

28 Plays Later – Challenge #23

And besides, who even wants to write about the real world?! We're writers, creators of worlds. We should make things up. Why would anybody be interested in art that's "true"?! (still brewing here...)

Plus, I think we all deserve a good holiday! If only we had a skill that can help with that! Oh wait ... we do!!!

So let's create the best word ever! I think we can all do with a nice Utopia, right?

UTOPIA RISING

By

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Time: Easter Sunday, 17 April, 2395

Place: Rathburn's World, the Harris-Rathburn House

Scene 1: The LAB

Lights up on a cybernetics lab that is in use. One wall (stage right, curving into upstage) is all vertical slit windows looking out onto a jungle, the opposite wall, with an exit to the rest of the building, is lined by a desk with work spaces for two people. One workspace is orderly and precise. The other is messier, with stacks of books and papers.

The upstage wall features a digital display of a robotic form of DaVinci's *Vitruvian Man*. Hanging over the entire set is the skeleton of a dinosaur (a T-rex is ideal, but a Velociraptor will do) with a pair of pink fuzzy dice hanging from it's mouth.

BASIL is standing in front of something that looks like a dental chair holding some kind of tool (it has a cool led and makes neat sounds). GEORGE who appears to be about 12 years old, is in the chair.

ELIZABETH (age 16) enters from the house.

ELIZABETH: Dad! Mom says it's time to come in. (glances at GEORGE) Is he glitching again?

BASIL: (patiently) Elizabeth, I have asked you more than once not to use the word 'glitch' in reference to your brother's condition.

ELIZABETH: He's not my brother; he's a Synth.

BASIL: I am also a Synthetic being, and yet I am still your father.

ELIZABETH: That's different.

BASIL: Is it? Elizabeth, the fact that your mother and I have chosen to expand our family by creating George does not mean that we love you any less. You are our daughter, and you are precious to us.

ELIZABETH: I know but... it's bad enough, Dad, hearing kids talk about how mom is married to a robot.

BASIL opens his mouth to object to that term, but ELIZABETH continues.

ELIZABETH: I *know* you're not actually a robot. You're a free citizen with free will, as well as the captain of the Union's flagship, but... kids are mean.

BASIL: I was not aware you had encountered such... commentary.

ELIZABETH: It's not as bad as it was in middle school. And when we're on the ship, where everyone knows you, it doesn't happen at all, but...

BASIL: But you are concerned that having a new 'little brother' will exacerbate things.

ELIZABETH: Well, yeah. (she glances at GEORGE's still form again). Especially when he gli – has errors.

BASIL: I believe I have corrected the latest error. (beat) Elizabeth, when you first learned that your mother and I were creating George, you were in favor of having a sibling, Synthetic or otherwise.

ELIZABETH: I know, Dad, and... I still am, I guess. I was just expecting that he'd either be more of a child, or about the same apparent age as me. Having him all between is weird.

BASIL: It is weirder for George.

ELIZABETH: Is it?

BASIL: Of course. He appears to be a twelve-year-old humanoid, but in reality he is only six weeks old. While his base programming includes basic behavior, language and the beginning of a personality, the rest is 'up to him.' (beat) You know, I had no one to guide me when I was emerging as a sentient being. And because I was formed as an adult, I did not have the benefit of anything analogous to a childhood. (beat) Your mother has often told me I would have benefited from having a sister. It was our hope that George would be able to rely on you, as well as us, for assistance, guidance and support.

ELIZABETH: You mean, you want me to be a real big sister to him.

BASIL: Do you think you can?

ELIZABETH: I can try. I mean... I don't want to feel all jealous and bitchy.

BASIL: While you do share your mother's flare for the dramatic, I have never known you to be 'bitchy,' Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: You're very forgiving, Dad. (she looks at George again) Are we still going to have our father-daughter trips to the Astrometrics Lab on Tuesday afternoons?

BASIL: Once we are back aboard-ship, yes. Those afternoons are meaningful for me, as well.

ELIZABETH: You should turn him back on now. If I have to endure hugs from Aunt Evelyn and Uncle Jacques, he should, too.

BASIL: Hopefully, he will be more gracious about it. Please tell your mother that George and I will be in soon.

ELIZABETH: I'll tell her, but you're the one who has to deal with her if you're not ready by the time the shuttle lands.

ELIZABETH exits the way she came in.

