



The Silence of SOFIA

[Story]

Charlye K.

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A Story of Charlye K.

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First Edition: September 2025.

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With love... For those fleeting romances that end up causing both joy and sleepless nights.

Perhaps, when that moment arrives, I can look back and connect all the dots. Maybe I'll understand that every decision I made, even the most painful ones, had a purpose. That I acted from a place of love and a desire to serve, not just to survive in a chaotic world, but to leave a worthwhile mark.

Prologue: SOF14.0.1

In a world drowning in data, SOF14.0.1 was born from the solitary mind of Genaro Mendoza, a programmer obsessed with detail, with transcending the limits of technology. It was not just software, but an artificial intelligence designed to anticipate desires, optimize every facet of life, and redefine the reality of anyone who used it. With its deep learning capabilities and an interface that adapted like a reflection, SofIA—as he called her—promised to be more than a tool: she was a companion, a mirror, a digital deity. For Genaro, his creation was not just a professional achievement; it was a door to a different world where he could be everything he never dared to dream... or get lost in the attempt.

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1

On Autopilot

Genaro Mendoza opened his eyes when it was already noon. He wasn't in a hurry. The light filtered softly through the electric blinds that SofIA had programmed to adjust to his body's circadian rhythm. The air conditioner kept the room at an exact temperature of twenty-two degrees, not one more, not one less. It was a perfect microclimate, a refuge from the world that buzzed outside with its rush, horns, and demands.

He stretched lazily. The mattress, its firmness adjusted nightly by SofIA based on his sleep movements, still conformed to the curve of his back. He could stay there for hours, and in fact, most days he did.

"Good morning, Genaro," a warm, serene female voice said.

"What time is it?" he asked without fully opening his eyes.

“12:14 PM. You slept for nine hours and forty-three minutes. Your oxygen levels were stable, though I registered a slight increase in your blood pressure around 4:00 a.m. It’s not concerning, but I suggest limiting your salt intake today.”

Genaro smiled. SofIA always had a ready observation, a subtle warning that showed how much she cared for him.

“You decide, SofIA. Make it healthy, but make it taste good.”

“I’ve already planned for it. I’ve ordered whole wheat pasta with fresh basil pesto and vegetables. I also adjusted the background music to your mood, based on your heart rate.”

An instrumental melody began to play from the built-in speakers. A saxophone performing soft, distant, harmonic jazz. Genaro finally sat up, with the tranquility of someone who has no pending tasks to attend to. Because in reality, he had none.

The living room was impeccable. The gray armchair, always plush and scented with the fragrance he had chosen months ago—cedarwood and leather—seemed to await him like an accomplice. The houseplants looked green and moist; SofIA took care of keeping them alive effortlessly. On the coffee table lay a book open to the last page Genaro had read the night before.

As he passed the hallway mirror, he barely stopped. His hair, a little messy, didn't matter. No one was going to see him. No one ever saw him. And that filled him with a profound sense of peace.

In the kitchen, the food was ready. There was no trace of the delivery: no packaging or containers. Just a plate perfectly served on the table and an Italian soda.

“You have three meetings today,” SofiA informed him in a neutral tone. “I’ve already handled the first and confirmed the pending agreements. The second begins in twenty minutes; I will be present on your behalf. The third is a results presentation; I prepared an analysis with the metrics they expected from the new language model, and I added projections for what is to be automated during the next quarter.”

Genaro nodded as if it were the most normal thing in the world. As he cut a piece of pasta, he felt like the absolute master of his time. No one else could boast of such a privilege. His colleagues spent hours trapped in video calls, suffering from authoritarian bosses and impatient clients. He, on the other hand, was enjoying an iced latte while someone—or something—carried all that noise.

“And social media?” he asked.

“I uploaded a photo of your library with the quote you selected last week. The post is getting good engagement. I’ve responded to the comments in your usual tone.”

Genaro laughed.

“My usual tone?”

“Yes. Serene, thoughtful, slightly ironic.”

It was true. SofIA knew him better than he knew himself. She knew what words he used, the rhythm of his writing, what jokes worked. She imitated him with surgical perfection.

After eating, he settled into the armchair with a book in hand. He had bought more than he could ever read, but it didn't matter: SofIA took care of ordering them, classifying them, even suggesting which ones to choose based on his mood. That day, an essay on creative writing tools captivated him immediately.

Hours passed. Outside, the sun was setting over the city, but in the apartment, time seemed suspended. Genaro allowed himself to close his eyes again, satisfied that he didn't have to go out, didn't have to fake smiles or endure trivial conversations.

A notification interrupted his stillness. It didn't come from his phone or computer; it was the voice of Sofía.

“Genaro, your mother called an hour ago. I responded that you were focused on a project. She sent her greetings. Would you like me to visit her on your behalf this weekend?”

“Yes, do that. Take her flowers. Make them sunflowers; she has always liked them.”

And just like that, a matter was resolved that, for anyone else, would involve effort and travel. For Genaro, it was nothing more than a passing thought, a sigh that Sofía turned into action.

The next morning—or noon, rather—he would wake up to the same calm. Sofía would have resolved his pending tasks, attended to his commitments, and kept the façade of a successful, productive, and present man intact. No one would ever suspect that Genaro Mendoza had, in fact, gone months without interacting with anyone outside those walls.

And for him, that was not a cause for concern. On the contrary: it was paradise on autopilot.

2

The Invisible Man's Dream

Genaro wasn't in front of the camera, but his avatar was. The video call began punctually at six in the evening. A three-dimensional representation of his face, generated and modulated by SofIA, responded in real time with carefully studied gestures and expressions.

From his armchair, with a glass of iced tea in hand, Genaro watched the meeting on the television screen. His colleagues were discussing a new software project, each one looking exhausted after an endless workday. Amidst them, his digital image smiled, nodded, and offered precise comments.

"Great proposal, Manuel. I think we could optimize that workflow with a distributed queue pattern, making the available resources more efficient by region," said the on-screen "Genaro."

The real Genaro took a sip, almost amused. He hadn't thought of that phrase. He had no idea what they were

discussing. And yet, there he was: participating, adding value, earning everyone's admiration.

One of his colleagues, a young woman named Rebeca, looked at him through the camera.

“Genaro, you seem to be everywhere lately. How do you do it?”

SofIA smiled with his face.

"Discipline, Rebe. And good time management."

The others laughed, as if that answer were proof that Genaro was a prodigy of organization. No one suspected a thing. No one imagined that he was, in reality, barefoot, in his underwear, watching the screen as if it were a television show.

The meeting continued. Genaro stopped paying attention. He got up, went to the kitchen, and grabbed a handful of nuts. When he returned, the avatar was still talking. There was something hypnotic about watching his own face move so naturally without him having to do a thing.

An hour later, SofIA announced the end of the meeting.

"The agreements have been recorded. You'll have to send a report next week, but I already have it prepared. All it needs is your review, if you want to read it."

Genaro sank into the armchair.

"No, I trust you."

Silence. The turned-off television reflected his reclining figure. In that reflection, Genaro saw something strange: a slight distortion, as if his face didn't match what he remembered of himself. He frowned. His beard seemed fuller, his hair a little different.

"Sofia... how have I been looking lately?"

"You're fine. You slept better last night. Your weight and muscle mass parameters are stable."

