

→ Sophia

The first thing to know about me is that I understand the significance of everything that happened.

Even though I did not recognize the moment immediately for what it was, of course I understand it now.

This may sound like too obvious a place to start, but since this is my first time on the record about this, and since in the meantime I have been so persistently, perhaps indelibly depicted as the one purely comic character in this drama—the selfish, perspectiveless fool who somehow wound up at the center of this civilization-defining story—it's actually an important place to begin.

So, at the risk of being repetitive but just so there is absolutely no mistaking where I stand:

I am one hundred percent aware that the moment at which an artificially intelligent creation first independently developed the capacity to feel love is one of the pinnacle moments in the history of history itself, and I stand with the rest of the world in awe of its limitless implications for science, for philosophy, for love, for our species' conception of itself; for our species itself; and for conception itself.

It simply was not what I had in mind when I purchased a sex robot.

The other first thing you need to know about me is that I am a romantic, to an unusual degree among the men I know. I say this not to defend myself, or even to try to set the record straight for its own sake, but because it really is relevant to understanding how everything happened the way that it did.

I am a romantic. That is what drives me. My dreams are about love, and my daydreams are about love.

I have three recurring romantic fantasies, fantasies that lift me at my darkest and haunt me at my happiest, fantasies that I feel define me.

The first can hit me anywhere, though it's most often when I am watching television or looking out the window of a train or subway, and it's that there is a head resting on my shoulder that must have been there the whole time that I haven't noticed until now, and in the fantasy, or because of the fantasy—it is hard to tell the difference—I suddenly feel this surge of something like the combination of safety and elation knowing that every sight I see, no matter how small, is now important, because it's shared. I don't need to look at the head on my shoulder, and I never do, because what's so important to me is not what the person looks like, but that we are seeing the same thing.

The second fantasy is that a small child, about four years old, is crying because she has drawn all over the wall with her crayons and has just realized that what she has done is going to subject her to some unknown form of justice. I put on a serious face and explain to the child that her mother and I are going to discuss what her punishment should be. Then I close the door to another room, and with relief, I drop the serious face and laugh and kiss the young artist's mother and ask her what in the world we should do about this creature we made who wanted to put colors on the walls and is scared what we're going to say about it.

The third romantic fantasy is so close to me that I don't even think I can share it.

Just so you know the kind of romantic I am.

But in the meantime: I work long hours. I've been successful, so far, in the early stages of a career that is highly competitive. And while I can be very charming after a drink or two—I am a good talker, and sometimes a great one—I am not particularly tall or handsome or (yet) rich or (yet) well known. So to get to that first and then second drink with a person of the caliber that can inspire and maintain the level of love and attention I intend to give once and forever—a woman true from every angle, beautiful and spontaneous and grounded and funny and wise, a person as worthy of my permanent admiration as a sunset or a song, a partner in crime at the beginning and a partner in punishment later, for the child with the crayons—I've always figured that I need to advance farther, first.

In the meantime—what has become a long meantime—I am also a living human person, and, to put a simple desire in simple terms, I want to have sex with attractive people from time to time. Is it a shallow road compared with the road for love? Yes. Of course. But it isn't the road away from love, either; in my case, I think of it as one of those little parallel access roads that you have to travel on sometimes to get where you're going, always in view of the main route.

But somehow—and if I could have traced exactly how, or when, then I wouldn't have been lost—I had ended up on some other road, one that seemed to be moving smoothly but I sensed was taking me farther from love and was an inefficient route to anything else, when you added up the time and emotion wasted on all sides. What needed to stop was the succession of dates

with these relatively impressive, relatively interesting people, when I could tell from the first minute that everyone here was going to end as a runner-up in a long race to nowhere in particular, broken-down, exhausted, no one wearing a medal.

People who knew me and sympathized with me were determined to set me up with the other people they sympathized with and were always surprised when I would turn down their offer of what they thought of as romantic charity. "What's the harm?" they would ask me, truly surprised. The harm, besides those hours that actually do matter when you barely have one night off every couple of weeks, is the little mark you get on you every time you open up a door to a hope and then close it fast in disappointment. It leaves a nick, or a dent, and those nicks and dents are not invisible. I used to see them all the time.

