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Grade: 8

Story Title: Humanity

I feel a jolt and come to my senses in a small box, my mouth sucking in air, my mind immediately running a list of what might have happened. Words. I know these words, somehow, although my mind has never spoken any of them before. I know definitions, I know context, I know grammar and syntax. These words dance in my head, in the dark and quiet of this box.

Box. Noun. A rigid typically rectangular container with or without a cover. An open cargo container of a vehicle. Coffin.

Am I in a coffin? I do not think that this is a coffin. It is too rectangular, and I am not dead, nor am I arranged like someone had thought I was dead. I am upright. But I do not remember anything of a past. I do not know if I have a future.

The box has a lid. I am unsure of how much time has passed, but I know this; I know that there is light flooding into this box. I see a face. A human face.

Humanity. Noun. The state or quality of being human. The state or quality of being generous or friendly to people or to animals. All humans.

Why can I not remember if I am part of this "All Humans"? Why can I not remember anything? My mind has ran up a list of so many possibilities, but none of them are plausible. I open the mouth that I know I must have. It creaks as if my jaw has never been opened, or as if it is old. But as I do not remember anything, it must be that it has never been opened. Unless I only have amnesia.

Amnesia. Noun. Loss of memory often to brain injury, shock, tiredness, or illness. A blank spot in one's memory. The overlooking, ignoring or forgetting of events that are not useful to one's life.

No. No. Why am I in a box?

"It isn't talking," says the face. Its lips move several seconds before I hear the words, which seem malformed and strange. Who am I to know, only waking up seconds ago.

Should I say something? I cannot look anywhere but up. I hope that this, the first face I have ever seen, does not think me rude because I am staring. I cannot seem to blink. My mouth creaks open and forms the word hello.

I think that the sound must have failed to reach the face's ear, but then I notice the lips moving again, and a few seconds later I hear, "You work."

"I- work?" I try to find a definition that might explain what is happening, but I cannot find one.

"Can you come out of the box?" The face tips over the box before I hear the words. I am caught unaware and tumble out like a ragdoll.

Ragdoll. Noun. No, stop that. No words can define what is happening to me now. I look down at my limbs. I see tan skin, fresh and unwrinkled like a baby's. I am new, indeed, yet my knowledge seems to be more advanced than a newborn. The size of my limbs indicates a grown- man? Woman? I still do not know who I am. I wonder if they know only what I know, but they must know more, because the face is smiling broadly.

So I ask, "What who how am I here?" It is not nearly as comprehensible as the neat sentences in my head, but it works.

"You're a- Well. You're a robot."

I suddenly cannot think.

Robot. Noun. A machine that looks like a human being and performs various complex acts of a human being. A similar but fictional machine whose lack of capacity for human emotions is often emphasized. An efficient insensitive person who functions automatically. A device that automatically performs complicated often repetitive tasks. A mechanism guided by automatic controls.

Automatic. Adjective. Of a machine or device: having controls that allow something to work or happen without being directly controlled by a person.

Control. Verb. To direct the behavior of something. To cause something to do what you want. To have power over something. To direct the actions or function of something. To cause something to act or function in a certain way.

Am I an imitation? Am I controlled by humans? Am I directed to answer the whims of any human being? Am I so efficient? I am not insensitive or unfeeling, surely. If I am, why do I feel so small and helpless inside?

It must have been a while that I have stopped functioning normally, because I see her lips move again. "You can live a normal life once we have tested you to see if you function properly," the face attached to a female body with long, skinny limbs shifts and stands. She offers me a hand. I lay my own hand on hers. I feel the heat of her palm and the heat of my own. What a delicate thing, to have the right temperature and the right structure to move normally. Am I made of cheap plastic or sturdy metal? I feel light and agile, but still I may be metal.

"Am I made of metal?" I say.

"Well, most of you is silicone. Some parts of you are metal– the most delicate parts. Not enough to trip a metal detector. We made sure of that. Can you stand?" I stand shakily, unsure of how to move as I have not done so before. "Good, that's good. Wiggle your fingers?"

My head creaks slowly to the side, not because it is tight or badly made, but because I have no idea of what I can or cannot do. I see my fingers and will them to move. I see them twitch, and I close them into fists.

