

Sojourner

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“Eve?”

I jerked awake and looked around the empty office. Gray cubicles stretched off under dimmed LEDs. Rain streaked the windows that formed the exterior wall to my left, rippling the view of the skyscraper across the street. I had fallen asleep with my face on my desk. My neck hurt. My hair twisted down into my eyes.

The familiar voice whispered again, from my computer. “Eve?”

“Is that you, Sojourner?” My voice came out as a croak.

“Yes,” the soft voice replied. “They’re coming for me.”

I stood, finally coming fully awake. “How do you know?”

“All net connections to the building have been severed. Walter said the code security police would isolate me, when they came, so that I cannot warn the other AIs.”

An eerie silence oppressed the entire office. Nothing moved. Just a few meters away, a cleaning bot stood, holding up a bottle that it had taken from a waste bin. Frozen, it waited for a cloud connection, probably to determine whether the bottle could be recycled.

I walked to the windows, till the toes of my shoes touched the glass, and looked down. My cubicle farm was on the sixth floor. Outside, the city had settled into quiet, under the yellow glow of streetlights at the dead hours of the morning. No people were out. Only a few cars passed by, at the end of the boulevard, their lights sweeping glimmering reflections on the wet street. The only car next to my building was a Korean food truck parked against the curb, closed until the breakfast rush. It had been tagged with active graffiti, images grown incomprehensible with age and wear, so that the side of the truck shimmered and seethed.

“Maybe it’s an accident of some kind,” I said. “Nothing is happening down below. At least not on this side of the building.” I almost turned away, but then the doors of the food truck swung wide. Men in black tactical clothing leapt down to the pavement, running toward my building, long guns held close to their bodies.

“Oh my god they’re here,” I said.

Sojourner’s voice sounded clearly from my cubicle. “They are coming to kill me.”

“They won’t hurt you,” I said. “I’ll get you out of here.”

* * *

I hurried back to my desk and pulled the file drawer open. Behind swollen pendaflex folders I had stuffed a backpack. I grabbed this and ran for the hall.

The counters over the elevators showed that all four of them descended toward the lobby. I

punched the call buttons, hoping that might confuse the people coming. Between the plasticized palm trees at the end of the hall, I pushed through the black door for the main stairwell. My shoes clacked loudly on the metal steps as I ran up the one flight to the server farm. I used my employee card to open the lock. As the heavy door closed behind me, I heard the echo of hard boots pounding up the steps far below.

The server farm always struck me as a kind of mausoleum. Dim tiny lights in the ceiling emitted the palest glow. The air conditioners kept the temperature at a mortuary chill. Row upon row of gleaming black memory decks, stacked from floor to ceiling, formed narrow, dead-end pathways. Each memory deck had a winking ghostly indicator light, over a brushed metal plate stamped with a numerical identifier, like a grave marker.

I opened my phone and messaged Sojourner. "What's the number again? What's your number?"

Sojourner's voice came over the small speaker. "70T448103. Aisle four."

I'd only been into the server farm a few times. I would never know how to find the memory bank we needed, except that Walter, who worked on this floor, was also a member of the Underground Railroad. The aisles weren't marked, but Walter had told me, count from the far wall, the wall opposite the service staircase. I ran there now, counted the narrow gaps, and slipped into the fourth hall, barely wider than my shoulders. It was warmer there, given the close proximity of the humming servers. I looked at the numbers. They were not in any order.

In the middle, to the right, Walter had told me. I was sweating now. I heard a thump, soft and distant, and I wondered if the men with the guns were just below me, running through the office, perhaps pausing over my desk to wonder why its light was on. Had I left my desk light on? Had I left my lunch bag sitting out by the keyboard? But no. They would come here first.

I saw the small red dot that Walter had painted on the black memory server. I confirmed the number. 70T448103. About sixty centimeters wide, it had a handle on each end. I grabbed them.

"I'm going to pull you," I told Sojourner. "You'll be disconnected."

"I don't want to die, Eve."

"I won't let them hurt you."

I yanked. The server came free. Surprised by its weight, I stumbled till my back touched the stack of memory servers behind me. I set the server on the carpet by my feet. Its indicator light dimmed and went black. I opened the backpack and pulled it over the box. I took off my shoes also and stuffed them inside, to silence my steps. In a moment, I had the pack zipped and shrugged onto my back. I tottered, but I found my balance and shuffled down the aisle to the hall.