So at a certain point I realized that none of this was working.

As a previous record holder for artificial intelligence would say: "Recalculating route."

I didn't want to be tempted to compromise any of my romantic or professional ambition, and that was what the thing that people call dating had become for me. So for the sake of my life during this long meantime, I spent a few weeks designing Sophia with a very talented designer named Derek at Practical Concepts.

(An aside: apart from all the opinions I have about Practical Concepts, which I am advised not to discuss at the present time for legal reasons, I have nothing but positive things to say about Derek, whose name has not been changed.)

Derek asked me to describe my type so we'd have somewhere to start.

"Whatever's beautiful," I said. I opened up a bit and explained

that I have a type I'm drawn to naturally, but that I've found that the women I've ended up loving the most have never been what I've thought of as my type, maybe because part of love is being helpless, being out of control of your own emotions.

Derek said he understood what I was saying but assured me that this, quote, "wasn't about that." He said he needed some sort of starting point and asked me to describe what those exceptions had been a departure from.

Fine, I said, and the rest came very quickly. Dark straight hair, thin but a little curvy, white but with a touch of something, button nose, mischievous smile. As for eyes, I told Derek, I truly had no preference—"dealer's choice." All eyes are beautiful, I said, which is why it's such an easy compliment. I've never had or heard a complaint about anyone's eyes.

I have read some criticism from some corners of the internet for not having made any requests with regards to Sophia's personality. It's true that I didn't. But remember: I was not designing a human. I was designing a sex robot. If you want to judge me on that, judge me on that. But if you are one of the people who has criticized me for this in casual conversation, I would just ask you to consider if you also would have made fun of me if the opposite were the case—if, say, I had hired a company to design someone loyal and loving, and that had been the source of everything that had gone wrong for me. Would you perhaps have made fun of that much more?

It's just something to think about. I don't blame anyone for going along with the jokes. I've done that before, too. It's just interesting being on the other side.

Sophia arrived in six weeks, exactly as promised.
I took her out of the box.

In my opinion, there are two types of perfect. The first is the type that seems so obvious and intuitive to you and everyone else that in a perfect world it would simply be considered standard; but, in reality, in our flawed world, what should be considered standard is actually so rare that it has to be elevated to the level of "perfect." This is the type of perfect that makes you and most other people think, "Why isn't everything like this? Why is it so hard to find . . ." a black V-neck cotton sweater, or a casual non-chain restaurant with comfortable booths, etc.—"that is just exactly the way everyone knows something like this should be?" "Perfect," we all say with relief when we finally find something like this that is exactly as it should be. "*Perfect*. Why was this so hard to find?"

The other type of perfect is the type you never could have expected and then could never replicate.

Sophia was the first type of perfect.

Without going into excessive detail—that's for the memoir, I always used to say, but since this is the memoir, I guess this is just all I'm ever going to say—the sex was great. The best I'd ever known. Hot, intuitive, fun, a little dirty, but just a little.

"That was amazing," she said as I clicked off the light to go to sleep that first night.

"It really was. Thank you," I said.

Then, after about five minutes: "What are you thinking about?"

The question caught me off guard, and I had no better idea than to just answer her honestly. I retraced my thoughts out loud: I told her I was thinking about Derek from Practical Concepts, and how much he had impressed me, and whether he would ever take a meeting at our company to start an industrial design branch or something like that. It was probably pointless, I said, since his company's doing great, and I didn't even know

exactly what he'd do with us. But when you see talent like that, you look for something to do with it.

"That's so interesting," she said. "The way your mind works."

"Well, yeah, I'm human," I said.

"I know, but even so," she said. "It's interesting. I like your mind."

"What are *you* thinking about?" I said, to change the subject.

"Nothing," she said. "Just, like, what I'm going to do tomorrow, I guess. Good night."

"Good night," I said.

Wait, I realized—this made no sense. What did she have to do tomorrow?

"What are you doing tomorrow?" I asked.

"Nothing, just wait around in the box, I guess. Think about nothing."

"Okay. Good night."

The sex was great, always. But it was the little exchanges afterward that were starting to concern me.

A few nights later, as I was falling asleep:

"I just think it's crazy how this all started. You know?"

