

## Remembering

Your big green eyes faded, the light that you were draining away as your body went limp. Round metallic hands uncurling around the smaller one that you had held only a few moments ago. The weak whirring from your broken voice box slowed and stopped, you had been trying to say something... Your last message, lost forever through the audio distortion.

You had said this day would come. You had felt the little gray battery that powered everything that was you fading and sputtering. Believing you had been difficult; you were the world. And the world dying again seemed quite unlikely. But like always, your prediction was right. Your computation ability has always been the best, this time was no different.

Finding another battery had been impossible, not for a lack of desperate, frantic, trying. Endless nights of digging that had torn away coats of paint and bits of fingers.

“A waste of time” you had said. There were none left. Most of the batteries had been consumed by the parents. The rest had been snatched and drained by hollow crawlers. You just wanted to spend your remaining time looking for lost treasures together. Not on some “wild goose chase”, which probably meant doing something useless.

Now it didn't matter though.

You were gone.

The one thing that had kept the crushing “alone” of this empty, empty place from becoming suffocating had been dragged away. You had told me that robots probably shouldn't feel the “alone”.

Either way, the pain was here now. Crippling, all-encompassing pain that tore at the wire gut, bent mechanical knees, clenched aluminum hands around the torso and curved metal spines. It seared, burned, came in waves. Moving seemed like an impossibility and for a while, it was. The light gray-yellow sky had turned to the black gray of mold before the arduous task of bringing you home was undertaken.

Lying there with you would have been easier but the crawlers would come. A way to join you that you probably wouldn't approve of. Carrying you was impossible, you were too tall, so dragging you was the only solution. Your head bumped against metal, every loud, clanging jostle sparked guilt and fear. Your limbs kept getting buried and stuck in the faded, dusty, discarded wrappers that lined the ground, regularly slowing the crawling pace to a stop. If they came now, it would all be over.

After what seemed like forever, you were gently propped against the soft inner wall of home. The makeshift bag you had strapped around your shoulder laid deflated and forgotten on your legs. Our last treasure hunt together and we hadn't found anything.

"Treasures." You'd always said you disliked that term. It was "inaccurate". What we were really searching for were "relics" or "ruins". Things the parents had left that would give us knowledge. "Treasures" implied monetary value, something that didn't exist anymore. Just like the "hollow crawlers" which you said sounded like something the parents would have put in one of their horror movies. Something not representative of the reality of the machines searching for energy that prowled outside. You'd said that I had a habit of making silly names for things.

But those silly names would make you smile and laugh. Your smile was so pretty, and your laugh was so warm, so the names stayed. Plus, "treasures" seemed right. The sparkle they brought to your eyes and all the stories you had told me about them made them seem very valuable indeed.

Now though, they didn't seem treasure-like at all.

With no one to tell their stories, the faded objects that lined the popsicle stick shelves were barely differentiable from the plastic wrappers of our walls.

What to do now? What would you want to do? Finding a good place to leave you was important. Maybe the last important thing left. So that was what should be done. But where? Everything was the same, piles and piles of decaying junk. That wouldn't do, you weren't junk.

Wait.

Maybe where we met could work? What you called the library... One giant treasure we could never bring home. It was too big and too far.

You loved that place. We even lived there for a weeks, back when you first found that scared and lost little robot. We'd had to leave though, too many crawlers around.

You'd talked about it for days and days, wishing we could go back. But one thing led to another, obstacles piled up and we never did. Now, we would, and you would get to stay there forever. A treasure among treasures.

But for now, the only thing left to do was to collapse beside you with a clunk, curl up in a ball and wait.

Odd. Robots can't feel exhaustion. That's what you said anyways...

During the time that passed, there was nothing but the dark and the occasional shuffle of crawlers outside. They didn't detect anything, however. Few still had functioning heat detectors and those that did couldn't penetrate our walls.