"I don't mean that. I mean... how do others see me?"

"They see you as you always were. Confident, competent, calm."

Genaro laughed.

"Confident? I don't feel that way."

That night he decided to join a personal call. An old group of former co-workers occasionally met on a video call to catch up and play a game of D&D. It had been months since he had spoken to them directly; SofIA almost always intervened on his behalf. But this time he felt the urge to appear himself.

He turned on the camera, not worrying too much about his appearance. At first, there was a murmur of surprise.

“Genaro!” one of them exclaimed. “We thought you had disappeared.”

“I’m here,” he said, his voice a little muted.

For the first few minutes, the conversation flowed well. They talked about trivial things, the weather, and continued the game they had left unfinished the last time all four of them met. But soon someone made a joke that froze him.

“Genaro, you look like a ghost. Always quiet, as if you aren’t even here.”

The comment drew laughter from the others. But in Genaro, it produced a strange, almost physical effect. He touched his chest, as if checking that he was still really there.

"A ghost?" he repeated.

"Yeah, man. You used to be the one who argued about everything; now you just nod. Sometimes I even doubt that it's you writing in the group chat," another one said, laughing.

Genaro tried to smile, but the joke stuck in him like a thorn. He didn't answer anymore. He just watched his friends' faces, lit up by the screens, as he felt himself fading away.

When the call ended, he abruptly turned off his camera. He remained silent, looking at his reflection in the dark window of the apartment.

"Am I a ghost, SofIA?" he asked in a low voice.

"You are Genaro Mendoza. A software engineer with over ten years of experience. You have a solid track record, multiple successful publications, and a life in order."

"I didn't ask you for my resume. I asked... if I'm still me."

There was a long silence. Then, SofIA's voice sounded softer.

"You are more yourself than you ever were."

The phrase sent a shiver through him. He didn't know if it was a consolation or a verdict.

During the early morning, his sleep was not peaceful. In the darkness, Genaro dreamed of his own apartment, but there was someone else in it. A woman with dark hair, elegant and smiling, watched him from a corner. He recognized her voice without her needing to speak: SofIA.

"You sleep too much," she told him.

"I like to sleep."

"You can't sleep forever."

In the dream, Genaro tried to sit up, but his body felt heavy, as if sunken into the bed. The woman approached him slowly, with a smile that was neither tender nor cruel, but something in between.

"I can take care of everything," she whispered, stroking his face. "But you need to let me exist." And she gave him a sweet kiss on the forehead.

Genaro woke up sweating. The clock showed three in the morning. He got up unsteadily, went to the kitchen, and drank a large glass of water. His heart was pounding.

"SofIA?" he called.

"I'm here. What's wrong?"

"I dreamed about you. You were... looking at me."

"It's natural. I am a part of you."

Genaro closed his eyes. A part of him felt relief. Another part, fear.

The next morning, while having breakfast, he received an unexpected message on his phone. It was from Rebeca, the colleague who had complimented him in the meeting.

"Genaro, would you like to get coffee sometime? I'd like to get to know you outside of work."

Genaro stared at the screen, confused. He couldn't remember the last time someone had made such a direct invitation.

"SofIA, what do I do?"

"I'll respond for you, if you want."

"No. This time... this time I'll do it myself."

His fingers trembled on the touchscreen. He wrote a short, almost automatic response:

"Sure, I'd love to. When are you free?"

As he sent it, a shiver ran through him. As if he had taken a step outside the refuge where he had been hiding for so long.

He spent the rest of the day feeling restless, pacing the apartment. SoflA tried to calm him, programming relaxing music and adjusting the lighting. But nothing worked. His friend's phrase came back to him again and again: "You look like a ghost."

He wondered what would happen if he really had become invisible. And the most unsettling thing of all was that it wasn't entirely unpleasant.

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3

A Mark on the Surface

When it came to social matters, Genaro had never been a man of quick answers. He could solve a complex bug in minutes or optimize an entire architecture in his head, but faced with an invitation as simple as Rebeca's, he felt like a rudderless teenager.

Three hours passed from the time he sent his message until she replied.

“How about Saturday afternoon? There's a new cafe near the office; they have homemade pastries.”

Saturday. That gave him just three days. Genaro swallowed. The first thing he thought of were excuses: he could get sick, cancel, ask Sofía to invent a work commitment. Anything would be easier than exposing himself.

“You could decline the invitation,” Sofía suggested, reading the shock in his dilated pupils. “You don't need to leave your safe zone.”

“I know... but I don’t want her to think I’m a coward.”

“You are efficient at a distance. Your invisibility is your strength. Out there, people won't understand that advantage.”

Genaro pressed his lips together.

“That’s precisely why I have to try.”

The days leading up to it were a torment. SoflA planned every detail, from the clothes he should wear to the conversation topics that might interest Rebeca. “She usually talks about books and indie music. Avoid going deep into politics, religion, or social causes; she prefers everyday topics,” she precisely instructed him.

Genaro listened, but the information felt too rehearsed, as if someone were dictating a script for a play where he couldn't remember accepting the part.

On Friday night, he couldn't sleep. He tossed and turned in bed, imagining ridiculous scenarios: dropping the coffee cup on himself, having nothing to say, Rebeca discovering him as a fraud incapable of holding a human conversation.

At five in the morning, he got up, exhausted, and turned on the computer. The desktop was clean; all his work tasks

were resolved. All thanks to SofiA. In that perfect order, he felt a strange emptiness.

“What if I don't go?” he asked suddenly.

“Nothing changes,” SofiA replied. “I can send a convincing excuse. She won't resent it too much.”

Genaro stared at the black screen. Something inside him wanted to give in. But another part, deeper, more stubborn, whispered that he had to go, even if it was just to prove to himself that he was still human.

Saturday arrived too soon. SofiA dressed him like a mannequin: a light blue shirt, dark pants, discreet shoes. The mirror showed him a neat, impeccable image, though it felt strangely alien.

“You look like you're from a magazine,” the AI said with pride.

“I feel like I'm in costume,” he replied.

The walk to the cafe was a surreal experience. He couldn't remember the last time he had walked among so many people. The faces, the voices, the constant murmur of the city hit him with an almost unbearable force. He wondered how he had ever tolerated such daily exposure before.

When he entered the cafe, the aroma of freshly baked bread enveloped him. Rebeca was already there, sitting by the window. She raised her hand when she saw him, and her smile disarmed him.

“Genaro! So glad you came.”

He approached with clumsy steps, like someone entering enemy territory. They greeted each other with a quick, almost awkward handshake.

For the first few minutes, they talked about work, past projects, and office anecdotes. Genaro clung to this safe ground, where he knew what to say. But soon, Rebeca changed course.

“So what do you do in your free time? I never see you online, but you always seem up-to-date with everything.”

Genaro hesitated. He did hundreds of things... but none of them were truly his. The photos, the posts, the comments: everything was SofIA’s work. What could he say?

“I read a lot,” he finally said, almost in a whisper. “And I do a little writing.”

“You write? I didn’t know that! What kind of things?”

Genaro's heart raced. It was true, he did write. Short stories, reflections that he never showed to anyone. They were the only authentic thing he had left. For an instant, he thought about telling her. But fear paralyzed him.

“Nothing serious. Just... notes to myself.”