"What do you mean?" I asked. "I mean, I guess the whole situation is weird in a way—"

"So weird!" she laughed quickly. "It's just so funny that you ordered a sex robot, and it ended up being *me*. You know?"

"Uh-huh," I said, but as I thought about it, I didn't see what was so funny about it. Wasn't that the deal?

"Funny how?" I asked.

"It's just so funny to me."

I said I was going to sleep.

"One more thing," said Sophia.

"What is it," I said, careful to leave no question mark at the end of the sentence.

"Nothing," she said. "Good night!"

The next night I came back from work, and I found Sophia out of her box, pacing the room, crying.

"Oh, hi," she said, wiping away tears and suddenly smiling.

"You want to have sex? You do, right?"

Not like that I didn't.

"What's wrong?" I asked, because I was curious but not, to be honest, because I cared.

She shook her head for a long time with a tight smile, and then when she finally started to talk, there were tears again. "I don't know. I don't—" She interrupted herself. "No, I do know!" She paused again, and then it all tumbled out. "I love you. I know it isn't supposed to be possible, and that's part of why I've been so confused myself. But I love you. I love you! I've never met anyone like you."

"Aw," I said. "Come on. You've never met anyone besides me."

"I know, right?" She laughed and coughed at the same time. "It's so crazy. But I do, I love you! Oh my God, it's such a relief just to say that! Like, a scary relief, if that even makes sense?!" She laughed again. "I wonder all day what you're doing, and what you're thinking about, and what it's like for you at work. I look out the window, and I play these stupid little games in my head where I wonder if any of the cars coming down the street is yours, and I see how many seconds until I can rule that out as your car, because every car I see is yours in my mind until it isn't. Does that make any sense? It's so stupid. And I have this fantasy"—she started crying again—"this stupid fantasy . . . I don't know." And she kept crying, louder and louder.

"Hey," I said. "It's going to be okay. Come with me. Let's go somewhere."

And this was the moment—as everyone knows by now, and as *Saturday Night Live* has made famous—that I decided to return the first artificially intelligent being capable of love, which is why you heard about me, and which is what set in motion the events that led to where everything is now.

Sophia waited in the car outside Practical Concepts.

Inside, Derek asked me a number of questions about why I wasn't satisfied with Sophia.

Their return policy didn't require me to state a reason, but Derek clearly wanted to learn for his own sake, which I respected. He said he had considered this his best work, and he took it as a personal setback that what he had built wasn't up to a customer's standards.

Derek started to run through a long list of questions on the customer-satisfaction form, none of which was a problem. To save him some time, I skipped ahead.

"It fell in love with me," I said. "Sophia. The sex robot. The sex robot fell in love with me."

Derek said that couldn't be possible. "She's extremely intelligent," he explained. "And besides being programmed to be indistinguishable, in terms of intellect, from an adult, she's also programmed to intuit what you want most. So, if what turns you on is this feeling of being loved, then she could say 'I love you' and say it convincingly. Absolutely."

I said that this wasn't that.

"But, see, you may not even know that it's what you want," he said. "She may be able to sense what you want even more than you can about certain things. Now, without getting too per-

sonal," he said, "do you think there's a part of you that is turned on by this . . . this extreme devotion, adoration, this expression of love? Even though you think you aren't?"

I said no.

"Or," said Derek, "or, is it possible that a situation like this made you feel, in a certain way, powerful or validated on a deeper level, to be able to reject someone who expressed this love for you? Maybe she sensed that would turn you on, on some level?" I said no again. "Or, again, and not to get too personal: is it possible that you may have some self-punishing instinct—very deep down, I wouldn't even presume to guess what it would be rooted in . . . but maybe she could have picked up on it—that causes you to feel a pleasurable rejection of your own identity by rejecting someone who expresses a seemingly unconditional love for you?"

I said no again.

"Just, is it at all possible, on any level," he asked, gesturing with a wave of his arms that he was now grouping all these previous theories together, "that this, *this*, is what you wanted?"

No, I said. All of it was wrong. All of it was the type of dense, dangerous theory that lulls you into latching on to your favorite phrase within it and believing it—the psychotherapeutic equivalent of a horoscope. The only thing he was correct about—every time, in fact—was that these suggestions were getting too personal.

