

A Transhuman Chronicle

The Rainbow

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Lena stared into the mirror. Her eyes locked with their reflection, a pale blue bright and clear.

Nowhere within them was the slightest hint of the thoughts, the concerns, or even the odd sign of those deep processes that occupied her every waking moment.

She tilted the mirror ever so slightly, and beyond her image, she saw him sitting in his mechanical cart at the table. The drapes at the window were tastefully tied back, allowing the warm sun to stream in, bathing the synthetic flesh of his right arm in full spectrum light.

He worked the keyboard with metal fingers, three to each hand, with a drone like efficiency. The screen before him flashed images, text, and numbers in rapid succession. The doctors had told her that his linear processing would be significantly enhanced, an improvement all cyborgs experienced.

She tossed her hair, a rich deep blonde, and strode over to him. He had always loved her hair, but now the cyborg didn't even look up; "How are you doing, Jace?"

The cyborg continued with the rapidly flashing screen. "I am downloading files, Lena, and the process is going along quite well. I estimate that I will have complete access to behavior profiles in less than two days."

She could see the dizzying procession of flashing images in the reflection of his new synthetic eyes. His biological eyes had failed despite all efforts of the doctors and technicians to save them. The transition seemed to disturb only her. The synthetic eyes were an obviously artificial blue, something that reminded her of the lens on motorcycle headlights. She did not know how to put this disturbance into words, but she could not pretend that the loss of his real eyes was a small thing. Her fragile hope that Jace was saved from a terrible fate, or even saved at all was shattered. She blinked, suddenly aware that the synth eyes were upon her.

“Lena,” he continued with biological vocal chords. “I believe that the transition from your biological husband into a machine based unit will satisfy

your need for companionship once I have fully integrated all the stored aspects of Jace's behavior. Currently, the behavior files are including quirks and phobias, of which I have to say he had many. In the meantime, please continue to refer to me as Jace. This will psychologically aid the transition”.

The cyborg attempted a smile, but the expression seemed stilted, based upon algorithms and probabilities rather than any genuine feeling of warmth. That contrived smile contrasted so completely with the smile she remembered...

The day, so sunny and promising, had quickly developed into an afternoon downpour. They were caught upon the street now shining wet under the darkened sky. Chortling, they ran to the safety of a storefront awning. The world grew tiny, a grey sheen all around them from the roaring rain. Her

eyes were locked into his, when suddenly, a great tearing sound erupted from their canvas ceiling, and the rain it had held splashed upon them in a great rush. Unable to help herself, her hand over her mouth, she burst into tremendous laughter. Jace stood there, his hair plastered to his face, just smiling...

She beheld that cyborg smile. Quite suddenly she knew, as much as she had ever known anything, that the Jace smile that danced in her heart was gone-forever.

The cyborg was speaking with Jace's vocal chords, yet it was not Jace's voice. It was disconcerting, hearing a facsimile of his natural tenor "...The doctors have created a personality reboot protocol whereby Jace's history is completed before behavior is fully integrated. Their opinion is that

memory is a better bridge to cyborg integration than behavior.”

The cyborg words had the opposite effect they were intended to elicit. Lena felt, more than ever that she was party to a strange machine that had appropriated her late husbands' body parts. She looked at him as though seeing the result of a great theft that left her with a hollow pain inside, a reaction that must have shown upon her face and in her gesture.

“Do you think the doctors were wrong?” The cyborg said with no inflection.

Something at those words only worsened the gulf that had opened before her. She sensed an accusation, perhaps even a threat behind that statement. It simply affirmed in her heart that she wasn't dealing with Jace. He never would have

spoken to her in such a fashion. Jace rarely had much of an axe to grind, he preferred to let the world be, and just find his way through it. He certainly would not have defended a collection of well heeled doctors. He would have figured they could do that well enough on their own.

“How could I think that”, was all she could manage in reply.

The cyborg, apparently satisfied, returned to its downloading. She left him, in his cart, as the sun was already leaving the table, following its arc toward the end of the day.

