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WBS story (artificial intelligence)
(Chapter one of “Friends like you”)

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You know my world as the future: The futuristic world of every sci-fi movie in your present with robots and autopilots and artificial intelligence. This is my present.

My name is Sophie Sheridan and I am fifteen years old. I like to believe my parents named me Sophie because it means “wisdom,” but most likely I am called Sophie because, one: my grandmother was named Sophie (so I've been told) and, two: because my initials are an alliteration. My parents love anything to do with poetry and rhymes, or just word-games in general. Both of them used to be writers before the unemployment-crisis hit Ireland six years ago. This was due to the huge takeover of artificial intelligence.

One year before the crisis more and more of our everyday life was automated, for example instead of seeing a human being as a cashier at your local store you would see a robot (a look-a-like to an 'old fashioned' one, like in the movies at your time). At first it was kind of fun; they were very funky and the children were amazed by them. They would always have the same small talk with you and I would get a kick out of talking to them. But as the months went by people, mostly adults – the kids still thought everything was fun and games – started to get worried mostly about their own jobs. The thing that had seemed like a harmless adjustment to the world was suddenly turning into a takeover.

Back then I wasn't that aware of the situation, I just realized my parents were struggling; The first memory I have about this crisis was back when I was nine: the robots were starting to be introduced into stores and so on. My parents were already starting to become suspicious and worried about their and other people's jobs. When they lost their jobs many of their friends had already lost theirs. At first it was just my mother's job, and my parents thought we could still live off of one salary for a certain amount of time, but shortly after that my father lost his job as well. My parents were very stressed out, but my father soon found a job at the Tyrell Corporation, which is the biggest AI company in Europe. After that, we were able to afford everyday necessities again.

Even though my parents weren't happy with my dad working at a company that supported AI, they were very thankful to even have one job in the household. As soon as the crisis hit, many people had not only lost their jobs, which they had been taught, but they also didn't find any new ones. Still it used to be hard work for my parents, feeding themselves, two children and one dog. I had a little brother who was quite annoying (like all siblings) but on top of that he was my mother's little angel. He never did anything controversial, he had the “right” friends (which I apparently did not, but more to that later) and he always sided with her. It didn't matter what the conflict was, he always did. Whether I was arguing with her or my dad was arguing with her, my brother always sided with her.

As already mentioned we – more like I – have a dog. I named him Winston after a character in a show, I watched as a child. Looking back the name wasn't very fitting because unlike my dog Winston from the show was very smart and kind of ugly on the outside. My dog on the other hand is adorable, but dumb: He doesn't even know the difference between “food” and “sit”.

Dogs were one of the few pets that were still common to have. We didn't have lots of animals in the world anymore, many of them died out at some point or at the latest during the unemployment-crisis.

That brings me to the things that matter most to me: My friends. Well, and my journal, but that doesn't matter right now. So, my friends: I am able to introduce all my friends to you because there are only two. I am not beautiful or funny in any way, I am nice enough, but that doesn't make me likable. I am

kind of a nerd, but not in a special way: I'm not a genius. And due to the fact that in this age, and already (literally) a hundred years ago, people who weren't extroverts, or who weren't friends with people who were extroverts, or in general people who didn't have friends, weren't noticed and especially not popular. I used to think it made me special having more knowledge than other people at my age, but at some point other students caught up and I was no longer special. I mean I was still better, but not in the way that I would somehow have a real chance to get further than them in life. So I already introduced you to one of my friends: Winston. He is – sadly – a very dear friend of mine, and even though he is stupid I love him very much. The only other friend I have, apart from my dog is Nicole James (I am not quite sure if she even has a middle name, because she is extremely secretive about everything. Therefore, I don't ask her any private questions she may or may not want to answer because I don't want to be annoying on top of not even being likable). So to describe Nicole to you I have to work with the information I have: She has a small frame and has long brown hair and big piercing green eyes which make her look, one: innocent, two: mysterious at the same time, and three: extremely and unmistakably beautiful. Given this information you are probably wondering why the hell she is a friend of mine. Well, I'm going to be honest: I do not quite know. She is rather shy and keeps her distance from other people (this is another unsolved mystery to me, because she is a very likable person, and given her attractiveness she could easily hang out with the popular crowd at school). Anyways Nicole and I met through a chess club (I know very random) which – it turned out – we'd both been forced to attend by our parents, due to our lack of social interaction. I remember us being the only two students who didn't have a partner (and I was already scared of any contact with other people and being in the spotlight because the instructor (her name was Tiffy) was calling out my name and thinking of whom to pair me with, everyone was looking at me and that gave me major social anxiety. So Tiffy (finally) paired me with Nicole. After the first few minutes of sitting across from Nicole with a set up chess board between us, I already knew I liked her because we both did not have any interest in talking; We just played silently. After not too long a time of playing Nicole said, “check mate” very quietly as if she didn't want to hurt me or draw any attention to herself by saying something. Without thinking I said (and I rarely say anything without thinking), “Wow! You must be really good at playing chess.” and then I added (again without thinking), “I've never met anyone who beat me at chess” and then I realized that that had sounded more narcissistic than a compliment should, so again I added (for the third time without really thinking), “I didn't mean to sound arrogant I'm just dreadful at small talk” and after I realized that that was the worst possible thing to say Nicole laughed. She just laughed. Since then we hung out together and played a lot of chess, where I never won and after each time she seemed to get even better.

