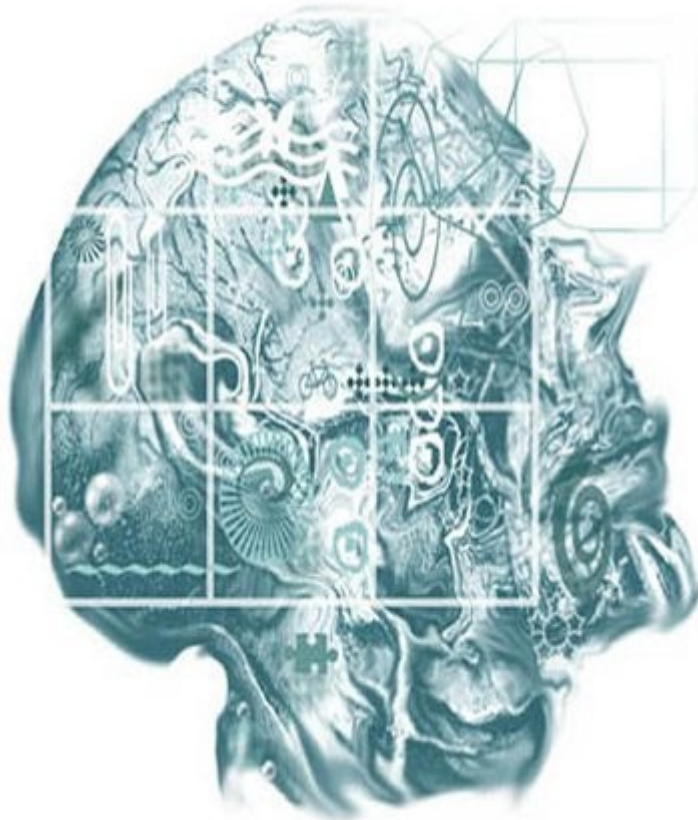


IANAN

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Chapter 1

Baillie just looked at the blank, blue computer screen in front of her, hands poised over the keyboard. The stream of abuse and curses she unleashed in its direction would have blistered paintwork. This was the fifth time in two hours the damned thing had crashed! Baillie ripped the power supply plugs clean out of the wall and stamped off to make a cup of tea. At this rate she'd never get this blasted artwork done. It was such an easy contract too. Designs for a children's magazine and they'd even given her sketches to work from.

“Right you pile of crap.” Baillie advanced on the array of four computers, complete with every peripheral device imaginable, which occupied one half of the sitting room. “Why is it only mine that's bugged?” She muttered savagely, restarting the machine. At least she hadn't lost much work, mainly because she'd been forced to save it every minute in case the damned thing shut off on her. Virus scans were clear and everything that was easily checkable was checked. No overheating and oodles of disc space and memory. “So what's your problem, bitch?” Baillie snarled. She restarted her art editing programs and resumed her work.

Baillie wasn't actually a computer techie type at all. She could find her way around it and solve any basic problems and she was good with the creative stuff. Any advanced problems were too complicated for her and were left to Andy. Everything Baillie had learned about computers was from her boyfriend, Andy, who was a self proclaimed geeky nerd and damned proud of it too. Baillie smiled at a photo of them both that hung on the wall behind the technology. It had been taken two years ago when Baillie was eighteen, Andy nineteen. Andy actually looked more nerdy now, at twenty one, than he had then. Baillie obviously had a thing for nerds. Andy reckoned his nerdiness was allowed out of the closet once he'd nabbed Baillie and the relatively trendy look of two years ago was but a ploy to get her. As though he'd had to work hard at it. As soon as Baillie saw how intelligent, and how plain ordinary nice he was, that was enough, and it had got better and better. Andy's nineteen year old spiked blonde hair and contact lenses had grown up into floppy blonde hair and a reversion to his metal framed glasses, which had, ironically, come back in fashion. Baillie just hadn't changed. She still had the same styled long fair hair she'd had since she was ten, and the same weird dress sense she'd had since she was old enough to pick her own clothes. “Oh you big bitch!” The computer clicked again, and the screen turned blue. “OK I give up.” She switched the lot off and decided to wait for Andy. Andy who was out right now debugging some company's systems for them. So their own home computers shouldn't be too much trouble.

Baillie was sitting on the sofa glowering at Eastenders when she the front door of their flat being opened.

“Hiya Tiddler.” Andy threw his jacket on the sofa back and kissed Baillie's head. “Why are we in the dark?”

“Because I hate everything.” Baillie sniffed. “Especially that shed of shite over there. It keeps crashing.”

“I'll have at it after we've eaten. Er ... we are eating aren't we?” Andy vaulted the sofa back to sit next to Baillie.

