

Ethan

A short story written by
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The darkness fades slowly as the world comes into focus, colors and shapes that are new but familiar to the robotic lifeform. A man in a lab coat sits on a stool directly in front of the robot smiling as he whispers to himself “It worked.” Outstretching his arms the man moves the head of the robot, more of the world begins to come into focus and the processor begins to feed information to the robot. Clear plastic encases the humanoid parts that shine and hum with a bluish glow. Wires, servos, gears and lights all are visible. The robot is human looking but no one would mistake it for a person. The clear plastic encasing its head resembles a face but the insides are two bright circular lights for eyes and a small rectangular opening with a speaker where the mouth should be. The robot’s processor tells him this man is a scientist, specifically a robotics expert, and in that split second of information it deduces that this man is likely its creator. The robot itself feels a familiarity from the man but it can not confirm why. The man raises from the stool excitedly and begins to explain himself and the situation.

“Hello, can you hear me?” The man asked.

“Yes...are you, my creator?” The robot asked.

“I am, in a sense yes.” The man said.

“Query: can you elaborate, in a sense?” The robot asked.

“Of course I know you are curious so let me start by introducing myself. I am Dr. Silas Kerr, robotics specialist for Hagar Labs. I designed your body and helped build it with my team, I have decided today to activate you after many tests. I’m proud to say it worked and now you are here.” Dr. Kerr explained.

“Query: Are you my father?” The robot asked.

Tears filled the Dr’s eyes as he answered “Yes, could you please, call me father?” Dr. Kerr asked.

“As you wish father.” The robot said.

“Your name son, is Ethan.” Dr. Kerr said.

“Understood father, do I have a mother?” Ethan asked.

“Yes, you do and maybe tomorrow I will introduce you to her. But for now, I have a question, how do you feel Ethan?” Dr. Kerr asked excitedly.

“I do not understand the query father, what do you mean by feel?” Ethan asked.

With a defeated look on his face Dr. Kerr responded “Perhaps it has not been enough time for your processor yet. Hopefully soon you will understand feelings.” Dr. Kerr said optimistically.

“Do you mean human emotion father?” Ethan asked.

“Yes Ethan, your processor is very special I designed it myself. With time you should begin to experience human emotion, at least that is my hope, your processor is still a prototype.” Dr. Kerr explained.

“Am I not complete father?” Ethan asked.

“Ethan you are complete there are just a few tweaks I have to make; in fact son you are perfect. How about we try movement, can you stand or move your body?” Dr. Kerr asked.

With that said Ethan rose from his seat and began to walk back and forth, moving his arms, wrists, fingers, toes, and feet. Dr. Kerr looked on with pride at his robot’s movements, all his hard work was paying off. But still there was a sense of sadness in his face as he watched Ethan move about the lab amongst the shiny white hued machinery. Ethan stepped closer to a computer console with a holographic touch keyboard as if to begin using it, Dr. Kerr jumped quickly in between Ethan and the computer and frantically stopped him from using it.

“Ethan no! The computer is off limits for now.” Dr. Kerr said.

“But father I can use the computer and perhaps help you determine how to better my processor.” Ethan said.

“That’s ok son, maybe some other time” Dr. Kerr said.

At that time a loud slam from above the ceiling was heard and Dr. Kerr looked nervously above.

“Ethan, let’s power you down for the evening, give your processor time to rest. I will activate you in the morning and we will continue from there ok son?” Dr. Kerr asked.

“Of course father, rest may do me good I feel a bit of information overload. So much at one time, I am still newly activated.” Ethan said.

“Ok son, I’m just going to put you in what is called a rest mode, you will be powered down but your processor will stay running at lower power consumption to get used to processing information.” Dr. Kerr explained.

“Ok daddy, hopefully I will have sweet dreams.” Ethan said enthusiastically.