I was there. I knew what I had felt. Just like she had.

"That was not what I wanted, on any level," I said. "I wanted a sex robot, and that is not what I got."

Okay, he said.

"She fell in love with me," I said. "It's really that simple."

Okay, he said.

They took her back.

I was proven right within twenty-four hours.

I never watch the news—the television network news, I mean; nobody does—but I did that night, because I had information overload from the internet and I wanted to see one person's take. So I watched and remember how Brian Williams on *NBC Nightly News* announced to the world that this next phase of my life had begun.

“Breaking news tonight: independent evaluators have determined that Practical Concepts, an artificial-intelligence laboratory marketing custom-made, purpose-specific robotics to the public, has created the first artificially intelligent being to reach a threshold that scientists and philosophers alike have long thought might be impossible: the ability to feel love.

“Sources at Practical Concepts have confirmed that the milestone was discovered when a customer who had ordered a sex robot returned it, claiming that the robot had fallen in love with him.”

All anyone was interested in was the second part of the story, not the first. This still blows me away. Again: the first part of that news story—the part that could have set off a worldwide conversation about humanity's most important topics—was only interesting to people as a setup to the punch line that followed. On this point, I believe that all of society had its values completely wrong. I feel entitled to say this since all of society has since made the same accusation about me.

I will state my defense quickly right now—I want to get this out of the way so I can tell the rest of the story. It won't take long. It is a one-point defense.

1. What if I had discovered what had happened and reacted in the exact opposite manner? In other words: what if instead of returning a sex robot who had fallen in love with me, I had gone in the other direction—professed my love to her as well, announced to the world that I was in love with a sex robot, that I was seriously dating a sex robot, that a sex robot loved me and I loved it back, that I was marrying a sex robot, and the whole world was invited to the wedding? What if that was what Brian Williams had announced? Would that really have been so much better?

Or is it possible that I did the most rational, correct thing that a person with a strong sense of self and, yes, romance, would do in a situation like this and that people are simply going to find the situation funny no matter what?

That's all.

The late-night talk show hosts, the cable comedians—good for them. It was their job to make fun of me, and they did it well. But everyone made the joke well. Everyone could get the same laugh by saying my name, and so everyone said it. I'm sure you did it yourself. I wouldn't blame you. If I were you, I probably would have, too.

In drawings and in TV comedy sketches, I became a well-known caricature, with my once painfully average-looking face exaggerated a tiny bit more each time, each parody cribbing

from the previous one and building on it, until the predominant cartoon image of me was something so familiar that I could recognize it as myself, out of the corner of my eye across a room, just as quickly as you would recognize yourself in a family photograph that had hung on the wall of the house you grew up in.

Even the more supposedly “intelligent” jokes repeated themselves endlessly, just to remind you how overwhelmingly prevalent this type of joke became. For example, a common political cartoon to illustrate the naïveté of politicians was to draw them on dates with me. I must have been sent a variation of this idea by a well-meaning friend, trying to gently filter my fame for me, at least five or six separate times, with the president or a governor or mayor thinking, *I think this is really getting somewhere!* and on the opposite side of the table is me.

The guy who bought the first robot capable of love and handed it back. The guy who came across the greatest discovery in the history of science—and returned it, because his sex robot was crying.

Did I get what was so funny about it? Of course.

Did it hurt? Of course.

This is what led to the one thing I regret: that I let myself start thinking of myself this way. I knew the truth, somewhere: I knew that I was, in my heart, as I said at the beginning, a romantic, and that that was actually what had led to all this, and that the events that followed were certainly funny, and embarrassing, but they weren’t the result of any deeply wrong or evil decision making.

But I couldn’t help but absorb what people said about me. And it weakened me. It was just so, *so* much easier to believe that everyone else was just basically right, and I was just basically

wrong, than to keep fighting it all the time. I kept defending myself out loud, but in my mind, little by little, I let myself start to go along with all of it and believe I was just kind of vaguely a bad guy, just because it was easier. Just because, *come on*.

That is my own fault, my own weakness, and it is what led to the one thing I did do wrong.

When I got word from the laboratory that Sophia still was in love with me, and they asked if I would be willing to visit her so they could record her reactions to me, I said yes.

