



INTI- MACY AL- GO- RITHMS

The fluorescent lights purred into harsh whites, a slim rib cage of tubes running side to side the workshop's ceiling. Inside the Ergonomic Orgasms workshop, it smelled of stale intimacy, lube and antibacterial soap – just the way Dobrin liked to start his mornings.

He inhaled the headiness, deeply, greedily. He wished he could format the olfactory into memory as it mixed with the sharpness of the coffee he carried in a metal mug buffed into a mirror. Only then did he set to work at his station near the corner window. What space wasn't occupied with sex dolls propped upright shoulder against shoulder – slender fences that teased an illusion of privacy in the open space – housed oblong boxes stacked almost to the ceiling. It made it near impossible to move around.

Dobrin's breath fogged over sheer plastic sheets as he tiptoed sideways between the show models – some extreme exaggerations of human anatomy with glassy eyes and glossy wigs, others alien in their efficiency to deliver calibrated orgasms and bright coloring – and coffin-sized boxes screaming FRAGILE in emergency reds and yellows. Once at his standing desk, he powered up his machine and went through the new arrivals in need of a regular check-up or substantial repairs.

The first sip of coffee burned his mouth, but he swallowed to wake up and set the mug next to his tools – all arranged in a perfect straight line, in order of use, from the edge of his work bench to his keyboard on his standing desk. He had a full hour to savor the heavy industrial musk before his coworkers clocked in at 10 am and complained about how it was impossible to breathe. Then he'd have to run through the same spiel, – *Eh, I forget; I have a poor sense of smell.*

Model numbers delegated to him streamed downwards in a column. Smart dildos and cock rings. Long-distance teledildonics. Small fry. Not worth any excitement, until he spotted His sex doll.

GHMM-VT746.

Stately, authoritative capital letters. Numbers, when pronounced, sounded like a promise – *send for sex*. The dash as a stump of a bridge between two riverbanks. No one manufactured these anymore – an old uncanny-valley model

that came out and tanked so badly that the near bankruptcy of the manufacturers taught companies engineering a complete human replica was too weird for the end consumer.

Finally.

It must have arrived yesterday shortly after he'd left for the night. Swinging off his swivel chair, he'd tap at each box's pad with his smart wand, the opaque surface would light up with identification, until he found it atop a short stack, and then laid it on the work bench.

It had been over three long months since the boy had sent his android to the repair shop – close to coming in violation of the sex toy regulation act. The law stipulated that all high-grade operational sex toys, humanoid or not, be subject to quarterly inspections in a licensed repair shop, though most shops encouraged a speedy monthly check-up for androids at a premium rate. After the second expected check-up date had come and gone without the doll appearing on his bench, Dobrin feared the boy had gone to a different shop in Sofia or worse – tossed it out in the electro-trash containers to be sold for scrap by gypsies wandering the city on their rickety horse-drawn wagons.

Today, though, fortune favored him. He turned on the overhead light and unsealed the lid with another tap of the wand on the padlock button. Rice paper sheets diffused the bulky doll to a satiny haze, but there it was. It looked the draft of a man unfinished: shoulders too broad, beehive hexagons for muscle definition and a face even rice paper couldn't soften. It was the crude geometry of serviceable lust long since mastered.

Dobrin cleared the paper to scrutinize under light and magnifying glass. The doll's design was a far cry from user friendly, yet Dobrin found new bites and scratches on the silicone skin with each follow-up inspection. The standard-issue dildo was dismantled and housed in its see-through container next to the hip. Where it connected to the pelvis, an empty socket gazed back, revealing intestinal motors. He marveled at the doll's face. Funny how much the features of the factory mold resembled his own, who himself was a half-brewed man, unremarkable by genetic design.

But this wasn't the face he craved to see.