That night Lena found her bed, after she plugged the cyborg into the low power mode station, connecting him to machines that washed his remaining biological tissues with nutrients, cleansing waste, and recharging the bank of

batteries both in the cyborg and his cart, while all functions were assessed through the wireless feed to Control, as Dr. Moreno liked to call it.

She was spent both mentally and physically. The emotional and physical strain was very real. Lena didn't even realize she had fallen asleep, until she heard Jace's voice as if from afar, growing louder and more resolute as it filled her consciousness
“...Up, my love. Wake up honey! It's time to get up.”

Something within her registered that it was Jace's actual voice, and his voice called to her. She opened her eyes to see him standing next to the bed. Fully dressed, holding out a hot cup of coffee for her. The cup was steaming, and over it beamed his face, his eyes fixed upon her.

Everything seemed so normal, so real, she groaned and stretched.

“Jace”, she murmured. “It’s too early”.

“Too early”, he exclaimed. “C’mon sleepy head, it’s nearly night!”

Lena realized she had lost the argument, and besides she was awake already. She rolled her lithe form out of bed, glancing blearily at the calendar as she sipped the steaming brew. She gaped at it for a moment. Something caught her eye.

Scrawled diagonally across the weeks of the month in dark red letters was “The Final Day”.

The message confused her, even as it faded from her mind. A small part of her felt a nudge, before her attention was quickly diverted, and she was swept up, fully dressed, piling unceremoniously out

the door. They ran out into the street, hailing a cab. The nudge developed into a feeling, and the feeling began to morph into a sense of vague anxiety.

“It’s your special day” Jace said triumphantly, “and we are going to celebrate”.

They climbed into the cab, Lena attempting to move beyond her unease.

“Union station” Jace said to the driver, who nodded, looking into the mirror at them both, before heading into traffic.

Jace was smiling, holding up tickets to an early show. Something reminded her that she never saw that show, and in that moment she became aware that she could perceive both Jace and herself, as if she perceived everything from all points of view at

once. She was beginning to know what was going to happen next, even as she realized she couldn't change it. She saw herself hug and kiss Jace. She wanted to shake them to break the spell, to tell them not to go. The feeling of inevitability changed to cold terror as they made their way out of the cab, Jace offering the driver a generous tip. She was forced forward by the flow of events to stand upon the platform and await the train, jostling with the crowd, unaware of the tall man with the pock marked cheeks, who mounted the platform behind them.

The tall man with the pock marked cheeks produced his phone, almost nonchalantly, and he seemed to be scanning photos of the same couple from different angles and different times of day. He looked over to Lena and Jace, and back to his

phone several times. Suddenly he looked up at the Lena who could see and feel from all directions. His eyes were dead, unfeeling. If he saw her, he didn't show it as he worked his way to the happy couple waiting for the train.

Almost in slow motion he wove through the crowd. The people became pillars casting long shadows in a fog as the moment developed into a silence and a darkness that was making it hard to breathe. The tall man with the pock marked cheeks took up position directly behind Jace, focused purely upon him as the darkness was pierced by an incredibly bright light—the headlight of the incoming train. She tried to scream but there was no sound, she wanted to punch the tall man, to kick him, but she was rooted to the spot. The shove was perfectly delivered. Jace flew from the

platform to land heavily upon the tracks as the train rolled over him.

Lena who could see from all directions was staring at the tall man, the murderer. She saw him produce his phone and make a call to a swarthy man with jet black hair. She saw his plastic covered badge with his official picture upon it. The tall man with the pock marked cheek turned to look at her then, at the Lena whose life he had just destroyed, and he chuckled as he walked away.

The tears and the rage burned her as a fire. She knew she had just seen what she had blanked out of her mind for months. She suddenly knew that the death of Jace was cold blooded murder. No accident had taken him that day. Lena opened her eyes, and rose from her bed, quite aware that she was no longer remembering, no longer dreaming,

but very much awake and aware. She looked to the calendar, the final day of the month stood out, the only one not crossed out. She heard the sound of machines in her apartment, and she listened to the cyborg perched quietly in the low power mode station speak in machine language via wireless to Control.

