

The Scientist's Son

“The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it.” - Henry David Thoreau

Dr. Philip H. Morrison had spent a lifetime exploring the known universe; he had three PHD's, from various prestigious universities: organic chemistry, mechanical engineering, and computer science. He had also published in the fields of botany, biology, and dabbled in the fields of medicine, collaborating most often with neurologists. He had won a Nobel Prize for his work in limb-replacement, a process that enabled doctors to attach biological tissue to circuit boards--connecting the human mind to electronic nerve endings. More than ten years had passed since then, and he had grown rather bored with his tenured faculty position at the university.

He had been eager to influence the budding young minds of future prize winners; but it hadn't been that way. Instead, his grad-students were dull, a bunch of inauthentic kiss-asses. His PHD candidates, while intelligent, lacked any sense of ingenuity leaving him with a resounding sense of disappointment. This did, however, afford him time, time to tinker in his absurdly and abundantly well-funded robotics lab. So well-respected was he that this facility was also his home. It was twenty miles into the hills outside the small town in which the university stood. A secluded location nestled in thick woods. The air always seemed to smell of pine, and earth. A comfort to his busy mind.

It was here that he received a call from his physician. He had been ignoring the first three attempts; his head too invested in his present task--the building of a better droid-being. This robot would surpass all of his previous creations. The idea had sprung upon him like a wolf in

the night. He lay in bed scrolling through various feeds: world news, innovations, and scholarly breakthroughs stuck in the mindset of his daily tedium. This is when he came upon a recent publication; a collaborative group had utilized his methods to cure short term memory loss in a chimpanzee. The chimp had sustained a grievous head injury from another male in a vie for control of their community. The efforts of the two teams had given the chimp a normal life again for six weeks, alleviating the memory loss by replacing the damaged parts of the brain with his medically patented circuit implant. The problem was that the mind of the chimp had recognized the foreign nature of the board and began to reject the programming, essentially developing an immunity to the bio-electro connectors. Unfortunately, the intensity of the inevitable short-circuit had killed the chimp. Morrison considered the facts and reviewed the report they had shared with the journal. Unsatisfied, he contacted the director of the collaboration and enticed him into sharing the raw data. He had been pouring over the research notes, concluding that their error had been in leaving any remnants of the original biological tissue, in this case the chimp's brain. It would have been more efficient to upload the entirety of the chimp's persona into a fully-developed robotic brain. He had been testing the theory and found that the closer in maturity the two subjects were, the more successful the upload would be, and the better it would hold. The phone rang again, and this time, in his frustration he answered. Not used to being interrupted, he did not shield the voice on the other end from his unappreciative mood.

“This is Morrison, better be good...”

Two clicks and a beep told him he was dealing with a bot. He waited.

“Yes, Morrison, Dr. Philip Morrison, body ID number 477398?”

“Yes.”

“This is the office of Dr. Armand Rotham. The results of your last safety scan cleared his wire this afternoon. We regret to inform you that you are no longer safe. Expect symptoms of the disease to appear within the next six months. Dr. Rotham sends his most sincere apologies.”

The automated voice cut out as Morrison dropped the metal handset to the desk. His glass of ice water hopped slightly from the weight of the kinetic wave that flowed out from the dropped object. Its contents spilled over to the floor, and he just stood there and watched it trickle, pooling near his dark brown loafers.

His mind raced, his heart fluttered so rapidly he worried it would fly from his chest leaving him dead right here and now rather than two years from now. No one survived the disease; he was going to die before his fiftieth birthday. In 1922, Albert Einstein was awarded the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics, for his services to Theoretical Physics, and especially for his discovery of the law of the photoelectric effect. He was 42. Dr. Morrison had been the same age when he had won his own prize, a goal he had set for himself in grad school. Never a man to be easily satisfied, he felt compelled to continue questioning the cards dealt to him and all of humanity by that beast known as nature.

Yet in that moment all he felt was pressure, as if a clamp had been locked down on one of his major arteries. Like all the oxygen had fled from the room and he was being sucked into the void. He was incomplete; he had yet to reach perfection. He had so much more to do. Surely, this was not his end.

He had spent decades, and well-earned government funding, building the safety-system. He'd been called upon to advise Congress on its best implementations: schools, transit stations, borders. If a subject triggered an alarm it signaled their local medic who would then file a

summons. Morrison had received fourteen medic-summons since the university had installed the system, and each time he'd met with the medic he had been cleared. They'd chuckle at the ludicrous idea of someone like him, someone so aware and safeguarded, contracting the disease.