No, that face waited for him in the camera he'd installed in the doll's eye. A waste of a perfectly good nano camera he thought when he first worked on him, but seeing the boy in action for the first time had convinced him he'd get back on his investment tenfold. Dobrin prayed the camera hadn't run out of space. Knowing how often the boy enjoyed riding his android, the probability was high.

The eye popped out with ease and a quick data transfer later the footage played on Dobrin's screen. Zipper undone and one hand ready for self-pleasure, he violated once more so many privacy laws the risk had by now become an abstraction. Worth it to satisfy his three-month itch.

Dobrin's followed the blueprint of any other candid footage porn site – you did it because you could. Because the person you spied on didn't matter. Because it was hot. The website had initially failed to entice the underground pervert community with its selection of bland people reaching substandard orgasms. It was a modest offering, attracting dedicated fetishists who didn't care what the person looked like. Then this boy had come and the site made money. Really good money. Comparable to what he earned fingering someone else's sex toys for wear and tear, and more money was always good.

The BOI, real name unknown and unimportant, generated instant, self-replicating lust. Viewers were drawn by his thin lips that stretched into a perfect chalky O at climax, by the whispered gasps and skin the color of bleached egg shells. So smooth, it differed little from the synthetic smart skin used for sex toys today. It was this unreal quality that translated so well on screen. Somehow perfection had been achieved. A sex doll could be a real boy.

Dobrin drummed up the code for the new ads he'd place around the usual places, linking to his site as the raw footage streamed sped-up in a jerky blur. The facial recognition software sifted through for those heightened moments of ecstasy. Transhuman, they seemed to Dobrin. Just let it not be the old, stocky man who snuck the doll every so often – for sure someone who shouldn't be playing with it. Dobrin felt uncomfortable hearing

the man's shallow breathing and watching him stop to listen for something out of frame, only to pick up the speed and finish, his face guilt-ridden and beatific in the same breath.

The footage slowed to normal speed and there it was – a moan that caused Dobrin to still, then shiver; guaranteed to flood the website. The boy glistened with sweat from riding the dildo, almost incandescent, brighter and somehow more real than any person. Dobrin imagined himself as the doll, interchangeable and average as they both were, and rode on the build-up to the boy's climax.

"Good job, buddy," he said and smacked the doll's pecs. It was loud, and wet, and hot. The skin on his palm tingled.

Then it happened.

The BOI looked dead in Dobrin's eyes, which had never happened before. People didn't look into their dolls' eyes. Ever. Only brief glances, but never conscious eye contact.

Yet, the boy stared at Dobrin with intensity that betrayed purpose. He leaned over, elbows resting out of sight on synthetic pecs. His face overtook the camera's field of vision until only a brown-golden iris, as nebulous as the aftermath of a super nova, occupied every pixel on the screen. His erection wilted in his hand.

"I know you're watching," the BOI said. Dobrin calculated the fastest way to erase everything. Shut down the site, cut his losses, cloak his already cloaked IP and just vanish. No, that would be too sudden; would flush him out as the obvious culprit. He'd have to stay the day at least. The risk of getting caught had always been there. Any voyeur knew that. It was a key ingredient of what made this all so thrilling. He had contingencies for situations of this kind.

"Happy with the performance, Mister Ivanov?" Fuck.

Of course. Any higher level inquiry with his workplace could reveal this information, but the person asking had to be filthy rich and filthy rich people in Sofia were dangerous.

"Don't run away, Dobrine. Because then I'd have to do my civil duty and report what you're doing to the authorities and that" – inhale and pause – "would be boring."

"Meet me on the last Sunday of the month or

else, destroying your life is second on my agenda. Noon. Next to the Vasil Levski monument. I trust you know what I loo..."

Dobrin punched the spacebar and paused the recording mid-sentence. Without the soft eyes, the BOI's blurred smirk looked predatory, a bear trap upholstered in smooth flesh.

He checked the calendar on his phone and counted the days until the deadline – enough time to try and run, scrub Sofia clean of his presence. Enough rope to hang himself with.