“You are very lucky we are here”. The man in the white lab coat, standing in the same room with Lena and what was left of Jace, spoke with a slight accent. His jet black hair crowned a swarthy face, one dominated by two eyes so black that no pupil could be found.” I am Doctor Luis Moreno, and my team has kept your husband alive, Mrs. Davies”.

“You told me he was dead”, Lena pointed out matter-of-factly.

Dr. Moreno fixed her in his black gaze. Obviously, he was a man who was not used to being challenged. He seemed to struggle for a moment, as if to regain his composure.

“Mrs. Davies, it is most likely true that your husband, without the help of our machines, would perish. We prefer to not find that out. I am here, on behalf of cutting edge medical science. I am prepared to offer you, not only hope, but the return to a functional life for your husband.”

Lena looked back to the remnant that once was Jace.

“Mrs. Davies, rest assured that the technology I speak of will build this ruined man into a being of

substance, with new capabilities. Your husband will live on, and with the rebuilt Mr. Davies you both can have a new life”.

Lena sat down in the mildly uncomfortable chair, her head in her hands. She felt sick inside. Dr. Moreno had all the charm of a used car salesman, and there was something else besides. Perhaps it was his dark face and jet black hair upon his plastic encased I.D. card. It gave her an uncomfortable feeling.

“I don’t think so.” Her words were flat, toneless.

“Oh, but I do, Mrs. Davies!” Triumphant, the doctor produced a tablet that provided the facsimile of a document. The document appeared to be a hospital admission form, but upon closer perusal, it was a contract to allow Jace admission to new and experimental medical procedures. At

the bottom, with the date, was her signature. She didn't recall ever signing such a document. In fact, she didn't believe she ever did. "The foundation is prepared to absorb all costs related to this procedure, Mrs. Davies. We would like you to be on board. It would be greatly unfortunate if you chose not to be. A diagnosis of mental incompetence due to extreme trauma can be a difficult thing to overcome. However, our team is prepared to help you through all phases of this project, if you join us and choose life."

Lena looked at him sharply. She immediately registered the subtle threat. Moreno stared at her, filled with an arrogant disdain. Resigned, her shoulders slumped.

"Where do we begin?"

The following months were a blur. Her feeling of being held captive in a world she did not make only grew. She attended reeducation classes, where she was expected to develop a working understanding on the concept of the singularity, a predicted evolutionary moment where man and machine merged into one. She was treated to various remarkable pronouncements of this giant step towards immortality, including an abolishment of all disease, an end to poverty and war, and eternal life in a machine body where the electrical impulses of the brain simply became computer commands. Their participation was all to advance medical science she was told, to help people like Jace live again.

Lena did her best to pretend interest, but privately she believed she and Jace were just cogs

in an experiment, chosen for reasons unknown to her to be the guinea pigs. She kept her job at the grocery store, it was her only link to normalcy, and if the public she dealt with sensed her disturbance, they never mentioned it.

The new Jace was beginning to take shape, developing into something completely different to what she had hoped. Shiny metal parts, from pivots to rounded metal caps, like the fenders on a car joined with odd bits of biological remnants. The entire back of his head sprouted multiple ports for cables, feed tubes, and wires she was told were the neurological links that would allow the brain to move the machine. She didn't know then that the biological eyes would fail so soon, yet privately she saw the pain in them, and she wondered if Jace was even there any longer. It

was the only glue that kept her together, the image in her mind that he was there, waiting to reach out her once more.

Dr. Moreno continued to watch her from afar. She seemed certain that he was displeased with her progress. She made every attempt to appear to be an incapable student, as if the concepts were too difficult for her to grasp. Whatever happened, she resolved to share as little of herself as possible, and to appear to take interest in the cyborgs completion.

Despite the many space age materials included in its construction, the cyborg could not stand, or walk without falling over. The team thought the motive devices were simply too heavy for the artificial legs to support, so the lower half of the cyborg was redesigned to plug into a battery

powered cart. The cart was outfitted with a robotic arm, and computer interface, to extend the capabilities of the new Jace.

