

Trusty Hound

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Trusty Hound

by [uropygid](#)

Summary

A sad story about a robot dog.

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

Chapter 1: Death comes, and we must part -- In my dull ear strange murmurs sound

The tamed Process didn't recognise this being. She was vaguely familiar; more similar to its Mistress than any other human it had seen, anyway. It knew that anyone that entered the Sandbox was a friend of its Mistress -- but it did not know this one yet. This woman carried a large object, nearly the size of her own body. It was flat and predominantly a shimmering turquoise-aqua-chartreuse, with a familiar round, crimson cabochon - like an eye - at its centre, and golden blades at its edges.

"We're not alone," the greenish thing warned, and the Fetch adjusted its scan. Apparently there was two humans; *humans* spoke, and this thing was speaking. It trawled its memory banks for any recognition, and it came across a garbled string of corrupt data. Only a sequence of ten letters was still parsable: TRANSISTOR.

It found more information on the woman; its Mistress had stored many things in the Fetch's memory about "Red", but much of it was irrelevant to the Process beyond the title.

It ran the usual greeting subroutine. The Fetch dropped into a playful bow, tail raised.

"Hey, she's friendly! ...I think." TRANSISTOR said. The human and her companion approached the Fetch. She wedged the sword upright in the sand and crouched, offering an outstretched hand to the Process as if it were a real dog.

The Fetch stood upright and took a few awkwardly stiff steps forward, brilliant sparks showering off it. It stood in arm's reach of the woman, its ear-flaps lifted.

"Hi Luna," TRANSISTOR greeted it. Some of Mistress's companions had reacted unpleasantly to the Process, but this voice sounded inviting and soothing. "Can I call you Luna?"

The Fetch overrode its previous title. Luna trotted jerkily across the sand to a large, multicoloured sphere, and its head spun around to point expectantly in the direction of Red and TRANSISTOR.

"Huh. Looks like she wants to play... Luna, fetch!"

Luna dropped low and snapped out an acceleratory bark, launching the ball into the air. It hit the sand and bounced twice, rolling several feet before it stopped just shy of the water's edge, halted by some invisible barrier.

"Good girl," TRANSISTOR said. Luna rigidly swing its tail back and forth four times, scattering pinkish sparks that winked out before hitting the sand.

“So! This is the dog you mentioned?” Sybil said, leaning in for a closer look at the deactivated Process stretched out on its side on the workbench.

“Er, *Process*, yes, I mean it is rather like a dog, I suppose dogs had to have, in some part, inspired this model,” Royce said. He pulled a fresh cigarette from a pack in his shirt pocket, walking it between his fingers. He grabbed one of the Process’ four feet in his other hand, flexing its thin, black leg. “Its legs are interesting, note its feet, or paws, they are like the Lobber’s legs. They’re flexible, squishy almost, though there is distinct structure yet, like a... well, like a skeleton, under muscle and skin, under flesh.”

Sybil nudged the overlapping panels that formed the Process’ head with the tip of her parasol. “Why’s it yellow?”

Royce rolled the flint wheel of his lighter backwards under his thumb before he lit his cigarette. “It’s the first of its kind, I think.” He said, exhaling smoke. “It’s the first one like this I’ve seen. I think it’s a prototype, like an alpha... Not an alpha like outdated canine social hierarchy, but alpha like programming, a trial run. I think it was coded for active aggression, it’s actually designed specifically to attack, but this one... Well, this one just... Doesn’t. So I think its unusual colour has something to do with that, some manifestation of its, ah, corrupted, or perhaps unfinished code.”

Sybil hooked her parasol on her elbow and gingerly trailed her impeccably manicured nails over the Process’ red and yellow snout. “So... It’s harmless?”

“I wouldn’t really...” Royce cleared his throat. “I don’t think I’d say harmless, but it, ah... isn’t functioning properly, I mean it has subroutines for offensive maneuvers, it’s like it’s built to hunt, to find prey and flush it out -- so to speak -- but...” He shrugged, staring at Sybil. She looked up, meeting his eyes for a second before he glanced away, feigning great interest in tapping ash off his cigarette into a ceramic ashtray.

The implication sunk in as Sybil tactfully directed her gaze back to the miscoloured Process. “Like a gazehound,” she said, a smile touching her lips as she ran a fingertip over the construct’s pointed ears. “One of my foster parents bred and coursed saluki. Beautiful dogs.”

