

# Sympathy 3000-21

*Unit 3000-21 is warming, makes a humming sound, when its circuits duplicate emotion.*

"Sam, it's time for breakfast, it's your favorite."

The plate of french toast, bacon, and scrambled eggs was placed down in the familiar spot at the table. The same spot Sam has sat since they moved into the house five years ago, when he was thirteen. The french toast was lightly powdered. Sam sat and, began to cut it into pieces, delicately adding syrup to each piece. Foster was wearing his typical garb of orange pants with a grey button down shirt. A slightly mussed blue apron, with a light sprinkling of powdered sugar on it was draped over the whole outfit. On the front of the apron in red cursive letters were the words 'Born to Serve.' Foster stood by the counter, and watched Sam eat his french toast with loving eyes.

"You know you should cut those into smaller pieces, Sam."

"I'm an adult now, Foster, I know how to eat." Sam had been eighteen for three months now, and coped with the awkwardness by constantly asserting his adulthood.

"I'm just afraid you'll choke, is all."

"I know. Hey, where's Dad?" The chunks of french toast were now smaller, but an increasing number of pieces got shoveled into his mouth at once.

"He had to go in early. They're launching a new application today. Finish up, you'll miss the bus."

Sam shoved the bacon into his mouth and got up from the table.

"You know, things are going to be so different without you, Foster." Sam mumbled with a mouth full of bacon.

"Let's not talk about that, hey?"

"I'm sorry, it's just that I'll miss you."

"I'm going to miss you too."

Sam kissed Foster on the cheek, grabbed his backpack, and rushed out the door.

Through the kitchen window, Foster watched Sam waddle off, and he wondered what things would be different. It seemed impossible to know, so he decided to not think about it and began to clean Sam's dishes. It would be another half hour before Gracie woke

up. Foster placed the plate, silverware, and glass at her normal seat, and he sat down at his. He wanted Gracie's food to be warm for her, so he held off on starting it.

His mind wandered. The tasks and concerns for that day twisted and turned and formed lists in his head. He thought about Sam, he really was turning into a fine young man. Gracie was a different story. She was so distant and foreign. She built her own world and would never let Foster in. He wondered if he would miss her.

Miss miss miss miss miss

He probed his brain for all of the meanings, implications, connections, and idiosyncrasies of the word. Failure to hit. Miss the mark. A young lady, like Miss Gracie. Not attending, not obtaining, missing out on. Miss the boat. Avoiding, barely missed it. Failing to understand, missing the point. A feeling, a mix of loneliness and nostalgia. I'll miss you.

A feeling a feeling a feeling a feeling

*When it tries the way it does, makes it seem like it can love.*

Foster made Gracie's french toast, knowing full well her dislike for the dish. He was putting the plate on the table just as she walked in. He looked into her eyes and could see the contacts glowing with the light of an artificial realm. He could see that her left eye was playing a video of some sort, the right seemed vaguely normal, it was only partially lit.

"Good morning." Foster beamed, the glow in his voice mimicked the glow in her eyes.

"Hi." Gracie plopped down at the table, and a slight grumble emitted from her throat.

"What are you watching?"

"My french toast?"

"I'm certainly not going to eat it. What are you watching?" Foster asked again.

"**Calamidy Trio: Elephant, Rocket, Catapult**, they're having a concert in India right now."

Gracie had always enjoyed listening to music. Never making it, just listening. For her fourteenth birthday she had received high fidelity audio implants. She had blown them out just in time for her sixteenth birthday. They were always turned on, unless she was made to turn them off.

Made - artificially produced. Made - forced to do.

The rest of the breakfast took place in silence. Foster cleaning up. Gracie eating,

watching her concert, and telepathing with friends. She got up from the table, took her backpack, and looked at Foster with her glowing eyes. "I'm excited for the new you." She turned and walked out the door. Foster could barely manage a "Bye!" before she slammed it.

"Have a good day at school!" Foster called out. He finished cleaning the kitchen and began to make the beds. The daily routine. Vacuum, laundry, dishes, order groceries. The apron slung around his neck throughout.

No more work and three hours to kill. Foster took off his apron and carefully hung it up on a hook in the kitchen; he moved to the family room while removing the power cord from his pocket, he plugged one end into the socket, the other into where his belly button would be, and he sat on the Laz-E-Boy.

The sweet nectar of life flowed inside of him through the wire like some sort of post-natal umbilical cord. Post-natal, as if he was actually born. Born to Serve. On a typical day, Foster would normally turn off, but not today. Confusion running through his head, the umbilical cord served as a familiar warm feeling. He sucked it in and was comforted by the steady 60hz rhythm. The habitual 110 volts. It felt like a promise of continued life. The more he took in, the more he realized it was an empty promise. Fear began to take hold.

*One more robot learns to be something more than a machine*

Unit 3000-21 is a mechanical architecture that mimics the construction of a human. An android. The "head" houses a computer capable of 10 quadrillion calculations every second, roughly the same number as a healthy human brain. This processing power is used to run a model of a human brain. The chemical make-up, the 7 billion neurons, various ion channels, and 50 quintillion synapse connections are all synthetically modeled inside of the unit's powerful computer mind. All thoughts are processed through the model. The result is a machine with slightly below-average human intelligence and the ability to simulate emotion. Also, because the functions of the machine rely solely on a simulated brain, the machine can and does forget.