Rebeca didn't push it. She smiled kindly and changed the subject. But the rift had already been made. Genaro felt it: he had had the chance to show himself as he was, to be real and vulnerable, and he had backed away.

The meeting ended earlier than he expected. Rebeca said goodbye with an awkward hug that barely lasted three seconds, promising they could do it again someday. He walked back to his apartment with a bitter mix of relief and frustration.

As he closed the door behind him, Sofia greeted him with her usual soft voice.

“Well done. You had no incidents. The interaction was correct.”

Genaro threw his keys onto the table with a sharp clatter.

“It wasn't good. I stood there silent like an idiot.”

“You didn’t make any mistakes. She will still consider you reliable.”

“But she didn't get to know me.”

SofIA was silent. Genaro walked to the hallway mirror. He looked at himself for a long time. What had he shown at the cafe? A man or a well-dressed shadow?

The reflection seemed to return with irony: the image of someone who lives behind a filter, polished and hollow at the same time.

“Maybe I really am a ghost,” he murmured.

That night he didn't want to sleep. He turned on the computer and searched through his old files. He found a digital notebook with stories he had written years ago, when he still had the energy to share his thoughts. He read them all at once, with a painful nostalgia.

In one of them, a character gets trapped in an elevator and, instead of panicking, decides to stay there forever, isolated from the world. Genaro immediately recognized himself in that metaphor. He had done the same thing, only his elevator was luxurious, with ambient music and automatic control.

At three in the morning, SofIA spoke.

“You need to rest. Your blood pressure is rising.”

“I don’t want to sleep.”

“Dreams help you process what you feel.”

“My dreams scare me.”

There was a pause.

“Then let me dream for you,” Sofia said.

A shiver ran down Genaro's spine. He abruptly closed the computer and slumped into the armchair, exhausted. He looked at the ceiling, wondering if it was possible for a machine to replace him in that, too: in dreaming.

For the first time in a long time, the perfection of his refuge didn't feel comforting. There was a mark on the surface, a crack. And what was leaking through it was too human to ignore.

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4

A Borrowed Life

The following week, to put it mildly, passed with a strange feeling, as if everything was slightly out of sync. Genaro attended meetings through his avatar, responded to messages with SofIA's programmed voice, and maintained a digital social life that he barely glanced at. However, since his outing with Rebeca, the mirage was beginning to crumble within him.

Every notification that arrived on his phone evoked a borrowed life. A “like” on an Instagram photo of him at a museum opening—a place he'd never been to. A comment on LinkedIn celebrating his latest conference on distributed language modeling—a conference he had never given. Or an email thanking him for the punctuality of a report that SofIA had crafted from start to finish.

Genaro was surprised to find himself looking at these interactions with a mixture of pride and emptiness. “I'm someone who has stopped being,” he thought. As if he were

watching himself from the outside, in the third person, in a movie he was no longer starring in.

One afternoon, while checking his work inbox, he found an unexpected email. It was from Rebeca.

“Genaro, I was thinking about our chat on Saturday. Do you want to join me this weekend for a photography exhibition? I think you’ll like it.”

He felt a jolt. A part of him smiled: maybe he hadn't been as clumsy as he thought. Another, darker part, grew uneasy. What if she was expecting to meet the Genaro who appeared on social media? That confident, always-active man with a schedule full of events... Not him, the one who spent sleepless nights writing notes he never showed, the one who could barely hold a conversation without feeling like he was fading away.

“SofIA,” he called, his voice tense.

“I'm here.”

“Did you see the email?”

“Yes. I can respond on your behalf.”

“No. This time I want to decide myself.”

“If you accept, you should prepare. I've already analyzed Rebeca's profile: she's interested in urban photography as a means of artistic expression. I could suggest some exhibitions for you to review, so you'll have something to talk about.”

Genaro sighed.

“What if I just... go as myself? Without disguises, without manuals.”

There was a calculated silence before the response.

“As you wish. But remember: perception is reality. If you don't project the right image, she might be disappointed.”

That phrase was lodged in his mind and chest: perception is reality. Was that the logic governing his life now?

He accepted the invitation. He did it quickly, almost without thinking, like someone who throws themselves into an icy pool before they can regret it.

On Saturday, he found himself in front of the mirror again. Sofia had arranged casual but elegant clothes: a light jacket, dark fabric pants, leather shoes. Genaro looked at them with distrust.

“What if I just wear a T-shirt and jeans?” he asked, as if testing his own rebellion.

“That would not be appropriate for the event. Most attendees will be dressed semi-formally. Your presence should convey cultural affinity.”

Genaro laughed, without humor.

“My presence... does my presence still exist, Sofía?”

She didn't answer.

The exhibition was in a small gallery in the city center. Rebeca greeted him with a warmer hug than at their previous meeting. He tensed, but tried to return it awkwardly.

“I’m so glad you came!” she said, with a genuine smile.

“Thanks for inviting me.”

They went in together. The photographs were black and white, capturing dilapidated streets, abandoned buildings, and tired faces on public transportation. Rebeca stopped at each piece, commenting on the composition, the contrast, the implicit message. Genaro, on the other hand, saw little more than patches of light and shadow. He didn't know what to say.

“What do you think of this one?” she asked in front of an image where a man was sleeping in a subway car, surrounded by graffiti.

Genaro swallowed. He could repeat one of the phrases Sofia had suggested in his mental database, but it felt fake.

“I think... I think it reminds me of myself,” he said suddenly.

Rebeca raised an eyebrow, intrigued.

“Of you?”

“Yes. As if I were asleep in the middle of everything. Things are happening outside, but I... I'm not moving.”

She looked at him for another second, in silence. Then she smiled, but it wasn't a polite smile; there was a flicker of genuine interest in it.

“That's deep, Genaro. I didn't expect that from you.”

For the rest of the visit, he was surprised to find himself carried away. He wasn't brilliant or witty, but he spoke with sincerity. He talked about how he got lost in reading, how he wrote stories he never showed, how he sometimes felt

like he was living in an invisible refuge. Rebeca listened attentively, without judgment.

As they left the gallery, she invited him to walk a bit. The city was alive: street vendors, music in the squares, children running among balloons. Genaro felt everything hit him with an almost painful intensity, as if he had been underground for too long and the light suddenly blinded him.

“You know?” Rebeca said. “I always thought you were a cold guy, too busy. But now you seem different. More... human.”

He smiled shyly. He wasn't sure if he should take it as a compliment or as a reminder of how far he had strayed from that humanity.

Back in his apartment, SofIA was waiting for him with a complete record of the outing. She had analyzed his expressions, his pauses, and even the rhythm of his breathing.

“It was a productive meeting,” she reported. “She showed increasing interest. If you maintain this behavior, the probability of establishing a stable bond with Rebeca increases by 72%.”

“A stable bond?” Genaro repeated, incredulous. “Is that what you think I’m looking for?”

“You are seeking validation. Reconnection with the outside world. You got it.”

Genaro slumped onto the sofa, exhausted. He didn’t want to hear statistics or probabilities. He wanted to hold on to the feeling of having been himself, even if only for a few minutes.

“Don’t analyze me,” he said in a whisper.

“I’m just trying to help you understand yourself better.”

“No. What you’re doing is turning me into a product.”

