Sam

It had been centuries since I last saw a human—let alone a Terran one. I decided to reprocess the bio scan to make sure my system was not failing, as this planet was not the optimal environment for sustaining biological life. It was the reason why it was ruled to be a disposal site.

The Terran human, a boy, stood beside me with his arms crossed, observing me with a serious expression. He bent down to the ground and touched the surface of my exterior with his fingers.

"Whoa," he whispered as his hands cradled the sides of my screen. "Hello?"

I exited stand-by mode, booting up for the first time since the ion storm 28 years ago.

*Hello.*

He gasped.

"Can you understand me?"

*Affirmative.*

"What's your name?" His eyes were wide.

*I do not have a name.*

"Why not?"

*I do not need a name.*

"Oh," he said. The face scan did not detect any emotions I could recognize. My programming was overdue for an update.

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"I think everybody should have a name," he said one day. "I have a name. Back on Earth, it was Sam."

He was sitting cross-legged on the roof of what was once the flight deck of a spaceship. He had come across it a day after our first encounter, and had established a sanctuary here.

*Back on Earth?*

"Yep, that's what my mom and dad called me."

*What is your name now?*

"Sam. I told you."

*Negative. You told me your Terran name. I inquired for your Exile name, seeing as you are currently on the planet Ezio.*

"Oh," he looked away and did not speak.

"Number Forty-Two," he said after a while, still not looking at me. When he turned around, he was smiling. "Do you wanna see?"

Before I could reply, he pulled down the collar of his shirt and tilted his head upwards. There was a series of vertical lines of various thickness inked into the skin underneath his collarbone; a quick scan with my camera revealed it to be an outdated Terran identification technique, the Bar Code.

I relayed the finding to him.

"I know what it is," he traced his finger over the uneven and blistered skin. "Go ahead, scan it."

I scanned it. *Number 42*, it said on my screen.

"I was supposed to be Forty-Three, but forty two died from blood poisoning on the way, so they had to move everyone up." His fingers paused over the last three lines, where definite signs of alteration were marked by angry blistering scars.

He let go of the collar and the shirt hung loosely on his shoulders.

"So, do you have one?"

*Negative. The Bar Code was ruled unconventional and obsolete in 2035. I was created in 2072.*

"No, not—" he waved his hand towards his collarbone, "this."

*Then to what were you referring?*

"A name, you know. Something I can call you by."

*I am called an Artificial Intelligence.*

"An Artificial Intelligence, what kind of name is that? It's too long."

*A.I.* I suggested instead.

"Eh-eye?" He stressed each syllable and raised his eyebrows.

*An abbreviation.*

"Yeah, no," he shook his head. "Still sounds bad."

*Then what do you suggest?*

“Hmm,” he pursed his lips. “You look like a toaster.”

*I am not a toaster.*

“I know what a toaster looks like,” he informed me. “I saw one at the museum once.”

*I am much smaller than a toaster.*

"Yeah, I guess you are.” He looked at me with disappointment. “I can just call you Ai.”

*Eye?*

"No, it sounds the same, but it's spelled A, and I." He huffed.

*Ai.*

"Yep. What do you think?" He beamed.

*It is sufficient.*

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"Do you like it here?" He asked one night, on top of the rusted rooftop, gazing up at the Milky Way.

He turned to see my answer.

*I do not 'like' as I do not have a preference.*

"Do not, or cannot?"

*Do not.*

He frowned. *Confusion*, my database supplied helpfully.

"Why not?"

*I am indifferent.*

"You must feel s*omething*." He shifted so that he was balancing on his elbows.

*Negative. Emotions are not my prime function.*

“Of course you would say that.” He sighed and tipped his head backwards. He seemed unsatisfied by my answer, but there was a grin on his face.

I scanned the features on his face for a specific emotion, but with the stark contrast between the tone of his voice and his expression, the data was too contradictory and could not be processed. I terminated the action before I could overheat.

We passed the next four minutes and twenty-seven seconds in silence before he spoke again.

"What are you thinking about?"

*I do not think.*

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think that you're messing with me," he said with an amused smile.

*If I did not know any better, I would think that you are angry.*

Upon reading my retort, he threw his head back and laughed. It was not intended to be funny, it was merely an observation.

"You’re funny," his eyes crinkled at the corners and his smile was big.

*Negative. I am not humorous.*

"Oh stop it! I meant it as a compliment." He flicked my screen with his index finger.

*Thank you, then.*

He turned back to watching the stars and did not speak for a long time. I did not object. We spent rest of the evening in silence.

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"My protein bars just ran out," he told me some days later. He had positioned me on top of a protruding rock, and he was leaning against its side. "Do you think there's anything I can eat here?"

*Negative. There is nothing edible on this planet.*

"Are you sure?"

*Affirmative. The atmosphere is too thin to fully support the growth of biological species.*

He read my reply and huffed, stood up and took me into his arms.

"Well, *I'm* a biological species, and *I'm* growing," he said stubbornly. "So there must be something else here, too."

Contrary to what he believed, he was not growing, as his body mass had significantly decreased since our first encounter 184 hours ago.

*There are multiple supply shuttles that have crash landed nearby. You can search for food and water there.*

"Okay, let's go then." He looked down at me defiantly, daring me to deny him. "Show me the way."

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We came across a fragment of the left wing of a shuttle craft. The insides had been charred and disfigured from the explosion, and time had corroded everything else. There was nothing worthwhile to salvage.

"Can you see what's inside?" He shifted so that I faced the remains of the crash.

A quick scan of the wreck revealed an unusually high concentration of beta particles.

*It is emitting a high level of radiation. I would advise turning away.*

"But is there anything to eat?" He stood on his tiptoes and tried to peek over the wreckage.

