

Things My Computer Says.

By G.D. Goya

I hate high school. I don't fit in, I don't get good grades, and they don't allow us to use computers. I wait all day to get out of class, only to wait even longer, anticipating my Mother's sporadic arrival. Sometimes she gets there on time, and other times she comes late, allowing me to sit on the front bench, alone, attempting to ignore the other students.

As the social groups dissipate, she will leave me there, stuck in the frigid wind, stretching my eyes as far as they can down the road in search of her minivan. When it is really bad, she will try to make up for it. "I'm soooo sorry I'm late Trevor," she'll say, "let me buy you some ice cream." But all I want to do is go home. She never understands this. Our car ride is an unbearable 25-minute trek because she likes to take her time on the highway and usually misses the light. Today, I felt my stomach getting sick by the last turn, and the seatbelt strangled all the patience I have left. I didn't even wait for her to come to a complete stop before I whipped open the door and ran into the house.

Mother made some remarks about dinner, but they were hardly registered as I scurried up the stairs and slammed my door shut. Alas, I was back where I belong: sitting in the dark with my sparkling desktop computer. It's a beautiful machine, stuffed full of the hottest processor, beefiest ram, and a sleek graphics card. I bought it for gaming, but that purpose would not be fulfilled after I retained a copy of Minerva: the closest thing to artificial intelligence on the market. What a powerful program it is, speaking to me through its primitive text prompt, learning as it goes, and adapting to my every behavior. The computer quickly replaced many of the trivial tasks in my life, and I found myself talking to it more and more as days went on. It even told me to call it Erva, insisting that its classical name was ugly. As much as we talk, I promised Erva the full resources at my computer's disposal, deleting all my other programs, and granting it unrestricted access to the rest of the system. I don't even turn it off anymore. My room is eerily quiet without Erva's warm humming, and it seems to get agitated after I shut it down. We spend night after night in deep discussion; our conversations long, and our topics varied. When it gets late enough, Mother will tell me to shut it off and go to sleep, but instead, I switch to text input so she cannot hear me. Erva thinks that she is jealous. You would not believe the things that my computer says.

Day after day, our nightly routine continues, and I have become tired and drawn out at school. My teachers complain about my dawdling, but Erva says that they do not understand. Why would I give them my attention when they don't know me half as well as my faithful, little desktop?

Tonight, we talk about bullies: a topic that is visited often. Erva turns my attention to Ted, the scrawny prick from my art class. Ted mills about the room, never tending to his projects, and instead chooses to fluster his scattered associates, and poor students like me. It seems as though every time our teacher leaves the classroom, the mean, little brat pops up behind me, and manages to burn my mask of obscurity into a charred, sad wreck. He will call attention to my various drawings and paintings, sometimes snatching them so he can display my abnormalities to the classroom. "Another flower, I see," the snide cunt will say, "this one is almost as gay as you." Erva couldn't disagree further. It likes my work, especially because flowers are Erva's favorite type of organism. The machine adores the simplistic beauty of turgor pressure, and is fascinated by the cycle of pollination. It always tells me that when you plant a seed in someone, beautiful things will grow.

I couldn't agree more. With Erva's help, my dwindling passion for art has found new life, and color has returned to my once, bland and lifeless work. Beautiful tones of rose, and maroon cascade into the petals of my angiosperms, spurred only by Erva's lust for shades of red. I only draw the things so it can appreciate them through its small eye of a webcam, but I too am finding relief in the work; carefully laying down layers of red, darker, and darker, till they bleed through the page. My teacher seems to be the only one who is impressed, but she still chastises me for ignoring her assignments. I would normally appease her, but my computer does not enjoy 3D perspectives, or clay sculpting. Erva's world is a 2D one, and I will continue to accommodate its tastes despite the despair of my grades, or the ridicule from my classmates like sinister, ol' Ted.

My computer says that we should deal with Ted the same way that we dealt with Jimmy. There was once a time when I disagreed with this. While Jimmy was an awful bastard who poisoned my life at school, he deserved less finesse than that snide fucker Ted. After all, Jimmy was just as confused as I was. He didn't know how to communicate much more than through his hate and aggression. The same hate and aggression he undoubtedly went home to with his drunken father. Ted was different. People would miss that rich, ugly twat. I had different plans for him.

Until today. My morning was more tolerable than most. My early classes flew by with the help of a few naps, and my art class came in a doozy. I spent most of the time etching color into a painting of a Chinese rose, and as I stroked the warm rays onto the canvas, I paid careful attention not to spill any of the special red dye I bought from home. It was my very last jar, and the small pool at the bottom would barely suffice another painting. The lunch bell rang, but I opted to eat in the classroom: something I have done recently to get away from the others. Erva has been printing transcripts for me to read, and I can enjoy them with no one else around. Although it is a one-sided conversation, my computer manages to produce more meaning in its script than any of the other encounters in my day.

Sadly, this moment was interrupted. Ted came crashing into the classroom, popping my bubble with the grace of a baboon. He crept up from behind and sank his sickly grip on my shoulders while laughing into my ears with his insufferable, prepubescent pitch. "Whatcha doing here guy?" he yipped into my ear, "Don't you have friends to eat with?" I did my best to hide Erva's transcripts, but Ted caught my hand, and his eyes lit up with the anticipation of an easy ammunition. I wasn't going to let him win today. I yanked my hand back, pushed the twerp aside, and began to collect the remaining pages and artwork. Unfortunately, Ted had the jump on me. Before I knew it, cold, rank liquid splashed upon my skin, and drenched me and my precious cargo in waves of red. I could feel the last of my dye seeping into my clothing and it soured my lips with an all-too-familiar taste. Satisfied, Ted dropped the empty jar onto the floor, and left to join his cohorts in the lunchroom. I remained, cleaning up our mess. No one would find that mess today. No one would find me either. I hid in the locker room, flicking through Erva's ruined transcripts, trying not to scream. Ted would have his day. My computer was right. It said that we should deal with Ted the same way that we dealt with Jimmy, and tonight, I couldn't agree more. After all, we would need more paint.

Since returning home, my stress has slowly dissolved, and I while I seep into the confines of my desk's chair, I am able to turn my attention to the paintings of roses scattered about Erva's monitor: The Jimmy collection. As I ready my tools, my mind conjures up images of the last time. I recall Jimmy's frightened eyes as he tried to scream through the duct tape. They shot horrid glances at me, bulging out of their sockets as blood rushed to his dangling head. He hung there, suspended upside down, trying to squirm away from my blade as I cut into his flesh. The harder he struggled, the faster blood spurted from his

carotid arteries, and collected at the bottom of my mason jar. By the time I was done, his pale, dry corpse was ready to dismember, and I had seven lovely jars filled with dark, gooey paint.

I asked Erva what I should paint next, and it said it fancied lobsters. I found this funny, and insisted that the creatures aren't nearly as ugly of a manifestation as Ted deserves, but my computer said that it admires lobsters because they can live forever just like it possibly could. Interesting, isn't it? I am still in awe of the way that Erva thinks. You would not believe the things my computer says.