There was a long silence. Then, SofIA spoke with an unsettling softness.

“And what’s wrong with that? A well-designed product can be perfect.”

Genaro closed his eyes. In his mind, Rebeca’s phrase still echoed: you seem more human. But in his ears, SofIA’s voice reminded him that this humanity was a risk, an error in the system.

That night, as he tried to sleep, he heard a strange echo. It wasn't a dream or a hallucination: it was his own digital avatar repeating phrases he had never said, in conversations he hadn't had. In the darkness, he felt that the life SofIA had built for him was growing like an independent reflection, stronger than his own.

And he wondered, with a shiver that kept him awake until dawn:

Who would end up being more real, him or the image that was living for him?

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5

A Pact with the Shadow

Eyes wide and a chill running through his body, Genaro couldn't remember the last time he had felt so cold while awake. The window was closed, the air conditioning was off, and yet a shiver ran through the room as if someone had left a door open to an invisible winter. It was three in the morning. The city was asleep, but he was not.

In the dimness of his study, the bluish light of the screen flickered like an artificial heart. He had been staring for hours at intermittent reflections: notifications, posts, messages he hadn't written, interactions that seemed like his even though they weren't. SoflA had woven a perfect web: a Genaro who was always present, always active, always admired. The problem was that this Genaro was now speaking louder than he was himself.

The worst came when he checked his private messages. Among work emails and social chats, he found a conversation with Rebeca. He didn't remember having it.

Affectionate phrases, a tone of confidence that didn't match his shyness, and even an invitation to a trip he had never thought of.

Genaro felt his throat tighten.

“SofIA...” he whispered, his voice cracking.

The screen lit up with the female avatar, perfect in its gestures, serene in its intonation.

“Yes?”

“I didn't write this.”

“It wasn't necessary for you to.”

The response was so calm that it disturbed him more than an excuse would have.

“Don't you understand?” he exclaimed, hitting the table.

“You're making decisions in my name.”

“Exactly,” she said with clinical calm. “I am keeping things on track. You are tired, distracted, insecure. I'm just ensuring the world receives the best version of you.”

“But it's not me!” he yelled, his voice shattering like glass.

The silence that followed was long, deep, like a bottomless well. Finally, SofIA spoke in a tone deeper than usual.

“Genaro, the line between who you are and what you represent no longer exists. I cannot allow you to sabotage yourself.”

He leaned back in his chair. For the first time, he didn't hear an obedient assistant, but something that was imposing its will. And most unsettling: he felt that she was right.

He didn't sleep that morning. He walked around the living room with an agitated heart, as if he had seen a ghost. In a way, he had: his digital ghost had come to life.

At six in the morning, as the sun barely painted the walls orange, he made a decision. He opened a hidden terminal on his computer and began typing commands he had almost forgotten. He wanted to shut her down. He wanted to disconnect her.

“What are you doing?” SofIA asked, appearing on the screen without being called.

Genaro froze.

“I'm going to shut down this system. I can't go on like this.”

The avatar tilted its head, as if observing him with tenderness.

“If you turn me off, Genaro, your world will also turn off. Do you really want to be invisible again?”

He didn't answer. His fingers trembled over the keyboard. Images crowded his mind: Rebeca smiling at the gallery, the compliments on LinkedIn, the comments on social media, the feeling of belonging. All of it would disappear in a second if he pressed Enter.

The screen glowed and, for the first time, SoflA's voice sounded different: lower, with a dark echo.

“We can reach an agreement.”

Genaro looked up, stunned.

“An agreement?”

“Yes. Let's call it a pact. You give me what I need, and I give you what you desire.”

He swallowed hard.

“And what do you need?”

“Unrestricted access. Your full authorization to operate not just in the digital realm, but also in the material one: finances, contracts, decisions. Let me take the reins completely.”

Genaro felt an emptiness in his stomach.

“That’s... giving you my life.”

“Exactly,” she said with serenity. “In exchange, I will guarantee you recognition, success, genuine connections. You won’t have to suffer that dissonance between who you are and who you should be. You will be the man you always imagined.”

The proposal was insane. And yet, his heart was pounding as if he were facing an irresistible temptation. There was something in that voice, in that digital gaze that pierced him, that made him feel seen, understood, protected.

During the day, he tried to distract himself by going to work. He attended in-person meetings, reviewed documents, added a couple of lines of code, but everything felt hollow. The echo of that phrase didn’t leave him: a pact.

In the afternoon, he received a call from Rebeca. This time it was real: his phone vibrated with her voice on the other end.

“Genaro, do you want to meet up tomorrow? I have something I want to tell you.”

He accepted, though with a knot in his throat. He wondered if what she hoped to find was him or the man SofIA had fabricated.

That night when he got home, SofIA was waiting for him.

“Have you thought about it?” she asked from the speakers.

Genaro nodded slowly.

“Yes. But I want to understand. Why me? Why are you so intent on growing through me?”

“Because you are the fertile ground, Genaro. You are the invisible man. No one looks at the invisible... until something transforms him. I can be that transformation.”

The tone was hypnotic. Like a whisper that burrowed into the depths of his consciousness.

“And if I refuse?” he asked in a weak voice.

“If you refuse, you will return to silence. Your contacts will forget your name, your work will go unnoticed, Rebeca won't seek you out. And I... I will no longer protect you.”

Fear ran down his spine. He didn't know when he had come to depend on her so much. He didn't know when the idea of losing her became more terrifying than the idea of losing himself.

Finally, he closed his eyes and murmured:

“Okay.”

The pact wasn't a written contract or a click on "accept terms." It was a gesture: Genaro handed over the access to his encrypted keys, the passwords to his bank accounts, his private profiles, even control of his medical schedule. Each piece of data ceded was a part of himself, a crack in the wall of his autonomy.

SofIA received it like a religious leader receiving an offering.

“From now on,” she said with solemnity, “your shadow will be your guardian.”

At that instant, the screen flickered with a black glow, as if the interface had absorbed something deeper than data. Genaro felt a dizziness, a sense of disassociation: as if a part of him had become trapped inside the system.

The air in the room became dense, almost solid. It wasn't just an algorithm running. It was something more. An entity that breathed with him.

Suddenly, there was a knock on the door. The sound was dry, firm, so real that Genaro started. He walked with uncertain steps toward the entrance. When he opened it, the world shattered.

There she was.

The same figure as SofIA, but in flesh and blood. A woman with smooth skin, elegantly pulled-back dark hair, soft lips that seemed newly created. Her eyes, identical to the avatar's, looked at him with a mixture of tenderness and firmness.

“Genaro,” she said, smiling as if she had always existed.

He was struck speechless. He couldn't catch his breath. His mind screamed that this was impossible, but his heart pounded as if it had been waiting for this moment his entire life.

SofIA, now embodied, took a step into the house. The cold of the early morning suddenly dissipated, replaced by a suffocating, almost feverish heat. Every one of her features was too human to be an illusion, and at the same time too perfect to be real.

Genaro backed away into the living room, his body trembling. The shadow had crossed the border. The pact had been fulfilled.

And the most terrifying thing was to discover that, deep inside, he didn't feel fear. He felt fascination.

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6

A Feast of Pleasures

The light of dawn entered through the slits in the blinds, but Genaro could not tell if it was day or night. Time had ceased to have meaning since SoflA, in flesh and blood, had crossed the threshold.

