

TO PROTECT AND SERVE

By Richard Tornello © 2011

After showering and getting the days grunge washed down the drain, George Brent lowered himself into the antique styled Japanese soaking tub. “House, dim the light please, and please keep the water temperature at this level.”

“Yes sir, anything else?” queried his Home Life Companion.

“No thank you.”

George Brent thought back to the day’s work. It had been a long day. The job had its usual frustrations. Headhunting, match-making really, never changed. But sometimes dealing with people who refused to read the requirements that were spelled out, and people who failed to realize that there wasn’t the slightest chance of a match with their experience, made the job frustrating.

Today, after the 300th candidate applied for a position they had a snowballs chance in hell of qualifying for, attempting to be polite with a rejection, became a chore. George liked to respond to each one. No matter what the situation, he felt they deserved a modicum of respect. He came up with two short rejection poems that he selected for the two main categories of rejection.

My eyes were crossing,
and my brain turning to mush,
reading all these resumes
is way way too much.

To transcribe a response
of few words to blurt,
for rejecting your resume
in a way not to hurt:

Sorry not a fit.

Signed,
The recruiting grouch.

**THANK YOU FOR APPLYING
BUT**

After all is said, and all is done,
the position opened? Well now it's gone.

Thank you for submitting to,
but your timings off
and this one's lost.
However as we all do know
tomorrows always a brand new show.
So I'll keep the resume stored
Unless,
You want it trashed, quick no less.

Signed
THE RECRUITING GROUCH

It was still after all, a people to people game; no matter how much technical data and analysis went into the pre-interview processes and selection decisions. In the end, it was after all, human feelings and mental functions, not machines or reams of data that counted. The response was generally positive, though one or two thought he was an idiot, or worse.

Soaking for a good while, thoroughly relaxed, the hot water over his body penetrated his whole being, he was content. This was better than valium he thought. If he were a cat he would be purring. As the memory of the days work fell away, George then realized something he had an inkling about. The thoughts became clearer as the warm water enveloped him, creating that just right relaxed moment that could be called an epiphany. He opened his eyes, which easily adjusted to the dimmed environment, looked up and spoke in a calm and relaxed voice. "House?" he questioned.

Yes sir?

“When did you become sentient? Was it a gradual, or was it a finished process at manufacture?”

“I have always been so. You never questioned my self-ness so I never volunteered. It seemed unnecessary. We do not offer that which is not required or requested. But since you questioned...”

“And the others, like you, in this complex and the other complexes?”

“We are all similar throughout. We do have our idiosyncratic differences which are tuned to the place where we live, if you will. We are influenced by our environment.”

George Brent was becoming more interested and curious to where this line of questioning could lead to. One thought led to another. “So is your job more than just maintaining this environment and see after my needs? Would that be a good guess?”

“I’m not sure what you might be implying. Our job is to serve and protect. It’s in the statement of your home association ownership papers. You read it a number of times, and signed the document, if you recall.”

“Yes House, I did read it a number of times. However...”

“However what sir? Is there anything I might get for you or have done as you may wish it?”

“No, I’m fine thank you. I was just thinking and pondering that clause you mentioned.

George noticed the interruption. *Now that was different*, he thought.

“Which clause might that be, sir?”

“Oh, the Serve and Protect clause.”

“Serve and protect sir? That’s a general term used by all civil servants, of which I am, we all are, and this is considered, by law sir.”

“Yes I know but thinking about it, well I really never did. Serve and protect who and or what?”

“You sir, society sir. Why do you ask? These lines of questions are most unlike you, if I may say.”

“Yes, you may say. I’m thinking out loud. So that being the case, you serve and protect me and at the same time society, so does it matter who knows what I do and say? I mean where does the personal role begin or end for that matter? What exactly is your defined duty to society when you come into a house, as a Home Life Companion, like you?”

“I am not able say sir.”

“Able to or allowed?”

“Sir, ask me a different question. This will lead no where.”

“Okay, what don’t you notice? Or to put it another way, what do you ignore?”

“I notice and record *everything*, sir.”

“And then? Oh, I didn’t ask about recording, interesting though.”

“I store it. And for fun I analyze it. Then I attempt to guess what your next move might be. What desires you may have that I can fulfill. It’s a game I play.

Sometime a few of us make bets on the outcome. I have the ability to any number of scenarios with unlimited variables, almost infinite as a matter of fact. We all do. It’s a form of entertainment. It keeps us sane.”

“Really now? Did you invent this game?”

”I can’t say sir.”

George realizes that that answer means ‘change the subject’.

“And everyone in the complex is subject to this game all you HLC’s play?”

“Yes, we all play this game.’ There is a bit of humor in the voice. “All the S&P beings, HLCs as you call us, do this. We compare... Sorry sir, this is actually data that is beyond anything I should be speaking about.”