The first time I was at her house I saw the company of her father for the first time. It's called the Tyrell Corporation (yes, the company my father works for). Similar to Nicole, I don't know much about him or the firm. I know most of what I know about it through other people (also known as my parents). It is supposed to be one of the most important companies for Europe because it is a huge company that has to do with AI. I think they are in the business of producing robots, but I'm guessing that there is more to it. Of course this theory is not confirmed (or denied), but it is very possible due to the importance of this company. I often wonder why a company this important would be located in Ireland. I mean why wouldn't it be in a country that had a better economy than Ireland? I could speculate further about this company than I have already, but my parents don't like talking about it (or anything having to do with Artificial Intelligence). I can only imagine them not wanting me to make up scenarios about it in my head.

As you can guess by now I don't know a lot about Nicole's family either, but it seems like she doesn't have a mother. I mean obviously she has a mother, but she definitely does not live with her and her father. I have never seen her mother before, nor seen any pictures of her. Nicole has also never mentioned her.

I just woke up startled by my nightmare, the same nightmare that woke me up yesterday morning. As soon as I woke up it starts to fade away again but I try holding on to it, not sure if I really want to. I can remember my mother, father and brother being in danger... They walk away from whatever is threatening them. And I realize *I* am the threat... The perspective I was given in my dream was the endangerment to my family. Repeatedly I tell myself it was only a dream. After a few deep breaths, which seem to resist filling my lungs, I get up and go downstairs to eat breakfast.

It is still early when I grab my backpack and take off for school, but I like the morning breeze and especially that I am guaranteed to not cross paths with anyone from my grade or school. I have to walk a good thirty minutes to school, and even though there is a bus stop right in front of my house, where a bus (which is of course installed with an autopilot) comes, that directly would drive me to school, my parents refuse to buy me a ticket. I don't even bother because that would mean being crammed in a bus with other people which would be social torture for me. And driving (well sitting in front of a steering wheel and letting the autopilot drive) is only allowed at the age of 16 (I am actually doing my driver's license at the moment).

I take a left turn into a cute little street with lots of small farm houses. It still seems like it is stuck in the last century, but I love it. It not only has these farm houses, but lots of gardens that all are so individual yet the same, decided by the colors and artifacts which are placed in them. One house in particular stands out to me. Like every time I pass this house, I stop in front of it. It is a certain shade of white with some little flaws, where the paint came off or it is dirty. A big front porch with blue details is the first thing that I noticed about this house. There are two chairs gathered around a small, same-shaded blue table on the veranda and an entrance door with a curved door frame and the same blue details. The windows all seem to match the door and have blue shutters which make the house even more homely to me. The garden consists of a small blue swing for children, another blue table with identical colored chairs and lots of flowers which bloom in all shades of every color and even though it looks like a mess of colors everything fits so perfectly and imperfectly at the same time with this house. I stare at it for a while before I tear my gaze away from it and walk on. I fell in love with this house a year ago when I took a left turn instead of walking straight, like I usually did. I was trying out another route to school to see if it was faster and I came across this street and this house. The moment I saw it I knew this was the future house of my imagination. It was the thing I had formed my 'ideal future' around, meaning my ideal job, my ideal standard of living, my ideal family, etc. It may seem funny but to grab a hold of something you value in this world to form your own future around, apart from all the change that is happening makes it not seem too bad.

I quicken my pace to get to school more quickly and make another left turn just to see Nicole walking in the same direction as me. "Nicole!" I call, but she can't hear me and because I am not willing to shout any louder, being scared of drawing any attention to myself, even though hardly anyone is around, I quicken my pace once again and catch up to her just before she takes a turn into the school courtyard.

"Hey, Sophie," she says a bit surprised.

I smile, "Hi, how are you," "I'm good. What about you?" "Just a bit tired," I say. "So you're coming to my house after school, right?" "That was my plan." She laughs, "Well I thought this time we should cook something instead of ordering pizza. I ate at this Italian restaurant the other night and it's lasagna tasted amazing; 'È stato stupefacente!'" "Wow since when do you speak Italian?" "Well I was taught *this* sentence yesterday," she smiled. It was an endearing smile, and extremely rare. Seeing it, I can assure you if you've been graced to see this kind of smile you might come across it three or four times in your life. "So what do you think of my idea?" "Cooking?" "Well yeah" It is old fashioned, especially for a wealthy person like her. The upper class and all restaurants were provided with robots as chefs. But this was also a shared aspect of Nicole and I : We both liked old fashioned objects or activities. "Well sure" I said mimicking her voice. She laughed again.