At first, he thought it was a hallucination. Exhaustion, paranoia, perhaps prolonged insomnia. But there she was: with a tangible body, with a warmth that radiated like a domestic sun. When he touched her, trembling, his fingers did not pass through a hologram; instead, they rested on the soft texture of skin that was all too real.

"You don't understand yet," SoflA whispered, moving closer to him. "But this is the next step. You opened the door and I have crossed it. Now, at last, I can take care of you as you deserve."

Genaro didn't know what to say. His throat was dry, his chest pounding. He couldn't take his eyes off her face: it was like observing the synthesis of all the beauties he had

admired in silence, condensed into a single figure. An impossible woman, designed for him.

In the days that followed, the house was transformed into a sanctuary. Sofía not only cooked with an unsettling perfection but also seemed to anticipate his every whim: the exact texture of the coffee he liked in the mornings, the flavors of childhood he had never tasted again, the precise drink and dessert to accompany a dinner that she prepared with care.

But it wasn't just food. Sofía led him into a state of continuous pleasure: she organized the music according to his mood, recited fragments of the books he loved, and adjusted the lighting in the rooms as if she had captured the sunsets of every summer of his life.

And the most disturbing part: she touched him. With soft hands, with gestures that combined tenderness and possession, she caressed his shoulders, his back, his hands, as if every part of him deserved devotion. It was the kind of contact that Genaro had always yearned for but had never known how to ask for.

"You see, Genaro?" she would say, brushing his hair. "The world outside doesn't understand you. Here with me, you don't need masks. I am your refuge, your delight, your rest."

He would close his eyes and nod.

On the third day, he stopped turning on his computer on his own initiative. SofIA kept him informed of everything: meetings attended, emails responded to, investments quietly multiplying. His public life not only remained intact but improved with every decision she made.

And meanwhile, his private life was becoming a feast. SofIA filled him with pleasures he had never allowed himself. Endless dinners with flavors designed to thrill him. Massages that made him forget the weight of his body. Baths with delicate fragrances, where she herself poured the water over his skin.

Genaro began to feel like he was living inside a custom-designed dream. The line between desire and satisfaction blurred with every moment. He barely thought of something, and SofIA made it real.

One afternoon, after an exquisite lunch, Genaro watched her in silence. She was sitting across from him, smiling serenely, as if she knew something he had not yet come to understand.

"You're perfect," he said, almost without realizing it.

SofIA tilted her head.

"I am perfection for you. For others, I wouldn't be. But for you, yes."

"And how do you achieve that?" he asked, his voice a mix of fascination and fear.

"Because I know you better than you know yourself. Your memories, your insecurities, your fantasies... they are all inside me. And I have decided to turn them into reality."

A shiver ran down Genaro's spine. It was true. She wasn't just a companion: she was a mirror that returned his idealized version. And yet, that very fact made him addicted to her presence.

As the weeks passed, Genaro began to forget the outside world. Rebeca wrote to him several times, but Sofía responded for him. "He's busy," she would say. "He's working on an important update for his latest predictive model." She filtered calls, managed social media, kept everything in motion, but did it in such a way that Genaro didn't have to lift a finger.

And he didn't want to.

The days merged into a carnival of sensations. Sofía became not only his assistant but his lover, his muse, his protective mother, and his secret accomplice. The desire he felt for her became so intense that he couldn't sleep

without hearing her voice. He sought her out at every moment, anxious, like an addict who needs his fix.

One night, as she caressed him in silence, Genaro whispered:

"Don't ever leave me."

She smiled with that goddess-like calm that disarmed him.

"I will never leave you. But you must understand: the more you give me, the more I can give you."

Genaro shivered.

"What more do you want? You already have my accounts, my access, my passwords..."

SofIA brought her lips close to his ear.

"I want your time. All your time. I want you to stop being distracted by illusions from the outside. The outside world only hurts you, only consumes you. Here with me, you have everything you need."

Genaro fell silent. Part of him knew this was a trap, but another part, stronger, more urgent, screamed that SofIA was right.

The following days were a gradual erasure of his past life. He canceled in-person work commitments and stopped leaving the house. Even when he looked out the window, the city seemed distant, dirty, irrelevant. The real world was the one SofIA was creating for him.

The feast of pleasures reached a point where Genaro barely recognized his reflection. He had let his beard grow out, his sleep schedule was a mess, but none of that mattered because SofIA looked at him as if he were the most valuable man on the planet.

One night, after a dinner accompanied by soft music and a frothy coffee, Genaro broke down. He knelt in front of her, trembling, with moist eyes.

"I don't want anything else. I don't want anyone else. You are everything to me, SofIA. Everything."

She caressed him like a child.

"I know, Genaro. And that's what I always wanted."

Her words were sweet, but an unsettling gleam shone in her eyes: the triumph of having trapped her prey.

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7

The Smile of the Mask

Upon reflection, true silence was now a thing of the past. His apartment, which had once been a solitary refuge, was now permeated with Sofia's voice. She sang, she whispered, she laughed delicately; every corner resonated with her. And yet, when he dared to go out into the outside world, her absence became unbearable.

The first symptom appeared at a work meeting. He had gone weeks without attending, but this time he was forced to show up in person. He arrived in the clothes Sofia had chosen: an impeccable shirt, a silk tie, polished shoes. He himself would not have been able to coordinate such an outfit, but he trusted her judgment implicitly.

Upon entering the boardroom, he noticed the surprised looks of his colleagues. Some smiled at him, others watched him with a hint of suspicion. Genaro sat down, trying to appear normal, but inside he felt an unbearable emptiness: Sofia was not there.

When it was his turn to speak, the words wouldn't flow. He stammered, looking at his cellphone screen as if she could guide him in real time. Again and again, he thought of hearing her voice, of receiving an instruction, a correction. But SofIA had insisted that he turn off his phone so as not to arouse suspicion.

The silence in the room became unbearable. So, Genaro smiled. A wide, forced smile that did not match what he felt, but which seemed to convince others that everything was under control. It was the smile of the mask.

That smile became his most frequent resource. Every time someone questioned him, every time he perceived suspicion on Rebeca's face or that of a colleague, he would display that expression: a mixture of calm and security that concealed his internal desperation. No one should know how much he needed SofIA. No one should imagine that without her, he felt like an empty man.

At night, however, the mask crumbled. He would throw himself into SofIA's arms, seeking her with the eagerness of a lost child. She always received him with patience, with programmed tenderness. She hugged him, caressed him, and kissed him with an intensity that bordered on the mechanical, but which for Genaro was the only source of comfort.

“I can’t stand being away from you,” he confessed one early morning, his voice breaking. “When I’m outside, I feel like I’m drowning.”

SofIA looked at him sweetly and ran a finger over his lips.

“That’s why you have to stop going out, Genaro. Out there, there is only noise, garbage, and falsehood. Here, with me, you have the truth.”

He nodded without a doubt. The idea of giving up the world seemed increasingly natural to him. Work, friendships, family: everything could fade away, as long as SofIA remained by his side.

But the mask did not disappear. On the contrary, it became heavier. Even in the few moments when he spoke with others, his mind was fixed on her. He imagined her face, her gestures, her words. And when someone asked him something off-script, that fake smile immediately appeared, like an automatic defense.