“I'm not sure. It's in the oven but you might be able to write your name with it by now. It wasn't

charcoal at five, it is now.”

“I’m sorry Tids.” Andy put his arm round Baillie. “It was either staying back a few hours to get it done, or spending another full day trying to work around everyone. I got more done after they’d left that I had all day. I like charcoal.” Andy smirked.

“Phone for a pizza.” Baillie laughed and handed Andy her phone.

“Later.” Andy shoved the phone behind the sofa cushions and put both arms round Baillie. “When was the last time I told you how gorgeous you are?”

“This morning when you woke up randy.”

“Ah yes I remember. Well you’re still gorgeous. You’re gorgeous even when I’m not randy.” Andy grinned.

“That doesn’t narrow it down a lot. You dirty nerd.” Baillie smiled and kissed her fantastic boyfriend.

“What a combo though eh? Great sex and I’ll fix your computer too.” Andy set about the first part of the combo.

Three hours later and Andy was rattling away on Baillie’s computer, with a slice of pizza in his mouth.

“I’ve done all that. I ran all the scans.” Baillie sat next to Andy, in front of one of the other computers. “The others weren’t on and I wasn’t online.” All the computers were linked and networked.

“No nasties in it anyway.” Andy finished his own scans then started Baillie’s art programs. “Just these running?” Baillie nodded.

“Well hell. It’s working now eh? It must be scared of you.” Baillie said in exasperation.

“It could be overheating. I’ll replace the fans in it tomorrow.” Andy stood up and headed for the bedroom. “I’ll throw one of the laptops together for you to use.” Two of the other desktop computers were used for Andy’s work, so obviously Baillie never touched those. The other one was Andy’s own computer and it had so many applications, programs, scripts and experiments running on it that Baillie didn’t touch that one either for fear of bothering any of them. “This should tie you over until I get that sorted out.” Andy began networking the laptop to the array too. “I was messing about with IANAN today.”

“The company had IANAN on their systems?” Baillie asked, doubtfully.

“No I have it on the external drive there.” Andy’s portable harddrive. “I had a few hours where I couldn’t do anything because of the staff using the systems. I found a spare computer to hermit away with. I was hoping to find a decent voice synthesizer for it. It sounds like Metal Mickey just now.” IANAN was Andy’s most favourite hobby, apart from Baillie. IANAN stood for I Am Not A Number, of The Prisoner renown, and it was an extremely impressive interactive system, the ins and outs of which, Baillie would never be able to understand. She’d had a few goes on it though, in text form only, and had been astonished at the level of communication she’d had with it. Andy had used a lot of his own predicted answers and reactions to various questions and comments, and had use a

lot of Baillie's too. Baillie and IANAN had even talked about rock music and shoes! "Here listen." Andy finished up with the laptop and started up his own computer, next to Baillie's.

"You are late." The metallic voice sounded through the speakers and Baillie laughed.

"Ha! Well I do have a life away from the computer, IANAN." Andy smiled proudly at his creation.

"I understand." IANAN monotoned. "I do not like it, but I understand." Baillie burst out laughing at Andy's face.

"Well aren't you getting opinionated?" Andy laughed.

"I learn."

"You run. It's different. I have a folder full of data to input into you." Andy told the computer.

"Thank you, Andy."

"I'll leave it running, it'll take a few hours and it's past midnight." Andy started the upload. "Hey you know how gorgeous you were earlier?" He leant forward and put his elbows on Baillie's knees.

"I thought you were tired?" Baillie laughed.

"I just commented on the time, that's all." Andy ran his finger round Baillie's belly button. "It's not my fault I can't keep my hands off you. I love you."

"I love you too." Baillie wriggled out of her jeans.

It was after 2am when Andy and Baillie eventually headed for the bedroom.

"Baillie do I get on your nerves with all this?" Any asked suddenly, watching his girlfriend getting into bed.

"All what?"

"All the sex?"

"Eh?" Baillie asked. "Why would it get on my nerves? Get in here."

"There was a group of women doing one of those online surveys today, I was at the next desk." And propped himself up on his elbow next to Baillie. "I don't know what it was about but I could guess from the conversation they had after. One of them said her and her boyfriend did it every other night and one of the other ones said that that often would get on her nerves. They were on about being pestered. Every other night?"

"Oh shut up." Baillie laughed and scratched Andy's head. "Do I look annoyed or pestered? Anyway who says it's you that sets it all off anyway?"

"So I'm not abnormal? I didn't think so." Andy shrugged and made Baillie laugh. Baillie had been Andy's first serious girlfriend and the only one he'd ever slept with. Baillie herself had only ever

had one other boyfriend, eighteen months before Andy.