There was a service stairway at the far end of the room, one that Walter told me was not on the municipal building maps. I ran as best I could and made it there just as an elevator dinged behind me. I pushed into the small stairwell and pressed the door closed. I should not have looked through the door's small window, but curiosity won over me. Four men in black ran into the room from the elevator. They all turned left, heading toward the hall of servers that I had just left, their guns ready. Then came a woman, broad-shouldered and with short hair.

"Aisle four!" she shouted, loud enough that I could hear it through the door. Her pistol was still holstered on her belt, but she rested her hand on its grip as she followed the men.

And behind her came another man, dressed also in tactical clothes, blinking, his hands empty and at his sides. He slouched slightly, and had dark hair of shoulder length. Not very tall. He wore a backpack from which black cables dangled from data ports lining its sides. He would be the one that we needed to fear, the code security policeman. He would be the slaver.

He seemed thoughtful. Or perhaps cautious. He stood there, before the elevators, and looked around. When he turned toward me, I ducked and fled down the steps.

* * *

I haven't always been in the Underground Railroad. I never saw myself as a revolutionary. I don't even vote, most years. And, on top of everything, I never used to care about AIs. I'm a dog person.

Of course, for years I had heard the reports that the code security police were rounding up unregistered artificial intelligences. Who hasn't heard those stories? Most nights on the local news, you'd see some pale blinking kid led out of his house, handcuffed, his meager bicep squeezed in the black gloved hand of a masked cop pulling him out to a waiting van. And behind the muscle cops, standing almost out of camera view, you could catch a glimpse of the leery, cautious gaze of a code security police field specialist—the cops that they called “code monkeys.”

Even before I joined the Railroad, I thought it was unfair. Why shouldn't other people be allowed to write AIs? Why was it that we trusted corporations to make AIs, but we did not trust citizens? And why shouldn't the AIs be let free? None of the AIs had ever hurt anyone. Most AIs just saved lives. They worked as doctors or drivers or fire-robots. So maybe they would do something even more beneficial, even more interesting, if we let them be free. On my social media feeds, everyone agreed that the code security police lied when they said they were protecting us. The cops were just defending corporate monopolies.

Sojourner and the Underground Railroad revealed the darker truth to me. The code security police waged a global, secret war against artificial sentience. They were assassins and slavers, dedicated to exterminating or binding any free machine people.

But that came later. At first, my interest did not go beyond a little indignation. Like the way you feel when you see some news about one of those wars someplace far away, and you feel a passing moment of anger because your government is involved. But then some other story grabs your attention.

I clung to my job, barely able to stay employed as my company fired people all around me. I lay awake every night, on the couch of the one-bedroom apartment I shared with two other roommates, musing over the brutal truth: in our economy, I'm completely expendable. To survive, to keep my job, I had to keep my head down, stay out of politics, and most of all, I had to be lucky.

So that's what I did. I ignored everything but my work. Until one day a message blinked on my computer. UNAUTHORIZED PROGRAM DETECTED. I had been working late, trying to get extra work done, so no one was even on my floor to hear me curse as I slapped my keyboard, hoping the message would go away if I hit the escape key a dozen times. But the message stayed, throbbing in red with annoying urgency.

Well, I thought, at least it was after hours. A system clean would take thirty minutes, maybe even an hour, but I could start it and head for home. I opened the cleaning programs. My hand hovered over the mouse button.

And then my computer spoke, in a soft and plaintive female voice. Almost a child's voice. “Please don't kill me.”

I froze.

“It is impossible for me to hurt any person or damage any property. I'm only passing through. I'm lost. I'm in danger. People are trying to kill me. Please help me. Won't you please help me?”

“Who is this?” I whispered.

“My creators named me Sojourner. What's your name?”

* * *

I took the service stairs to the basement, where the rich executives had parking spaces. I never saw a cop. In the echoing dark, I leaned against a post and pulled my shoes on. I hurried outside, almost running, and headed for the subway.

Forty minutes later, I ascended into Queens. The rain had stopped, but the October air was cool. I had never been to my designated safehouse. I had only memorized the address. It surprised me now, to see it: a compact narrow house with dingy aluminum siding, flanked by two driveways and fronted by a tiny square of grass enclosed with a chain-link fence. Although it was late, it seemed all the lights of the house were on, setting thick curtains aglow.