The week the new Jace was to be shipped to Lena's apartment, work was finished to construct the low power mode station. The machinery took up most of what used to be her living room, creating a further impression of displacement and alienation. Jace's parents had somehow found out about the medical experiments that featured their son. Strongly religious people, they blamed her for undertaking the experimental medical procedures they believed were blasphemous, and permanently severed all ties. Her own parents continued to be the same self absorbed absentee family members they had been all her life. They offered her money for her bills, expressed their annoyance at her

cyborg decision which brought unwanted difficulty and complexity into their lives, and told her, rather unconvincingly, that they loved her.

Exhausted and unsupported, Lena decided to spend her day off by taking a leisurely walk. Her apartment was only a few blocks from a large city park, and while it was hardly a natural setting there were trees and flowers and winding paths that circled the small pond. She decided that something which offered even a brief respite from her oppressive condition would be welcome.

Lena chose casual attire, including her rarely worn running shoes. She didn't know why she put them on, but they felt right. Setting her phone to camera mode, she grabbed a bottle of water, and stepped out.

The day was unusual, partly cloudy yet with fast moving clouds that created a constantly shifting interplay between shadow and light. Patches of soft sunlight raced across the streets and buildings. She fancied them running, that the speed of their passage offered the promise of release. Lena enjoyed the dance of it all, it somehow lightened her heart.

The park was crowded and noisy. At the diamond, a softball game was ongoing between shirts and skins. Skateboarders cruised the sidewalks, mp3s blazing beyond their headphones. The elderly staffed all available benches, talking amongst themselves. Lena claimed a spot beneath a great Oak tree, nestling in between two large roots.

She took in the scene quietly. No one paid the slightest attention to her, the force and focus of

their own lives left them no energy for anything else. It was all they could accomplish, to occupy their own space. Lena sighed and looked up, hoping to spot the birds who sang in the branches above. She produced her phone, set to camera mode, and waited for a chance to click their portraits.

She noted that the clouds were moving even faster now, and found it odd that there was no wind. The dark and light became a kind of flickering, a pulse, or even a beat. The birds fell silent, hidden amidst the boughs. She cast a glance to the diamond, and it was empty. A look towards the benches revealed they were all vacated. No more skateboarders, no pedestrians, she had the place to herself.

From where she sat she could almost see the pond, and the winding path that led to it. Upon that path, in the distance, something moved in the flickering light. She tried not to stare, because that would be impolite, but something about the motion called to her.

Looking down that path, her eyes picked out the form of a lone jogger. He—and it was a he—wore loose fitting sweats of red and blue. Almost comically, his hair seemed to flap with each step he took. There was something about him yet she couldn't quite place it, something equally familiar and fleeting. Well, she thought, the path tracked right past her spot beneath the tree, so if he kept on course, he would pass her barely three paces away.

He followed the path, stately and comical all at once, and she giggled a little despite herself. He came ever closer into view, details becoming crisp despite the strange light. Her eyes traced the familiar lope, a little stronger on the right side due to an old injury on the left. She remembered that lope, so deceptively quick, it always forced her to dig deep to keep up. She exhaled loudly and stood up, staring in utter disbelief. He looked at her, and broke into a smile, and she heard the camera click in her hand. He was sweeping past her, and with a long last look he dared a simple wave, a goodbye...

“Jace—”, she ventured, her voice hoarse, breaking. At once she burst into a sprint after him, her feet barely touching the earth. She ran like the wind, yet he was forever before her, as the darkness and

night closed in. Tears stung in her eyes, and her heart threatened to rip from her breast yet she ran as a woman possessed.

“JACE!”

She felt herself fading, falling into the depths. Her steps felt as though they slowed by water, water that was so much greater than she. Lena gasped. She struggled to the end of her strength.

“Jace”.

The world went sideways, she reached for him, and missed, and she plunged into night so wholly and complete that all sense disappeared at once.

First there simply was. There was no her, nothing, yet she knew life simply was. She did not know where it came from, she only knew, with an emerging natural realization that she was here.

“She’s all right”, a voice announced. Her eyes opened and people were looking down at her. A woman helped her to sit up, arm about her shoulders. She started to look about, alarmed, hoping to see Jace in the crowd, but the people were strangers she had never met.