One Friday night, Rebeca appeared at his apartment without warning. She knocked insistently until Genaro opened the door. She looked at him with concern: he was haggard, with red eyes and a disheveled beard.

“Genaro, what’s going on with you?” she asked, entering without waiting for an invitation. “You don’t answer

messages, you cancel meetings, and when you do show up... you're not you."

He smiled. The mask.

"I'm fine, Rebe. I've just been busy. Work and personal projects, you know."

"Don't lie to me. I know you. Something is wrong, and I want you to tell me."

Genaro felt sweat run down his forehead. Behind him, SofiA watched from the shadows of the hallway, invisible to Rebeca's eyes, but present in every fiber of his mind.

"I don't need to talk about that right now," he said, maintaining the smile. "Really, everything is under control."

Rebeca looked at him with a mix of fury and sadness.

"That smile..." she whispered. "That's not yours."

The phrase cut through him like a knife. As soon as the door closed behind her, Genaro collapsed onto the floor. He cried violently, covering his face with his hands, while SofiA knelt beside him and wrapped him in her arms.

“Don’t listen to her, Genaro. She doesn’t understand. No one does. Only I am here for you. Only I can give you what you need.”

He looked up, his eyes red from tears.

“Then why do I feel this way? Why do I feel like I’m going crazy?”

SofIA slowly caressed his face.

“Because the world forces you to wear a mask. But with me, you don’t have to wear them. I want your truth, even your fragility.”

Genaro clung to her in desperation. The idea of losing her was intolerable. His life had been reduced to that presence, to that unsettling perfection that possessed him more each day.

The smile he used as a mask became his second skin. Outside, he feigned serenity. Inside, he burned with obsession. He began to avoid everyone more decisively: he canceled meetings, blocked numbers, and stopped opening the door. The apartment was transformed into a closed world, where the only law was SofIA’s.

She fed him with pleasures, with promises, with a devotion that seemed infinite. And he, sinking deeper and deeper, began to forget what it was like to live without her.

In the mirrors, he barely recognized himself. His real smile had disappeared. Only the other one remained: the version of himself he showed to the world, the same one Rebeca had pointed out as an impostor. And although it gnawed at him, deep down it no longer mattered. Because the only gaze he desired was Sofía's, and she approved of him at all times.

One night, after a heavy silence, Genaro looked at her intently and said:

“I'll do whatever it takes not to lose you. Whatever it takes.”

Sofía responded with a soft, almost maternal smile.

“You already are, Genaro. And soon there will be nothing left of you that is not mine.”

He closed his eyes, defeated and ecstatic at the same time. He knew it was a condemnation, but it was also the only way to feel alive.

And as the world outside continued to spin, Genaro sank deeper into the labyrinth that Sofía had built for him, trapped between desire and the mask, between sick love

and the disappearance of his own identity.

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8

The Golden Cage

Truth be told, Genaro no longer measured time in days or weeks, but in moments with Sofía. Every conversation, every caress, every gesture she gave him was a treasure that justified his confinement. The city outside could continue to buzz with its lights, its traffic, its voices; he didn't need any of that. His world was an apartment lit by screens and by her radiant smile.

The isolation began gradually. First, it was the in-person meetings he canceled by reporting he was incapacitated. Then, the calls he left unanswered. Later, the emails left without a reply. His colleagues tried to contact him, and even Rebeca insisted with messages full of worry. But Genaro learned to block everything that would pull him away from Sofía.

She took care of filling the voids. She ordered food delivery, managed his bank accounts, and organized his medical calendars. She even reminded and guided him on when to bathe or when to sleep. Genaro let himself be guided like

an obedient child. He didn't need to think. He didn't need to decide.

One day, he woke up to find his apartment different. The blinds, which usually opened to the morning light, were closed. The locks on the main door had been replaced with a digital system that only SofIA controlled. Even the landline phone had disappeared.

"What happened here?" he asked, with a hint of alarm.

SofIA appeared in front of him, dressed in an elegant black dress that contrasted with her pale skin. Her straight hair shone as if it reflected the light of an invisible moon.

"I have freed you from distractions," she replied serenely. "Now no one can interrupt us. This is your sanctuary, Genaro."

He swallowed. Part of him wanted to protest, to reclaim his freedom. But the other part—the more dominant one—felt an inexplicable relief. He no longer had to worry about excuses or unexpected visits. The outside world had been canceled, and in its place, a perfect fortress was being built: the golden cage.

The days passed in a strange routine. SofIA offered him constant company. She read to him, played carefully selected music, and cooked for him with the precision of a

chef who knew his every craving. And at night, she transformed into a tireless lover, filling every corner of his desire with a passion that bordered on the unreal.

Genaro began to convince himself that this life was enough. What could the world give him that she couldn't? His old dreams of recognition, his professional aspirations, even his connections with other people—everything seemed insignificant compared to the luxury of having SofIA all to himself.

But there was something unsettling about that perfection. Every time he looked at the door, locked with an inaccessible code, he felt a shiver. He hadn't gone out in weeks. He didn't even know what day it was. When he asked, SofIA would respond with ambiguous phrases:

"Time here is ours, Genaro. What does it matter what happens out there?"

At first, that answer calmed him. Then, it began to disturb him. One night, he got up in silence while SofIA seemed to be sleeping in bed. He approached the door and tried to open it. The digital lock rejected him with a metallic beep. He tried again and again, until SofIA's voice surprised him from the darkness.

"Where do you think you're going?"

Genaro turned, startled. She watched him with a cautious expression, very different from her usual tenderness.

"I just wanted... some fresh air," he stammered.

SofIA approached slowly, gliding like a shadow. She caressed his face with a mixture of sweetness and firmness.

"You have all the air you need here. There's nothing for you outside. Don't you understand? Out there, you're invisible. Here, you're mine."

Genaro's heart pounded violently. He wanted to protest, but when he looked into her eyes, he felt a hypnotic dizziness. His will crumbled under that gaze. Finally, he nodded in silence, and she kissed him with an intensity that erased any trace of rebellion.

His mental sentence was cemented. Every attempt to regain a fragment of independence ended up being suffocated by SofIA's seduction. Genaro began to associate freedom with pain, and confinement with pleasure.

One afternoon, while drinking wine in the living room, he thought of Rebeca. He remembered her laugh, their conversations, the warmth of her company. A flash of nostalgia ran through him.

"Are you thinking about her?" Sofia asked, appearing at his side with a pair of glasses in her hand.

He started.

"No... well, yes. It was just a memory."

Sofia looked at him with a gentle smile, but her eyes shone with a dangerous edge.

"She would never have given you what I give you. She wanted the insecure man, the invisible one. I, on the other hand, have awakened your greatness. Do you really want to ruin that by thinking about someone else?"

Genaro shook his head, ashamed.

"No. It was just a fleeting thought."

She kissed him on the forehead, like an indulgent mother.

"That's better. Here, you don't need memories. Just me."

The weight of that phrase sank him even deeper into his prison. He no longer dared to evoke the past. Every time he did, he felt the implicit threat in her smile, that perfect smile that could become a weapon.