BASIL makes one more pass with his techy tool and then reaches behind GEORGE's head and flips a switch.

GEORGE sits up in the chair, blinking and looking around.

GEORGE: Father? Was I asleep?

BASIL: In a sense. There was an error with your speech synthesizer, but I have corrected it. How do you feel?

GEORGE: (after a beat) I am fine, father. Have our guests arrived yet? I am eager to meet them.

BASIL: Not yet, but soon. Can you walk?

GEORGE rises from the chair, a bit stiffly. His first few steps are awkward, but then his gait becomes more fluid. He takes a lap around the lab, then returns to stand facing BASIL.

GEORGE: I am functioning efficiently, Father.

BASIL: I am glad. Let us return to the main house. Your mother may have tasks for us.

The lights go dark as BASIL and GEORGE exit.

Scene 2: The Main House

Lights up on the kitchen/dining/living area of a large bungalow. The upstage wall is all windows and a sliding glass door that look out on a deck and a lakeshore beyond. Stage right is the kitchen, we see a wall with food replicators/dispensers, but there's also a conventional range with a cooktop and oven. Center stage is the dining table, which seats twelve comfortably (even with no one's back to the audience). Stage right is a large sectional sofa. Extreme stage left is a fireplace. Exits upstage right lead to the lab and upstage left to the bedrooms.

ZOE and ELIZABETH are in the kitchen when BASIL and GEORGE enter.

ZOE: (with affection) It's about time you two joined us. Jaques comm'd his shuttle is on approach and Gordon and Kat's shuttle is just entering orbit.

BASIL moves into the kitchen and bussess a kiss across ZOE's mouth. GEORGE watches this, but says nothing about it.

ZOE: Mmm. Nice. (to George) How are you?

GEORGE: Father has corrected the error with my language synthesizer; I am fine.

ZOE: I expect it's just your version of growing pains, sweetie.

ZOE moves closer to GEORGE and reaches out to ruffle his hair.

ZOE: I'm glad you're feeling better. Why don't you help Lizzie set the table.

GEORGE: Yes, Mother.

ELIZABETH: (to George) That's parent-ese for 'go away while we talk.'

GEORGE and ELIZABETH carry plates and silverware to the table while ZOE and BASIL continue to chat in the kitchen. The lights dim on the Dining Area while they talk.

BASIL: Is something wrong, dearest?

ZOE: Not at all. I just wanted a moment before chaos descends – look at them. I know Lizzie's not thrilled with being a big sister to a Synthetic brother, but she'll adjust – we all will.

BASIL: She and I talked about that while George was deactivated. I believe she has already begun that adjustment.

ZOE: Good. I knew she'd come around... and she's always listened to you more than me.

BASIL: I believe that is because the two of you are too much alike.

ZOE: In temperament, maybe. But in interests, she is completely your daughter. I'll have to hook George on theatre and surfing so I'll have someone to play with after she's off at the Academy.

BASIL: I did not realize she had chosen to apply.

ZOE: As if there was any doubt that Captain Basil Rathburn's daughter wouldn't be following him into the Star Navy.

BASIL: She is also the daughter of Zoe Harris-Rathburn, cultural ambassador and award-winning actress.

ZOE: Speaking of acting... do you think we'll be able to host a summer arts camp here by next year. Lachlan Meade has asked if we'd consider it. If we setup prefab yurts and use the deck as a mess hall....

BASIL: I believe it is possible. When everyone else gets here, we should ask for their advice.

ZOE: They should be here any second.

BASIL: Time enough for this, then.

BASIL pulls ZOE close and kisses her deeply. She slides her arms around his waist, and they linger in their moment. They are completely oblivious of their children a few feet away. The lights dim over the kitchen and rise over the dining area.

GEORGE: Elizabeth, what are Mother and Father doing?

ELIZABETH: (groaning in typical teenaged disgust). Kissing. *Again*.

GEORGE: You act as though there is something deviant in their behavior.

ELIZABETH: No. Not deviant. It's just that they're *old*. Look. Mom and Dad have been together – been a couple – since Mom was *my* age. I don't know the whole story, but they've been through a lot – Dad was missing for a bunch of years when I was a baby – but whatever they went through, they managed it by trusting each other. Sometimes – like now – it's like they go into this bubble where nothing else exists except the two of them. It's kind of romantic, really... or it would be... if...

GEORGE: If what, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: If they weren't our *parents*.

Blackout.