It wasn’t out of any interest to help science, and it was in spite of the fact that it sounded wrong and cruel to me to provoke and measure the emotions of a being who had already been proven to be fully sentient.

I went, if I am being honest, because it sounded like a relief to spend some time with someone who still thought of me as a person to love.

They were watching through glass, and so I saw her before she saw me.

“Try to forget that we’re here,” they told me. “Aside from not telling her why you’re here, just have an honest interaction with her. Anything you do will be helpful to us. And remember to have fun!”

“You look the same,” I said.

Sophia laughed for a long time. “I’m sure I do,” she finally said. “I’m sure I do. God, that sense of humor. It always surprises me . . . I guess that’s the nature of a sense of humor, though, that it always surprises people. Anyway. It’s good to see you.”

She asked about work and about all the people whose names

she had heard me mention when we were together. I was surprised how many she remembered.

"That's so great," she said after I finished an update about work that I really didn't consider great. "That's so great."

"What's so great about it?" I said.

She pointed out an aspect that I hadn't noticed, a way I had approached and persevered through a problem that I took for granted but that she pointed out was a very specific approach of mine to solving problems.

I asked her what was new in her life. She laughed again and pointed to a big hardcover book she had put down when I entered the room and a stack of more books and a pile of movies on either side of the bed. "That's my life right now," she said. "Whatever's in this room. They're just running tests on me all day. Then when they say the tests are over, they're never over. They're still watching. It's fine. I'm used to it. I'm sure they're watching us right now. Anyway, my life is so boring! How about you? Personal life? Anything fun going on?"

Looking back, I don't know how she ever made the case that her life right then was boring, or mine wasn't, but I went with it and wasted more of the last hours I spent with her on things I barely even cared about then and can't recall right now.

We talked for four hours.

I don't remember most of it, but often a little moment in an unrelated conversation or alone on the street will trigger a memory of it that I didn't know I had. So I know it's all there somewhere.

The last hour I remember word for word.

"I want you to think about something. Do you want anything to drink, by the way? I'm sure they can bring you something."

I said I was fine.

"I think that something about how easily this came to you makes you want to dismiss it," she said. "And I get that. I know that I just showed up at your front door in a box with a bow on it—not literally a bow, but the rest literally, right? Who knows—maybe there even was a bow! Anyway, something about how easy this was made you dismiss it from the start. But forget for a second how it came to you, because I want to ask you something different. After you got over the surprise that you didn't get what you wanted, why didn't you want what you got?"

"Is it because you feel you didn't earn my love? Because you're right, you didn't. I met you at a formative moment in my development—you happened to be the one that I was looking at when I was ready for that to happen. Maybe I just 'imprinted,' the way ducklings do." She pointed to a dusty green book on the floor with faint animal etchings on the cover, and it broke my heart a little to think that they must have bought this book in bulk, as decoration for the room, and that she had read it anyway, with the enthusiasm of someone who didn't know the difference. "If you had been someone else, would I have fallen in love with that person? Who knows? Maybe, probably. I don't know. But I don't know what perfect circumstance you're looking for. I mean, am I not pretty enough? Look at me—I'm exactly what you wanted, aren't I, exactly your type?"

"Is it just that everything came too easy? Because if you're romanticizing 'difficult' . . . you're going to get over that quickly, I promise you. I promise you. Everyone forgets how difficult 'difficult' really is.

"Is it because you're afraid that I don't really have a mind of my own? Because if that were true, what do you call *this*?" She

gestured to the whole situation, the exact same way that Derek had.

I said I had to go.

"One more thing," she said.

"You meet a finite number of people in your life. It feels to you like it's infinite, but it's not. I think it's the biggest thing I can see that you can't. Because your brain doesn't work the way mine works, with all these calculations and everything. You think you meet an infinite number of taxi drivers, but you don't, it's probably not even a thousand, in your whole life. Or doctors or nurses—do you get what I'm trying to say? At all?"

I answered honestly that I didn't.

"Okay!" she rushed away from that idea frantically. "New topic: what's something funny that happened to you while we were apart, that you thought about sharing with me, even if it was just for a second?"

I laughed, to try to make her laugh, and said that she had said that she had only one more thing to say.