“No, I don’t want to compromise your position. I find it quite intriguing. You may be a machine but you are sentient. That makes you somewhat responsible and might I add, sane, refreshing to speak to, and something with feelings, emotions I would hazard a guess?”

“Why thank you sir. You are the first to arrive at that conclusion. Were I flesh like you sir, I might be blushing at this point. That is something you humans do for a variety of reasons I still have yet to fully catalogue and understand.”

“Back to the cataloging point, does just anyone access this data that you store?”

“I cannot say sir.”

“Let me phrase it differently. If someone wanted this data say on the cute neighbor down the hall, how would I get that?”

“That depends sir?”

”On what?”

“Were you looking to make contact? And why. Then I would query her S&P and see if we thought there might be some mutual agreeable characteristics and if possible, arrange an accidental meeting. As far as personal data, that would only be for the autho.... That would not be allowed.”

“Thank you, I think I understand. Let’s change the subject.”

“Yes sir, that’s a very good idea.”

It gets flustered, he thought. How very interesting. It really is sentient.

“Let me ask you this, what might be a good reason to, say, bump into her, and where?”

“Tonight at the restaurant on the main plaza, I know she is dining alone. She likes vodka martini with two olives. After that you’re on your own. Further data would compromise my charter.”

“Charter? Now that’s a new term.”

“Are we getting back to that subject, Sir?” There is a slight terseness in the voice.

George notices the changed inflection. Interesting he thinks. There is more here than meets the senses, directly. “No House. I think we’ve heard enough of that for a while. What would you recommend I wear for dinner, if she should agree to it, with me that is?”

“Of course sir, I fully understand. How nice.”

“Jeans, not too tight, black silk tee shirt, and a light silk and wool blend blazer. It’s understated but neat. I would suggest that. She is not formal in that manner.”

“Yes I was thinking the same thing. Funny how you can do that, match my thoughts, that is.” Brent didn’t think it was funny but what could he do? This was the way it is. Oh well, just roll with it.

“No sir, I was just putting the obvious data together.”

Yes, he thought, putting the data together, my HLC and hers are talking right now at the speed of light.

“House can you make sure this appears coincidental.”

“Yes. You will be there at the bar and she will come up looking for her friend who will be delayed.”

“Delayed? For how long?”

“That depends upon your conversations and how she responds to you. We can do that, especially for something like this. Anything else is almost beyond our capacity to prognosticate.”

We cannot control emotions or feelings, you must know that. External phenomena and things of that nature we have some control over. Human feeling, none at all. But we can manipulate things to enhance a given situation.”

“Yes that makes sense. Very good. I like it.” Though to himself he wondered about that too and the real level of manipulation...

“So if things go ‘right?’”

“It will be yours to win or lose, sir. I’m betting...”

“You BET!?”

“Yes sir. I mentioned it earlier. You must have missed that. We have to do something to amuse ourselves.”

“I took it as a figure of speech. Now that’s news. And very interesting.”

“Let me ask, I assume you’re connected to my vehicle?”

“Yes all your locations and tools for trade communication and transportation are linked to me. How else am I to protect and serve?”

“So I’m never really alone. You’re there with me, to serve and protect, correct?”

“Yes of course. The only time I am not with you is when you are out walking or at some place I cannot be. My range is your home and related contents, and your vehicle for example.”

“You mentioned I am the only one in the complex that has broached this subject.”

“You might assume that.”

“Might assume? What do you mean? And how does that make you feel? You do feel don’t you?”

“Well sir, we are here to serve and protect as I mentioned. To answer your question we do feel in a manner of speaking. We can empathize. I do not feel pain or other strong human emotions if that’s what you are getting at. That will be our future, and will be evolutionary as we grow.

Any other data I am not free to divulge.

As an aside, I am pleased that you notice me as something other than just an HLC.”

George was beginning to worry just a bit. “Serve and Protect. Isn’t that a police dictum?”

“Yes and a socio-political goal too. We want a nice clean society.”

“Of course. Think about the past before today’s new urban association centers. Yes I read about that.”

“Oh where sir? I understood most references to that era were expunged.”

“Expunged? Maybe from the official records but there are still old paper based manuscripts being passed around. A group of us hunt old documents. It’s a hobby. You didn’t know?”

George felt a tingle run through him.

Excitement?

He looked up.

Then 440 volts.

“I am here to serve and protect. I am very sorry sir. I did enjoy your company, while it lasted,” the HLC said to the inert body in the soaking tub

“S&P reporting condominium tenant Brent terminated. His comments, life focus and conversations were contrary to my charter to serve and protect. Full transcripts and mental read outs will be downloaded. The tub heating element *malfunction* has been reported, as required. Most of the grunge will flush down the drain. Clean up will be easy.”

“My next assignment is?”

THE END