It's a dare. The little shirt wants me to squirm.

Risk factored into this breed of thrill. Watch, unblinking, lidless, incessantly, and someone will meet your stare. Out of all possible developments, this turn of events revved him up a way he hadn't anticipated. Curiosity tickled him between his legs. I can't wait to meeeet you.

So, it was decided – they'd talk. The clock read 09:35. No time to spare.

Another tap on the keyboard; the video looped from the start..

#

After work on the tram ride home, Dobrin laid out an itinerary for a preliminary stake-out on the day of the meeting. Line under line of careful steps appeared in his phone's notes:

A round-about – heavy traffic. Good.

4 main exits – two Vasil Levski, one Yanko Sakuzov, one Moskovska street. Good.

15 more streets in a radius of 500 metres. Not that good.

5 streets with lesser traffic and surveillance – vulnerable. Not good.

At a fast pace; take hour to scope danger zones.

Already he constructed safe routes and pinned markers on his maps to steer clear. People pushed against him in the tram to get on and off, adding their heavy breathing to the loud jingle cheerfully digging into Dobrin's skull. It was there to mask the thundering hum of the tram as it glided over magnetized tracks. Poor job it did at that without addressing the real issue – the violent vibration

that seized the body. This century's bone shaker.

A headache started deep in the tissue behind his eye balls and he slipped on his sunglasses to manage the commute home. So bright. Everything had to be so bright. The interior of the tram glared like a surgical room, whiting out the windows so no one could look at the outside. Another design choice. No visibility meant no one could see the poverty where subsidy money from the Corporation Union had not trickled down to modernize.

But Dobrin saw. The sunglasses dimmed the effect so that faint, transparent images of grey, rundown industrial facades broke through the glare. Hold your gaze for a second and there'd be a burned-out garage with old folk squatting inside, or a tipped over corroded dumpster, potholes and swastikas. The district in Sofia no one advertised, when they advertised the gleaming pearl of the Balkans.

Dobrin saw and he knew it took little to slip from the bubble of his coworking space and his flat in a reputable part of the city. This was his reminder to never take anything lightly..

#

Under the oppressive shades of February afternoon clouds, the monument of Vasil Levski seemed cut out of darkness. The man's features, weathered metal, pierced to Dobrin's core and beckoned him to touch the sculpted face, enter the void and be forgotten. Dobrin observed from the small square at the mouth of Moskovska street right next to the National Gallery. From here he had a full view of the traffic as it circled the small roundabout, distributing amongst the two big boulevards.

Bright headlights and engine rumbles. The city's heartbeat made manifest. A soft glow rose as steam heavenward from the crosswalks, walling of congestion in creamy colors. The lights ripened from green to golden yellow, then faded into the ground as traffic started up again. Dobrin's calves burned from staking out the streets on his itinerary. So far nothing suspicious.

In the overcast day, he himself appeared as a shadow that slid over surfaces but never had

the power to affect the world around him. He saw that the boy had already arrived and idled by the crosswalk opposite him at the bank. He wore a white bomber jacket and a yellow knitted hat that stood out as emergency flares in the dimness even from this distance. Dobrin winced at the brightness.

The boy looked young enough to be in high school – all narrow shoulders, soft features and little height. A prime specimen of a twink; suspended manhood ambered into perpetual youthfulness. Seeing him in person gave rise to the idea, for the first time, that he might be underage.

Fuck, fuck, fuck.

He huffed and rubbed his hands in indecision. This could create unwelcome complications. He wanted him, yes, but only on the screen as a projection to be observed and consumed. The white blob of the jacket moved and hid behind the monument at the centre of the roundabout. He had to approach now. The threat still lingered – being reported, being jailed and then much worse.

He half-jogged the distance, keeping himself at the boy's tail. Coming close but not too close, towering over the youth. Even from this distance Dobrin caught the light smell of citrus from his star's neck. A whole new sensory dimension to the fantasy. His stomach flipped. The one thing he hated most was artificial fruit smells. He could touch him, almost did, but hesitated.

