

28 Plays Later – Challenge #19

Title Provided: "I'd do anything for love (but I won't do that)"
For bonus points - stick a meatloaf in there somewhere!

**I Would Do Anything for Love
(But I Won't Do That)**

By

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TIME: May, 2370

PLACE: An officer's suite on a spaceship. Upstage has the curved bulhead wall with a window showing space beyond. A sofa is centered under the window, with a coffee table in front of it, and two club chairs on either end. A sliding door stage left of the couch leads to the 'bedroom' (off stage) . Stage left wall has a food slot with a small dining table. And another door. The stage right wall has a corner computer console.

Lights up on BASIL (wearing a space-y version of a naval officer's uniform, with the rank insignia of a commander) and ZOE, his girlfriend, in a domestic scene. She is significantly younger than his 30-ish years – likely a university student. There is something about BASIL - skin tone, mannerisms, whatever, that implies he's not exactly human.

ZOE: (at food slot): This recipe is supposed to be pretty amazing. Are you sure you don't want some?

BASIL: I will never understand the organic tendency to consume the flesh of other animals.

ZOE: I may have ordered meatloaf, but it's still *replicated* meatloaf. You know as well as I do that it's not actually animal flesh, any more than you are.

BASIL: That is true, but...

ZOE: (bringing her tray to the table and placing a salad in front of BASIL. Both of them will eat their meals during the conversation.) I know, it's the principal of the thing. From replicated meat to actual meat is a slippery slope you 'have no wish to encounter.'

BASIL: You are imitating me.

ZOE: Yes, but I do it out of love... speaking of which...

BASIL: (wary) Yes?

ZOE: When were you going to tell me your mother was a Synth, like you?

BASIL: You know she is a Synthetic Being? How were you able to discern this when my colleagues – our *friends* – could not?

ZOE: I've been dating you for two and a half years, and living with you for almost half that time. Do you really think I can't tell a Synth from an Organic? Especially when so many of your mother's mannerisms are so much like yours.

BASIL: I have had the same set of colleagues and circle of friends for significantly longer than we have been in a relationship.

ZOE: True. But they don't see you without your public face. They don't see you in your off hours when you're not expected to be anything but your most basic self.

BASIL: My mother is not aware she is Synthetic.

ZOE: You're joking.

BASIL: While my base programming has expanded to include sarcasm, snark, irony, whimsy, and the occasional humorous anecdote, I believe you are aware that I would never attempt to 'joke' about such a thing. Indeed, I *could* not.

ZOE: Okay, that's valid, but... How can she not know? And how did *you* find out. Do you have some super-Synthetic equivalent of gaydar, or something?

BASIL: (giving her a reproachful look) I have no such... sense. Rather, I noticed that her blinking pattern was the same as mine... *exactly* the same. That would not be possible in an organic being. As well, when she had the accident during the diving expedition –

ZOE: (interrupting) - I knew that dive was too deep, even for you –

BASIL: - her programming caused her to enter a state of unconsciousness until she could be reset. In the process, I discovered a comm-chip from my father.

ZOE: How is the old coot? We really should try to visit him, soon.

BASIL: It was not a real-time relay; merely a recorded message.

ZOE: If found, please return to Doctor Benedict Rathburn?

BASIL: Not as such. Rather, it was an explanation of what she was. It would seem that she was injured when she and my father escaped from the Slitheroid Invasion of Kestrin Blue thirty-five years ago.

ZOE: When they left you behind, you mean.

BASIL: Yes. Mother was critically injured in the escape. Father could not stand to live without her, so he transferred her consciousness into a Synthetic body.

ZOE: Without her permission?

BASIL: Apparently.

ZOE: And she has no idea?

BASIL: She does not.

ZOE pushes her plate away in disgust. Then she crumples her napkin into a ball before dropping it on the table. She scoots her chair back, and stands up, but seems unsure where to go. Finally she goes and sits on the couch.

BASIL: Dearest, I do not understand your reaction. My father loved my mother so much that he found a way to preserve her life. She may be Synthetic, but she has been designed to live a human lifespan and then die of 'natural' causes.

ZOE: But she doesn't know, Basil. She isn't who she thinks she is, and she doesn't know.

BASIL rises from his chair, gathers their used plates and utensils, and piles them onto the tray. He returns them to the food slot, waits a moment, and then punches some buttons on the display. A few seconds later a new tray appears, this time with two steaming mugs.

BASIL: (bringing the mugs to the couch and offering one to ZOE) I have made tea. You are sixty-seven-point-nine-two-four percent more likely to engage in rational conversation when you sip tea while we converse.

ZOE: (takes the offered mug and sniffs it) Mmm. Peppermint. (gives him a look) But, Basil, darling, nothing I've said has been irrational. I get that your father was devoted to your mother –

BASIL: (interrupting) – as devoted as I am to you, dearest –

ZOE: - but he changed the essence of who she was without her consent.

BASIL: You are aware that my consciousness was transferred into a duplicate body after I was critically damaged – (off a look from ZOE) - *injured* – during a skirmish with the native population of Zithros Five. And yet, I am still the Basil whom you know and love, and who is looking forward to marrying you next year.

ZOE: Well, yes, but it's different. You've *always* been Synthetic. There was never an Organic being called 'Basil Rathburn.' Sure, you might technically be Basil, two-point-oh, but your essence is still the same.

BASIL: I do not believe it would benefit my mother to know the truth.

ZOE: It would probably do more harm than good.

BASIL: But that the same time, if she knew, then I would be less alone in the world.

ZOE: You're not alone, Basil. You never have been, love.

BASIL: It is not the same.

ZOE: I guess not.

Zoe drains her mug and then sets it on the coffee table, then slides across the couch to snuggle against BASIL. He puts his arm around her, but there's something slightly mechanical in the gesture.)

ZOE: Promise me something?

BASIL: You know I would do anything for you, dearest.

ZOE: Promise me, no matter how old or sick I eventually grow. No matter if I succumb to some horrible disease or get hit by a bus, or whatever... Promise me that you will never, ever, transfer my consciousness into a Synthetic body without my permission.

BASIL: I do not wish to lose you.

ZOE: Well, you're like fifteen years older than me, so it's not like you're going to lose me anytime soon, but, Organics are meant to die, sweetie. It's part of *our* 'baseline programming.'

BASIL: In a Synthetic body, you would be as immortal as I am meant to be.

ZOE: I know that, but I wouldn't be me; I'd just be a copy. And death is part of life. You know that.

BASIL: I dislike it.

ZOE: I'm not really a fan, either. But I need you to promise this.

BASIL: Very well, Zoe. I promise that I will not transfer your consciousness into a Synthetic body without your consent.

ZOE: You've considered it, haven't you?

BASIL: Not with any real aim.

ZOE: You love me that much?

BASIL: My love for you defies quantification.

ZOE reaches up to guide his head down so she can kiss him. They continue kissing as the lights fade.

BLACKOUT.