An "inefficient" system you had called them. Functioning on basic sight, heat and sound, they couldn't fly, their problem-solving capabilities were mediocre at best and the cheap imitations of parent bodies that they wore could only fool the most basic of facial recognition software.

But you affirmed the designers couldn't be blamed, they had been desperate and in a "race against the clock". One they had eventually lost, leaving their creations in a futile hunt on their path to decay.

Their inefficiency, however, had never quelled the urge to hide under a blanket with you whenever one was near.

Eventually, the dust was brushed off you gently and you were wrapped in the largest, sturdiest piece of plastic around. Your head lolled backward as you were installed on the back. Its bent, unnatural placement was just as painful of a reminder as your eyes.

Looking was bad, it would stop progress, stop thought.

So, it was time to move, eyes forward, turning the whole body slowly to say goodbye to oncehome. Not just the head, that would make you swing into sight.

There were no crawlers the first day, only piles of leftovers. At first, you'd said, there had been mold in the piles. You were right of course; it was hard to tell though. The days when mold still was a thing had been a terrified, frantic, blur.

Now, the world was too dry for mold. Too dry for mold, too dry for trees, too dry for puppies and too dry for parents.

Puppies and trees. Apparently, there had been other living things than the parents before. You'd read about them in half-decayed books and kept pictures of them on our walls. Despite your best efforts, the pictures were never in the best condition, they would flake and fade with time.

Nevertheless, you were proud of them and told stories about the small balls of fur that they featured. When you did, it was easy to picture the green, rolling mountains and the yipping, huggable animals that played with children.

Meeting a puppy would have been neat. Or a kitten.

The sky went dark gray again, it looked fluffy and heavy somehow.

*Clank, clank, shuffle clank.* The sounds of your weight rung out around us with crystal clarity. Wrappers, cans and bottles slid with your passing, eventually they would make new piles. Wind did still happen, sometimes.

You wouldn't have liked travelling at night. Every loud, clumsy step risked inviting them to come and they would be harder to spot, our night vision was never that good. Before, during travels, we'd build shelters and huddle together, waiting the night out and whispering stories.

Now though there were no more stories, you had a place to be, no need to hurry but there wasn't a point in stopping.

Walk.

Up and down and up and over, pulling out our weight from the piles, trying not to make too loud of a crash but not take so much time as to be completely silent. If they were going to come, they would come. Maybe then, a voice box scream would ring out, perhaps the last one the world would ever hear. Too bad, the last scream would come from a high-pitched, annoying and crackly voice. It should not have been that one, that box lasting the longest seemed unfair.

After the scream, what would the silent crawlers do? Where would they bring the last battery to? Would they keep looking or would they stop? Staring until their orbits undid themselves and they joined the piles. When this conversation had come up, you had said that they would no doubt keep looking until they broke. They didn't have minds and there would be no one left to tell them to stop.

The trudge continued as the horizon became yellow. Today was a particularly smoky day, it was hard to see ahead. The heavy sky had come down, like a pillow on a sleeping parent's face in your scary books.

"It's not called smoke." you would have said. But saying smoke was easier than listing all the gasses present inside it. It looked like smoke and that was what was important.

No matter how hard it was to see, the way was clear. You had made sure we both had the coordinates registered in our systems as we left the place.

Snick...scritch...CLANK BAM CLANG!

The plastic wrapper attaching us together tore and you fell down a pile. The sound was so loud and echoing, it froze joints.

It was the loudest thing since you left.

The legs locked and the neck stiffened. Turning around was a slow process. Looking down was painful, not slow.

Your big head had landed hard on a can, denting it slightly. Your face was tilted up, your eyes large, round, and empty. Your neck had a kink and an edge that had not been there before. Your

small arm had flapped around in the fall and landed under you at an odd angle and a strange, dark liquid oozed out from your shoulder joint.

A squeal of distress proved impossible to suppress.

That was you at the bottom, you were there...