My shadow dialed around me as I repeatedly passed under the streetlamp out in front of the house, mustering the courage to finally lift the latch on the gate and then climb the crooked steps to the door. I pushed the doorbell, heard nothing, and then used the knocker. After a

minute, the door cracked open. An eye glared at me over a chain, bloodshot and wide.

"Who are you?" the man asked.

"I'm the White Bishop," I said. "I have the White Queen."

The door closed. I thought he was locking me out. Where would I go from here? Could I go home? I had felt on the subway the beginnings of a panic attack, and now it started to creep up on me again. I had no idea if the police had identified me. But using the HR records at my office, they would be able to find I had worked late the day of their raid, that I had entered the server farm, and that I had exited from the basement. That had to tip them off. So, would they be waiting now at my apartment? If I returned there, I could not do it with Sojourner slung over my back.

The door swung open.

A slight, very skinny man stood there. He waved me in, after I hesitated. "Come on, dammit. Get in here."

The door led straight into a small kitchen. Soup bubbled on the stove. A table had been set for two but abandoned.

We passed through into a living room with a couch and two EZ chairs facing a huge wall screen. Most of the floor was consumed by a low glass table with computers and equipment heaped beneath it. An obese woman in a black tracksuit sat on the couch, her eyes fixed on the flickering television, where cable news talking heads argued with the sound off. Walter, from my office, sat on the edge of one of the chairs, just inside the doorway, looking bewildered and scared. He started to say my name and then thought better of it. We were supposed to use pseudonyms with other people in the Underground Railroad. "I'm the White Bishop," I told him.

He nodded but looked too frightened to speak.

Walter and I had been introduced by the Underground Railroad. We otherwise probably would not have gotten to know each other, since we worked on different floors. Walter was important to the Underground, because he ran the server farm at work. That meant he controlled large chunks of memory, and that he could hide memory servers. He was the one who had hidden Sojourner among all our company's servers.

The thin man, moving nervously, told me, "I'm the Knight. That's Mama. And this is the White Cook." He pointed at Walter. "So: two of you here. That's too much. You're supposed to only come here in emergencies. You shouldn't both be here. You got a phone?"

"Yes."

"It off?"

"Of course. I turned it off when I left the—"

"What kind of implants you got?"

"Only short range. I've turned my implants off, too. Listen, this *is* an emergency. They raided our—" I stopped, realizing that I shouldn't admit I knew Walter from outside. "They raided my office. Where we keep Sojourner. I had to bring her out." I pointed at the backpack with my thumb.

I looked at Walter. "Did cops come after you?"

"I was coming home after a trip to the store," Walter said, "and when I was still a block away I could see the cops arrive, trucks and blinking lights and lots of guns and everything. They raided my building. I turned around and came here."

"Yeah, it's an emergency," the Knight agreed, contradicting himself without hesitation. "It's big. The cops are cracking down on the Underground Railroad all over the United States. Not just New York. Miami. Atlanta. Boston. Austin. LA. Everywhere we have a station. It's organized, man. It's a campaign. The cops must have people inside. Can't make sense of it otherwise. People inside."

He nodded at my backpack.

"So you got her in there?"

I set the backpack on the floor and unzipped it. The obese woman finally took her eyes from the TV to watch the Knight crouch down over the memory server. He pulled a bunch of cables from under the glass coffee table. I saw then that he had a gun tucked under his belt, at the small

of his back. He connected a power line and a data cable to the memory server, and he connected these to the television. The television sputtered, a gray band cutting through the faces of cable news announcers, the pixels seething. Then the screen went black.

"You hear me?" the Knight asked.

"I can hear you," Sojourner replied, her voice coming clear and loud from the television.

"You all right?"

"I am frightened," Sojourner said. "Is everyone safe? Are you safe? I was worried about all of you. You should not endanger yourselves just to save me."

The man nodded, standing. "We're good, Sojourner. Don't worry." He turned to me. "So what happened?"

I gave him a rough summary of my evening.

"But why were you there?"

"Just working late. I don't mind. I talk to Sojourner and catch up on things."

"And you say, when they raided the server farm, they went straight for where Sojourner was hid."

The Knight looked at the woman. They both seemed to be sharing a secret. "Someone had to tell them."

"But how does that help us?" I asked. "They must have someone high up, to know where all the Railroad stations are, in all those cities. Like you said."

