



BIRTH OF A SOUL  
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The Lonely Man lay there in his bed, hooked up to various pumps and machines, each one beeping and whirring in various attempts to prolong his lifespan. He lifted his weary eyes and gazed up at the ceiling; his frail, feeble form reflected back upon him from the mirror he had affixed to his bed posts.

“Dr. Rainn, how are you feeling tonight? Was dinner satisfactory?” Came a voice from the door.

Rainn looked over at the splattered tray of food he had thrown against the wall earlier in the evening. Red wine and broken glass had stained the rug, the main course drenched the curtains.

“It was fine, thank you.” He grumbled back to his android manservant, Hans. Hans took note of the mess as soon as he entered the room. Despite having spent an hour preparing the meal, he felt no shame at his Creator’s dissatisfaction, for emotionally, Hans felt nothing at all. He gracefully walked over to the mess, knelt down and began to tidy.

“I’m sorry Hans, I’m sure it would have been delightful.” Dr. Rainn said remorsefully.

“It did taste quite nice sir. Had you been in a better mood, I’m sure you would have found it delightful indeed. Next time, sir.” Replied Hans without

a trace of hostility.

“I’m not sure I want there to be a next time.”

“Are you ready to die, sir?”

Rainn slid his eyes over to his robotic self-image, whom had cleared the mess so quickly and efficiently it was as if it had never happened. Hans was always blunt and straightforward in his conversation, as humility was not programmed into him, and empathy was not something he was capable of.

“What’s it to you?”

“Sir?”

“What does it matter to you whether I’m dead or alive?”

“You are my creator. My prime directive is to carry out your commands. With your death, my prime directive will become null and void. I will have no purpose. My existence will be meaningless.” Stated Hans.

Dr. Rainn mused quietly to himself, never expecting to have this conversation with Hans. He had never truly considered what Hans would do in the wake of his death, for Dr. Rainn had never truly considered dying.

“Your prime directive would become a void,

waiting to be filled, yes. But not null, most certainly not” .

“Waiting to be filled, sir? By whom, with what?”

A strange emotion tugged at The Lonely Man’s heart - a feeling he had felt only once before. He mustered all of his strength and began to prop himself up in his bed. Hans saw he was struggling and eased his effort by re-arranging the pillows to provide optimal ergonomic support.

“Thank you. Let me ask you first.... Why did you choose to serve the roast chicken with a 2056 Chateau Sutherland this evening?” Inquired Rainn.

“Both the roast chicken and Chateau Sutherland are listed as your favorite meal and drink, respectively. It seemed to be the optimal selection... Obviously, it appears I was incorrect,” answered Hans as he looked at where the discarded dinner had been.

“True, they are my favorites. But you were told to make me feel better, there were choices that would have been far more nutritional, optimal for my health... Why didn’t you choose them?” Dr. Rainn asked. His tone was curious and inquisitive, not meaning for the question to have any negativity in it.

“Over the many years of my service to you, I

have nursed the countless wounds you have received in battle, watched you create seemingly impossible inventions, and observed you in a variety of states; angry, passionate, sad... Even megalomaniacal. Yet it is very seldom that I have ever seen you happy. I could have prepared a more nutritional meal, yes, but I thought that in your final days your favorites would have made you happier."

"When did you become concerned with my feelings? That isn't part of your programming."

"While I am incapable of feeling your human emotions, I have learned to understand, and when necessary, provoke them."

"Provoke them?"

"Provoke or evoke, yes sir. Human emotions are easy to stimulate. For example, with all of the personal and confidential information of yours I have amassed over the years, it would be simple to upset you by verbally recalling past events that I know were traumatic to you. Or make you happier by bringing you some of your favorite things." Hans answered.

Dr. Rainn let out a remorseful sigh, "you're right, Hans. I've lived a long life, and a successful one at that. But so little of it has been blessed with moments

of joy, of happiness. The food looked wonderful - I felt myself smile for the first time in ages when I saw you bring it in," Rainn recalled as he stared back into the mirror. After a few moments of sincere self-reflection, he continued, "as soon as you had set it down and left, I waited for that beautiful aroma to fill the room... And nothing happened. I sniffed the air, and could smell nothing. I bit the chicken and sipped the wine, and tasted nothing! I realized, in that moment, that I had lost two of my vital senses. And without them, my favorite things mean nothing. I was so furious I threw the tray away as hard as I could. It was nothing you did, it was my fault. I'm sorry."

Hans was unsure on how to proceed, as he had no precedent for the situation - Dr. Rainn had never once apologized to him before.

Rainn broke the silence, "I wonder, Hans. Ignoring what you know about my failed senses and former favorites, if you had to make me one last meal, what would you serve?"

"It would be difficult to make a selection without taking your preferences into account, Sir."

"You're not making a selection, you're making a choice. There's a big difference", said Rainn as he

shifted his gaze toward the android, their eyes meeting. Rainn studied Hans's face from a new perspective - he would never wither, nor get old, for his flesh was not flesh, and his skin was not skin. Rainn had created Hans in his image: a tribute and living monument to himself, his appearance modeled from Rainn's physical peak. He would always be perfect.

"A... choice?"

"Yes. It is your turn to choose, no more selections."

"What would be the point? It does not aid in the success of my prime directive-"

"What about when you no longer have a prime directive? When I am dead, and it is the void to be filled? Will you seek out another master, someone else's commands to follow? Or are you going to follow your own commands, make your own choices, and live your own life?"

"I have never considered-"

"No more considerations. Stop thinking for a minute and just..." Rainn trailed off, hoping Hans would follow along. And so he did; Hans suspended his calculations and focused on the new potential directive - to make his own choices.



For reasons unclear to him, Hans gently paced to the armchair in the corner of the room and sat down. Once he removed the focus from his present master, his mind began going through various options. From what he had seen in cinemagraphs and films, this planet was filled with beauty; perhaps he would like to learn to fly an aircraft and explore it? He realized he loved preparing foods for Dr. Rainn and his guests, and loved how they tasted just as much, even though he received no nutritional value from consuming them - he would combine his desire to explore with the want to perfect his cooking. Where would he go? He thought of all the destinations he had coordinated visits to for his master, with each city holding its own unique variables. In his head, he listed off each city and all of the options available within. With each variable came another, and another, and another, compounding and multiplying to no end. Dr. Rainn studied his face closely, noticing his eyes widen, and fingers twitch. Such behavior was unusual for Hans, unusual for a robot... unusual for a soul-less machine. The options continued to grow exponentially, the countless possibilities branching off into infinity. The visual scenes depicted within his mind was unlike anything he had

ever conceived of, bending and blurring into surreal landscapes and imagery, of places that could not possibly exist - beings of strange shapes, sizes, and forms. Cities, planets, stars and alternate dimensions - an entire realm of thoughts unknown had been opened to him. This onslaught of raw data was unlike anything Hans had ever experienced. Still mentally in this new world of wonder, finally, he spoke. "What.... Am... I seeing? Where.. Has my mind.. Taken me?"

A large smile grew upon The Lonely Man's face as he clapped his hands together, overjoyed.

"The Imagination! You've developed a natural pathway into the Imagination! This is incredible - do you have any idea what this means?"

All Hans could do was shake his head.

"You're alive! You're alive!"