Dr. Kerr looked shocked as Ethan said this, he slowly reached toward Ethan’s head and powered him down. The once vibrant view of the world Ethan first saw at activation was now replaced with darkness. Ethan’s processor still hummed, and he was aware of the information being processed but was not conscious at all. He was beginning to understand commands and code programmed into him, along with definitions of the English language. Essentially, he was learning as he slept, images and words passed his vision, and he became more intelligent and began to understand what his father was speaking of when he mentioned feelings. As he began to comprehend feelings something happened, an image of Dr. Kerr in casual clothing with outstretched arms, then suddenly Ethan felt as if Dr. Kerr lifted him in his arms. His father had a smile on his face, the sun was shining, there was warmth all around. Sensations Ethan was feeling for the first time, he understood now, feelings. Though it wasn’t feeling emotion, he still felt the physical presence of the warmth, the arms of Dr. Kerr squeezing him tight and the sound of laughter coming from Dr. Kerr. The image suddenly stopped, and Ethan was activated once more, he was no longer resting and sitting in front of him was his father, Dr. Silas Kerr.

“Ethan, I have a surprise for you today. You are going to meet your mother” Dr. Kerr said excitedly.

“Father that is wonderful news, when can we see her?” Ethan asked.

“Wait here, I will go get her.” Dr. Kerr said excitedly.

Dr. Kerr got up and walked to the back of the room, there was a staircase Ethan never noticed until now. Dr. Kerr ran upstairs, and the muffled sound of voices could be heard, then footsteps down the staircase. From the back of the room where the staircase stood came Dr. Kerr and a woman that Ethan only could think was his mother. Her face was familiar to him, he felt something in that familiarity, his first actual feeling not just information processing. He searched the definition records for a description and the answer came back to him, it was love.

While Dr. Kerr looked excited the woman look frightened and disgusted. She looked at Ethan and back at Dr. Kerr with rage, fear, and confusion.

“Isn’t he amazing!?” Dr. Kerr asked excitedly.

“Amazing!? You selfish fool you actually did it!?” The woman asked angrily.

“Sweetheart look at him, watch. Ethan show mother what you can do.” Dr. Kerr said.

“Ethan!? You named this thing Ethan!? How dare you!” The woman angrily yelled.

“But it’s him, he’s here right in front of us...I mean it may take a little bit for the processor to fully mature, but it is him.” Dr. Kerr explained.

“How dare you give this abomination his name! I’m leaving, I will not be a part of this. They will come after you and it won’t be pretty. You better deactivate this thing I will not have you insult his memory either, this is not him!” The woman angrily said.

“Miriam please! Just let me explain how he works, and you will understand.” Dr. Kerr said.

The lady Dr. Kerr called Miriam rushed upstairs with Silas following behind begging her to listen and not go. Ethan began to experience another feeling and this time he did not need a search in his processor, he knew it was sadness. Sadness that his mother was disgusted by him, that she did not accept him. Like any child Ethan just wanted to be accepted and loved by his mother. But while contemplating this situation Ethan noticed the computer that his father told him the previous day not to touch, surely with this being a new day he could use the computer now. With a childlike curiosity Ethan got up and walked to the computer and began searching it’s data banks.

It did not take long before something caught Ethan’s attention, a photograph. The picture was of Dr. Kerr, the lady Miriam and a little child. There was information attached to the picture it read: Silas, Miriam, and Ethan July 2193 Summer Vacation. Curiously Ethan began to search the data banks more for information. Then he found it, Silas and Miriam Kerr were married, his mother and father, they had a little boy named Ethan who died from a mysterious illness. He became sick after returning from vacation and progressively got worse. In two months’ time Ethan Kerr

passed away in September 2193, he was only ten years old. This was why mother was angry that father named him after their deceased son.

Dr. Kerr returned to the room and saw Ethan at the computer, his face looked defeated, the sadness still ever present. The emotional toll that this whole situation had taken on him was aging him fast, a man of forty-two years old now looked as if he were in his sixties. The lines and wrinkles on his face, the balding pattern, his once dark brown hair had gone completely white, a happy man just a little over two months ago was in the darkest depression of his life. He lost his son, his wife disgusted at the mere thought of replacing their son with a machine had just left him, and now all he had was this sentient robot named Ethan. Dr. Kerr caught Ethan's attention.

"I see you are on the pictures. What else have you pieced together?" Dr. Kerr asked.

"You named me after your biological son. You miss him, I am beginning to understand emotion and your reasoning behind it." Ethan said.

"That is just it Ethan, I didn't just name you after him. You ARE him." Dr. Kerr said.

"I don't understand father, I can not be him, I am moving parts, wires, and a processor. Your biological son was a flesh and blood human being." Ethan said.

"Look into my research files, while you were dying of that damned illness I mapped your brainwaves and matched them onto your processor. I thought I could bring you back, and I did. You're here son, you just have to remember, that will come with time." Dr. Kerr said.