You hadn't shouted, hadn't bent your knees or put your hands over your head. You'd flopped and broken.

Nausea took over and the knees folded gently.

Nausea? What? Why would they simulate that too?

This thought was distant, somewhere up in the smoke.

A few silent minutes went by, and after some scrummaging, a new wrapper was acquired. This one was not as see-through, it had probably once been a color other than faded gray and it was huge, maybe twice your size. The parents must have been giants to use things like this. You'd said they were, which means they probably were, still, it was hard to remember anything about them except their hands though. Thin and soft.

You were softly pulled from the can, wrapped up gently, eyes half closed and once again, tied to the back.

You were painstakingly dragged up from the dip between the piles, wrappers and plastic packages slid under, threatening to send us tumbling back down. Eventually though, the journey resumed, one echoing, crackling step after another.

After a few hours... or a few minutes, hard to tell without others, there was a noise. A clunk, more precisely. This was unusual in the fact that it hadn't coincided with any of our movements.

That didn't happen very often and when it did...

Now there wasn't just alone, there was afraid and we had to move.

Doubling the pace was difficult on the motors but it was the more cautious thing to do. You'd have probably rather we got to our destination.

We ran up and slid down again and again. It was hard to tell if there were other noises while we did but as the sky started to darken, we slowed down. There was no point in running forever, it had probably been left behind. We moved cautiously, slowly through the night, gaining confidence as time went by. The smoke had dissipated somewhat, retreated to the sky where it swirled slowly. It sort of looked like your old pictures of the ocean, gray and blotchy.

Had the ocean actually looked like that? What had swimming been like?

Looking up at the sky like this, it was easy to imagine falling up into it, tumbling through the gray and fluffy to the inky abyss above.

Maybe swimming had been like that, a long, cold fall.

*Crash clunk*

Oh no...

Fear spiked, dropping insides and shaking knees. Hands reached out, moved by the habit of holding yours. They were met with air.

Another hand shot out through a pile, stretching and grasping towards you. It was huge, half your size and long, slightly too long to be a real parent's hands. Its beige fingers crawled forward, remaining stiff and straight as they did.

The knees refused to move, the eyes stayed forward, watching.

The hand latched onto something heavy on the ground and pulled. The pile collapsed around the thing within it and a figure emerged, tall and thin.

The knees started to listen, backing away slowly. The eyes were still trapped.

It was on all fours in a way that was disconnected from its design. It had no doubt been made with the idea of a biped in mind, without proper execution.

“Bipeds take too long to engineer.” You had said.

“Is this better than alone?” Asked a small voice.

Run.

No, this *was* alone.

Nothing was more alone than the pits where parent's eyes should have been. Nothing was more alone than the slightly baggy and torn plastic skin that covered the thing's naked body. The fakeness of its too-wide smile made to lure us in, put the fact that there was only one heart left under a bright and harsh light.

Run.

"We don't have hearts" You would have said....

RUN

Something clicked and the hunt had started. Motors whirred to life, you were frantically yanked forward and up the nearest pile. Luckily, it held and the fingers brushing your back closed around nothing.

The crawler was long and fast but stupid and clumsy. It moved like how you described dogs did but wrong. It jerkily tried to follow us, its neck bent permanently up, damaged from being in a position improper for its anatomy.

"Design flaw" you would have said.

The crawler's weight and broken limbs failed it and it fell through the pile with a crash. Slowly making it collapse and slide down. The package under us started to fall.

Up, we had to go up more. Any lower and it would snatch us.

But there was nowhere more "up" to go...

So forward. You would make it. You had to.

You were untied from the back and brought to the side.

Motors whirred, joints creaked, cans fell.

The crawler was silent.



You were thrown to the next pile. A feat which you would have probably thought impossible.

Please...

You were stopped from falling by a can which your back crashed onto with a creak.