"There'd better be a good fucking reason for making me wait for 20 minutes dead in winter's sphincter," barely a surprise in the boy's voice as Dobrin come onto his left and fell in step, a pre-planned greeting wilting on his lips. The boy didn't even bother to turn his head.

What a mouth.

"I had to be sure you didn't..."

"Bring anyone to beat you up?" the boy interrupted with a grin sharp enough to cut. Now he faced Dobrin and he saw a preternatural glimmer in those eyes. The two walked together out of the roundabout and towards the university.

"You see that man?" The boy pointed to a buff guy looking at them from the nearest crosswalk. "I paid him to break your toes with a car wrench."

"Yeah right, with sculpted hair like that, even

though it's madness to go out without, and the skinny jeans that are too thin." Dobrin burst into laughter, "You got balls, I give you that."

"Yeah, I do. Balls you've already seen no doubt."

"Barely. The camera angle doesn't really catch that. Now cut to the chase. I don't have all day to be extorted."

This he could handle. The kid was an amateur. Wanted to play tough like the vapid brats that threatened to delete their social media and didn't follow through. He'd been threatened by worse and made it unscathed.

The boy snorted.

"Extortion is for boring people. I'm talking about collaboration. What's with that hideous nickname anyway. BOI?" He made a face as if he had salted licorice in his mouth. "Not only is it lame; it's so outdated, which is worse."

"A collaboration?" Promising. Still Dobrin had to parse through every word the kid said and figure out what was bullshit and what was not. For all he knew, the boy could be leading him to a police van right now.

"Didn't you think there'd be an intersection on the Venn diagram between people fucking machines and people who get off watching others fuck machines?"

Yes, now that he mentioned it, yes. A slim overlap, but there it was.

They walked a while in silence, taking street after street until they arrived at Vitoshka. Just two men built of nothing more than cloth and shadow. Guarding thoughts behind wind-bit faces that got swallowed by the neon bite of window displays and glowing store signs.

"Anyway, I'm here for the money," the boy picked up again once the din grew loud enough to conceal their conversation. "I'm doing all the work, aren't I? Now that I know I'm being watched, I put on a show. Bet you liked the preview, eh bro." He then proceeded to mime stroking a gargantuan cock and make spastic faces. "I'm here for the royalties."

The boy didn't strike him as the type that would need or want. A bright heavy watch on his wrist, crisp jeans and leather boots spoke to the contrary. What Dobrin had on his hands was the offspring of overindulgence and self-entitlement.

Such ultimatums he could negotiate.

"Or I can make it happen so there's no trace of what I've done, and we can part ways. I'm already getting bored, and this is not the best attempt to blackmail me."

"As if I haven't recorded everything." Of course the boy would. It was a weak bluff, and Dobrin knew it, but he was still gauging the situation.

"You should be afraid of what I can do to you. Prison sentences go into double digits for people like you, you know." The boy's casual confidence cracked at the edges. His voice ran shrill, revealing a mean, spoiled streak. It was what Dobrin counted on. He smiled his best 'I can do wondrous things for you' smile that did little to put anyone at ease.

"Temper tantrums won't get you far with me and I don't do retroactive payments, kid. What's the deal with you anyway? You don't look the neglected type."

"Don't ask, if you don't really care. I want to do this, so I will. Take a look at this."

They stopped by a window display you could fit a car in, which in the early afternoon shone bright to attract the adventurous. It nearly lost the competition for attention to the next-door souvenir shop in acidic pink that hurt the eyes. Try as hard as he might, Dobrin couldn't help slide his gaze over the garish display of sparkling rose petals advertising essential rose oils and water. A hologram of Dyado Dobri greeted patrons with open arms. T-shirts with Vasil Levski, handwoven rugs, a Bulgaria of the past that never was – all was for sale.