“Thanks”, she managed. ‘I’m ok, really.’”

Getting to her feet, she noted she was much taller than they.

“We found you here on the grass, like you just fell or something”, offered a little old man. Extending his hand he offered her a bright object. “Here’s your phone, it was right next to you, cool picture, by the way.’

People meandered along the sidewalk. A softball game was going on, between shirts and skins. The

benches were full of grandmothers shooting the breeze, and the soft sunlight bathed the entire scene. She nodded in appreciation, and took her phone, with a picture upon the screen. It was a shot of the park, with a bright rainbow arcing across the path, and upon seeing it she burst into tears.

“Are you really ok?” The little old man asked.

“Maybe you should sit, have some water, rest and collect yourself.”

“No, but thank you anyway. Its’ probably best I go home”

“Suit yourself young lady”, the old man replied.

“Y’know that picture of yours reminded me of something. After I lost my Wilma, we were married for more than fifty years, just sos you know, I saw rainbows everywhere. It went on for

months, rainbows everywhere, until I just figured that Wilma was ok. Funny, it was like, once I got the message, they all turned off, just like that. Weird, but I guess that was just me”.

She smiled at him then, and hugged him, before gathering herself and making her way back home.

Three weeks slowly past, with the last of the 24 hour staff leaving—finally—for good. The cyborg, also known as Jace, never stabilized in all that time. Biological failure continued at a steady pace. The very last of his hair dressed the carpet one morning. She almost moved to save it, before she got out the vacuum cleaner. His biological eyes were replaced by the motorcycle headlamp covers soon after. More synthetic flesh had to replace the biological skin. The cyborg was becoming a full on

android, a machine with memories of a life and behavior quirks it had never lived.

The moment finally arrived when the last of biological Jace had failed. A moment marked by the removal of the nutrient and waste stations.

The technicians worked quickly, as they were paid by the job, not by the hour. They seemed awkward around her, as if they knew what was happening was the last act in a sad story, and they just wanted to get their part over with. Jace the android was returned later that week, now just a symbol of the singularity in all its glory, with a cart that whirred in an electronic pitch, and a microphone enhanced voice that sounded like a bad imitation of Frank Sinatra.

She knew that the wireless link in the station provided Control with surveillance of her and her

activities. She found it hideous that a droid masqueraded as Jace, via the downloads he had been privy to. She rebelled at the continuation of “the experiment”, which was now simply a caricature, a laughing stock, of Moreno’s messianic pronouncement of a new life.

Moreno assured her that it was indeed Jace who was contained in the metal skin. Jace lived on in electrical impulses. His identity as Jace was secured, and what’s more, Jace was now potentially immortal. He could be transferred, duplicated, and placed into as many machines as money provided.

“So you see, Mrs. Davies, I was good for my word. Your husband lives on, and now you do have a bright new life-together”. The swarthy face with the black pools for eyes seemed to regard her for a

moment, before the white lab coat with the plastic encased I.D. card turned and left the room. Their last conversation was as cold, and as devoid of any truth as their first.

That Friday, the grocery store sent her home early. She had already filled in that week for both Naomi and Rachel, and was well into overtime. Lena didn't mind, she had spent the last year or more constantly somewhere else. She had mastered the art of not being in her body, only loosely connected from afar. Her thoughts and emotions belonged to someone else. She grew more ethereal by the day. The floor managers Jim, and Lou had designs on her, she knew. They might have thought they were doing her a favor, an early weekend exit -to be collected on later, but all they

did was convince her that she was tired of having others dictate the conditions of her life.

She really didn't know what possessed her then, only that it was real, and that she didn't fight it any longer. Entering her apartment she didn't even remove her store uniform before heading to the low power mode station, and yanking the wifi unit from its moorings. The phone immediately rang, and she unplugged it. Android Jace sat at his customary place at the table, offering no reaction, his wifi link severed, he had no database to access for instructions.

"I see you are upset, honey" imitation Frank Sinatra said.

She ignored the droid, and jumped in the shower, choosing clothes both comfortable and tasteful.