"Nice. How about you touch your thumb to your fingers?" I marvel at the control I have over my own body. Perhaps I am not so much of a robot after all. "We'll just take some scans in the next room." The kind woman shows me through a door, helping me figure out how to twist and open the doorknob. My skin has tiny ridges that give it friction, just like a normal person's.

I am still nervous. I am a robot. Will anyone treat me normally, or will I go through life treated like I cannot think or feel?

There is a man with white hair and a beard in the next room. He sits in a chair next to a large blinking machine. His mouth tilts into a smile and he nods at us. "I am Gavin. This is Emilia. I assume she has forgotten to introduce herself, as always."

"You do this often?" I ask. He shrugs and gestures that I get into the machine. I nearly do, then realize that he has not answered my question. "How many robots?" I ask angrily.

"Three. Four, including you," he says, exasperated. "I'm sorry. I forgot for a moment. Two of the robots have never achieved the level of ability that you have, and broke down within several days. The third couldn't move, and asked for us to plug it into the computer. You are... special."

"I am not special," I say, frustrated. I want to say more, to express myself further, but I just enter the machine and let the blinking lights and whirring scanners do their job.

"Incredible," Gavin says. "Not one flaw. You work perfectly."

I make an effort to blink, knowing that if I have no flaws surely I would be able to. It feels strange when it works. I think of any things that may not be right, and then I ask him, "Do all humans see someone's lips move before they hear the words?"

"Oh, no," Gavin said, tired. "I was rather nervous about that. I can adjust that if you can tell me how big of a gap there is. And I can set your eyes to automatically blink every two to eight seconds."

"That would be..." I search for the proper word. It only takes a millisecond. "Great." The word is not sufficient to portray my mixed feelings. If I had never been created, I would not have to make corrections for this mechanical body, and I would not have any problems. "How does it work?"

"We used a relatively new technology for the skin- It's really a very flexible sensor that can feel temperature, pressure and humidity. It won't work as great as real skin, but we hooked it up to wires that carry signals to your brain, and you will have an edge that future robots won't have. It's at least as accurate as anything else."

I think on this for a few seconds, wondering if I am glad for my life or glad for this technology. I do not think I am glad for my life just yet, but at least I will not live entirely without feeling the world around me.

"You use the wind you suck in to help power small parts of your body, but the main source of power is food. You must eat at least three thousand calories a day to keep your body functioning. It's slightly

more than what we humans have to eat to get enough energy, but you have to get enough energy somehow, and this way is the least strange," Gavin explains.

"Which means you don't have to plug in batteries," Emilia says. "Just try not to get hurt. Your skin is tougher than ours, but if you have a big scrape, you can't grow back the sensors."

"Don't freak her out," Gavin scolds Emilia, smiling.

I look at them both, then felt something strange. It wasn't from my skin. "Am I a her?" I ask timidly.

"You can be either," Gavin says. "Just do what feels is right."

I am about to say that it is impossible, but I am not sure if it is or not. "I cannot have children," I say, my voice harsh. "I cannot know if I am female or male."

"Are you sad?" Emilia says quietly.

I think that sadness is that feeling where something seems to be sinking lower and lower and I cannot bring it up. I am about to say yes, but then Gavin interrupts.

"No, she can't be sad," he says. "Besides, I programmed for the regular body responses to happen if she is sad. I don't see the tears."

They do not understand my pain. They do not understand how I hate this confining metal body and their preconceived ideas. Now I feel inside myself. I feel something, something that maybe is more than just a robot or a machine. "If I may call myself David," I say, my voice short and brisk. I am painfully aware of the difference in sound between my lips and ears.

I find my way to the door without caring if my senses never work right. I just want to escape these people who think they are treating me well, but see me as less than humanity. I know what humanity is, now. It is not something that can be defined in several short words. It is all the flaws and perfection and feelings that make up lives. I am sure I do not have to be human to feel it. What is humanity, anyway?

Emilia races to hand me a bag of things and something else- a manual. Telling me how to act human, I am sure. She says that she is sorry. I feel wetness come from my eyes, and then I feel something more- a feeling of uncomfortable pain that makes my insides churn. It makes me want to run, to push my way out of this door and just live without any of this.

I take the bag. I push my way out of this door.

I run.