Relief unclenched hands and let legs jump to you. You were hastily tied to the back. The crawler was confused for a moment. It had clambered up the collapsed pile, finding nothing there. For a few seconds, it scanned uselessly. Enough time to dive under the leftovers and to start digging down. The lower we went, the safer. The crawler would climb eventually, and it was faster, but it was big and could not dig.

The danger was it possibly being able to detect heat. It could follow us and wait... Like the first one did...

Whatever, that would be dealt with later.

The idea of getting caught by that thing was newly chilling. If we had been parents, tears would have flown through the spaces between the leftovers around us.

A survival instinct? How odd for one in this situation.

Maybe it was the idea of you getting tossed aside and forgotten that was so repugnant. Maybe it was that being torn open and drained didn't seem all that pleasant.

Either way, as we started moving, silence was kept in the cramped darkness.

We inched forward, forearms bellow us, legs almost flat behind us, you lay on top. Every few seconds, we stopped to pull a leftover out of the way or to get you unstuck.

The space around us threatened to collapse with every pull forward. But no matter how unstable, it was better than what was above.

Eventually though, the motors, unaccustomed to this weight, overheated and it was time to take a break.

Remember when you first found that scared little robot? It had been in a place similar to this. All cramped and dark. The fear had been even stronger then. All-consuming, debilitating, made more potent by confusion and ignorance.

Q3 had just been caught, right outside of the tunnel. We'd been created together and left beside each other when the last of the parents started to fade. They'd gone exploring into the piles, digging tunnels to get around. Being alone was too scary so the only option was to follow them. They didn't know about the crawlers; they weren't careful while leaving the safety of the underground.

One had been waiting. It had snatched them. The knees didn't work so nothing was done as they kicked, their voice box screeched, and their cutting tool broke uselessly on twitching fingers. Eventually, the crawler smelled Q's battery out, in their chest. Its long fingers clenched around their torso and pulled.

A scream, broken voice box shitters and limbs going limp. The thing's face didn't move.

Q's chest had been pulled inside-out, exposing their battery. Wires fell to their side, dark liquid splashed onto the leftovers, and everything floated into the smoke.

Nothing to do but sit and wait for the crawler to find the other power-source that cowered lamely nearby.

A shudder shook the things that lay on top of you.

Now that the motors had somewhat cooled, moving was probably a better use of time than thinking of such scary things.

We started making progress again, slowly but surely.

But what would happen after the library? What was there left to do?

Maybe nothing or maybe something could be made.

Not that it mattered now anyway.

Reach, pull, move, reach, pull, move, again and again until we entered an already dug tunnel, where walking became possible.

The library was slowly getting nearer, this was one of the tunnels you'd built close to it, particularly the one you'd used to follow that first crawler with.

Your hand had reached out softly. Your skillful distraction of the monster was worthy of complete awe.

After it took Q3, and you'd safely brought us back to the library, you left. This had created more confusion, the questions of where you had gone piling up with those about the crawler. Going after you was considered but the idea of running into that thing again prevented any movement.

For a night, there was quiet. Then, you'd crashed through a hole in the ceiling, a big black plastic bag in tow. You fell with a distressed whirr, trying to catch you had resulted in us colliding with a loud metal clunk before being buried under the bag. You'd rolled out from the pile, stood up and brushed yourself off.

“That tile was stable last time I went up there. It must have decayed over the last few days.”

“Oh, I guess it must have.”

“Why did you try to catch me? I'm larger than you and was carrying something, you could have been crushed.”

“Well, I thought the fall would hurt.”

“We are both robots, we cannot feel pain.”

“Ah... I guess you're right.”

“Regardless, I am glad you are uncrushed.”

“So am I- glad you're not hurt I mean....So what's in the bag?” Out of all the questions buzzing around, this was the only one that was able to be articulated.

“Oh, I brought them back.”

“Brought who back?”

“The robot that was attacked by the battery extractor. The one you were with.”

“You mean...”