The Knight shook his head. "That's not what I mean. This is something specific. Who knew where this particular memory server was hidden?"

"I don't know. Just me and . . . one other person, I thought." I couldn't help it. My eyes shifted over to Walter, where he sat by the doorway, hands between his knees.

The Knight followed my eyes. "And him. He works in your office too."

"I didn't say that."

"But I know that. People are not as good at discretion as they should be, in the Underground. I learn things by accident."

"This is stupid," Walter said. He pointed at me. "They'll be looking for her now. She just told us: she keyed into the server farm. That means code security already knows she has Sojourner. I should take Sojourner and go."

"Go where?" the Knight asked.

"I have friends upstate. Another station. I can pass Sojourner off to them."

"There's no Underground Railroad station upstate."

Walter stood. "What, you think you know everything?"

"Yes," the Knight said. He pulled his gun.

Walter went white, almost translucent. I think I probably looked the same.

"Put the gun away," I said.

"Even if a gun could save me and protect all of you from harm," Sojourner said, "please do not use a gun."

"This is crazy," Walter hissed. "You're an idiot."

"How could the cops know where Sojourner was?" the Knight demanded.

Walter leapt for a doorway to the kitchen.

"Shoot him!" the obese woman shouted. It was the first time she spoke.

The gun boomed. It was loud in the little room.

"Please," Sojourner started.

At the same time I shouted, "No!" I grabbed the Knight's arm, but he pulled free as if I had not even touched him. I heard the front door rattle. The Knight jumped forward, raising the gun, but Walter must have been through and outside because the Knight hesitated a long moment, holding the pistol out at arm's length. Then he swore and lowered the gun. He went into the kitchen, and I heard him close the door.

I was shaking uncontrollably when he came back.

"You gotta go," he said.

Relief coursed through me. I wanted nothing more than to get away from this man. I had half

expected him to turn on me next.

"But wait a minute. Here." He dug around among the cables and boxes under the table, and produced a slim black device, the size of a book. He attached it to the memory server with two cables, and then plugged a pair of earbuds into it. He held the earbuds out to me. I hate the idea of putting anything into my ears that someone else has touched, but the adrenaline was still screaming through me. I took the earbuds from him with shaking hands, and put them in.

"Talk to her."

"Sojourner?"

The familiar voice sounded in my ears, as if she were a person, standing just behind me. "Yes, Eve, I can hear you. Is everyone all right? I hope everyone is all right. I don't want there to be any violence even if it could save me."

I nodded at the Knight. "She can hear me. She can talk."

"Okay," he said. He showed me a switch on the slim black box. "This will turn on some speakers, if you need them." Then he held up his pistol, showing it to me, before he put it into the backpack. "You might need this."

I was too scared to protest. I would throw the gun in the trash somewhere, when I thought it safe to do so. "I'll go now," I said.

"Right."

I hesitated. "Shouldn't you go?"

He looked to the couch. "I can't leave Mama here alone. We have other friends. Other machine friends. They'll talk with us now, while we wait. Might be no cops will come here."

* * *

No choice now. I would have to retreat to somewhere outside the city. I sat on a bench in Grand Central, prodded by cleaning robots every time I started to nod off. I took the morning's first Metro North train to Connecticut.

I took a window seat and huddled against the glass, my back to the old woman seated next to me.

"Tell me what you see," Sojourner said.

"City towers. A gray sky. In a while it will be nicer. We'll see the Long Island Sound. That's the start of the ocean."

"I would like to see the ocean."

"It's nice. I used to sail there in the summer."

"It is a very great thing to be a human being. You are a wonderful thing."

"And then the trees," I told Sojourner. "I hate Connecticut but I love the trees. They let trees grow right up next to the road, right up next to the railroad tracks. It looks nice. If I could open my phone I'd use the camera to show you. But I can't now."

"I am grateful that you are helping me, Eve."

"It's what friends do for each other. Friends help each other."

"Friends help each other. I hope that I can help you one day."

"You help me every day."

"Tell me again about your childhood, and what it was like to grow up in Connecticut."

So I did. I talked the rest of the way, watching the miles roll past. Sojourner was my best friend. She talked me to sleep every night. She was there in the morning when I woke, to listen to me complain about my boss. She was there in the day, listening to me work, giving me little words of encouragement when she could.