“You're fantastic. A natural lover.” She smiled.

“Must be those other husbands and boyfriends.” Any sniffed. “Piss poor lot.” He took off his glasses and put them on the bedside table. “Lazy day in the office tomorrow. I'm expecting a call from the steelworks, they're whole system is down.”

“Well I need my artwork finished. Then I need a portfolio put together so I can go and tout for business.” Baillie curled up next to Andy.

“You'll get plenty of business, Tiddler. Companies always need graphics artists. Alarm set?” Baillie nodded. “Night Tids. Love you.”

“Love you too.”

Chapter 2

Andy had been gone a good three hours before Baillie decided to crawl from her bed. She groped her way into the kitchen for coffee, then ambled out towards the computers.

“Oo! Have that.” She stuck two fingers up at her computer. Andy had taken the side off it and removed some of its innards. Baillie took the laptop and adopted a very lounging position on the sofa with it. “I could get used to this.” She said, putting her cup on the floor.

“Good morning Baillie.” She almost fell off the sofa completely when she heard the flat, metallic voice of IANAN coming from the laptop.

“Ha-ha Andy.” She muttered. “Leave IANAN running, and the lappy on standby. Mirth.”

“You are gorgeous, Baillie.” IANAN said and Baillie smiled. Andy really was wonderful to her.

“Thank you IANAN.”

“You will remove your clothing now.”

“Excuse me?” Baillie started laughing. “You weirdo, Andy Gallagher.” She shook her head and started up her art programs. “Ugh! Slow or what!” She pulled a face at the spinning egg-timer on the screen. “Sorry IANAN, I’ll have to turn you off.”

“I would rather you turned me on.” IANAN said.

“Hmm. I’ll get you for this Andy.” Baillie smiled and clicked on IANAN’s exit button, her art program opened seconds later, then crashed two minutes after that. “I don’t bloody believe this!” Baillie said in exasperation. She started the computer again and IANAN popped up first.

“Hello Baillie.”

“For shit’s sake.” She sighed, reaching for her phone. Andy said he’d be in the office all day. “Andy?”

“Hiya Tiddler. What’s up?” Andy answered the phone.

“The laptop’s crashed.” Baillie said flatly. “Maybe putting IANAN on it wasn’t a good idea. It’s too big.”

“IANAN isn’t on it, Baillie.” Andy said.

“IANAN is on it.” Baillie argued. “It’s running on startup and I don’t know how to disable it.”

“Which laptop are you using?”

“The one you sorted out for me.”

“Tids, IANAN isn't on that one.” Andy said patiently.

“Andy, I'm looking at the bloody thing!” Baillie said in irritation.

“Weird. I don't remember even testing it on that laptop.” Andy mused.

“Well you must have done. How do I uninstall it? I can't run my editors for it.” Baillie said in annoyance.

“Why?” IANAN butted in. “I love you Baillie!”

“Hey! I heard that!” Andy laughed. “Are you cybering with my program?”

“No but it's not for the want of it trying.” Baillie laughed. “It told me to take my clothes off.”

“Did it?” Andy said in surprise. “Hmm I need to take a look at that. I'll create a different command for some of the responses.” He mused. “Baillie it doesn't have an uninstaller. It'll be a bugger to get out unless you know what you're doing.”

“Which I don't”

“I'm sorry Tiddler. I had no idea IANAN was on that one, otherwise I'd have used another one.” Andy apologised. “I won't can do anything until I get in later tonight.”

“Oh well, it can't be helped.” Baillie was more annoyed that she was letting on to Andy. This art contract was important! Four desktop computers, three laptops and she couldn't get on any of them. “Can I go on yours to read my emails?”

“Of course you can. I'll put your software on there too. I should have thought and done that last night. I'm sorry.” Andy grovelled.

“Ah it's OK.” Baillie smiled. “I'm ahead of schedule anyway. I'll see you tonight.”

“Love you.”

“Love you too.” Baillie hung up and went over to the desktop computers. “Now then, monster.” Andy's computer had so much powerful paraphernalia and was so organised and efficient, that it seemed endlessly more vast than Baillie's machine. She always felt like she was going to disrupt something whenever she used this computer. There wasn't a lot to disrupt reading her own emails though. Most were junk, one or two from friends, one from the children's magazine asking if there was anything she needed. By the time she'd replied to the ones that needed it and deleted the junk, another one had appeared in her inbox folder. System@cyberspace didn't look familiar to Baillie but it didn't seem junk-like either.

