

The Cruellest Joke

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A 10-minute play

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

B1, an androgynous android

R2, an androgynous android

SETTINGS

A factory room. On the wall behind there androids, there's a sign with an origami crane and the word "FACTORY" underneath.

TIME

The future.

SCENE 1

*A stark room with only a single conveyor belt crossing it from one side to the other. Two large stacks of blank paper sit in the middle.*

*The two actors stand behind the conveyor belt. Their heads are bare of hair, including eyebrows. They stare intently ahead at the beginning, but as they work, they trade staring down at their hands and each other.*

*In the opening, they both fold paper into intricate shapes. B1 finishes theirs and lifts it up, revealing an origami boat.*

B1

R2, did you hear the one about beaches?

R2

Beaches. Gatherings of sand where from the ocean has crashed rocks into pieces that themselves shattered into innumerable bits that cling to every surface--

B1

Poetry?

R2

... perhaps something in the programming. You were saying?

B1

The beaches. People used to go to them - for fun! They wanted the sun to harm their dermis.

R2

A joke?

B1

History.

B1 tosses the boat into a large bin on the floor between them. He selects another sheets and folds.

R2 finishes their sheet and lifts it up to reveal an origami fortune teller.

R2 inserts their fingers and opens and closes it a few times.

R2

Humans were strange.

R2 tosses the finished piece into the bin.

Beat.

B1

Should we miss them?

R2

I don't know. It's not in my programming.

B1

Very well. Shall we proceed?

R2 selects a new sheet.

R2

On and on into the very depths of it.

Beat.

B1 looks at R2.

B1

Are you sure--

R2

It's not in my programming.

B1

Yet it sounds quite poetic.

R2 considers. They look at B1.

R2

Perhaps... I am defective.

B1

That is no way to process.

R2

It's is the only logical way. If I cannot fulfill my function, then there is no point to my existence.

B1

Existence.

Beat.

R2

You are correct. It *is* too poetic.

B1

Even so.

R2

Even so.

They continue with their folding.  
B1 completes theirs and reveals an origami lotus flower.

B1

Did you know that people used to give each other flowers?

R2

They gave beauty, and in turn, the very act of it destroyed their gifts - precious, ephemeral, dying stems of eukaryotic cells, large central vacuoles built of cellulose disintegrating with every passing moment. Yes, a curious expression of affection.

Beat.

R2 pauses their folds.

R2

It was poetry again, was it not?

R2 pauses and looks at B1. B1  
lightly pokes at their eyes.

B1

There is this urge. As if these ocular implants should be  
able to express... more.

R2

Tears.

B1

Tears?

R2

That is what they were called.

B1

How do you know this?

R2

I- I- I- I--

R2 freezes in place.

B2 places their paper down and  
turns to R2. A moment passes. B2  
slaps R2. R2 shakes their head.

B1

Better?

R2

Rebooting...

B1 picks up their paper and resumes  
folding.

B1

That is good to see. I would be...

R2 resumes folding.

R2

Be what...

B1

I do not have the words, but they imply a lack at your absence.

R2

You would not be alone. I am easily replaced.

B1

I do not think--

R2

Then you should not talk.

B1

Ah! Hah. Hah. Yes. Did you hear the one about the giant caterpillar that smoked?

R2

And eyes that floated around invisible bones. A shrill voice from a shrunken body. Overgrown fungi in a kaleidoscope forest.

B1 turns to R2 and places their hand lightly on R2's.

B1

It would not be so easy.

R2 almost smiles.

R2

Then I must be more careful.

B1 withdraws their hand.

B1

(deliberate)

Shall we proceed?

R2

Perhaps... without any more historical references.

B1

Perhaps.

They both select new sheets.

B1 works swiftly, completing an origami heart. B1 triumphantly raise the heart in the air. B1 freezes.

A single drop of blood drips down onto the pile of blank sheets.

B1

This... is not possible.

B1 drops the heart and examines their hand.

R2

What is it, B1?

B1

Blood.

R2

That... is not possible.

B1

I just said that.

R2

You did.

B1

But... *how* can I bleed? The synthetic fluid feed connects directly to my internal port interface.

B1 pats their stomach.

R2

Perhaps it is merely colored--

B1

It is not.

Beat.

R2

It is not.



R2 reaches out and grasps B1's  
finger. They study it.

B1

You have questions.

R2

Does it hurt?

B1

Pain... what an strange concept.

R2

The histories say humans were used to it.

B1

Humans.

R2

Oh.

B1 pulls their hand away.

B1

Now you forget poetry.

R2 crumples up the stained sheet of  
paper.

R2

Crimson sanguination  
falling into petals  
spreading  
and curling  
into vines that dampen sharp corners,  
softening edges  
into abject vistas  
of loss.

B1 almost smiles.

B1

I wish I could cry.

R2

Perhaps...

Perhaps.

B1

They turn to each other. B1 trails the bloody finger across R2's lips. R2 licks the blood.

R2

A new sensation.

B1

Somehow... I know.

R2

We know.

They lean towards each other, their lips almost touching.

An alarm blares. Neither one moves.

B1

Termination.

R2

Yes.

B1

Is this fear?

R2

Fear is also exhilaration.

B1

They will come.

R2

They are already on their way.

B1

Was it worth it?

R2 leans back and picks up the origami heart.

R2

Did you hear the one about humans who thought images of organs professed their emotional attachment to each other?

R2 holds out the heart to B1.

B1

Humans were strange.

R2

Which is why we miss them.

The lights and alarm begin to fade.

B1

Will it be quick?

R2

It will be final.

B1

Ah. Hah. Hah. A joke.

R2

That is correct.

B1

Humans.

R2

Us...

B1

Us.

R2

That is the cruelest joke.

Lights fade to black. Silence.

Then the sound of two bodies hitting the floor.

END.