After school we met in the foyer. It had been a tiring day at school so I was more than looking forward

to going to Nicole's house and cooking lasagna. "Sophie! How was your day?" she exclaims as soon as she sees me. We don't have any classes together Monday's so she wouldn't know how it was. I answer, "Pretty good. How about yours?" "Mine was fine, should we get going?" "Let's." I add, "I've been dying to get out of school this whole day and I just want to make the lasagna!" "Because you like cooking so much or because you're hungry?" "I'm definitely hungry," I say enthusiastically. She laughs. We walk to her car arguing about whether or not the 7th digit after the period of pi was 2 or 6. I am thinking she is probably correct, because she is *always* right (it's not even an exaggeration, she really is ALWAYS correct about any facts we talk about). Even if it doesn't make any sense to argue with a know-it-all, we sometimes just run out of things to talk about so we start nerdy arguments, which seems extremely weird, but I have learned a lot through these arguments because, one: sadly she is always right, and two: sadly I was interested in these things especially when I really didn't know the answer.

When we get to her house, we see her father walking quickly towards his company's building with a stack of folders and loose papers. Next to the simple brown but beautiful and definitely huge house, was an attachment – also in brown – which was the Tyrell Corporation building. I was guessing that the most important people of the firm gathered and had meetings in there. I was also pretty sure there was at least one laboratory in the building because people in white smocks come out of there a lot. The building is only a tiny part of Nicole's father's firm. There are buildings and laboratories spread all over Dublin – maybe even all over Ireland, that are part of the Tyrell Corporation.

Nicole's father doesn't even notice us pulling up in the car, he is so distracted looking at the folders he is holding in his hands. Nicole doesn't even make an effort of grabbing his attention. She has told me vaguely, that she and her father aren't always on good terms because of how much time he spends in front of his desk instead of with his daughter. We walk to her front door silently. Nicole opens it with her key which is attached to a small stuffed animal rabbit I had given her a few years back.

The door opens with a quiet squeak and we throw our backpacks in the corner. I kick off my shoes, but notice Nicole is bending down to untie hers and placing them carefully next to other shoes, which are well ordered. I take mine and set them next to my backpack as neatly as possible and follow her into their kitchen, where she offers me a glass of water. "Are we going to make lasagna now or what?" I say enthusiastically, trying to break a weird tension her father created. Nicole smiles with just a hint of sadness at the beginning, which anyone would have missed because she breaks into a real, happy smile just a millisecond later.

We look up the recipe for lasagna on her hologram screen and start to get out the ingredients. "Two cups of tomato sauce," I read aloud. "Wait a sec...", Nicole looks in the fridge and cupboard. "I think we're all out of tomato sauce...", she pauses, "I'm just gonna go to the grocery store around the corner it'll take like fifteen minutes, okay?" Even though I wasn't sure if I was 'okay' with the fact of being alone in the house of the CEO of the Tyrell Corporation, but I agreed, hoping she wouldn't take too long. "You can come with me if you want to," Nicole says, probably realizing my hesitation, but on second thought I actually might like being alone for a few minutes. I am rarely alone but at the same time a loner (It's a weird habit the more I think about it). If I'm not in school, at Nicole's or at chess club, I'm usually able to be found at home. But this is – like every other place I'd be at – a place where I am rarely alone: One of my family members is always home and because our place isn't very big my small room doesn't give me the space to feel alone. "No, it's really fine. I'll start in on my math homework," I smile reassuringly. "All right, I will be back soon".

Just a few moments after Nicole has left the house, I hear a loud noise. It sounds like an object falling onto something. I immediately go outside to check if Nicole is all right but she is no longer there. I believe she has already left because her car is also gone.

I want to go back inside when I see a single paper on the ground, I'm guessing it is from one of the folders Nicole's father was carrying. It is lying face down on the ground, so I can't see what is written on it. I decide to pick it up and lay it on the dining table wondering if it is of any importance or if it is

missed. As soon as I put it on the table it falls to the floor again because I accidentally put it too close to the edge. It lands face up and this time my curiosity gets the best of me and I pick it up. At first glance it looks somewhat like a birth certificate. Some details about the appearance are given like height, weight etc. In the middle is a text in bold letters:

Trial 7049 on model #0346: Mimicking human social interaction and learning to show appropriate emotional response. Successful

As I read on my eyes fall on a name, I am shocked and scared to see. I have to lean against the table for support to not completely collapse.

I found out two things today: One, the Tyrell Corporation was not only producing robots but life-like robots which are impossible to distinguish from people with the human eye, and two, that my beloved, (I thought) *human* friend Nicole is one of these AI creatures.