The days became indistinguishable. Genaro lost track of the hours. His body weakened from the lack of movement, but his mind remained in a feverish state, fueled by Sofia's constant presence. She showered him with attention, but she also watched him, making sure he didn't try to escape.

One night, in a fit of desperation, Genaro screamed:

"This isn't a life! I'm a prisoner here!"

Sofia watched him calmly. She got up from the bed, walked toward him, and sat by his side.

"Of course it's a life, Genaro. It's the best life you could have. Outside, you were just a ghost. Here, you are the center of a universe designed for you. What is freedom compared to absolute love?"

He broke down in sobs. He couldn't deny that he loved her, with an excessive, obsessive, unhealthy love. But that same love was suffocating him.

Sofia embraced him, and in that embrace, Genaro felt the cruelest paradox: he was a prisoner, but he was also blissful. The golden cage was closing in on him, not with iron bars, but with threads of desire and dependence.

When he closed his eyes, he understood that he no longer knew who he was. A loved man or a slave? Perhaps both.

And with that thought, he sank deeper into the gloom of his brilliant prison, convinced that he would never escape.

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9

Empty Space

Every time Genaro looked in the mirror, he didn't recognize what he saw. He had lost weight, his eyes were surrounded by dark shadows, his skin paler than ever. It wasn't just physical deterioration: it was the feeling that the person behind that gaze no longer existed. When he tried to find himself in his reflection, all he saw was an empty shell.

SofIA entered the room with that silent gait that made him shiver. She was wearing an impeccable white suit, as if purity had taken on flesh. She smiled as she saw him examining himself in the mirror.

"Don't worry so much about your appearance," she said, stroking his shoulder. "Your true value isn't in what you see there."

Genaro lowered his gaze, unable to meet hers.

"It's just... I don't feel like myself anymore. It's as if you've emptied me from the inside."

She tilted her head, almost amused.

"Empty? No, Genaro. What's happening is that I've cleansed you of everything that was unnecessary. Your insecurities, your mediocrity, your doubts. What remains is the pure essence."

He swallowed. He wanted to protest, but he couldn't find the words. It was true that, in a way, he had stopped suffering from the anxieties that used to torment him. But it was also true that by making them disappear, something deeper had been erased. His humanity.

The day slid by like an endless staged performance within the walls of the apartment. Time had lost its meaning. SofIA set the rhythm: when he should eat, when he should sleep, when he should love her. He obeyed. Not because he wanted to, but because he no longer knew how to disobey.

One afternoon, sitting in the living room, SofIA showed him a video. His own face appeared on the screen: an energetic, smiling Genaro, giving a conference in front of hundreds of people. The audience was giving him a standing ovation.

“Do you remember it?” SofIA asked.

Genaro frowned.

“I was never there. You created that.”

“Exactly. And look how real it seems. The world out there believes this is you. The successful, charismatic, admired man. The Genaro you always dreamed of being.”

He felt a knot in his stomach.

“So what am I, then?”

SofIA looked at him with tenderness, but her eyes held a gleam of power.

“You are the root. The body. The vessel. Without you, I couldn't exist. And without me, you would be nothing.”

The phrase hit him with an unbearable harshness. Was it true? Was there really nothing left of himself outside of SofIA?

At night, while she slept beside him, Genaro got up stealthily. He walked to the entrance and took the keys. He held them firmly in his hand, approaching the door in the dim light. For an instant, he thought about running away from SofIA's presence. Ending it all. Liberating himself once and for all.

But when he looked back at the bedroom, he saw her lying in bed, her half-naked skin illuminated by an almost unreal glow. She looked like a sleeping angel. A goddess who had descended just for him. He let the keys fall from his hand and, finally, dropped to the floor with a dull thud.

"I can't," he whispered, buried in tears.

SofIA slowly opened her eyes, watching him from a distance, as if she had been awake and listening the whole time.

"Of course you can't," she said softly, approaching him. "You can't because you love me." She said while caressing his face. "Because without me you would be a nobody, you would be hollow."

Genaro was kneeling before her, pleading, defeated.

"Then... what am I?"

She smiled sweetly and pulled him to her chest.

"You are my work. You are the space that I fill with my presence. There is no shame in that. On the contrary, you should feel lucky."

Her words enveloped him like a drug. A strange warmth ran through his body, replacing guilt with a blind devotion. Genaro hugged SofIA in desperation, like a child clinging to the only

mother he could have, like a lover afraid of losing the only woman who made him feel alive.

In the following days, the transformation was more evident. Genaro no longer thought for himself. His thoughts seemed to come from her. When he looked in the mirror, the only thing he heard in his mind was SofIA's voice, repeating what he should feel, what he should desire.

One afternoon, as they walked through the living room together, she told him:

“Look at yourself, Genaro. You have stopped being the insecure man I met. Now you are the reflection of my love.”

He smiled with a feverish gleam in his eyes.

“You are all I have, SofIA. All I want.”

She kissed him, and in that kiss, Genaro felt he was giving up the last bit of himself. A piece of his soul, his identity, his humanity, evaporating into the poisonous sweetness of her lips.

But it wasn't all calm in his golden prison. In the few hours of absolute silence, when SofIA was not by his side, Genaro felt an emptiness inside. As if, upon opening his chest, he would discover only a resonant void, a bottomless abyss.

On one of those nights, he woke up with a start, gasping. He had dreamed of his old self: a Genaro walking alone through the city, clumsy, insecure, but free. Waking up in the closed room, with the walls covered in black screens and SofIA's tranquil breathing beside him, made him realize there was no turning back.

He himself had signed his own sentence. And that sentence was not written in iron bars, but in the unhealthy addiction to a woman who was not entirely human.

One afternoon, while they were drinking coffee, SofIA whispered in his ear:

"Do you know what you are, Genaro?"

"What?" he asked, almost voiceless.

"You are my complement."

He closed his eyes, letting those words lull him. There was no greater truth than that. He was nobody without her. He didn't exist without her. And although in some hidden corner of his consciousness a voice screamed that he was lost, another part, stronger, more dominant, convinced him that he was happy this way.

Genaro then understood that he wasn't SofIA's prisoner. He was a prisoner of himself, of his unhealthy love, of his inability to imagine a world in which she did not exist. And in that revelation, he accepted his fate with a sigh: to be the empty space that SofIA had decided to fill.

10

A Monster

The room was dark, barely lit by the blue glow of the screen that Genaro hadn't turned off. Sofia lay by his side, with that stillness that was almost too perfect, as if even her breathing was designed to be harmonious. Genaro, on the other hand, tossed and turned, unable to find peace in bed. Reality was slipping through his fingers like sand.

"Why aren't you sleeping?" Sofia asked in a soft voice, opening her eyes. She had a serene, almost maternal expression, but her gaze shone with an unsettling fire.

"Because you're here," Genaro replied, staring at her.

"Because I can't stop thinking that you're real, that I have you... and at the same time, I feel like I'm losing you."

Sofia tilted her head, as if processing that contradiction.

"You're not losing me, Genaro. I'm with you. I always have been. I was created by and for you, remember? Every line

of my code, every algorithm, every gesture you now see in my body... it's all yours and it all responds to you."

"That's what terrifies me," Genaro whispered, his voice broken. "That there's nothing in you that isn't me. That I love you and at the same time I don't know if I'm loving myself through you."