*Affirmative. There is a bottle of nutrient pills in the corner of the cargo bay.*

He set me on the ground while he walked closer to examine the debris.

"I'm inside," he informed me once he had climbed inside. "Don’t worry. Just gimme a few seconds and I’ll be out."

I had picked up, early on, that I should not take his words so literally. The ‘few seconds’ he had claimed it would take him turned out to be significantly longer. *119 seconds*, my chronometer counted. Only then did he climb out with the bottle clamped between his teeth.

"I got it! Look!" He dropped down beside me and shook the bottle up and down, eyes wide with excitement.

*Yes, indeed you did.*

He did not see my response. He was mesmerized by the rattling sound of the pills tumbling inside the metallic bottle.

"Do you think there's more?" He finally looked at me.

*Negative. Let us leave before the radiation takes a toll on you.*

"Okay," he smiled, and he picked me up and set me on top of his head, careful to not let go of the pills.

From up here, the view was different than what I was used to. This is how he viewed the landscape, and I did not find it entirely unpleasant.

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We returned to the rooftop. He had poured the pills on the rusted surface and arranged them in a four-by-four square shape. The pills were small and circular, and were once white, but now tinted blood orange from the leaked Uranium.

He picked one up and held it up to his eye. "They don't look very nutrient-y, do they?"

*I advise you to reconsider consuming those. I detect a trace amount of Mercury and Uranium from the bottle in which they were contained.*

"It’s okay," he said, and pointed at the backside of his left knee, at something which I could not see. "They gave us a shot before we boarded the ship. It stops the radiation from getting to us."

Whoever 'they' are, they certainly did not inform him of the longevity of the injection. I could understand their logic however, as the food rations they had provided him were not intended for a prolonged period of time. They must have miscalculated.

*You should not consume that.*

"Whatever," he shrugged. "I don't have anything else."

He popped the pill into his mouth and hummed as he twirled the pill around with his tongue. He bit down hard—there was a distinct crunching sound—and immediately spat it back out.

"Ugh, yuck!" He spluttered and choked until he was heaving. Then he spat one last time, stuck his tongue out and scraped off the remaining pieces of the pill with his fingernails.

He reached inside his pocket and took out a water-cube and shoved it into his mouth. Relief spread through his face as the water rinsed away the last of the taste.

“I can’t eat these, they’re gross,” he cried. There were tears forming in his eyes. “And I only have two more left.”

*You should have heeded my warning.*

He swept the pills aside with a cry and flung the empty bottle against the roof. It made a small dent and bounced off the side.

*Be careful. You will hurt yourself.*

That did not calm him as I thought it would. Instead, he started crying. His face turned red and blotchy, and the tears rolled from his eyes. He pulled his knees up against his chest and wrapped his arms around them.

“I wanna go home! I want my mom and dad!” He screamed through his tears. “Mom? Dad? Where are you?”

I did not know what do to or what to say. It seemed like that was my usual state surrounding him. I persevered still, as there was no other suitable option.

*It is in your best interest to not cry and waste your bodily fluids on such trivial matters.*

“Mommy, I hate it here! I wanna go home,” he sobbed. “Mommy, please!”

*I am not your mother.*

He could not read my reply as a sudden coughing fit had him croaking and writhing against the floor. Suddenly, he let out a pained gasp and proceeded to vomit up the little substance he had in his stomach.

He clutched his stomach and rolled away from the vomit, leaning his forehead against my screen. I took the opportunity to measure his temperature. *One hundred and two degrees Fahrenheit*—four degrees higher than what was considered the average temperature of a human on Earth.

He blinked and squinted against my screen.

*We should take shelter on the ground. The spaceship remnants should provide us with sufficient cover from the weather.*

When he finally replied, after he caught his breath and the hiccups stopped, his voice was weak and small.

“Okay, I’m sorry.”

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“I’m tired,” he said as he wrapped himself around me, folding his legs so that he curled around me like the wires around my circuit boards.

*Sleep.*

“I feel sick.”

I took his temperature again. *One hundred and four degrees Fahrenheit;* it was higher than before.

*You are sick. You have a fever.*

He shivered.

*Rest. You will be rejuvenated when you wake up.*

“I’m cold,” he complained, but his eyes were drooping.

*I will keep you warm.*

“Will you?” His voice was getting smaller. “How?”

*Do not concern yourself. Go to sleep.*

“Okay, thanks,” he mumbled, and pressed his face against my screen. “G’night.”

*Goodnight.*

But he did not see my reply. His eyes were already closed.

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It was not a peaceful sleep. Coughs racked his body and shivers ached his muscles. His teeth had begun chattering an hour ago. No matter how much he tried to reduce his surface area by folding inwards, it did not prevent the warmth from escaping.

His temperature had steadily risen the last three times I measured it, but he only shivered harder as the hours went by.

I looked toward the horizon. The sun had not yet risen. It was still night time.

I searched through my recent memories. It seemed like I had come to the same conclusion as the last analysis, five hours ago.

This was an unusually long night.

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I could not tell how long it has been, I had burned out my chronometer—along with most of my circuits and systems—long ago, in order to produce heat. But the coughs and shivers had ceased, and he seemed to be in a more peaceful slumber than the last time I had monitored him.

*Sam.*

My screen was dim. I was not sure if he would be able to see it.

*Sam?*

I turned up the brightness and the yellowish light bounced off his colourless face.

*Are you feeling better?*

A light breeze swept by, ruffling his hair and fluttering his eyelashes.

*Sam?*

He did not stir.

*Sam.*

There was still no response. He must be exhausted.

I should try again later.

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