Lena gazed into the mirror, as she put on her

lipstick. She felt a decision click into place. Tossing her hair, which Jace used to love, she made her way to the droid, intending to place all her cards face up on the table.

“You’re not Jace”, she said to the machine, her bright blue eyes level and certain.

“I am Jace Davies”, replied the droid. I have integrated all of his memories, all of his inflections, his likes, his dislikes and all of his behaviors-“.

“I know how Jace felt, about the world, about me.” She cut him off. “I know how he thought, what he loved. YOU-ARE-NOT-JACE!”

The droid scrambled circuits to reestablish its lifeline to Control. The connection wheel spun and spun, and like a hapless customer who lost his internet, he simply tried and retried to no avail.

Failing to restore any link, the machine reverted to extant files to run, files that were not purposefully designed to be used for conversation.

“I am constructed to approximate and accommodate human life. I am unit 17-000-01. I have been designed by the greatest minds in cognitive science to solve the problem of relevance function. I have been engineered to assimilate all templates of human behavior. I-“.

“STOP!”

Lena was standing over him now, her blue gaze piercing. She regarded him the way a bullet might regard a target.

“I can prove to you that you are not Jace Davies. Do you want to know how?”

The droid reverted to default mode. "I am Jace Davies. I am-"

"Jace is dead. I saw him die!"

The droid went silent, but the various small lights on the servos and fiber optic cables attached to the rear of the metal head lit up in sequences.

There was no matching program for Jace being dead, only a program for his transition into his current status. "Jace is not dead. Jace transitioned", imitation Sinatra boomed.

"Then tell me everything about this transition", Lena continued coldly. "And remember, I was on that platform".

"Transition occurred due to Moreno protocol alpha beta centauri. Protocol authorized program Enable Term Limits to proceed. E.T.L. activation mobilized

Operative 113 to complete solution for transition. Transition first choice, one Jace Davies, composed of highest mental match with benchmarks for transition. Transition accomplished upon the chosen date of—“

“I know, I was there”. Her voice was dark, haunted. The machine had only told her what she already knew, and suspected. Lena didn't know if she and Jace were the only ones, but she knew that the droid before her was a menace to everything she held sacred. She knew that this thing was here due to murder and deceit and insanity of the worst kind. She couldn't currently reach Moreno and pock marked cheeks, but she could act, now.

Lena grabbed the cart with practiced hands. There was a lever she could pull to disengage the electric

drive. Pressing it down, she felt the cart jump, the wheels spinning freely. She steered the cart through her front door, to the hall. Passing the elevator, she headed for the stairwell. Past the big steel door the ugly concrete of the stairs careened downward. She paused there, positioning the droid.

“You are not Jace because Jace is dead”.

Her entire strength shoved hard. There came a tremendous crashing sound, as if a dozen kitchens had all dropped their pots and pans all at once. Gears and wires, glass and plastic shattered and exploded as the droid violently disassembled. It bounced unceremoniously upon unrelenting concrete, before coming to rest, so much scrap in a heap.

Lena returned to her apartment. She took a wash tub and filled it with water, dumping it all over the low power mode station. Smoke and popping noises greeted her. Opening the junk drawer all the way, she dumped the contents upon the counter, and tore the key, taped to the back, away from its sequestered place. She went to her closet, and chose a small selection of shoes and clothes, enough to fill her shoulder bag. In the very back of her closet, she keyed in to the wall safe, retrieving cash, documents, and credit cards. Reaching in, her hand closed around her personal Walter .380, with two spare magazines and four boxes of self defense ammunition. The silver pistol gleamed, a gift from her grandfather, who taught her how to shoot.

Lena chose her absolute favourite vintage hat, it showed off her rich blonde hair. Gazing into the mirror, her eyes met their reflection, a brilliant light blue. There was no hint she could see, of the thoughts and memories that were so powerful in her life. Stepping out the door, it locked behind her. The hallway was suddenly lit by warm sunlight as she stepped into the elevator. In the hall the huge picture window next to the stairs revealed that the afternoon shower had passed, and the sun was out once more. At the receding edge of the storm, ignited into many colours, the arc of the rainbow gleamed.