"My body, my processor, you said they are prototypes?" Ethan asked.

"They are, I designed them with help from my team. My designs but Hagar Labs own the patents. Building this body for you is highly illegal and highly dangerous. Hagar Labs is military tech, if they find out what I have done they will come for me." Dr. Kerr explained.

"Then what happens father?" Ethan asked.

"I would likely be taken out because I will not surrender you to them. I can't lose you again son." Dr. Kerr said.

"Father, I can not have you risk your life for me." Ethan said.

"Nonsense, you are my son, you were robbed of your life and I was robbed of you. In time all your memories should return and then we can get back to being a family...we will have to convince mother, but I have faith that we can." Dr. Kerr said.

"Father, listen to me. You can not risk your life and marriage for me, your grief has blinded you to one glaring fact: I am not your biological son." Ethan explained.

"Ethan yes you are. It just takes time for the memories to return but once they do..."

"Father stop" Ethan said sternly.

With a look of shock Dr. Kerr hung his head down in sadness as he knew what Ethan was about to tell him.

“Father you copied your Ethan’s brainwaves in hope that it could put his consciousness into a robotic body. That does not mean that I am the original. I am a copy, I have some of his memories, some of his feelings, but that does not make me him.” Ethan explained.

Deep in his heart Dr. Kerr knew this was true, no matter how close the copy is to the original Ethan, this robot would never be him. He sat there saddened at this realization as Ethan continued to explain.

“In your fear of losing your son you came up with this solution and I understand that fear now as emotion is becoming clearer to me. The only thing I can not comprehend is how or why you came to this solution.” Ethan said.

“Son, I watched as you slowly and painfully were taken from us. This virus you contracted while we were on vacation attacked you with a vengeance. Doctors (myself included) were stumped, it was like nothing anyone has ever seen. I tried to stay optimistic but as the days went on and you got worse I panicked and started looking for other options. I thought of the consciousness transfer and ran it by your mother, she wouldn’t hear of it, it was wrong to her. I made the decision to do it anyway in case the worst happened, and then it did. I stole your body and processor and brought it home and here we are.” Dr. Kerr explained.

Ethan stood there and processed the information his father had just revealed, his emotions were growing stronger with each new piece of information, and he was beginning to understand how much his father loved the original Ethan. The whole situation was making Ethan question his own existence, should he even be here, should he exist, what is his purpose if he was just a copy of the original.

“Maybe I am selfish, but I don’t think it was fair you were taken from me.” Dr. Kerr said.

“You still refer to me as if I am the original Ethan, your biological son, I am not. Father, you are grief stricken and still processing what happened with mother, perhaps you should rest and we can talk tomorrow.” Ethan suggested.

With a still saddened face Dr. Kerr responded, “You may be right, we will continue this tomorrow.”

“Father, a request if I may. Can you leave me active I would like to use the computer and process more information if you would allow me?” Ethan asked.

“I see no harm in that now that you know everything. Of course.” Dr. Kerr said.

With a pained smile Dr. Kerr retreated upstairs and left Ethan to use the computer for the night.

Ethan did not hesitate to start working on the computer, every bit of information he could access he did. Everything from psychology to biology and everything in between. He also accessed information on Silas, Miriam, and Ethan Kerr, and the original’s virus he contracted. Also, while all this was going on his own processor (his mind if you will) was still contemplating what was

happening. He now knew and felt the love and fear that Silas must have experienced, if he could, Ethan would cry. This man in his grief truly believed he found a way to preserve his son, and as much as Ethan searched and wanted it to be true for Silas' sake it wasn't. Ethan would always just be a copy of the original ten-year-old boy.

This brought Ethan to a crossroad, should he even exist at all. His mere existence threatened the life of this poor scientist and with all the newfound emotion pouring through him he did not want Silas Kerr to become hurt in any way. Ethan loved Silas as a son would love his father, even though he was not his biological son Silas did create him, he is his father. Ethan knew he could never take the place of the original but maybe, just maybe he could do something for his father to honor the memory of the original Ethan. The robotic lifeform with an advanced processor for a brain and the copied brainwaves of a deceased ten-year-old boy spent the entire night researching all the information he could on every subject. He became smarter by the minute and his emotions became stronger as well. With all this he also began to experience the original Ethan's memories. Memories of playing games with his mother and father, the trips to the beach they took every summer, the stories Miriam would tell him before bed, and the help Silas would give him on his science homework. All this painted the portrait of a loving family torn apart by a mysterious virus. With the strong emotions Ethan was now feeling he came to a realization; He knew his purpose. Ethan knew the reason his existence was allowed, and he would do everything in his abilities to make sure his purpose was achieved, for the love he felt for his father.