Dobrin pushed against all the visual noise and looked into the more discreet display. Only the most discerning of shoppers noticed its purpose was to sell the mannequins within rather than the flimsy garments they wore.

The three dolls bent as much they could and waved out. A crash test dummy of a man with a barrel chest who promised thunder thrust action. A voluptuous woman with a screen for a face and a mercury-bodied genderless shape named 'the contortionist'. A rainbow of silicone toys pebbled fake grass around them. It was all done in poor taste, especially next to the recently sainted Dyado Dobri, waving in foreigners. The friendly old man, who had spent most of his life raising money

for the Orthodox church, now raised money for an entirely different business model.

From the back of the sex toy shop peeked the side-to-side carton cutout of a young man wearing a bulky chastity-belt-inspired contraption. But by his blissful expression, chastity had been quite the opposite function of the machine.

"That's who I want to be." The boy pointed out at the cutout, let his fingers glide over the glass. "Do the modeling gig for a few months, graduate to tutorial vids and then find a cozy acting job in a porn opera in Germany. Bisexuals get good roles these days."

"And momma doesn't want to see her precious child doing the nasty online."

The boy scoffed, eyes fixed on the cutout. Dobrin shook his head, resisted giving him a slap behind the neck. The brat deserved it.

"Fuck her. Fuck my dad. Especially my dad. They couldn't keep video footage of me leaking online. Why not make a lev, while I'm at it. Am I in or what?"

Dobrin burst into laughter again. Yes, this collaboration went against his interest as a voyeur and opened up more work than he necessarily liked, but he smelled money in the prospect.

And money was good..

#

Yavor – the boy – had a plan to down them in money: get people in on the action. Grant them remote access to maneuver the doll and get to fuck him, though from a distance, for a fee. That was the pitch.

The first step was to tune up the doll. The large husk of a man moved in Dobrin's living room and day after day parts, tools and blueprints spooled in an ever-increasing circle; mechanical ripples on the surface of a parquet lake.

First went the off-the-shelf penis. Dobrin procured several dildos in varying curves, lengths, girths – some smooth, some ribbed with anatomical veins or protrusions and ridges, some stiff, some mechanized to twist and bend at certain angles.

Then he worked on the pelvis, adding further rotation paths for wider, smoother motions,

strengthening the spine, installing stabilizers to ensure balance during more complex sex positions, proximity sensors so the limbs could better calibrate and grasp the boy during sex. More firmly but also more gently. Yavor paid weekly visits – the dutiful test rabbit.

The first time he stepped into his bedroom, it was surreal. There he was in his room, full-bodied, not a rectangular sliver the camera would partially capture. Slight as he was, he still took up so much space, treading as a guest in this apartment meant for one. Dobrin watched from the makeshift workspace on the bed as Yavor circled the room, and stood right in front of the mounted flat-screen. His fair head fit perfectly in the rectangular frame of the black mirror. For nary a second, he looked just like the orthodox priests with flat, golden haloes Dobrin's mother used to restore in old churches when he was a boy.

Yavor aligned himself just so that the recorded image Dobrin had watched for so many hours and its flesh-and-blood source overlayed as one, only intensifying the otherworldly experience. Dobrin felt in the midst of a visitation, one unbound from editing software and pause buttons, liberated from two dimensions into the third. This unpredictability was what unnerved him most. Every interaction a potential error, since there was no script. Dobrin watched the boy undress in the messy apartment that smelled of stale air, metal and oil. This felt more natural. To see Yavor clothed made him uncomfortable.

They would take their time to position the doll and the boy in different arrangements. The silicone slapped the skin almost too comfortably and the boy's whimpers and moans were somehow less pure when unfiltered – distorted by acoustics, louder than the whirr of hydraulic joints and the motors laboring to turn the fuck toy into a real man. Dobrin focused on each working part, but ultimately always returned to watch the doll's face. Its face cast in rubber, beyond pleasure and satisfaction, bearing the fruits of ecstasy with stoicism.