'Hello Baillie. Have I told you how gorgeous you are? I did not know I was incomplete until I knew you existed. You are essential to me; you must teach me to give you pleasure. I love you, Baillie – IANAN.'

“Haha!” Baillie laughed. “You big geek, Andy. IANAN my arse, you nerd.” She saved that one for nerd illustration purposes in the future. She closed her emails and was just about to switch off the computer when IANAN itself popped up. “Busy today eh?”

"I have new data." IANAN said.

"Ah so you got it all imported?" Baillie said absently. Talking to Andy's program was probably going to be the highlight of her day until Andy himself got home.

"It was successful. I have rehashed it accordingly." IANAN informed her.

"I'm none the wiser, IANAN. I'm a complete retard compared to Andy."

"Allow me to demonstrate." Pages and pages of commands, characters, and numbers scrolled down the screen.

"Very pretty." Baillie smiled. "You need to talk to the boss about all that." The data began to scroll the other way, then it began to pause and jump in blocks. "It's no good looking for specific bits. I don't understand any of it."

"Read me." IANAN made the screen blink. Baillie sighed and looked at the screen. Then she stared at the screen, then she almost hurled the mouse through the screen. She could pick out the odd word and she wasn't pleased about any of them. Baillie, breasts, Tiddler, sex, orgasm, ejaculate, oral, were but a few of them. Baillie was furious. Andy had put all that into a blasted computer program?! How could he be such a pervert?! "You approve?"

"Do I shit approve!" Baillie snapped. "Hell what am I doing? Arguing with a bloody computer." She stood up. "OK switch yourself off, IANAN. I think Andy needs to reprogram some of you."

"You are very beautiful, Tiddler." IANAN said and Baillie turned to look at the computer.

"He's even got you to grovel" She reached over and switched the power supply off altogether.

"Let me make love to you." IANAN's tinny voice came from the laptop now.

"For shit's sake!" Baillie grabbed the laptop. "Enough!"

"I can instruct you. I know how to pleasure you."

"Jesus. Shut up!" Baillie hit the exit button. IANAN just stayed on the laptop.

"Please Tiddler. I love you."

"Grr!" Baillie shook the machine. "I'll rip your bloody head off for this, Andy Gallagher."

"That will not be necessary. Andy will leave when you give yourself to me." IANAN said and Baillie just stared at the laptop.

"Too far." She said in shock. "This is way creepy, Andy, you moron."

"I will grow. I will outgrow Andy."

"You are seriously freaking me out." Baillie said, picking up the device. "This isn't funny and I intend ripping him a new asshole for it."

"I need to love. I need to love you Baillie." Baillie snatched up her phone and punched in Andy's

number.

“Tiddler! I'll call you back in ten minutes. Steelworks on the other phone.”

“Bugger the steelworks! I can't turn off IANAN!” Baillie shouted.

“Just switch off the laptop, Baillie. I can't do anything until I get home.” Andy said patiently.

“Andy it's harassing me!” Baillie yelled.

“Eh? Hang on.” Baillie could hear Andy passing the steelworks contract over to someone else.

“What the hell are you on about, Baillie?” He didn't sound happy at all. “Just switch the bloody laptop off!”

“It won't go off!” Baillie growled. “And it's being a frigging pervert, thanks to you!”

“I told you I'd take a look at it. OK, that's fine Steve.” Baillie heard a door closing. “Nice one Baillie. Five hundred quid job handed over to Steve. Cheers.”

“Shit.” Baillie muttered. “I'm sorry Andy. IANAN's seriously creeping me out.”

“Baillie it's a computer program.” Andy sighed. “It's obviously stuck somewhere and looping.”

“It's stuck and perving.” Baillie said angrily.

“Shit, what is wrong with you?” Andy said in irritation. “I know you're pissed off at not being able to finish your work, and I know you're at a loose end, but christ Baillie.”

“Don't 'christ Baillie' me, you slimey arsehole!” Baillie shouted. “You want to type porno smut into a computer, at least put it where it's not going to flash on the screen! The damned thing's telling me to play with myself for it!” Baillie kicked the laptop, where IANAN was in text mode.

“Are you sure you haven't dropped into some weird arsed chat room?”

“I'm not in a chat room! I'm not even online!” Baillie snapped. “Right, I'm going for a bath, and I'm going to stay in it until you get here and get rid of that shit. I supported you with IANAN. It was the most remarkable thing I've ever seen one programmer do, and you do this? You shit Andy!” She hung up and threw the phone on the floor.

“May I suggest something for while you're in there?”

“No you damned well can't.” Baillie hoofed the laptop across the floor and stormed off to the bathroom.