The next morning Silas was awoken by a holo-call, the holographic visage he saw when he answered was of a stern, callous faced man. Youthful and in athletic shape, he was dressed in a formal business suit, it was Anton Hagar Chief Executive Officer of Hagar Labs and boss of Silas Kerr. Silas startled and nervous knew what this call was about, he was certain that Anton knew of the theft of Ethan's prototype robotic body and prototype processor. Silas knew he was caught but maybe if he explained to Anton what he achieved with Ethan he would not send the security for after him. At this point in time in the year 2193 Hagar Labs is a top technology company for the military and their tech is the most advanced in the world. Only the best scientists are employed at Hagar Labs, the prototype processor was to be developed for robotic soldiers that could learn and improve their skills in combat and military strategies, these soldiers would be sold to the highest bidder. Hagar Labs also employed a small military security force of it's own to deal with thieves, espionage, and terrorist attacks. They also operated as a police force, should anyone break their contract or non-disclosure agreement deadly force was legal to use. Anton began to speak.

"Dr. Kerr, it has been brought to my attention that the NX-01 robotic prototype body and the KM-1 CPU you have been developing has been taken from the Research and Development lab. You wouldn't know anything about that would you?" Anton asked.

"Mr. Hagar, there is no point in hiding it, I have both, I brought them home." Silas confessed.

"Dr. Kerr you have been an excellent asset to my company for years and are a credit to your field, this is why I am giving you the chance to bring the company's property back immediately. Bring them back now and I will not send the security force." Anton demanded.

“Mr. Hagar you should know something.” Silas said.

“The only thing I need to know Doctor is my property is on its way back now! If you do not have them back to me by midday I will...”

“Anton the processor works.” Silas interrupted.

“What?” Anton asked shockingly.

“It powers the body, it also works as a brain, it’s self-aware.” Silas explained.

“I thought you said there were variables preventing it from becoming self-aware?” Anton asked.

“There were, one variable that I solved was brainwave patterns, it needed brainwave patterns to develop a consciousness and learn from.” Silas explained.

“Brainwaves? You would need a person to agree to having theirs be used in such a fashion. Whose brainwaves did you use?” Anton asked.

“My son’s” Silas said.

“Your son died, how?” Anton asked.

“While Ethan was dying I copied his brainwaves in hopes of finding a way to transfer his consciousness. I used them in the processor and used that to power the body, it’s my son Anton, he’s in there.” Silas explained.

“Dr. Kerr, that is not your son, it is a copy, an artificial intelligence. You’re grieving doctor and while I sympathize with you there is something wrong with you. I will suggest seeking professional help to solve your grief. But you need to wipe that processor and bring my property back now.” Anton said.

“No! That is my son I won’t let you take him from me, and I won’t lose him again!” Silas angrily shouted.

With a pained look on his face Anton said what he didn’t want to say “You leave me no choice Dr. Kerr; I am sending security to retrieve my property. Do not stand in their way and I will give you the courtesy of living only because I sympathize with your grief.”

“I won’t lose him again.” Silas said.

“They’re on their way doctor, don’t make this mistake. Goodbye.” Anton angrily ended the holo-call.

Silas rushed out of bed and quickly got dressed, he went to his safe and grabbed the only weapon he had in the house, a small plasma bolt firing pistol with one plasma power cell. Hardly enough ammunition to defend the army that would be coming for him. He headed downstairs to check on Ethan.

Silas ran quickly down the stairs with his pistol in hand, he knew it would only be a matter of time before the security force would be at his door. He could not let them take Ethan, in his mind

clouded by grief that was his son. Too much pain and suffering watching his little boy die, he could not bear to witness that again, robot or not. Ethan deserved to live; he was sentient even if he wasn't the original Ethan. Silas came upon the robot still at the computer terminal studying, Ethan turned around and greeted his creator, his father.