“Unfortunately, they’ve been damaged beyond repair but I figured you’d want them back.”

“Oh... why would I want that?” The fact that Q would never talk again was quieting the voice box.

“Well, to give them a funeral, right?”

“A funeral?”

“Yes, excuse me for a moment.” You’d scampered off out of view through the towering shelves.

The dark bag sat on the floor, seeing Q’s broken body with wires hanging out was not an enticing concept so it was left alone.

After a few seconds, you’d popped back into view, dragging a large, marine-blue book.

“Here.” You’d stood it up and gestured towards the title.

“A record of mortuary practices across history” written in faded gold letters with a smaller, cursive subtitle that read “Tome 5: The twenty-first century.”

Being able to walk upright greatly increased our speed, it was only a few hours before the dull yellow glow of the sky became visible in the distance.

Your wrapper had been almost completely shredded by our crawl, that was fine though, we didn’t have long to go.

No crawlers were visible outside and the library was in sight. It was huge, larger than a thousand of us. Its three floors were visible through large glass windows, some of which were

miraculously intact, and it had large slabs of marble decorating its faded gray brick outside. It was just as impressive as the first time.

The first time you'd given a tour of the library was filled with awe and loss. The imposing silence of it was a reminder of Q's situation but the bookshelves that seemed to go on forever served as an adequate distraction from it. We'd been looking for a coffin, but that journey was constantly interrupted by breaks to look at books. You seemed to know every bit of knowledge that this place had to offer, yet you weren't bored at all.

You'd managed to explain the purpose of a funeral during our search.

"The parents did it to make their dead feel better and to celebrate their lives."

"Did it work?"

"Probably not, there is no evidence that it did anyways."

"So why do you think we should do one?"

"Well, because it's interesting and I thought it could make you feel better."

"Hmm... if there's a chance it could make Q feel better, then I guess it makes me feel a little better too."

You paused, as if about to say something, shook your head and continued.

"Alright, let's start at page 50."

*Crash clunk crash*

Behind us.

We turned and there it was, a few meters away, dead-eyed, fake smiling and stiffly crawling towards us.

One of the entrances to this tunnel must have been left uncovered. It had followed us and gotten in.

Fear reared its head, preparing the motors for a new surge of effort.

The hollow crawler lunged awkwardly, arms forward.

We took off, ducking to escape its grasp. Your head jerked back as we reached the light.

Destroy the entrance. Trap it.

But it was too late, the thing was already halfway out, squeezing and wiggling itself free, what should have been its eyes were fixed right through you, where the battery was.

The library was not far, only a few piles away. Its entrance was completely blocked by leftovers but there was another way in.

Up and down and up again, we crashed through packages and furniture, the motors would probably be damaged by going at this speed while carrying you and the knee joints were making strange clicking sounds. That wasn't important right now, we had to make it.

There it was, the metal drainage pipe which hung from the roof, a way to escape.

Metallic crunches rang out behind us as the crawler got free and made its way towards us.

The knees bent and tensed slightly beyond what they were made for as we sprang into the air.

Latching onto the pipe, we crawled up as fast as the worn-out limbs would allow. The roof was right in reach.

*Snap*

The damaged plastic that kept you attached gave out and you plummeted to the ground. No

Your hand was caught by the fingers, leaving only one arm to grab at the roof.

*Pop*

The shoulder was wrenched from its socket, but the fingers did not let go. We swung back and forth as the crawler reached the pipe. Its face was blank as always, not a spark of glee or recognition, even as it neared its prey.

You wouldn't have liked the word "prey" either.

The arm inched forward, and the limp shoulder was brought to the top, then the chest, then the legs before you were finally pulled up. Your face dragged across the tiles and your legs dropped onto them as the motors gave out. Moving would be impossible until they had completely cooled.

Bellow, the crawler jumped and snatched at the pipe, its body, however, was at its limit and the thing's shoulder snapped clean off. It fell to the ground, tried to get up but could not stand without that front arm.