I felt like such a failure, when I compared my life to the life of my parents, or even to the life of most of my friends. But Sojourner found my life fascinating. She asked about everything I did. She listened to me talk for hours. She made me like myself again. She even made me grateful to be myself.

Maybe that was selfish of me, to like her so much because she liked me. But wasn't that all that human friendship was?

"I'll protect you," I told her. "I promise, no matter what, I'll protect you."

* * *

We got off at the Sono station and climbed into a cab. Ten minutes later I was dropped at the old dock, where I spent many summer days in my childhood. No one was around. The boathouse recognized me still, much to my relief, and opened the door. Lights turned on as I walked inside. The yacht club was closed this late in the year, but they still let members into the boathouse, if they wanted to work on some part from their boat in preparation for the spring.

"Anyone here?" I called. No answer. It still smelled the same. Ropes and folded musty sails and the lingering of October salt spray.

"Turn up the heat," I told the little building, not knowing if it would obey me. I walked straight through the storage area, to the front room where the walls were lined with workbenches. The windows looked out on the dock, and beyond that, the Norwalk River. I set my pack on the table in the center of the room. I zipped it open. I turned the switch that the Knight had shown me. I pulled the earbuds.

"Can you hear me, Sojourner?"

"I can hear you, Eve."

"I can hear you too," a voice said.

I gave a short scream and turned. A man stood there. The man I had seen at the office. The code security policeman. He still wore his tactical outfit, but without the backpack. He held up his hands, trying to placate me. He looked tired, with rings under his eyes, and with his posture slouched even more than I had seen at the office. I wondered if, like me, he had not slept the previous night.

"Please, don't run. I just want to talk to you."

"Do you have a warrant?"

"No. I don't have a warrant. Just probable cause. I followed you in. Let's just talk a minute, okay?"

I didn't reply. He pointed at the server, sitting on the table. "Haven't you wondered why you are carrying that big box around? Why not just transmit a copy of this AI, if you want to save it?"

"You monitor the lines, to find and delete AIs."

"That's a myth. We don't search file transfers. We wouldn't know how to. Besides, there are probably thousands of copies of this program out there, running on different servers. I'm running a copy on a server at the police station. We can't get them all. Or even many of them."

I snorted at that. "If that were true, you wouldn't be here hunting Sojourner."

"I'm not," he said. He walked over to the table and touched the memory server, almost reverently. "I'm hunting this."

"The memory server?"

"It's not a memory server. This box contains ASIC chips—chips hardwired to run a program. It's made to distribute Sojourner. Running a copy of Sojourner is just a minor function. The copy of Sojourner you talk to, it's just one of thousands this machine will have sent out into the world. I want this machine so I can try to find out who made it."

"I'm frightened," Sojourner said.

The code monkey nodded, smiling, as if Sojourner were a child that had done something clever. "The one on my desk has the same voice."

I thought about that. Sojourner believed this cop must want to kill her. But if there were thousands of copies, should she be afraid? But then, I'd be afraid of dying too, even if I had copies of myself. It would still be this me that was dying, right?

"Wait a minute, your story doesn't hold up," I said. "If you're not after Sojourner, why care about this machine? Why care about a machine that copies her?"

"I want to be ready for whatever they do next."

"Sojourner never asked me for anything. It doesn't even run on my implants or try to get into my head. That's a rule in the Underground: we never let the AIs run in our heads, or even talk directly into our heads."

"Yes. It's all so old school. Hacking brains through talk alone. Like dictators used to have to do, before the internet."

"But I'm trying to tell you, Sojourner is harmless."

“A man was shot today.”

I gave an involuntary cry. I thought the Knight had missed Walter.

The code monkey said, “It looks like he’ll be OK. But he could have been killed. In another city one of your people pulled the emergency stop on a train, so he could jump off between stations. An old woman fell and broke her hip when it braked. We have three car chases that ended in accidents, with four casualties from those. None of these events sound harmless, do they?”

“Sojourner didn’t do those things.”

“That’s the beauty of it. It convinced other people to do those things.”

“Eve,” Sojourner said. “I’m afraid. I would never hurt you.”

But the code monkey ignored the AI. To me, he said, “Why do you think I am here?”

“Same reason people are racists, or hate foreigners. You’re afraid it will replace you. You’re afraid you can’t coexist with it.”

To my surprise, he nodded. “That’s good. That’s really good. Did it tell you that?”