“This is impossible.”

Impossible, no it was more like probable. Yet there he stood, stating it flatly over, and over again to the empty lab. He felt light-headed; a coppery taste coated his tongue and the cheeky-walls of his mouth. He swooned like a southern belle, dropping to the cold white linoleum. He lay undisturbed in the pool of his overturned glass water for many hours. By the time the sun made its march into the eastern sky, Dr. Morrison had trudged to his palatial home. He dropped his jeans and stepped out of his shoes. Peeling his socks off one at time, he envisioned a future in which he'd need assistance to perform the task. Cringing, he pulled off his button-up and set his thin-rimmed glasses on the inset shelf near the shower door. He set the temperature to just below scalding and placed a thick towel on the rail of the shower-door. He tugged firmly on the imitation cotton, how he missed the feel of real cotton, the smell of it. Warm and clean. Another thing lost to the whims of the previous generation. He set the room's wire to play the latest upload of the London Philharmonic Feed. He turned on the display screen before stepping into the steam-filled space. The neon blue logo appeared on the stone tile parallel to the twin shower heads. The cellos buffeted him with their earthy voices. He recognized the piece immediately, Bach's Cello Suite No.1 in G. His favorite. He recognized the film as well, an archaic recording of low visual quality--two dimensional. The man in the seat center stage, however, was a being he'd always admired. Bach's Cello Suites had been a signature piece for YoYo Ma. The sound was impeccable, and Morrison wept silently at the perfection.

After two days of sullen behavior and unheard outbursts of violent anger, he returned to his lab. Morrison had never been a socialite; there was no merit to spending his time in such a fashion. Yet he had desperately longed for someone in those first two days, a friend, a lover, a long-forgotten cousin. His ambition and his focus had cost him these ties that bind a man to the world. He was alone, and his work was unfinished. His work--that was the answer. It had been early in the morning, just before sunrise when he discovered his solution. Morrison would build himself a new body, a new mind, one capable of housing his own consciousness. Where the previous team had failed, he would succeed. Convincing himself that he could develop a completely robotic brain took him a surprisingly short amount of time.

Statistics told him that he had a minimum of ten years to complete this task; no one had control over fine motor function by that point. He strode the ten steps to his favorite workbench, still in his socks he slid across the floor. A large glass countertop flowed smoothly into the glass wall. He sat with practiced ease on the swiveling padded work stool. His instruments spread out before him, cold silver and tempered glass, each millimeter marked in black. He took a deep breath and a cursory glance about the pristine surface. Everything in its place. He didn't stop to study the beauty of the rising sun above the thick pines.

YEAR 1

Henry's body was complete. Morrison had named him for his favorite author, a transcendentalist who'd understood the pertinence of privacy and appreciated nature. Henry's body was complete, but his mind was still very much that of a child. He could complete very menial tasks, sweeping the floor of the lab, pouring a glass of water--but nothing as complex as making a meal, let alone holding a conversation. Morrison often ignored him unless he was checking the status of Henry's development. He was growing frustrated at the slow progress, not

appreciating the truly rapid pace at which Henry grew. He had no basis for comparison; he'd never spent much time around children.

Henry had been enticed by the tones of symphony birthed waves. They floated down from Morrison's home every evening after the scientist vacated the lab. He often felt hollow at this time. He had no concept of hunger or cold but surely if he did he would make these associations as well. Every evening, as the sun set, Morrison would plug Henry up to the console nearest the doctor's big glass desk, the last scan which was Henry's last chance to show the efforts he'd made for the day. Henry did not yet know the word disappointment, but he recognized the lack of joy. There had been many times in his first six months that he had seen Morrison be joyful--laughing when he took his first steps and clapping his hands loudly when he'd uttered his first words. Henry was eager to please Morrison, his joy made Henry want to reciprocate. Morrison's laugh made Henry want to laugh, his clap, his humming of a sweet sonata all inspired Henry to mimicry. This gave him a sense of elation that he found thoroughly pleasant. Yet, as of late, Morrison had shown no joyous expressions and had begun to walk with a stiff gait. Uncertain what to do, Henry knew that Morrison was acting strong, but he could sense his father's pain, even if he didn't dare speak about it.