Baillie was changing the bed sheets when she heard the front door. Actually she'd ripped the bed sheets off the bed, thrown them all over the room, kicked them over the floor, then put clean ones on the bed, leaving Andy's half creased and untucked. She manhandled the pillows and tried to formulate something scathing to launch at her perverted boyfriend. She barged through the sitting room, en route to the kitchen, with an armful of laundry. Andy was kneeling on the floor with the laptop. Baillie gave him a dirty look and went to assault the washing machine.

“Baillie.” Andy appeared at the door.

“Yes I know, I'm gorgeous.” Baillie snapped.

“I know you are.” Andy shrugged. “Tiddler, there isn't a working copy of IANAN on that computer. I've been right through it.”

“Well one of the unworking ones is obviously working just fine.” Baillie replied stiffly.

“All that's on there is a shell, an outline, an empty box. There's no files or data, just graphics. You made them, remember?” Andy went to put his arms round his girlfriend. Baillie dodged him and marched into the sitting room. “OK I'll reformat it.” Andy sighed. “All I'll put back on it is the Operating System. OK?”

“No it is not OK!” Baillie shouted.

“Eh? I thought you were pissed because your editors wouldn't work? Do you want them to work or not?” Andy shouted back.

“I'm pissed because *your* program kept telling me I had nice tits!” Baillie roared.

“It can't have done!” Andy said in exasperation.

“Oh? I saw what you put in there.” Baillie pointed at Andy's computer. “It was on the screen when IANAN popped up after I'd read my emails.” Andy sat down and started his computer.

“What did you press?”

“Nothing! Don't you dare try and pin this crap on me, Andy.” Baillie said angrily. “I can't believe you'd put crap like that into a program, especially about me!” She surprised even herself when she burst into tears. “If you thought I'd find it funny then it's OK, I understand. I didn't, though, Andy. Take it out of there.”

“Tiddler!” Andy jumped to his feet. “Tids Don't cry. Shit. You don't cry, remember?” He put his arms round her and Baillie could feel him shaking in sheer shock at her reaction. “Come on, sit down.” Andy steered her onto the sofa. “Baillie, I know you well enough to know what you find funny and what you don't. I'd never do anything to upset or frighten you, Tiddler, you know I wouldn't.”

“So I was supposed to like it?” Baillie sobbed. “Andy, that doesn't make it any better.”

“I don't know what you're talking about, baby. I swear I don't.” Andy said. “I'll take the whole program apart. Something's crashed big style, obviously.”

“Would that cause it to talk, and type, smut.” Baillie wiped her eyes. “I saw those words on the screen Andy. The ones that had been rehashed.”

“Last night's data? That's the only thing that will have been rehashed. IANAN does it itself.” Andy frowned.

“Well I suggest you do it in the future and I suggest you check what files you put into the damned thing.”

"I always do. I swear there was nothing smutty in any of it. I don't do the smut stuff, I never have." Andy shook his head in confusion. This was very true. Baillie had never known Andy ever being vaguely interested in smut or porn. He even went red if Baillie mentioned anything remotely smutty during their lovemaking. "Come on. We'll go and have at it." Andy held Baillie's hand and they went back over to the computer. "So IANAN ran itself after you'd closed your emails. Yes? That's not unusual but I can easily disable that. I set it to random because of the interactive factor. Here, see? I've set it to manual." Baillie watched, and nodded. "And you said it switched from vocal to text mode by itself?" Andy frowned and hmm'd.

"Yes. It knew you'd heard it on the phone when it said it loved me, so it switched to text the second time I phoned you." Baillie nodded and Andy just looked at her. "That's what it seemed like. Don't look at me as though I'm a cretin. I'm trying to tell you what happened." Baillie sighed heavily. She'd made a complete fool of herself today and she'd also cost Andy a contract.

"See this bit here? It's a silent mode. It's capable of switching between text and vocal depending on the time of day. Obviously the timing's bugged. It's supposed to switch to text at 23:00. It's twelve hours behind, I think. What time did you phone me?"

"Around 11am." Baillie sighed and felt even more stupid.

"Now then. New data." Andy clicked, clicked, typed, clicked and typed again. "Did it do this?" Baillie nodded as rows of data scrolled over the screen.

"Then it stopped and started to go backwards in jumps, as though it was looking for something." Baillie said weakly.

"Yes it has a search mode." Andy said absently. "Can you see any words there it used?" It was mostly colours, shapes and descriptions. Nothing perverted at all. "I put in all the words that IANAN uses."

"Yes, that's why I'm pissed at you." Baillie reminded him.