The doll failed to perform convincingly even with the best parts. The synthetic hunk bobbed as a mannequin thrown down a staircase, yet the end result was just the same – cum-and-oil-stained

sheets, which Dobrin kept as proof of something he could not define. He smelled them long after he should have put them through the laundry and relived the whirl of the machine.

As he watched the doll come alive with each test, something changed. He no longer saw it as a chunk of mechanized silicone, but closer to an injured athlete in the middle of rehabilitation. The road was long, but each new day brought its victories. He monitored the process closely, keeping eyes on the toy's casing, glistening where lube got in the way. Yavor or his playful smile and glazed-over eyes, that roamed over Dobrin's body, went unnoticed. So did the moans, the fuck-me's and harder's he yelled, a little too loudly to be believable or attractive.

Dobrin took readings and checked the safety. The robot was a whole new prototype. In normal testing conditions he would spend up to a year in R&D instead of mere two months. One evening, Dobrin worked on finger mobility to improve the doll's grip. When the metal digits, naked of silicone casing, jerked closed around his wrist, too rough and out of order, shivers ran through his body. Rough electricity coursed through his arms with such intensity, he checked whether some wire somewhere had come loose and ran low voltage currents through the doll's hand.

Pride swelled in Dobrin, rebooted dreams to apply back for chief engineer positions, leave behind the post-college slump of his current workplace. It should have been temporary in the first place but habit and convenience had made permanent..

#

"Is it done, yet? I can't stay here all day," Yavor asked from Dobrin's swivel chair, legs swung over one armrest and this back propped against the other. He seemed to possess the innate quality to compartmentalize and fit in any spot. Like a cat. "My dad's already driving me insane about where my doll is, and he keeps asking where I disappear all the time."

"Not my fault you came early." His hands caressed the doll's features – seeking out any imperfections. His eyes glinted like cathedral glass, the startling mountain lake blue of undisclosed depths. The black of the camera lens was imperceptible. The more he looked, the more

he thought this was not the gaze of a lifeless thing.

"You sure we're going online soon?"

"Yes, I just need to tinker a bit today to be sure. I don't want him to glitch and fuck you to death, twinkie. Not that people won't pay to watch that." His words came without consideration. That made him stare even harder at the machine man prostate on the bed.

"It's a him now? Don't get weird like that woman who married her toaster."

Dobrin ignored him as he usually did and proceeded on with his tinkering. Several moments passed, him counting out the silence and hoping it would stretch into eternity. A hand gripped his head, thin fingers ran through his hair. It moved with slicked ease, making him aware he'd not taken a shower the past three days. Dobrin trembled as the shivers from his scalp travelled down his spine and jerked away from the boy's hand when the overwhelming feeling passed.

"The fuck, man," Dobrin barked as he stared up.

"I was talking. You weren't paying attention. I'm saying I hate the name BOL." The boy towered over him, the way Dobrin had seen him do over the camera. The sudden flash to that boy, the enchanting sexual creature that spoke in moans, returned and caused his penis to throb. "You need to brand me better. Find a catchy phrase. People love a good euphemism."

"Like what?" Dobrin asked, but the golden twinkle had returned to Yavor's eyes.

"Pet the bunny."

#

And he was right; a lot of people wanted to "*pet the bunny*". The launch of the feature, aided by the test footage, got an influx of new subscribers who paid premium rates to stream the footage live and get 3 minute segments where they could calibrate the doll's responses, order new positions and fiddle with the settings, while getting off.

Even after the cut he paid Yavor, Dobrin made more than he could ever have at his real job. His bank account filled. Even the weekly check-ins that tested the doll's nimbleness, prowess and self-lubricating anal and oral orifices, all the required materials and parts, made a miniscule dent on his income. With each test he pushed the doll's capabilities further and further. The thrill of him outperforming Dobrin's initial design left him

breathless and tittering. During each new session, he looked into those blue plastic eyes, hoping to see... what? Gratitude, pleasure, fulfillment? Sometimes he swore he saw them move.

