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The Big Community

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The Big Community

The director handed the brand-new script to the talented actor and told him to memorize it for the following day's rehearsal. "To memorize an entire protagonist's dialogue in an evening! That's an awful lot to ask of your lead," said the actor. "Don't worry about it," replied the director. "Even though you're the lead, something tells me that you'll have no trouble memorizing your lines by tomorrow. Now get to it!"

The actor sat on his bed in his cluttered studio apartment. He was facing the floor-to-ceiling mirror that stood perpendicular to the bed. The actor looked at the cover of the script. It read, "*The Big Community*." He flipped to the first page and read the introductory synopsis. The play was about an android that was created with no outstanding physical features or unique behavioral protocols. It was programmed to mimic what it perceived as positive behavioral and emotional characteristics exhibited by the people it met. It was additionally programmed to tell itself what it perceived itself to be upon the conclusion of whatever interviews it conducted, so as to achieve the end goal of telling itself, "I am a human with a soul and I am good" and thus returning to the lab from whence it came.

The first person the android encountered was a successful looking businesswoman on her way to work. The actor recited his lines: "Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is."

The actor cleared his throat and repeated the lines until he captured the perfect tone of someone confused, curious, and without a human soul.

"Please stop. I need to learn." The actor pictured in his mind's eye the woman hurrying away, feigning a desperate need to be somewhere else.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

The next person it met was a fruit vendor peddling his produce in the streets of the Chinatown in whatever city the play took place. "Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is." The actor felt he was getting better at reciting that line, which did reinforce his confidence in that aspect of his role, but he also wondered when the character would grow enough to warrant some change. "Please stop. I need to learn." The actor imagined the vendor yelling Chinese expletives at the android and brandishing a cleaver in its direction as he backed into the doorway of his shop.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"No wonder the director thought I'd get my lines down so quick," thought the actor. "It's just the same thing repeated in different scenarios. The character doesn't even grow enough to change the dialogue at all."

After its visit in Chinatown, the android found itself in a local science fiction convention known as RobotiCon. Upon its arrival it was immediately greeted with a frenzy of arms asking for autographs and the flashing lights of phone cameras. "We love your kind!" yelled the android's fans. "We love you!"

"Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is."

"Nailed it," thought the actor.

The fans ignored the android's words, however, and continued to take pictures of themselves with it, posting the photos online so their friends could see that they were *actually touching a real* android. The actor practiced squinting his eyebrows in the mirror, trying to capture the perfect aesthetic of someone so deluged in fans (something the actor thought he should have no issue conjuring).

"Please stop. I need to learn." A touch of frustration entered the actor's voice, but he then stopped and considered such a change. The android had not seen any frustration, so it would not know how to exhibit it. But surely that must itself be frustrating, right? The actor repeated the line with the same inquisitive but otherwise apathetic tone with which he delivered the line previously and found that to be the perfect method of approach for the scene, despite whatever real frustration lingered in his heart for his character. The actor looked back to the script and saw that the fans were relentless and, defeated, the android fought its way through the crowd to leave.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

The script was thinning with not many more pages left to rehearse. "Easy," thought the actor. "Just one more scene."

The android found itself in an alley behind a large and important theatre. Despite the ritzy façade of the building, the back was as repugnant and malodorous as the alley behind any of the other buildings in the city. It was in this alley that the android found an actor leaning against a dumpster and smoking a cigarette. He was using the neck of his white t-shirt to wipe bronzer off of his cheeks when he spotted

the android and his face lit up. The actor in the alley yelled out to the android and ran over to it. He explained to the android that he was trying to perfect a robotic role for a play he is in and he wondered if he could just spend a few moments with the robot to study it.

"Hello. Would you please answer some questions? I am trying to understand what humanity is."

The actor in the alley was delighted for such a response and let out a small cheer. Then he cleared his throat, regained his composure, assumed an emotionless, stony face, and repeated what the android said back at it.

"Hello. Would you please answer some questions?"

"Please stop. I need to learn."

"Please stop. I need to learn." The actor sitting on his bed and staring at himself in the mirror chuckled at how funny it was that the actor literally had to learn from the robot, and so his words held more meaning than he thought.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine." There were notes written by this line. *Both in unison. With fear.*

"What?" thought the actor. "Where was fear playing a role in this play?" The page ended after the note with the word *End*. "That's it? That's the whole thing?" He assumed the message of the play would be covered by the director during tomorrow's rehearsal, so he tried to pry no deeper and instead turned to the mirror to practice the final line. "I hope that whoever's playing the actor in this thing can get the unison well enough," thought the actor.

He stared at his reflection and twisted his face until it was the perfect face of the android. With his visage properly established, he repeated the lines, each time with a slightly more pronounced tremor in his voice than the previous until he matched what he assumed was the playwright's vision of fear.

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

"Evaluation complete. I remain a soulless machine."

End