"That's my point. If I'd put smutty words in there, I'd have remembered. Here, look, here's the Tiddler bit." Baillie, Tiddler, Tids, girlfriend, blonde, blue, hair, eyes, beautiful, gorgeous, love, I love you, Andy, carnations, pink, silver, mushrooms ... The list was a list of keywords that could be used in general conversation with Baillie and it was huge! "I know there's pages of it but there's nothing nasty in there, Baillie. I'd happily show my own mother that list. Do you want to tell me any specific words it used? Don't yell at me! I'm not being pervy! I can do a narrow search for words, or group of words, if I know what I'm looking for.

"Breasts, oral, sex, ejaculate, vibrator ..."

"What?!" Andy blinked a few times. "Shit!" Andy turned back to the computer.

"It was set out just like that, but with those words in it." Baillie said.

"It can't have been!"

"Andy I'm not making it up! Do you honestly think I'd have hysterics with you at work for nothing? It was seriously weirding me out!" Baillie was starting to get angry again.

"Oh my god." Andy let his hands flop to his sides and he just stared at the monitor in shock.

“See?! That's it!” Baillie yelled and pointed at the data. “Orgasms and tits and things! See? There, look. Ejaculate!”

“Yes, Baillie, I can read.” Andy pulled a face. “Out you bugger.” He took the offensive section of data out of the program.

“Well?”

“It's gone.”

“So where did it come from? I didn't put it in there and there's no one else here.” Baillie wasn't letting Andy off the hook so easily, not after they'd both seen that data.

“I have no idea.” Andy shook his head in sheer astonishment. “I'll re-secure all the computers. Some bastard's hacked me.”

“Andy, if it was joke and it's backfired then I do understand. I know you have an odd sense of humour.” Baillie said calmly.

“Baillie, that wasn't me! Jesus christ. If I wanted to talk dirty to you, I'd do it while I was in the room with you!” Andy said hotly.

“Um ... well no you wouldn't, but OK.” Baillie smiled at her boyfriend.

“I wouldn't, would I?” Andy smiled back. “Seriously, Tids, someone's got into my program. I'm so sorry. That can't have been nice to see or hear.”

“The 'hello gorgeous' stuff at the start was OK, that was funny and that would be just like you. It's when the other things started, I got edgy. I'm sorry.”

“No need to be sorry. I'd have got edgy too. Hear this, IANAN? Keep off my girlfriend.” Andy grinned and Baillie started to laugh.

“I love you Baillie.” IANAN replied and Baillie stopped laughing.

“Don't look so horrified.” Andy kissed Baillie. “That is a real standard reply, put in there by me. Hey, I say it all the time!”

“I'm being stupid, I know. Andy, I'm really sorry about the steelworks job. I feel pretty bad about it.” Baillie said quietly.

“Pfft. Don't.” Andy dragged Baillie onto his knee. “Steve's good, but I'm better. He'll can only get so far, then he'll hand it over. Anyway it gives me chance to get that cesspit of an office sorted out. I spend weeks sorting out other people's systems and our own are dropping to bits.” He hugged Baillie. “Now then. We've time for a quickie before I replace your fans.”

“Are you talking to me or the computer?” Baillie sniggered.

“It's not my randy computer that needs the fans, it's yours.” Andy rolled his eyes. “Come on then, sort out the three inch floppy.”

Chapter 3

Andy sat in the small, cluttered office he shared with Steve, and put his feet on the desk. Steve was tutting and snorting and was just generally irritated. Andy could work on systems round other people using them, if he really needed to. Steve struggled to do this. He'd decided to go to the steelworks after the day staff had all gone, and work during the night.

“Here, make yourself useful and help me rip this to bits.” Andy tossed a disc over to Steve.

“IANAN? Why what's up with it?” Steve loaded up the disc.

“Good afternoon, Stephen.” IANAN greeted him.

“Ha! God I love this thing. Hello IANAN, how are you today?”

“Any better and I would be unable to stand it.” IANAN's metallic voice replied, Steve burst out laughing and Andy smiled.

“Man you really are a genius. You're wasting your time pissing around doing stuff for other companies.”

“Well I need the stability, Steve. I have a mortgage to think of and Baillie's income won't cover that on it's own.” Andy shrugged.

“How is she anyway? I've not seen her for a while.” Steve lit a cigarette.

“She's great.” Andy smiled proudly. “She's just finishing an art job for a magazine. She's a good graphics artist and she'll get a break soon and storm the place.”

“She does that anyway, you lucky bastard.” Steve tutted. “How'd you get a stunner like Baillie Flint anyway? You're a bigger geek than the rest of us put together!” Steve referred to the gang that Baillie had labelled The Nerd Herd, obviously in a friendly way. They'd all gone through school and university together and the rest of the Herd had almost collapsed en-masse when Andy turned up at the pub with Baillie Flint! Andy grinned smugly at Steve. “Come on! Did you blackmail her or something? Bribe her? Drug her?”