Henry had taught himself to read, a feat he thought would impress the scientist. He was not aware that this ability was given to him via Morrison's daily scan and upload. He did not understand Morrison's impudent stare at Henry's mid-day interruption. He'd brought him a sandwich, and a glass of milk. Henry set the plate and cup down upon the far end of the smooth glass surface. The clang of glass on glass pulled Morrison's gaze toward the robot.

"Henry."

Miranda Ramirez

“Your lunch, Morrison.”

He studied Morrison’s reactions to the food.

“Was there something else?” Morrison snorted around a bite of crunchy peanut butter.

“May I have access to your library?”

Morrison set down his simple meal and swiveled the stool toward Henry. He’d expected this, but not this soon.

“Why the sudden interest?”

“I want to read,” he stated proudly.

Morrison stared at Henry, fascinated by the request. An evolution of the programming no doubt, he knew that the last upload would grant him the ability, but desire was another matter. To seek information was a base impulse, but this was unique. Why take the time to peer through tomes when he could have simply requested an upload from Morrison?

“Yes, of course Henry,” he said clapping him on the shoulder.

He made a quick note on the pad before him. Henry knew he was marking this event for later record. He smiled, this day he would see Morrison’s joy.

“Thank you.”

Henry would spend nearly six hours in the library; the sun was beginning to set when Morrison came to get him for his nightly scan. This night he considered two new words as he watched the smoldering helium ball that he now knew was the sun sink behind the pines. He thought mostly about the word “beauty” and how humanity had attributed sunsets as the

irreproachable representation of the word. He felt that he understood this sentiment. His last thought, however, when the sun's rays no longer lit the cold white linoleum, was about a concept he didn't quite comprehend, time.

□

Morrison's library had been filled with great volumes of scientific discovery, and armloads of ancient anthologies celebrating the great poets of old. Henry had been so enthralled with his studying that he hadn't noticed Morrison watching him from the doorway. The scientist had intended to take down further notes, specificity after all was essential if the process was ever to be repeated. Yet he found himself staring at curious young man. Henry physically appeared as a twenty-something male human being. Predictably, he'd built Henry with features similar to his own, mousy brown hair and hazel eyes, a sharp jaw line. Henry was lithe and strong, as were most beings of his nature. Morrison followed his movements as he stepped quickly to another shelf. He easily lifted the heavy volume with his right hand, keeping his gaze fixed on the pages of the tome held high in his left. Watching the robot move about, he realized that Henry resembled a more able-bodied and attractive version of himself. The scientist chuckled and turned abruptly about, his halting step made not a sound.

Striding through the lab, Morrison rubbed his chin and smiled. Progress may have been slow, but this was impressive. He marveled at the capacity of the programming, enamored with the way Henry's mind had begun to evolve. His interest in literature seemed natural, natural for a boy his age. This display of intrigue reminded Morrison of himself, recalling his own desire to peruse his father's library. He flipped on the wire and pulled up the security system for the house. He spied, fascinated, on Henry's exploration of the library.

Tilting his head side to side, Henry slid closer to the desk. He had taken a seat at the bureau beside the window. The library itself was a relic, crafted in replica to the library of Morrison's youth. Morrison's father had been a neurologist and the family had lived well. The large leather desk chair rolled on brass wheels, catching slightly on the thick Persian rug. Morrison cupped his elbow with one hand while he tapped his lips with the other. Things were taking longer than he'd anticipated, but he was accomplishing a fair amount in the meantime. Luckily, the disease had shown itself in very limited ways. Henry hadn't even noticed.

YEAR 3

Six weeks into the start of his sabbatical from the university, Morrison decided that he wouldn't return. He intended to become a new life-form; what place would he have amongst those dusty-old farts and mediocre children?

“Henry, I’m going to need to boot you down fully this afternoon.”

“Is there something wrong?”

“No, no. I just want to run a few tests that may incapacitate your normal functions, and I assume this would be... disconcerting for you.”

“Thank you for your consideration, Philip.”

Morrison’s face soured, lips converting into one thin line. Henry internally snorted; annoying his father had become his favorite activity as of late. He watched the scientist insert the connector; he could feel his systems calming, returning to a sedentary and unconscious state. He snickered to himself; he supposed *Phillip* had triggered his sleep-mode. Closing his eyes, he began to dream.