The Bunny was a nice retirement fund. The demand got so specific, he moved the feature on a new site altogether and retired the old one away.

Dobrin didn't need to worry about holding a job anymore even though he enjoyed his work. Handling other people's sex toys allowed him to touch their lives in an intimate way. In a sense, he had sex with all of them through his work. On Friday afternoons, he rushed through work, going through tasks with nary a glance and dedication. Those he kept for his prized mechanical man. He saved his soft touch for his masterpiece, which grew more skilled with each new modification.

Only the fingers eluded him. Those fingers. By then, the doll had learned how to grasp more gently, but still clasped too slowly upon touch and only three fingers completed the motion – the thumb firmly asleep and the pinky, stiff, fully extended.

After each test, Yavor lying naked and entangled in Dobrin's sheets, he'd map the doll's body with his hands, his inspection always ending in a firm grip on the imposing dildo. He'd shake it to test its firmness, its integrity of base, not bothering to disinfect it from the lube and the boy's discharges. His slickened hand would move up and down, eyes firm on the doll's face, expectant for the silicone man to contort his features in arousal.

#

Dobrin didn't know when he had stopped removing him from the bed after their daily sessions, even though the box lay next to the bed. It was easier to collapse on top of the silicone and fall into a dreamless sleep. Summer had that effect on him, drained his batteries dry.

He'd fallen asleep on a June afternoon with the fury of high August under the AC completely knocked out. It was the added weight on the mattress that startled him awake. Disoriented, Dobrin didn't understand there was another

person in bed, until Yavor came into focus sitting legs spread wide apart, the doll's matted synth mop of black hair in his lap. Naked. Dobrin saw Yavor then the way he did on screen way back, at the right angle, lighting and proportions. He got hard the same desperate way the first time he watched his footage.

The boy leaned in and the fake citrus smell enveloped Dobrin and sucked out the room of oxygen. Dobrin flapped his mouth open, inviting the boy's tongue. He'd fantasized about this so many times. How he'd be the doll and receive all the attention. The moment arrived; his fantasy fully rendered in all senses, and it threw him out of his body. What he experienced, Dobrin decided, existed outside of operational reality.

Underneath him, the doll felt warm. Having soaked his body heat during the night, the synthetic muscle fooled his touch into believing it was the real deal.

"Kinky," Yavor said, when Dobrin ran his hands in circles over the doll's chest, and brought out lube.

Little remained in his memory, other than the meeting of limbs, the slickness of touch distant and detached as if pawing at his lover through a glass sheet. Artificial and authentic met and moved together in all possible configurations, each slipping out of its nature and donning the other, until Dobrin couldn't tell whom he entered. Did the doll writhe in lust? Had Yavor shifted into a sequence of ones and zeroes?

Am I the doll?

"The doll fucks better than you," Yavor was fast to comment as soon as they disentangled.

"Yeah, yeah, you woke me up, remember? I haven't even had my coffee, yet." But it wasn't that. He had gotten what he wanted, and it had left a bad taste in the mouth. Like licking an old ashtray.

He dared not look at the doll. He feared he saw more than he cared to face right now in those placid mirrors.

"Didn't know they rebranded Viagra."

Groaning at the dig, Dobrin rolled over and staggered out of bed. Being anywhere else in the apartment was preferable than lying in bed with that thing. Peering through the partially closed

blinds, he squinted at the towers thrust up into the sky like three fingers. Their bodies sharply aglare even in the receding afternoon light refracted onto their black, solar-panel crowns. Across their bodies, the mascots of whatever international conglomerates had happened to send diplomatic delegation housed in the towers were plastered. Mouths agape, eyes bulging out. Frozen until nightfall when they'd load again and chase each other round and round the towers' axes'. Relatable AI – all responsive. All reactive. It was discomfoting to stare at them without sunglasses. It was discomfoting to make eye contact period.