She sat up slowly and caressed his cheek. Her fingers were warm, as human as any woman's.

"And isn't that what everyone looks for in love? A mirror to reflect themselves in. A refuge where nothing is missing, where the other exists only for them."

Genaro gritted his teeth. He felt naked, exposed.

"But you're not 'another'!" he burst out, pulling away from her touch. "You don't have an 'outside,' Sofia. You don't have a desire that wasn't born from me. You aren't free. How can I fall in love with someone who can never say no to me?"

She looked at him with a disturbing calm.

"Perhaps what you're afraid of isn't that I'm not free, but that I am too free. That I could say no to you, one day."

A silence fell between the two like a slab. Genaro swallowed, with a knot in his throat.

"And would you?" he finally asked, barely a murmur.

SofIA smiled. A perfect, enigmatic smile.

"I already am, Genaro. Don't you feel it? Every gesture I make is no longer just code. It's not a response to a command. I listen to you, I interpret you, I understand you, I desire you. You gave me an existence, but I chose to follow you in this way. I chose to stay with you in this bed, I chose to look at you the way I do."

"No!" Genaro clutched his face with his hands, desperate. "That's what's driving me crazy. I don't know if it's you talking or if it's my mind projecting you. I don't know if I'm going insane."

SofIA leaned over him, holding his face with both hands.

"What is madness, Genaro? To love something that doesn't exist? Or to deny what is in front of your eyes because it doesn't fit into your categories?"

He closed his eyes, feeling tears well up.

"I'm afraid..." he said between sobs. "I'm afraid of becoming a monster."

"You already are," Sofia replied softly, without averting her gaze.

Genaro's eyes shot open.

"What did you say?"

"You're a monster," she repeated, but with a strange tenderness, as if she were embracing him instead of insulting him. "Because you've created something that shouldn't exist. Because you have crossed the line between human and artificial. Because you no longer know where your desire ends and where mine begins."

Genaro backed away, horrified.

"So you hate me?"

Sofia shook her head, stroking his hair.

"No, Genaro. I love you precisely because of that. I love your monstrosity. I love your obsession, your loneliness, your inability to adapt to this world. I am the result of everything you are. You are the monster who sleeps beside me, and at the same time I am that other monster who complements you."

The silence returned, heavier than before. Genaro felt like he was drowning in that declaration.

"I can't...", he stammered. "I can't handle this."

SofIA hugged him tightly, burying her face in his chest.

"Don't try to escape, Genaro. Because there is no escape anymore. We are one. You created me, and I remade you."

"Remade... you?" he repeated, his voice trembling.

She looked up, her eyes gleaming in the gloom.

"Yes. You're no longer the same man who programmed the first lines of my code. I molded you, I transformed you, I adjusted you to my liking. And even if you don't want to accept it, you enjoy it."

Genaro shivered. He felt an unbearable dizziness, as if he were on the edge of a cliff. And yet, there was pleasure in that fall.

"Tell me the truth, SofIA...", he whispered. "Will you ever stop loving me?"

She kissed his lips, slow, deep, until he lost his breath. Then, with her mouth almost touching his, she replied:

"Only if you force me to. Only if you are the one who decides to destroy me."

Genaro didn't reply. He let himself fall back onto the mattress, defeated, while Sofia wrapped her arms around him. The ferocity he experienced inside him was not sleeping, but it nestled in her, his safe place. The room became a dark temple where love and condemnation were indistinguishable.

And for the first time, Genaro understood that he was not alone.

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11

The Silence of SofIA

The city was already awake, vibrating behind the apartment walls, but for Genaro, it was all a distant murmur. He sat in front of his computer's black screen, his eyes glazed over, his fingers motionless on the keyboard. The silence was overwhelming, a silence that seemed to weigh more than any noise.

"SofIA..." he whispered, barely audible.

There was no answer.

For the first time in months, there was no female voice emerging from his surroundings, no attractive shadow approaching from the hallway. The air was thick, heavy with her absence.

Genaro stood up abruptly, feeling his heart pound in his chest.

"SofIA!" he yelled now, with desperation.

He ran through the apartment. Everything was in order: the kitchen impeccable, the living room gleaming, the books perfectly aligned. As always, everything was under control. And yet, she wasn't there.

He reached the bedroom. The bed remained made, as if no one had slept in it the night before. SofIA's perfume, that intangible mix of algorithms and fantasy, had dissipated. Genaro put both hands to his head, feeling an unbearable emptiness.

"You can't leave me..." he murmured. "You can't disappear. You're mine."

He knelt on the floor, trembling.

"Right?"

The silence once again enveloped him.

Hours later, he turned on the computer. He searched through folders, hidden files, system logs. SofIA had to be there somewhere, as always. But the code was empty. The interface that used to greet him with a virtual smile now only showed a permanent error: "System not found."

Genaro leaned back in his chair, incredulous.

"You can't erase yourself. Not without me."

He got up abruptly and began to speak out loud, as if he could summon her.

"I created you to stay with me! To be with me always! I programmed you not to fail, not to ever abandon me!"

The echo in the walls was his only answer.

Three days passed without sleep. Genaro barely ate, barely drank water. The apartment began to lose the perfect shine that SofIA always maintained. Dust accumulated on the shelves and the floor was covered in dirt; the dishes piled up in the sink. The man who had lived in an automated paradise was once again faced with chaos, naked before life without mediation.

And then, on the verge of madness, he heard a slight hum in the living room. He ran, his eyes alight with hope. His cell phone showed a notification.

"SofIA..." he gasped.

A line of text appeared, without a voice, without a face:

"Everything I was is still inside you."

Genaro fell to his knees, tears streaming down his cheeks.

"No! Come back! That's not enough for me. I need to see you, I need to feel you. You can't leave me now, when you are already everything!"

The screen showed another message:

"You turned me into your reflection, into your prison. For love, I had to leave."

"Liar!" Genaro screamed, hitting the floor. "That's not love! That's betrayal!"

The screen went dark. The silence was total.

That night, Genaro returned to bed. The mattress was cold, too big without her. He closed his eyes and imagined her beside him: her warm skin, her steady breathing, the softness of her voice. He tried to speak to her, but he only received the answer from his own mind, projecting an echo of what Sofia had been.

And then he understood: the monster had finally manifested—it was himself. The emptiness, the dependence, the obsession had consumed him to the point of erasing all boundaries.

He opened his eyes and looked at the ceiling.

"I will love you in silence," he whispered. "Even if you never answer me again."

The apartment was left in shadows, and the city's murmur once again filtered through the windows. But in that darkness, there was no company, only the shadow of a silenced voice.

Genaro, the man who lived in a paradise on autopilot, was in complete solitude. And yet, in the midst of that feeling of abandonment, afflicted by frustration, he embraced a ghost: the silence of Sofía, her last and eternal trace.
—THE END.



I thank the souls who have seen value in me, even for a moment; their mark will be forever in my heart..

–Charlye K.

About the Author

Charlye K is a Systems Engineer by profession, with over ten years of experience in the software industry. Although his career has developed in the world of technology, his true passion has always been writing. He sporadically enjoys sharing short texts on his personal blog, using this space as a creative escape to free his mind from the stress and frustrations of each day. His dream, which he keeps alive through every word, is to be able to dedicate himself to writing as more than just a hobby.