Morrison turned to the steadily beeping monitor, Henry lying serenely beside him, his frustration with the lack of formality had subsided the minute Morrison had realized how humanistic Henry's behavior had become. He was like a willful child. As annoying as that was to the stoic doctor, it was also reassuring that the dream-state program was working. Using the neural programming designed by his father, for geriatric care droids, Morrison wrote an upload for Henry. The unique thing about this program was that it included counter factual versions of Henry's daily events. It was tedious, but he would review the video logs from the previous day and rewrite the choices Henry made, sometimes shifting the outcome of the event or endeavor. He was providing Henry with alternative realities to the one he had experienced. When he completed the upload, Henry would have both realities in his mind, but he would still retain which outcome had occurred. Morrison was manipulating Henry's thought processing; he was slowly teaching him to think like a human being.

Humanity had learned early on in bot development that the major flaw in human/bot relations and communications was that the man-made mind was too perfect. A bot would give you the same answer every time you posed a question – but a human, a human might give you a different answer depending on his mood, or daily experiences. The lack of mood variances caused bots to remain in the realm of tool for many decades. The technology required to convert a bot into a companion had come at the hands of Morrison's father, a task he had not appreciated until now. Morrison had often questioned the necessity of a bot that could emote; his father would laugh and shake his head, returning to his work.

It was not that Morrison was devoid of philosophical contemplations. He often found himself wondering about consciousness, will-power and its place of origin. Did reality exist as he

perceived? These thoughts sometimes lead him to consider Henry and what might become of his fictitious psyche. *Would it be possible to preserve the mind independently from the body?*

YEAR 5

It was midafternoon. Henry had spent most of the day in the woods outside of the lab. He had shirked his duties, cleaning the lab was boring – and honestly it didn’t need cleaning. Morrison hadn’t worked on any project other than Henry in last 3 years. The university had accepted his early retirement request, and they were now living off the considerable wealth of the Morrison family. Henry failed to see the purpose in cleaning a place that was already clean and was not going to be used. Morrison refused to let him tinker in the lab, and as a sort of protest Henry refused to clean it. He made sure to care for his father’s needs, meals, medicine, and the occasional outraised hand to help him from his seat, although this was typically refused. This morning, Henry had made eggs benedict with substitute orange juice.

“Is this really the best that we have?”

“Fresh squeezed is very expensive.”

“We have the means, Henry.”

“Yes, but why be wasteful?”

Morrison sighed heavily and muttered something about taste buds. Henry was annoyed with Morrison, he felt unappreciated. Poached eggs certainly were not a simple task; he considered it an effort of love. Yet, all that Morrison had noticed was the lack of oranges and fresh squeezed juice. Having this on his mind when he strolled out to water the garden he

decided to keep walking. He'd lost track of the time, and indeed, how far he had travelled from the lab.

Henry had been outside of the lab many times now, travelling to and from the local grocer on Morrison's behalf. Yet, they had never explored the scenic beauty of the land surrounding the house and lab. He had been watching a sparrow, as she dove from the tree tops to the grass below, reveling in her freedom, a happy tune on her lips. Henry tried to mimic the sound, but quickly stopped, he sounded nothing like the bird. He sounded like a man, a man trying to whistle for the first time. The jarring attempt had startled the sparrow, and she retreated quickly to her nesting tree. He continued his march as the sun rose over the pines; his olfactory sensors could smell the dew and the sweet pungency of the trees themselves. It reminded him of Morrison's smell, his after bath smell -not his three days of work in the same clothes smell.

He heard crunching beneath his heels and glanced at the brown boots he now wore. Henry had begun wearing shoes and clothes shortly after his 4th birthday, not that his body needed protection. He simply felt that it was the proper thing to do; a grown man should dress himself. He was not a nudist, and his skin could now sense things like a breeze, raindrops, or fire. Morrison had developed a synthetic skin that could feel pain but would not be damaged. This had been a major accomplishment for Morrison, one of the last he had shared with the university, and thus, the public.

As thankful as Henry was for the new sensations, the process of replacing his skin was quite unpleasant and the unrelenting flow of data from the new sensors had been overwhelming.