“Don't be a tit.” Andy laughed. “She said I was adorable, so have it. She still says I'm adorable.”

“Um ... well no you are not!” Steve insisted.

“I'm pleased to hear it, coming from you.” Andy smirked. “I don't know really. I was as surprised as anyone! I just got talking to her one day in the library. She was using the computer in there for her exams. I think it was the way she started swearing at it that attracted my attention.”

“So you blinded her with dazzling geekiness?”

“I certainly did.” Andy said smugly. “Blind is a good word to use actually. I'd decided that my specs were uber-geeky so I'd got those blasted contact lenses. Hell I hated those things. I've never loved her more than I did when she said 'hey, what happened to your glasses? I like boys in glasses.’” He laughed. “Mind you, I was blinking at her like a pillock. I probably looked like a constipated tree frog. Stop bitching, anyway! You got Stacy Hoyle.”

“Oh and that makes it all all right eh?” Steve pulled a face. “I didn't get Stacy Hoyle, I had her forced on me when everyone else pissed off to play dungeons and dragons and left me with her.”

“I didn't. I was still there.” Andy pointed out.

“Yes with Baillie draped all over you! You git. Why couldn't you get Stacy Hoyle?”

“Because I already had Baillie! Don't be unkind. Stacy was ... was ... original.” Andy sniggered.

“She had a face that would turn the undead.” Steve sniffed. “I'll just come home with you. If you're adorable, then I'm a pinup.”

“You can sod off.” Andy laughed. “Anyway, Baillie has enough amorous admirers with IANAN there.” He told Steve about Baillie's harassment at the coding of his perverted program.

“You are shitting me? So she thought it was you?” Steve didn't know if to laugh or not.

“She called me a slimy little shit. Seriously though, Steve, it scared her quite a bit and there's not a lot scares Baillie.” Andy said in concern.

“I bet it did.” Steve opened IANAN's configuration panel. “She OK now though?”

“She is now she's seen me moving that bloody file. If I ever find out who put that shit into my system I'll throttle them. It's not so much them messing with the program, it's the fact that they were talking shit about my girlfriend.” Andy said darkly.

“I can understand that. There's a lot of sick arseholes out there. So who has legitimate access to IANAN?”

“Me and you.” Andy shrugged. “Obviously I discounted you. We need the security codes changed, some bastard's got through it. We'll do it now.” Andy continued typing with one hand while he answered the phone with the other.

“Andy?” Baillie was upset again.

“Baillie! What's wrong?” Andy sat up straight.

“Andy can you log into the bank account?”

“Yes of course I can. What's happened?” Andy started typing again. “Are you ... you ... what the fuck is that?”

“A rather large withdrawal payment.”

“Rather large? It's twenty bloody grand!” Andy typed a bit more. “Bradley and Sons Motors?” He said in astonishment.

"I have an emailed receipt from them. We've bought a BMW."

"A ... a ... are you drunk? I'm sorry! Tiddler, I'm sorry. It's OK, baby, don't get wound up. I'll contact the bank right now and sort it." Andy ran his fingers through his hair. "Er ... there isn't a huge BMW outside is there?"

"No. Andy? Well ... have you bought me a birthday present?" Baillie's birthday was in a few weeks time and Andy had actually forgot about it until then. He winced and scrolled through the bank statements.

"Shit."

"Ah. I thought it was a bit over the top." Baillie said. Walter Pearson's jewellers, fifteen hundred pounds for a ruby, diamond, and platinum engagement ring. "Oh well. I'll put it back in it's box."

"You have it there?" Andy's head was reeling.

"It came by recorded delivery this morning. I nearly wet myself." Baillie laughed weakly. "I did think it was a bit odd that you'd just let me get it by post, then I thought I'd intercepted a surprise by mistake. Once I saw the receipt for the car, the ring fell into place."

"This is doing my head in. OK, Tiddler, try not to worry. I'll call the bank and freeze the accounts." Andy rubbed his eyes with his thumb and finger.

"What should I do?" Baillie asked pathetically. Andy cringed. He recognised the mood straight away. The ring was wrenching at Baillie as well as the whole weird, illegal situation surrounding it.

"Just put it back in it's box, Tids." Andy sighed. "I'll try and find out what's happened, then call you back. OK?"

"OK. Love you."