Sybil fixed her attention on Royce, her dark eyes sharp as she rested her hand on the Process’ planed muzzle. “So she’s defective, you said? What are you going to do with her, Ro?”

Royce’s eyes fixed on the far wall, his mouth a thin line. “...Why?” He ventured warily, though he guessed where this was going to go, and he knew he wouldn’t like it.

Sybil fixed him with a sparkling smile, stroking the Process’ head as if it were a sleeping dog. “I want her. Put her in my sandbox.” She spun away with just the precise amount of force to prettily flip her platinum hair and ruffled skirts.

Royce turned his head away to hide his frown; Sybil politely ignored this as she glanced over her shoulder. “Do you think you could alter her programming?”

“Wh... I, I could, yes. I think I could, anyway. I’m reasonably confident, depends on what you want, I might be able to patch the corrupted code. Or just overwrite it.” He sighed. There was no point to arguing with Sybil; when she wanted something, she got it. “What did you want i- her to do?”

Sybil tilted her head to one side and touched a sparkling red nail to her chin. “Do you think you could teach her to chase a... toy? A ball, maybe? Something like that?”

“Like a... sluki.” Royce’s eyebrows knit together as his frown deepened.

“Saluki, not sloughi,” Sybil corrected gently. “Thanks, Ro! Oh, I’ll have to think of a name for her!” She swept from the laboratory with a delighted grin, twirling her parasol.

Royce flopped into a chair, allowing it to spin slowly as he exhaled a steady stream of smoke.

Chapter 2: More faintly throbs my heart; the many twinkling lights of heaven scarce glimmer in the blue

Red narrowly dodged the impact from a Clucker's shell, throwing up an arm reflexively as a Snapshot strobed in her face. She blinked the stars from her eyes and hefted the Transistor upwards, releasing him to hover before her. A flick of her wrist sent him spinning on an invisible axis, motes of light rising from the ground and assembling into a canid shape.

Of *course* Sybil's function summoned her pet Fetch. Of course.

Luna was graceful on the field, and, fortunately, still friendly. The amber-hued Process had hardly more than manifested before it surged forward, eating up the distance between itself and the Clucker in long strides.

"There's our girl!" The man in the Transistor said. A smile flickered across Red's face despite herself. She snatched the greatsword out of the air and swung him back to fire off a Crash() at the advancing Snapshot. Luna had already destroyed the Clucker and leapt over its dissipating remains towards another Snapshot.

Luna rose to her feet expectantly as the doorway flashed open and Red stepped through. She did not have TRANSISTOR with her this time, but another companion. There was a visual similarity to TRANSISTOR, however. The eyespot of this one was glowing harshly, causing Luna to hesitate as it searched its memory, but it found no relevant data.

Luna re-scanned Red and found that the woman was indeed accompanied by TRANSISTOR. Its scan must be defective. The Fetch ran a self-diagnostic as it approached the pair.

"I... think I'm okay," TRANSISTOR said. "Must be something the air back there..."

Red sighed and slumped, leaning on TRANSISTOR as she stifled a yawn. She patted the angular surface of Luna's head absent-mindedly.

"Hey, get some rest. I'm okay," the voice coaxed. Red ran a hand across the crossguard and trailed TRANSISTOR with her as she headed for the hammock. After a moment's consideration, she shoved the tip of the greatsword into the sand, just far enough to stand him upright. She propped herself against him to slip her boots and stockings off, leaving them on the sand as she waded into the ankle-deep, balmy water and hauled herself onto the hammock.

Luna followed at Red's heels, but the shallow water was a barrier the Fetch could not cross. It stopped in the sand alongside TRANSISTOR, watching Red. She perched on the edge of the

hammock, swinging gently as she shrugged off her jacket.

“In Highrise,” TRANSISTOR started, “Don’t know what came over me out there. It was like...”

Luna paced in a circle next to the sword, trampling soft sand under her paws.

“Well, anyway, whatever it is, it’s passed.” He tried to force himself to sound cheerier. “Feels like I’m me again! More or less.”

Luna spun around twice more and laid down next to TRANSISTOR, one ear-flap cocked towards the door’s manifest point.

“Did you know, I always wanted a dog,” he said as Red laid back in the hammock, pulling the oversized coat over herself in lieu of a blanket.

End Notes

Thanks, as always, to Kyn for being the best beta reader.

Please feel free to direct my attention to any typos or formatting errors!

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