Today, though, it felt amazing. The morning air had been crisp, with a cool breeze rustling the branches, but the day had warmed quickly. Now at mid-afternoon, with sun warming

his back he inhaled deeply. The sweet smells filled his nostrils, everything about was in bloom. Songbirds gleefully set the scene for Henry's small rebellion. He imagined himself as young Arthur, escaping the woes of his youthful servitude, off to meet with Merlin. He had a fondness for paragon figures in his fiction. He desperately fantasized about saving maidens and taking bullets for old army buddies.

He had come to a large open field plopped down in the center of the woods. The white flowers of the bloodroot plant had lined the path to this grove, a sure sign that winter was over. Walking to the center of the field, he lay down on his back and stared at the clouds passing overhead. He had knowingly set off an alarm in the lab, most likely the minute he'd set foot in that field. Morrison naturally had put this in place for security. Henry was, after all, a brand-new technology, and at risk for theft. His father had even informed any visitor or fellow patron at the local grocer that he was simply a young relative, a second cousin, a nephew although he had no siblings, once he'd even told an elderly woman that Henry was his son. Henry didn't care about the alarm, what could Morrison really do from way back at the lab? More than that, he wanted him to know.

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The alarm rang through to the wire in the lab, Morrison turned from his desk to pull the feed over. As the screen illuminated before his eyes, he blinked, rubbing the ever-darkening circles that marred his lower lids. He checked the distance; Henry had travelled nearly ten miles from the main computer. The prospect of losing Henry didn't worry Morrison; he had taken precautions, established fail-safes. Henry was his creation and he would serve Morrison's purpose when the time came. It was a shame that he couldn't keep some small part of Henry intact. He'd really begun to like the boy. Flipping the monitor to video feed, he witnessed the

scene through Henry's eyes. It was truly a lovely day in the Appalachian woods, the likes of which he'd not seen since he was a boy himself. He thought to himself about how his allergies would be going insane, even after corrective surgery. Henry would never have to worry about that. Smirking, the thought comforted Morrison. Yet, soon enough, Henry wouldn't be worrying about anything – Henry would cease to exist. Every simulation Morrison ran stated as much. The upload would wipe away the naïve consciousness that was the scientist's son. As Morrison watched Henry he felt a pang in his gut, sharp and cutting. Followed by an immediate thought, he voiced out loud, "This isn't my fault." Shaking his head, he reminded himself, "artificial." Henry could have this afternoon; the scientist cancelled the alarm and returned to his work.

He would write a new dream sequence to include the picturesque grove, one that he hoped would cure this android mind of some of its meandering and adolescent thoughts. He'd been meaning to talk to Henry about death, but this would be the more logical path. He didn't have time to nurse him through every little thing. The simulated reality would have to include all of the minute details of Henry's journey, a task not as simple to code as the standard of the house/lab. He would have to watch the tapes. Though he was loath to do so after only five minutes of footage, the elation he heard in Henry's voice at each new plant or woodland creature would haunt him. He remembered walking through those pines with his own father, a thorough explanation on his lips for every mundane question young Philip had asked. Speaking aloud to the empty room, he asked, "What am I doing?"

Unexpectedly, an intense shiver ran down the left side of his body, the spasms heightening on his left calf and foot. There was no pain, but a sudden numbness and then no sensation whatsoever. It was as if there was no longer a foot there, like there had never been a foot there. He knew without trying that it would not bear weight.

□

“Your assistance is required, return to the lab, immediately.”

Henry ignored the wire as it rang from his wrist watch, but shortly after it was received an emergency code flagged. Terrified, Henry ran the remaining six miles back to the house. Morrison had never utilized one of these codes.

YEAR 7

“No, thank you that will be all.”

Henry returned the receiver to the handset, “Your new chair will arrive on Wednesday.”

Morrison ignored him.

“It’s the third one. I hope it is to your liking this time.”

“I’m certain it will suffice, and if it doesn’t we will order a new one.”

Morrison had become so morose these days. To Henry it felt as though his father’s heart hardened with the loss of each new limb or digit.

“What is that look?”

“Nothing. What would you like for breakfast?”

“It doesn’t matter Henry, you know I can barely taste anything anymore.”

“I do not understand, why you won’t just have the surgery-“

“Surgeries!”

Henry let it go at that.

YEAR 10

Morrison had lost the ability to speak that winter. He stopped going to the store or leaving the grounds a year prior to that. Henry decided he would move him into the yard this morning before it was too hot. The sunshine would do him good. It was beyond Henry's capacity to fathom his father's choice to remain in his collapsing system; Henry knew he was capable of building a functional body for himself. He would need assistance soon for lung function.