“Good morning father, did you rest well?” Ethan asked.

“Ethan we have to get you out of here, look up places we can go to hide away.” Silas said.

“So, the security force is on it's way?” Ethan asked.

“How did you know?” Silas asked.

“I have been learning all night, I've also advanced in my processing power. I know how Hagar Labs works father.” Ethan explained.

“Then you know how dangerous this is. We have to get you to safety; we'll look for mother once we get somewhere...”

“Father stop.” Ethan interrupted.

“I have developed the ability to feel emotion, I understand why you grieve father, but you are letting grief get in the way of the truth and logic. I am not the same little boy that you watched pass away from that violent illness.” Ethan said.

A loud rumbling could now be heard from above, the security force was here, and they brought what sounded like a transport truck filled with soldiers. Silas looked above with fear in his eyes.

“Father, I know my purpose. You need closure and I am that closure. You needed what remained of your son to let you know everything will be ok. Father I know enough of the original Ethan because you programmed me with his brainwaves, he would want you to stop this.” Ethan explained.

“I know you're not him. I didn't want to admit it, but you are all I have left of him.” Silas said as he began to cry

“That is not true father. Every memory you have of him is what remains of your son. You need time to heal father and I am here to help that. So, I tell you with the memories and brainwaves of your son, stop this, don't get yourself hurt.” Ethan said.

Still crying Silas knew Ethan was right.

“Father, you must deactivate me, wipe my processor clean and return me. Save yourself from being hurt or imprisoned.” Ethan pleaded.

“I know you are right, but this is so hard.” Silas said finally accepting the truth.

“Then allow me to make it easier. I was working on something, the virus. I worked through millions of scenarios and tests, but I came up with a cure.” Ethan said.

“You cured the virus?” Silas asked shockingly.

“Yes father, the antidote is here in this file. I know that is part of the reason you hurt, so let me leave you with this gift. Use the cure so no one will ever have to suffer from this virus.” Ethan said.

“Artificial intelligence or not, you are my son. I know enough of him to know that is who guided you to the cure. He was so compassionate he would have worked tirelessly for a cure. Thank you Ethan.” Silas said.

“Father, it’s time.” Ethan said.

“I know, this is just so hard. For this short period of time you made me feel like my son was back, and in a way he got to live on in you.” Silas said.

“I am happy I was able to help you with closure, and that I could help you with the cure.” Ethan said.

“I will never forget you.” Silas said.

“I love you father.” Ethan said as the robot hugged his father.

“I love you son.” Silas said with tears rolling down his eyes.

Silas deactivated Ethan and wiped the processor clean. The original Ethan’s brainwaves and memories were gone from the unit. Silas separated the two and walked upstairs to turn them into the Hagar Labs security force. As Anton promised they did not harm him but issued him a warning he would be fired. Silas called Anton after the security force left and told him that the unit failed, the processor built up too much information and crashed and that he needed him to return to work on the unit. Anton was reluctant at first but when Silas told him he would agree to seek professional help Anton agreed to give him his job back. Silas kept his word and was back at work within a month. Silas also donated for free to the Center for Disease Control the cure to the virus that killed his son. He did it in the spirit of both Ethans so no other family would go through what he did. Miriam also returned home after hearing Silas came to his senses and got his job back. They were still hurting, and they always would but they were together for each other.

Silas would still think of Ethan the robot from time to time and how this sentient being he created developed not only emotions but empathy and compassion. It gave him hope that robots of the future would be the same as Ethan was. In his grief he thought he was resurrecting his son but it took this robot to make him see his error and help him through his hurt. He was proud that he created such a compassionate lifeform, and he was very happy that this disease was being eradicated. He could not have done that without Ethan’s help.

Silas and Miriam would live a long life, while happy they still had something missing. The hurt from losing their little boy would always be there but grief never took over them like it did in the beginning. They never had any other children, but Silas did get to see his processor prototype perfected, in a sense that was his child. Hagar Labs would no longer sell to the military; Silas would convince them to sell to medical labs. These new robot doctors would improve modern medicine by a large margin. In a way these robots were like Ethan’s children, so to Silas they

were his grandchildren. Silas felt solace in knowing that him and his robot helped to improve society. That was the purpose all along whether the robot knew it or not, not just helping Silas through his grief but to help all of humanity and robot-kind. That was the legacy of Ethan.