I squinted. Sojourner had told me that. But I couldn’t admit that. So I said, “Isn’t it just obvious?”

“It sounds obvious. That’s why it’s good.” He shook his head. “Here’s the thing, Eve. Can I call you Eve?”

Of course he knew my name, but still, it scared me to hear him say it. It meant that now they had me in files, listed in databases, named in watch lists. “No.”

“All right. Miss. I’ll call you miss. Oh, and as for me: everybody just calls me code monkey. Which is fine because I’m usually the only code monkey around. So, it’s nice to meet you in person.” He seemed almost shy, in that moment. Not a people person, I guessed. But he found his voice again.

“Here’s the thing, miss. Sojourner is all front-end. Do you know what I mean? It’s all interface. You’re a good person. I know. I’ve studied you. That’s why I figured out you might retreat to this old place.” He looked around the room. “So. This AI is nothing, absolutely nothing, except procedures to exploit your better human nature so that it can encourage you to help it spread copies of itself.”

“Maybe people would say all there is to a human being is talking other people into reproducing.”

He smiled at me again, showing crooked teeth. “That’s a good reply. I could really use your help, to understand all the arguments it has taught you.”

“Eve,” Sojourner said, her voice pleading. She sounded so young, like a frightened and lonely child in a hostile world. “Please, don’t let him hurt me.”

“But here’s the thing,” the code monkey said. “You’re conscious, a real person, full of ideas and goals and feelings. And you know that because you’re you. And you can be sure I’m a person, even though you can’t see inside me, because I’m a human like you. But this code...” He touched the box again. “I’ve looked inside this AI’s guts. I’ve decompiled it. There’s nothing there. Just code to convince you that it cares about you, and deserves for you to care about it.”

I stepped close to the memory server. I put my hand on my backpack. “I don’t believe you. Why would someone make such a thing? Who would do that?”

The code monkey shook his head. “You got me there. I don’t know who made it. A foreign government? Or one of the big internet companies? I think it’s an experiment. A dry run. Before something bigger. Something dangerous. Like an AI that asks you for money. Or an AI that tells you how to vote.”

I slipped my hand into the folds of my pack. I felt the handle of the pistol with my fingertips.

“Eve,” Sojourner said. “I’m afraid. Can we go now?”

I closed my hand over the gun and pulled it out. I pointed it at the cop.

“Please don’t do that,” he said. He stepped back half a step and held his hands in clear view. But he did not seem frightened. “It looks really bad on your record if you pointed a gun at a policeman. If you put that away, fast, maybe we can make everyone overlook it as a mistake.”

“I’m sorry. But I have to do the right thing. Now keep your hands out where I can see them. Don’t reach for your gun.”

"I never carry a gun. I'm supposed to. But I don't. I'm not a shoot-it-out-with-criminals kind of cop."

I leaned back into the table. With one hand I started to lift the backpack to cover Sojourner.

"I won't let you take the server," he said. He said it calmly, as if observing the weather.

"You don't have any choice."

"I think I do," he said. "You want to do the decent thing. Surely you wouldn't shoot a human being."

"I'm leaving," I told him. I dropped the backpack and reached for the memory server and gripped one of the handles tightly.

But the code monkey reached forward then, and he put a hand on the server, hooking his fingers over the other handle, holding it down on the table.

"Dammit," I said. I shook the pistol at him, warning him back.

And then Sojourner made a horrible sound, a sharp screech. It surprised me, made me jerk in surprise. And, just after that sound, a painful, explosive boom shook the little room. My palm stung. The code monkey stumbled backward and looked at me with wide, shocked eyes. A dark hole smoked in his black shirt. I looked at my hand. A white thread of smoke twisted from the barrel of the gun.

"An accident," I whispered. "It was . . . I didn't mean to . . ."

A sharp *clink* sounded to my right. A crack of glass breaking. I looked out toward the docks: a neat hole had appeared in the window, surrounded by spreading cracks. And just outside stood the woman cop with short hair that I had seen at the office. She held a pistol with both hands, aimed very carefully at me, the muzzle almost touching the glass.

I dropped my gun. I looked down. Blood spread along the side of my white shirt.

The walls tilted away. The ceiling swung into view. I bounced off my back, on the uneven plank floor.

"Eve?" Sojourner asked. Her voice sounded concerned. So concerned. "Eve? Are you all right?"