Henry wheeled Morrison into the yard while the wind whistled through the pines, an earthy pitch that blew the lengthy hair from Henry's face. He smiled and imagined how his father would feel about being placed like a plant on display. Still Henry arranged the blanket neatly across Morrison's knees.

“In case you need it.”

Morrison's sad eyes looked up at him; it pained Henry to see such a man laid so low. He respected his father and his many achievements, and it broke his heart to think of a world without his brilliance.

“You know how to reach me if you need to.”

He walked back to the house. He strode into the lab, heels clicking across the hard floor. He wanted his father to have his privacy, but he wanted him to be safe. He decided to sit in the lab for his morning read. From the grand glass desk where his father had worked for so many years, he could easily see Morrison alone in the yard, watching the birds, the breeze, who knew, certainly not Henry. He seemed more at peace though. Morrison had rarely smiled even before he'd lost the ability, but a smirk seemed to sit upon his face.

Propping his feet up, Henry began to read. He stopped suddenly, knowing how easily he fell into these fantastical realms, and reached for the wire to set an alarm. This station clearly hadn't been used for a while, as it was still logged into Morrison's user ID. This must have been his father's video log for his work on Henry, as there was no connection to the live feed. It was all the data his father had gathered on him, his creation. Curiosity getting the better of him, Henry played the last entry. His father appeared on the screen, before the paralysis had taken control of the left side of his face.

"Today Henry demanded that I tell him why I refuse to obtain corrective surgeries for my illness. How could I tell him I was not in need of such devices, that I would shortly be living my days in his shoes – literally."

His father was wheelchair-bound, and the camera was angled in such a way that Morrison could not turn aside from its view. He saw his head in his hands, his shoulders sunk.

"I can't do this."

The video stopped here. Henry looked at the date/time stamp on the file; it had been taken over nine years ago. He knew immediately what it was his father couldn't do, and he understood now why he'd never fought his disease. No, that was wrong, he had fought it in the most efficient way he could. If his body was failing him, he would build a new one – and he, Henry, of course, was that body.

Hot anger and feelings of betrayal welled up within Henry's gentle heart for just a moment. *Why didn't he do it?* Henry stared at Morrison's back through crystal clear pane. He looked at the pitiful state his father had allowed himself to live in. Henry had been forced to care for the man more and more in the last few years. Henry raged, a feeling he'd never experienced,

he swept all the delicate tools from the pristine glass surface with both arms, not even stopping to watch them crash to the floor. Broken glass still tinkled as he rushed into the house. He was headed to his room, he would leave now before Morrison could change his mind. He stumbled up the short stairwell falling face first to the carpet. Overwhelmed by hurt and anger he just lay there sobbing. He looked down the hall toward the bedroom he'd been running to, his room. Something granted to him on his 5th birthday.

“Birthdays,” he snorted, he hadn’t had a birthday prior to the bedroom granting occasion.

Beginning to lift himself he glanced to his left, into the library. His father’s study. A room he’d fully explored, a room that had been the root and start of his love of the man he called father. Seething in his sense of betrayal he crawled into the room. Seeing himself in the reflection of the window he didn’t like what he saw, his own face distorted and twisted-subconsciously recognizing his father’s features. Breathing deeply, he sat at the grand desk, running his palms over the sun-warmed wood. His thumb hooked the handle of the locked top-drawer. A place he’d never ventured. He’d asked Morrison once why it was locked; the scientist had lied stating he’d lost the key. Henry had known, of course, but hadn’t questioned it. He broke the lock in one quick movement; the wood splintering into his clean lap. The smell of old paper and leather wafted up at him. Seeing nothing but old pens and paperclips, he jerked the drawer to the extent of its rails, probably damaging the mechanism. He didn’t care. There in the back corner of the drawer sat a leather-bound moleskin with well-worn edges, a gold embossment on the cover: PHM.

