangers to her body at the base of the falls, he told them what happened. She was trying to take a selfie, too close to the falls, and slipped, hitting her head on a rock, cracking it open like it was made of eggshells, instead of a bony structure capable of withstanding almost a ton of pressure. After hours of investigation and an autopsy, required now by The Conservation and Affordable Housing Act, involving AI “regenerates,” it was deemed an accident.

Sam began writing again, but never once tried to finish the novel. It was a love story about him and his relationship with Janet, and the ending he wanted was not possible now. There could never be the “echo,” the childhood lost by the parents, but found within their children. He did, however, have a lot of success writing short stories and, several years later, was selling books, which became very popular in the speculative fiction genre. Though the acclaim filled an open space within him, he missed the companionship of Janet. The Janet who loved him and never argued or wished him dead. And then he smiled as he turned on the computer and accessed the Regenerations website.

The hologram of Janet had dark strawberry-colored hair and the athletic body he remembered. The eyes were as green as dark holly leaves, and her cute nose and sensual lips made him remember Janet as if she had never left him. Within six months, Janet was as real as Sam, and he showed her the art studio he had built and the painting she had not finished. She grabbed him in her arms and told him what a wonderful day it was, and wanted to finish the painting. He handed her the paintbrush, placed his hands on her face, and pulled her closer as he kissed her. He told her he would be writing as he left the room.

As she began to paint, she started to remember how controlling Sam used to be and how they argued all the time. He always had to have it his way, and she was not one who could exist in a world where she was not an equal with the man in her life.

I never liked cheese on the omelet. He did. I wanted to just go to Maui, not all the islands of Hawaii. And those moments alone together. The inane conversations made me long for silence. I don't think I can live with someone so condescending and pretentious. He thinks he already owns me because he made me. Plus, his eye twitches. It always did, and I just ignored it until I had had enough of his verbal abuse and self-righteous indignation. I think he has some sort of mental disorder. I fear his synaptic wiring will misfire, and there will be another self-inflicted head wound. As a "regenerate," the investigation and the autopsy required by The Conservation and Affordable Housing Act should confirm my suspicions and absolve me of any wrongdoing once again.