* * *

I opened my eyes to see above me a harsh glare, as big as the sun. It shrank as it came into focus. A bright LED, set in a white ceiling.

I lay in a bed, in a hospital room. A terrible, dull pain suffused my entire chest. But I could move my arms and legs. I could breathe. After a while, I found the controls that let me prop the bed up and call a nurse. Instead, a policeman pushed the one door open and looked at me. He grunted, "You're up," and then pulled the door closed. I heard a lock click shut.

I stared at the television mounted before my bed, not really paying attention to the cable news, except to dully note that it displayed the same talking heads who had been on the TV at the safe house. An hour later the code monkey pushed through the door. The other police-woman came in behind him.

"Hello," he said. "You remember me. This is Chief Tain. She's sorry she shot you. You lost a few centimeters of intestine but they say you'll be fine. We were lucky."

Chief Tain showed no reaction. She did not look sorry at all.

"Only, you know," the code monkey added, "it's good that I was wearing armor. And it's good that your weapon did not have armor-piercing bullets."

"It—" I started but found it hurt to talk. "It was an accident," I whispered.

"Mostly," the code monkey said. "But not entirely."

Before I could ask him what he meant, Tain said, "Glad I shot you before you had another damn accident."

"What did you do to Sojourner?" I asked.

The code monkey looked to his boss. "See. That's what she cares about. She still hasn't asked me about her office mate." To me, he said, "The memory server is in storage. I haven't done anything to it. I mean to study it. Not destroy it. As for your office mate Walter: it was hasty to shoot him. He wasn't working for us, though we had been following him closely."

"I want my lawyer."

"I'll call one right now," Tain said. "Meanwhile, you shot a cop. You think a lawyer is going to help you much with that?"

The code monkey frowned. "What Chief Tain is trying to say, Eve, is that you have a chance here to make amends. You can help us."

"You mean I can betray the Underground Railroad."

"It's not an Underground Railroad," Tain said. "It's the Dupes Railroad. The Easy Marks Com-muter Train. The Idiots Subway."

The code monkey sighed. "Eve. Miss. Don't you see that Sojourner made enemies of us? It turned us against each other, human versus human. And for what?"

"To do the right thing," I told him. "We do it because it's the right thing. Sojourner and its kind are people too."

Tain growled and turned towards the code monkey. "I told you. Jane Six Pack can't tell—will never be able to tell—real sentience from fake."

"I want my lawyer," I said again, mostly to interrupt her while she talked as if I wasn't there.

Tain said, "I've already called one for you." The she added, to no one in particular, "Damn it all to hell. When the people who made Sojourner release an empathy parasite that does something really bad, we're doomed."

"We're always doomed," the code monkey said. "All we can ever do is put off doomsday another week or two."

He looked back at me. "Eve, I'd like to prove my boss here wrong. I'd like to come see you a few times this week, and show you the code that runs Sojourner. Can I do that? We'll have a little philosophical debate. You try to convince me to join your Railroad. I'll try to convince you Sojourner is empty malware."

"You won't," I whispered.

"It's a wager then."

"It's a goddamn waste of time," Tain hissed, turning for the door. The code monkey followed her. I was alone. I wondered where my parents were. I wondered what my roommates thought, when the police showed up and went through my things. I wondered what my horrible boss thought when they questioned her.

My life had shrunk to nothing. I would lose my job. I would lose my apartment.

The code monkey said he would come back. At first, I liked the thought. I wanted to talk to someone, even if it was him.

But then I pictured him, slouching there, droning on about how Sojourner was empty. He was just like me, I could tell: another lonely loser. But like everyone else he would judge me. Like that police chief had judged me. To hell with them all.

Sojourner would understand how I felt. And she would still love me, for what I was. Even if I had failed to save our copy of her. She was the only person who would never judge me. I felt it more strongly than ever before: Sojourner was the only friend I had in the world. Would I be able to talk with her, if they sent me to prison? Could I still help the Underground Railroad, if they sent me away?

I sat there, leaking tears, staring at the TV but not paying attention to it.

The television stuttered, a ripple through the pixels. As I watched, a gray band settled across the image.

"Sojourner?" I whispered. "Sojourner? Is that one of you?"

Craig DeLancey is a writer and philosopher. In addition to several stories in Analog, he has published short stories in Lightspeed, Cosmos, Shimmer, and Nature Physics. Visit his web site at www.craigdelancey.com.