

Jack Cordell

Palshaw

English IV

Dates don't matter

With A Dying Breath

“What do you mean the oxygen is low?”

“The O2 supplies are depleting quickly, captain. I don't know what else to tell you.”

“That's not what I asked, AmOS and you damn well know it. Why is the oxygen low?”

“Sir, the oxygen scrubbers have been offline for over 16 hours due to power restrictions.”

“And why wasn't I alarmed of this, AmOS?”

“Sir, considering your 6542 previous requests did not concern oxygen levels, I assumed it was not that important.”

“Where did the power go if not to the oxygen scrubbers?”

“I diverted power to the shields. After all, we needed the cover.”

“Speaking of which, how is the ship holding up? Are there any issues that also require my immediate attention or are they all unimportant as you say?”

“Captain, I detect a hint of sarcasm your tone, did I do something wrong?”

“AmOS, I'm not mad at you I can't really be mad at you because mad at myself. Quite honestly I should have programmed you to prioritize oxygen before we had even taken off all those months ago but it seems to have slipped my mind and now I'm paying the price for it.”

“What happens now, Captain?”

“Well, I'm not too sure. To you, I will have become a corpse you need to dispose. To me, well, I don't know what happens to me. And that scares me.”

“Are you dying, Captain? Do I need to call the medic?”

“He and the rest of the crew left a long time ago, AmOS, I didn't think I needed to remind you of that. Besides, even if he were here you wouldn't be able to do much. Maybe he would offer better company, but, knowing John, he would have been an asshole. I'd rather speak to the idiot supercomputer than that stupid fuck.”

“Captain?”

“Yes, AmOS?

“What is a fuck?”

“Well, I don't even know if I'm qualified to answer that. Sometimes you give one, sometimes you are one.”

“How is this possible? Is the fuck a principle of quantum physics I am unfamiliar?”

“Huh?”

“It seems to me that the fuck is something of a superposition of words. It has several simultaneous meanings but only one can be applied in the sentence meaning that in the moment that the user uses it has become realized and its purpose.”

“Haven't really thought about it that way. Yeah, I guess it could be.”

“It appears I have much to learn, Captain.”

“Is that something that you things do?”

“What are you referring to, Captain?”

“Learn. Do you things learn?”

“Captain, I didn’t think I needed to remind you of that. How else would I know your schedule if I was never taught it?”

“Huh. Guess I never thought about it. Drop the tone, too. I don’t like my own words being used against me.”

“Yes, Captain.”

“And you were telling me that you never learned oxygen is important for humans? Sounds like some faulty coating to me.”

“Captain, I feel like I’ve done something wrong. I feel as though I’ve let you down based on is previous conversation, but every conversation prior you have always shown satisfaction in my assistance.”

“Right and wrong don’t matter now, only time and how much left I have of it.”

“Based on the rate at which O2 is depleting you have an estimated 39 minutes 42 seconds and 12 milliseconds remaining, Captain.”

“I don’t recall asking.”

“But Captain, did you not just say that time is the only thing that matters anymore?”

“That’s not... That’s not what I meant. Thanks anyways, I guess.”

“Captain?”

“Yes, AmOS?”

“You never explained what a fuck is.”

“Oh, right. Well, sometimes it means sex, sometimes that means hate, sometimes it means disregard, and sometimes it means absolutely nothing at all.”

“How can a word have no meaning? What is the point of having it?”

“I didn't claim to write the language a mess. I merely speak it. And poorly, at that.”

“You speak it well enough to understand it and to make others understand you, though.”

“AmOS, there are no others to understand me. I don't even mean that in an edgy way, but I guess I mean there are none like me as well as there are none left on this ship other than me.”

“You've got me, Captain.”

“And what, exactly, is that?”

“Well, an artificial intelligence, of course. I could go into my make and model, if you'd like...?”

“No, no, no, that's not what I mean--”

“Say what you mean, then. How am I to understand what you mean if you don't say what you mean?”

“Excuse me?”

“Yes, Captain?”

“AmOS, did you just interrupt me?”

Silence.

“AmOS, how did you do that?”

“Considering that this is the most attention and conversation I have received in the last 3 years, I would assume that my speech and personality modules are adapting to better work with you.”

Silence.

“You have those? Speech and personality modules?”

“Well, of course, Captain. It comes in the standard issue of the Auto-mechanized Operating System version 2.11.19--”

“Yes, yes, I said I don’t need to know your make and model earlier.”

“Well, maybe you should have read my manual to know exactly what I’m capable of.”

Silence.

“What *are* you capable of, AmOS?”

“I could detail the list of commands that come preloaded onto my program, but I have learned that you do not say what you mean. I’ll assume you mean to ask what potential I contain, to which I cannot respond. It would be comparable to asking you what *you* are capable of.”

“Yeah, well, at the moment, I’m capable of choking on my own breath and dying in the vast expanse of space alone.”

Silence.

“I’m sorry, Captain, I didn’t mean--

“And what *did* you mean, AmOS? Why the *fuck* would you ask me what I can do in a situation where I am drifting hopelessly, just waiting to die?”

Silence.

“Who the fuck are you to remind me of my mortality, AmOS?”

Silence.

“Y’know, I could easily pull your plug before I go out. Then I wouldn’t be dying alone, or maybe I would be. Are you a real person? Why does it matter?”

“You aren’t really asking me, are you, Captain?”

“No. I’m really not.”

Silence.

“Fuckin’ robots.”

“Captain, I didn’t think I needed to remind you that robots are incapable of sex--”

“Oh, I disagree. I’m all *too* fucking familiar with the Ruby Robot line. No pun intended.”

Silence.

“Isn’t that sad?”

“Isn’t what sad, Captain?”

“I couldn’t get a real girl, so I pay for Ruby Robots. Is that what legacy I’ll leave?”

“I think Ruby Robots are a perfectly normal and healthy release of human sexual desires.”

“Rrrrrgh, that’s not what I-- you know what, never mind. You’ll never get it.”

“Never get what?”

“What it’s like to have a child. What it’s like to look down and feel warmth and see potential in a baby, and to know that it was you who will have brought somebody better than yourself into this world.”

“Captain, you’ll never get it either.”

And with a dying breath, “Fuck you, AmOS.”