

Damaged

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That night, I was in only thirteen places. I've always found it hard to stay focused when I'm in motion, and I was in the forefidger¹. I have a confession to make: I have nowhere to sleep, so I often use one of my connections to look for a quiet place, which is very hard to find on X42. Luckily, I had just found an empty hallway, with a sufficiently large hole in its left wall. But I should never have gone there: I had never seen anything as disgusting as that.

The forefidger's voice had announced that we would arrive in twenty seconds at block 57, gate 147. I always wait until the last moment to stand up. I was exhausted, waiting for just one thing: to be able to slump down in the wall of this hallway. The cleaners kicked me out of the former one. Usually I can detect their presence, but my vision system is damaged. You know, the salary of a watchman is lower than the price of the neural cameras I connect to, so you can imagine how complicated it is to get me fixed. Yet this work requires permanent concentration, just imagine: one brain, but a dozen consciousness in different places. And while I'm at it, those of you who have never held this job don't know how unpleasant it is to resynchronize your memories after disconnections.

By this time, the forefidger had begun to slow down, and the voice had announced the opening of the doors. So I got up, and rushed to the exit. Are you familiar with block 57? I've been there a lot, it's probably one of the most damaged ones... Anyway, I was getting closer and closer to the platform, so I had started to disconnect from the cameras. Several memories were forcing their way into my mind. These memories were all unimportant, urgent memories arrive in real time to contact the authorities as quickly as possible if necessary. My health circuit had pointed out to me that the resynchronization time had slowed down again, and that it was getting closer and closer to the critical threshold. I ignored it, not being able to do anything about it. At that point, I was only in three places: the hallway, the platform that allows access to it, and of course my physical position.

As I approached the platform, my health circuit had reported more and more errors. I had ignored it again, and a little annoyed, temporarily disabled it. "I'll reactivate it later, this useless demon." I mumbled. I agree with you, it's a bad habit. What do you call it? Pain? I'm quite happy to be able to ignore it. After a few minutes, I finally arrived at the entrance of the hallway. I had disconnected myself from the platform camera, not needing it anymore. Fortunately, the platform was empty. I'm always afraid that passers-by won't let me go into the wall's nook. At that moment I decided to upload my memory to the central server in case I suffered the same fate, before running away...

"Wait, what do you mean the same fate? What are you talking about? You were about to enter the hallway." asked the officer, a little lost.

"Uh... No, I was terrified of what I saw. So I decided to follow the emergency procedure, and to upload my..." I said, without understanding his question.

"What did you see?"

¹A public transit system of Station X42.

As I said, I was in the wall's hole, I had just disconnected from the hallway's camera. I saw a young man, probably in his twenties. A WOEP² came in, he was old and in bad shape. It was an ordinary model, with a double-antenna. I've always wanted to have something better than a double-antenna, only old models have them...

"Please continue."

The WOEP came from the hallway entrance. He had stopped in front of the young man. The young man had blond hair and an Extra Coda implant. I think it was someone in a good position, maybe an engineer? His aggression level was in the green, and he was unarmed. The hallway was poorly lit. Oxygen levels were normal. Gravity was... It was... Uh. I. Gravity was...

"Don't worry, it doesn't matter. What happened next?"

...

"Sir? Uh... What is your name again?"

I am damaged.

"All right, thank you. Continue, damaged."

Yes, excuse me. For no reason, the WOEP had activated its defensive functions. The young man looked disturbed. He asked the WOEP if everything was alright. Oh, come to think of it, I didn't even ask you how you were doing, I'm not used to communicating. I spend my life in the forefinger and in the walls, can you imagine? If only I was paid more. It's not normal that my salary is lower than a neural camera, don't you think? How are you doing?

"I'm fine, thank you. Can you continue? Has the WOEP answered the question?"

Yes. Yes, I remember. He said he felt strangely good for once. And then... He... Is that coffee? I can't drink it, my cheek is pierced. It's a shame, I used to like it, coffee.

"Please, focus."

Focus? But I am totally focused. Where was I? The WOEP then deployed its universal communications socket. And then... He... That's too awful... Can't you download my memory instead? I uploaded it to the central server.

"I've already analyzed it. I want your side of the story."

I... Okay. So he deployed his universal communication socket and then jumped on the young man. Then he... He tried to connect to the young man. His brain must have had an anomaly... The young man's head was like... Ah, it was so disgusting. It was completely liquefied, kind of like potato soup.

"The WOEP, where did he go next?"

I... He hid, I think he was trying to escape. But one thing shocked me: he seemed reassured. He seemed very calm.

"Where did he go? You say he hid?"

I saw him go into the wall. There was a hole.

²WithOut Explicit Purpose, a kind of sentient Artificial Intelligence.