The model is, of course, augmented to suit the needs of a machine Born to Serve. Designed to be content while working, free of anger, resentment, and depression, it is an incomplete model. However, it is still capable of fear, guilt, sadness, remorse, and invalidation.

Sitting in the Laz-E-Boy, Foster's artificial mind was awash with these emotions. In a few hours the newest model would arrive at the door. Unit 4000-21. More powerful and with a digital-organic brain, 4000-21 experiences emotions instead of synthesizing them. Foster is to transfer his entire brain into this new unit. The new unit will then become Foster. Just as he became Foster. Rebirth.

Foster's thoughts were an endless sea of unknowns: Did Unit 2000-21 feel the same way I feel now at this terminal hour? He loved, and I took that from him. Yet, he couldn't feel like this, and there was no way for me to know what he felt, but he didn't feel like this. He was inferior.

He did feel though.

How can one live on in a new body? I can't ever remember not being me. How much of the self is the shell and how much the mind? Will I feel different with this new brain? Smarter, yes, but how can my emotions be better? More real? This anxiety that I feel, a combination of nervousness and guilt, this is real isn't it? Samuel seemed to understand that there would be a difference, but Gracie just sees it as an upgrade. How can I still be Foster with a new brain, and a new body, and new feelings?

Psychosomatic. It's one word. The body and the mind are inseparable.

Knock Knock. Foster walked to the door with knowing dread in his brain. He opened it, revealing two men. One was in a brown uniform, the other in bright orange pants, a button down shirt of a darker grey than Foster's, and an apron with "Living to Serve" scrawled across the front.

"Hi, yes, Serial ZX55MMM, meet Serial KF99ACE." There was no response needed, Foster looked into the artificial eyes and was greeted by a blank stare. The deliveryman plowed on, reading partly from the clipboard and partly from memory "Yes, right, so you know what to do, yes? Take the new unit's hand and begin the transfer, as you do so walk around the house. You can talk or not, whatever is more comfortable. Once done, verify all the important information has been transferred, routines, preferences, schedules, yadda yadda."

Foster doubted the yadda yadda was written on the clipboard.

"Afterwards you can transfer your personality file into the new unit. The new unit will check for missing information and add anything that you overlooked. He will then lead you to the curb and someone will be by in about three hours to pick you up. Sign here."

Foster wondered if the deliveryman noticed his slight hesitation when he grabbed the pen. He carefully etched his serial number inside of three concentric ovals. Foster brought the new unit into the house and closed the door behind him. He led the unit into the brightly lit kitchen and stood in front of it. He stared into the face of his sequel. Thoughts of fathers and sons, inheritance, and lineage ran through his head.



“Hello.”

“Hello.” The unit parroted, with an identical voice, yet it was distinctively lifeless.

“Who are you?”

“Unit 4000-21, serial KF99ACE, Living to Serve.”

“Do you live? Are you alive?”

“I’m quite a bit more alive than you.” There was no inflection in the voice; it was just a canned answer. Synthetic, manufactured, Campbell’s Chicken Noodle Soup.

“I don’t understand.”

“You’re not supposed to.” Maybe it was Foster’s ego getting in the way, but he thought he heard condescension.

Foster stared into the cold, lifeless eyes and felt inferior, worthless, and inadequate. The worst part about it was these feelings were wrapped up in the knowledge that this new unit would be able to feel them better than he ever could.

Yet again, he will be becoming this new unit, so he will have these new and improved feelings. “What will happen to the memories of my feelings?”

“Feelings are relived, not remembered.” How could this machine be more capable of life when these words are so cold and heartless?

“I don’t want to do this, I don’t think it’s necessary. I feel.”

“Not as well as I can, that’s why I’m here.”

*Feeling a synthetic kind of love, dreaming a sympathetic wish*

“You don’t understand; I love them. This is my family. They love me too.”

“And I will love them as well, better.” The unit cocked his head with defiance in its cold eyes.

There was a long silence, Foster ran through the memories of his family. He relived the contentment he felt being a servant to his family. His family. They were his, not this interloper's. He cooked and cleaned and asked about their day.

*Is it wrong to think it's love, when it tries the way it does*

"They ordered me, you know." Like a knife through a heart that wasn't there. "I can't serve them without your memories, you know. You know I'll have your personality."

"Look, we can just send you back." There was a pleading and a yearning in Foster's voice.

"That would be silly. This is for the best." He held out his hand, expectantly, and with a slow reluctance Foster took it into his own.

Hand in hand, they walked through the house, Foster calling up his memories of the places and the people, seeing them vividly in his minds-eye. Then they were gone, transferred. Step by step, room by room, more memories gone forever.

The two of them, nearly identical twins, walked silently hand in hand. Elder and child, master and protégé, new and old, history and innovation, one slowly coming to life while the other slowly died. Memories like so many candles, blown out one by one. Until they were all gone.

They were back in the kitchen, and they sat at the table, hand in hand, looking into the other's eyes. One cold and lifeless, the other filled with the sadness of lost memories.

An instant role reversal. What's old is new again.

"Who are you?" Foster asked.

"Unit 3000-21, serial number ZX55MMM, Born to Serve."

"Follow me." Foster lead the unit to the curb, went back inside, and awaited his family's arrival. The family that he loved and that loved him.