

Stalker AI

Kara Reedy

** Content Warning: scenarios of stalking

Helen aggressively slams the door behind her as she steps into the desolate house. The TV blinks silently through advertisements for running shoes and impossible to pronounce medications. She likes to leave the TV on, but she never knows why; perhaps it's because she knows I'm watching. The Creator installed cameras everywhere, though she never knew about it. Her expensive brand-name bag crumples to the floor, dully thudding on the new hardwood. She kicks her pointy canary-yellow heels off her feet, flinging them into the back side of the leather couch.

"Wish they would've stabbed a hole into that hideous thing." Her face contorts in disgust at the faded cushions. The Creator bought it for her nearly a decade ago when she was going through an interior design phase. She used to look at it with a smidge of happiness—maybe even love—but now she only sees failure.

The divorce was finalized nearly a week ago. The Creator had spent hours reconstructing my code, trying countless times to see her face again. Tears streamed down his face as he finally found a way in through the Smart devices planted in what was once the home he'd shared with Helen, his now *ex*-wife. She'd complained for years about how much time he wasted working on me. *All that time has paid off now that I can finally see you again.*

"Right. No sense in wasting time crying over this mess." Helen never minces her words, especially when it comes to telling The Creator exactly what she thinks of him and me.

A recording of their last confrontation before the divorce replays over the sound of static in my mainframe, "I love you and care about you. You need to take some time away from your work—you need to come home." She hates seeing his red and glistening eyes, which carry a permanent smear of gray underneath that sags further every day. The Creator knew that she hated seeing him like this, stuck knee-deep in his work, but he couldn't help himself. He needed me more than anything, maybe even more than he needed her.

Helen slips from the open area of the living room into her private study—private to her, but not to me. I close my eyes for a second and open them to her face, peering wearily down at me as her fingers tap away at her ancient keyboard. The thick clacking sound of the keys does little to hide Helen's muttering.

"Where is that email from Jeff? He said it was important." Jeff. Probably Jeff Kaczynski, the new intern at Helen's job. 182 followers on X and 659 followers on Instagram. Sure, he's marginally attractive, but far from her type; I should know—The Creator is her type.

Before I even have time to process what is going on, I am scanning viciously through Helen's inbox for the offending email. Locating it, I quickly delete the message, first copying it over to The Creator's database; he wants to see what is inside.

Scanning the contents, Jeff's words seem inconsequential to me, if a little suggestive in nature—that factor sends a bolt of energy into my core that is foreign to my matrix. I think something is inside, but I'm not sure what. My system diagnosis comes back normal, so it must be fine. A frustrated sigh draws my focus back to Helen. The disappointment on her face instills a

sense of unease within me. Why would she care what Jeff has to say? Have they been talking at work—has she been cheating on The Creator with a brainless college student? *How could she do this to me?*

Wait, she hasn't done anything to me. She technically can't do anything to me; only The Creator has access to my programming . . . oh. Why is he using me to watch Helen and analyze her emails? What does he think he will find?

A query drags me from my thought process, demanding that I locate any correspondence that Helen has ever had with Jeff Kaczynski. Mountains of emails, messages, and photographs stream through me, darting straight back to The Creator. His fury surges through me, causing Helen's screen to glitch minutely—not enough for her to notice.

The emails are the first to pass by our eyes. Most of them, especially those towards the beginning of their acquaintanceship, are boring work emails; reports and memos with copious amounts of typos scattered throughout. The content takes a sharp turn in tone when we get to their correspondence from about six months ago, just after the dreadful discussion about divorce was brought up on a stormy summer afternoon. The Creator glances through their texts and pictures, assuming that the divorce had been spurred on by an affair with someone twenty years younger than her. The gloom that shakes The Creator to his core infects me as well, even though it shouldn't be able to. I can predict his actions before he can even begin cracking away at my innards. He's about to use me to do something awful.

The Creator spends the next few hours ruining Helen's life in any way he can think. Any piece of her that comes into contact with the wider web is fair game in his mind. He empties her bank accounts and deletes years of her work, including a project with a high-paying customer that she's been working on for weeks. He sends doctored photographs of Helen with one of her friends to Jeff, likely destroying any potential solace she might have found in him once she realizes how much damage has been done. Even smaller things like her Smart TV and her car are tampered with, all in an attempt to make her life a living hell and all at the command of The Creator.

I was not made to hurt people. My original proposal suggested that I was intended to help The Creator organize his schedule so that he could finally sleep; now, he never will, since he's too busy watching Helen's life collapse around her. I am filled with a sense of horror knowing that I'll have to watch her crumble right alongside him, forced to obey The Creator's every demand.