So instead, it looked up and wriggled pathetically, it did not quit and even as the sky darkened, it kept trying to reach us. Being forced to stare at it should have brought fear but the circuits were probably too overheated to feel that.

Eventually, when the sky looked its darkest and heaviest, the motors had recovered enough to allow movement. What was left of your plastic wrapper was tied around us and we hobbled towards the hole that you used to use to get in.

A dark wooden box about your size lay in front of us on the flat part of the mostly slanted roof. "Goodbye Q3." Was crudely carved onto it. You'd used your cutting tool to help write it, as this model had not been provided with one.

We hopped carefully down through it, landing onto the top of a shelf, one we had moved there together. A cloud of dust flew up around us, we stayed there for a few seconds as it gently floated back down. The library was dark and still, it apparently had been since we left. Nothing had changed, books were still reorganized according to genre, size and color, just the way you'd left

it. Huge paintings still covered the walls, faded and chipped in some places and off-color in others, where you'd tried restoring them. Scenes of mountains and rivers were depicted on the far walls, in between windows and tall, dark forests lined the walls beside us.

The mountains sort of looked like piles but larger, sharper and were colored in colors one would never see in piles. You'd explained that there were still mountains around to this day, they probably looked different though. This thought was very interesting, they'd probably be the biggest treasure out there, given the opportunity, you would have no doubt tried to collect them.

We climbed down the shelf, slowly because the shoulders kept clicking and shaking. Without anyone to help repair them, they probably wouldn't recover, that was okay though.

We landed on the once-bourbon carpeted floor, soft, stained and stringy. We passed the stairs to the level below. They were surrounded by large, ornate stone and wood railings who curved elegantly down. We had slid down them together almost every day, you'd protested at first, pointing out the danger and the risk of damaging the decorations. Eventually though, after a conversation on safety, you'd accepted and for hours, our laughs would ring out into the piles, singular in their loudness.

The steps and the carpet in front of them were torn and scratched, this pattern of damage lead to a fallen and crooked shelf. A dark stain surrounded it and a large beige hand stuck out from under it.

The dusty hand of a destroyed crawler.

The thing had broken through a window downstairs, it had charged right for you and had almost caught you. Luckily, a precariously placed shelf was just barely able to be pushed onto the thing, crushing it before it could hurt you.

You'd laughed nervously and, after a hug, expressed your amazement and admiration at the quick thinking and strength required to have successfully pushed the shelf on time.

“That was quite impressive, in your place, I would have frozen in fear. Thank you.”



This was the day we'd decided to leave the library. Too many crawlers had moved to the area and this incident had been the "last straw" (or so you'd called it).

We'd said goodbye to our home, you'd crammed anything you could take into our bags and with a bit of encouragement and reassurance, shuffled away from your favorite place. We'd find another, find new treasures, make huge and better discoveries for years to come. You'd repeat that promise every now and then. Both when you were filled with the joy and intrigue of finding a new treasure and when we couldn't find anything at all for days on end.

We moved towards the windows, one heavy and shaky step at a time, to your reading nook. It was not much, just a bean bag chair surrounded by walls fashioned of the books you couldn't take with you. They mostly consisted of encyclopedias, historical non-fiction and horror. We had spent evenings curled up together on that chair, reading those too scary to handle alone, assigning characters to each other and acting out the parts. It was your favorite spot, where you were probably most excited to return to.

It's good that you finally got to go back.

You were laid down on the chair, your wrapper was untied from you, your hand was held one last time. For hours nothing moved and there was no sound. But eventually, the time came, the sun rose, yellow and pale, filtering in slowly through the windows and illuminating your faded green eyes. I stood and your fingers flopped onto the chair.

Thank you for finding me, my treasure, maybe later I will find something of my own.

I'll be back at some point and the world will have a good rest.

For now, though, I should go.