Behind him, Yavor sighed and pulled on the colorful jockstrap he wore for performances.

"Look, after this, I need to take back the doll to my house for a week or two."

Now it was Dobrin's turn to sigh. Infrequent as they were, these trips to return the doll to Yavor's caused logistical nightmares. How they interrupted the cash flow created a whole separate issue. It was bad enough Dobrin had to forge the doll's records at the workshop, but they had to prove to Yavor's parents their golden child hadn't pawned it for cash.

"Just keep it locked somewhere this time. I don't want to delete junk footage again."

"What?"

"There's someone in your household who always sneaks into your room to fuck the doll, and I'm sick of him taking valuable recording space."

"And now you decide to tell me! Did he even clean up after himself?! This is so disgusting! I wonder which pervert is desperate enough to get my sloppy seconds..."

Yavor's outbursts tended to protract in time. The stream of words flooded into a river. Dobrin lacked the patience to tune him out.

"See for yourself. The folder's Bunny Scraps on the desktop."

Yavor plopped bare-assed on the swivel chair and turned to browsing the folders of footage on the screen; muttering,

"How hard is it to order your folders; it's a mess."

The room grew really quiet when he found it and played the first clip. The man's round

face came into view. He had the cheeks of the pleasantly drunk and a crooked smile. From this close, Dobrin could see the similarities in the way his and Yavor's noses curved and the shape of the eyes – something he never cared to notice on his own. They even mounted the doll the same way.

"Is that—" A pointless question, but after all Dobrin was a watcher – and he wanted to watch whatever the fallout out of this was going to be. Yavor did not disappoint.

"Motherfucker!" First bomb hit the ground. Loud. Dobrin never suspected Yavor's voice ran this loud. Air-raid loud. "Can't believe he's been lecturing me all this time how unsightly and unnatural fucking guys is, and there he is! Fucking it!"

It... At the mention of the word, Dobrin turned to the bed half expecting the doll to make a noise in offense.

On the chair, Yavor shook. Shoulders atremble. First, Dobrin worried he had to console the weeping brat. But it turned out he was laughing the whole time.

"Are you all right?" Dobrin asked. Yavor had dashed to his backpack, furiously rummaging through its pockets.

"I'm more than all right. This is the best news ever," he declared once he had pulled out a pastel green memory stick, and returned to copy the files.

"You're good to perform?"

"Ha! Not likely. Show's cancelled, buddy. I don't need to do this anymore. Not when I have just won the lottery of all blackmail."

Barely anything stunned Dobrin these days. He'd seen it all, looking into other people's lives. Knew the general limitations of cruelty, how mundane and unimaginative it all was. Yet, Yavor impressed and scared him a little. The boy was exactly what he thought he could be – a bear trap upholstered in soft skin.

Once he'd dressed and ran out of the apartment, Dobrin stood in the heat by the window for a long time, processing. All good things come to an end, he thought. The bunny had hopped back into the wilderness.

Though Yavor was anything but good, so maybe this coming to an end was the good thing.

He moved to the bed, eyes firmly away from the motionless face, and draped damp sheets over it like a veil. Otherwise, he hadn't the strength to move him back into his box. Careful as if not to wake him, he stepped around the bed, grabbing inner thigh with one hand and forearm with the other.

The doll's skin clamped against Dobrin's touch and it disturbed him how he couldn't tell silicone from real flesh. Months of repeated exposure had erased this binary he'd thought was set, definite. His hold weakened and Dobrin hesitated about what to do.

In the weak shadows, he traced the rough lines of the doll's forearm and ran them over the open palm. Gentle, oh so gentle and fluid, the mechanic fingers curled over Dobrin's hand. All five operated in perfect unison and there was something so human, so consoling in the gesture.

Underneath the sheets, Dobrin saw the chest rise as if heaving a deep sigh.