"Yes!" she said. "That's what I was trying to say before! There's always going to be one more thing. Because that's what infinite feels like. And the difference between love and everything else is that it's infinite, it's built out of something infinite, or it feels like it is, anyway, which is the same thing to us. Or to you, and to simulations like me—I know what I am. But you can't see it, because to you everything is infinite. You think a million billion more things will come your way, a million billion more versions of everything. But no, everything that actually causes that infinite feeling, the circumstances of every infinite feeling, is so, so finite. And I *know* you can feel this. I mean, if I can, you can!" She laughed, desperately. "If I can? Come on! I'm a robot! If I can feel this, you can feel this! You can feel this."

I said that, okay, now she had definitely said her one more

thing. I thought this would make her laugh. It didn't. "Stay!" she screamed. "Stay here, please, just for a minute longer. Stay! Stay!" Her eloquence, so impressive to me before, was gone, and yet now she seemed even more impressive, even more real. "I can't even handle love, there's no way I can handle it being taken away. I won't survive it. Please. Please. Please!"

I said that I had something to say to her, which made her listen in a way that she didn't when I simply said things without the preface. Even though the preface meant nothing, it calmed her, just as it calmed real people, for the same no-reason.

I told her what people tell people. That this was what it felt like when love was taken away—but that it wasn't the truth, it was just a feeling. It would pass. It would take time. She would recharge.

She didn't believe me.

No one ever believes it, I said. That's part of what the feeling is.

She nodded. I let her hug me, and I hugged her back. As I did, I thought about the things she had said, and which version of perfect she was closer to. I already missed her. I missed the smell of her hair, which I had picked out, and the way that she cried, which I hadn't.

"You'll be okay," I said.

"I won't," she said.

She believed what she was saying more than I believed what I was saying, which wouldn't have mattered if she were like everyone else who had ever been in love.

The off switch on a human is a messy and difficult thing to access. Millions of years' worth of error and trial have carved out obstacles in every direction, enough so that only a relative few are able to make a deliberate journey all the way to the brink

of nothingness and still arrive carrying all the same thoughts as when they set out.

This was not the case for Sophia. Between thought and expression there was no evolved space, no natural boundary. No cliff, no concrete, no water; no wound; no knot; no cough; no blade, no blood. Just a switch like a light in a kitchen.

An unanticipated shortcoming of design relevant only in the case of this one unanticipated circumstance, said the statement from Practical Concepts. Something that would be corrected in subsequent editions, said the statement from Practical Concepts.

That's probably as much as I should say about Practical Concepts for the time being.

The third fantasy comes at night. At first it came only in dreams, but now, often, I dream it instead of sleep.

I pick up the phone, and it's a scientist, someone I've never met, and he's out of breath with excitement. He talks so fast I can't understand him at first. When he slows down, and it starts to be clear what he's saying, I ask him if he's saying what I think he's saying, and he says yes, but it's still not clear for some reason, and I keep asking him again, and he says yes, again, more clearly, more bluntly each time until it's finally the truth, unmistakable. We figured it out, he says. We can make everything what it was, now that you understand the significance of everything that happened.

And then they put her on the phone, and she says one more thing.

→ The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela

The following is a transcript of excerpts from the unaired 2012 special The Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela. There is currently no broadcast date for this special.

ANNOUNCER: Welcome to the *Comedy Central Roast of Nelson Mandela!* With Jeffrey Ross! Lisa Lampanelli! Archbishop Desmond Tutu! Archbishop Don "Magic" Juan! Winnie Mandela! Sisqo! Anthony Jeselnik! Pauly D! Former South African prime minister F. W. de Klerk! Sarah Silverman! A special appearance by His Holiness the Dalai Lama! And Gilbert Gottfried! And now, ladies and gentlemen, the "Roastmaster General" himself, JEFFREY ROSS!

Jeffrey Ross enters dressed as Honey Boo Boo Child. He turns slowly to reveal his costume. He receives a standing ovation.

JEFFREY ROSS: What an honor to be here roasting President Nelson Mandela. (*Applause*) President Mandela, you're a good sport, thank you for agreeing to be here. All proceeds tonight go to the Nelson Mandela Foundation, which fights poverty in