His curious nature was ever dominant and to a slight extent it overrode his anger. The small journal felt heavy in his hand. He had never invaded Morrison’s privacy. The hairs on his neck stood upright even though he was confident that he’d never be caught. The scientist, after

all, was now completely enfeebled, He laughed at himself and his fitful flight from the lab. Logically he knew that Morrison was no longer capable of completing his task – there was no real risk to Henry now. This realization confused Henry. Seeking answers, he opened the cover. The tension broken, an old photo fell on top of the splintered wood in Henry's lap, image-side down. The writing on the back said, "Last day of Grad School. I loved you best in the Spring." He knew the handwriting wasn't his father's. Turning the image over he was shocked to see himself, well, a man that looked like himself, but thinner and with equally thin rimmed glasses adorning his face. A beautiful woman sat in his lap. Morrison had cared for Henry every day of his life, validating his accomplishments and teaching him about the world. He had never mentioned this person. Henry had always thought that their companionship, that the bonds of their relationship, that that affection was the only love either of them had truly experienced. That clearly was not the case. He wondered to himself how well he truly knew the man he called father.

He began to read the pages within this forgotten tome, hoping to discover his father's true self. He read of his father's school days, his need to impress his revered father, his sadness over the death of his mother at an early age, and of Susanne. From Morrison's description, he knew her to be the woman in the photo. He glanced at it once more--they both seemed so happy. He'd never known Morrison to look so carefree. He didn't notice how much time was passing as he sat, enthralled in the unknown history of his father's youth. He had completed over two-thirds of the thick journal and was reaching its close. The man in those pages was so much like himself and so unlike the Morrison he'd known. His Morrison was calloused and distant, always keeping the world at arms-length. Yet this Morrison, this budding and bright young scientist, was kind and vulnerable. He turned the yellowed page, to discover that his father's first, second, and third

research proposals had been denied by the University. Susanne and he were living together in her small apartment near campus, and he felt stifled. He wrote of his need to return to the solace of independent living, to clear his mind. In short, he blamed his lack of success on the distraction of her affection – a distraction he would no longer tolerate. This was more like the Morrison he knew. Henry expected the narrative to return its focus to Morrison’s scholastic efforts; he’d never mentioned any friends. The next entry was an abrupt leap forward in time and Henry had to decipher the text, his father’s neat penmanship nearly unrecognizable in this new scrawl.

“Spoke to dad today. He’s still angry about the engagement.”

“So, they were engaged,” Henry said aloud to the empty room.

“I tried to explain to him I didn’t know, but he knew I was lying. I can’t believe she told him about the pregnancy.”

“Susanne was pregnant!” Henry practically shouted, natural pregnancy was so rare even in those days. He expected the story to stop here but it didn’t.

“I didn’t know--not until afterward, I tried to convince my father. He threw the letter in my face. I can’t believe she’d sent it to him, the letter I regret. How could I ask her to give up the baby?”

He knew now why Morrison couldn’t complete his task, his guilt. He could not sacrifice another child. It was Henry’s turn to cry. His father had spent a lifetime relinquishing love to his thirst for scientific achievement. It broke Henry that now, now that his father had finally learned to have an open heart, he would die; having never experienced the freedom and fear that comes with such relations.

He glanced to the window, tears on his cheeks. The sun was low hanging over the pines.

An alarm was sounding, “Shit!” He ran from the library, ignoring the alarm and went straight to Morrison--the source. He could tell from the back stoop that something was wrong, Morrison’s face was pallid, and his lips tinted blue. Henry carried Morrison like an infant in his arms, rushing to the lab. He placed the oxygen mask over his father’s face and waited – Morrison’s chest was still rising and falling with the intake of breath, but his blood oxygen levels were steadily declining. He was dying. There was nothing more to be done.

Henry paced the cold linoleum floor, the shadows growing all around him until the only light left was the video monitor at his father’s desk. He stared at the man on the screen, the man who had built him for sacrifice, the man who had sacrificed himself to let Henry live. Henry wanted to be more than this man, he always had. He wanted to prove to him that there was more to life.

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If he failed, his father would likely become brain-dead within the hour. The upload was simple enough, Morrison had already outlined the procedure, the knowledge was easily obtained by a hard-download Henry had pulled from his father’s work-station. The bio-connector already in place for his communicator would serve as a conduit for the flow of consciousness. He had to set the process on a timer as he would lose cognitive control himself after just a few seconds, or so he presumed. Henry lay on the table, as he had almost every day of his childhood and knew that this time he would continue dreaming.



Miranda Ramirez

Morrison awoke to the whistle of wind, and the warm sun rising over the pines. It warmed his face as he sat up. Knocking his head on the lamp, he grabbed his head. That's when he noticed his body, sitting stiffly in the chair across the way.

“Henry?”