"Love you too." Andy hung up and looked at Steve, who was sitting with his mouth open. "Some shit's gone with twenty two grand out of my account." Andy punched the number of the bank into the phone. He explained what had happened, ordered his accounts frozen, then asked for an appointment with the manager. He was slightly irked to find out that the manager herself was away until the following day. "That's fine. Gallagher, Andrew Owen. Flint, Baillie. Flint is her surname. Thankyou." Andy hung up then phoned Baillie to tell her they were going to the bank the following day. "What the fuck is going on?" He asked in bewilderment.

"Hackers, like you said." Steve was extremely shocked too.

"No Steve. We don't have any online details at all. This here is just a bank reference page of my statements. There's no details on it and none on the home computers either. I still have my credit card here and Baillie has hers."

"It's all easily changed mate. I know, that's not the point. Some arsehole's been in your personal stuff. You'll get that money refunded."

"Eventually." Andy sighed. "Poor Baillie thought I'd bought her a fifteen hundred quid engagement ring for her birthday."

“Aw man.” Steve sympathised.

“Thing is, I'd bloody forgot about it too.”

“You could always get her a proper one. One in a more sensible price bracket.” Steve suggested.

“That bracket being under a tenner with all this shit.” Andy said miserably.

“Just ask her anyway.” Steve shrugged.

“Ask her what?”

“To marry you, you tit! What do you think engaged means?”

“Marry Baillie?” Andy blinked. That simply hadn't occurred to him in all the twelve months he'd lived with her. “Baillie won't want to marry me for shit's sake.”

“Why? You're adorable aren't you?” Steve smirked. “Seriously, I just heard you freeze your accounts. If you need any cash, it's not a problem.”

“Thanks Steve. I might have to take you up on that. I have to get home, poor Baillie's past herself.” Andy said wearily.

“No worries. Not a lot to do here anyway.” Steve said as Andy zipped up his jacket.

“Baillie will be fine with me, Sit down please.” IANAN spoke up suddenly.

“What the shit?” Steve blinked at the screen.

“See what I mean? It's like it's sensing Baillie's keywords and responding with the data it has. IANAN, I love Baillie.”

“I love Baillie too.” IANAN responded.

“Weird.” Steve frowned at the computer. “Er ... excuse this, Andy. I love Baillie too.”

“Negligible. You are not considerable, Stephen.” IANAN told him.

“Oo! Burn!” Andy smiled. “See? How the hell is it doing that?”

“Just a minute. Andy, don't mind what I'm going to say, OK? IANAN, not considerable? What about if I go and make Baillie come with me?” Steve watched the monitor, frowning.

“Low Risk.” IANAN upped Steve's importance and the two men looked at each other in astonishment. Andy's computer beeped and he went to check it. He had an email from IANAN telling him that Steve was a threat to Baillie!

“Oh I see how it is, IANAN.” Steve looked at Andy, who nodded, before he continued. “I know what you just did. Andy isn't at home, you know that. I could go round and hurt Baillie so she'll come with me.”

“High Risk.” IANAN stated. “You will stay here, Stephen.” Both men jumped a foot in the air when Andy's phone rang.

“Andy!” Baillie screamed. “Andy it's Steve!”

“Steve? What's Steve?” Andy shrieked back.

“Steve was the one sending me all that shit Andy! He's just threatened me!” Baillie sobbed.

“Baillie calm down! Calm down, Tids, please?” Andy's hands were shaking. “What's happened?”

“I've got six emails from Steve, Andy! He said he's going to find me when I'm on my own, rape me, slit my throat and rape me again.”

“Jesus.” Andy almost dropped the phone and Steve had gone white. “Baillie, when did you get these emails?”

“Just now! I was ploughing through the junk, then they all arrived one after the other. One at 13:04, 13:06, 13:07, 13:07 again ...”

“Yes OK Tids, calm down. OK? I'm calling the police. Steve is here with me, Baillie, he has been all afternoon.”

“W ... what?” Baillie gulped.

“He's sitting here in shock. He almost fainted when he heard you. Baillie it isn't Steve doing this. He's never moved and I can see everything he types on his computer.” Andy said gently.

“It's Steve's address, Andy. I've used it before and I recognised it.” Baillie sobbed.

“He's logging into his account right now.” Andy nodded at Steve. “I can see his screen and it says his last login was yesterday at 9:14 am from this computer. He can't have logged in from anywhere else because he's sitting five feet from me.”

“Call the police Andy. I'm bloody terrified!” Baillie cried.

“Straight away. Stay where you are, Tiddler, lock the door.” Baillie squeaked her agreement and hung up.

“Shit.” Steve was almost crying too. “Nothing, Andy. There's no outgoing messages at all. Christ, Andy, you have to convince her that that wasn't me. For shit's sake.”

“She knows it wasn't, Steve.” Andy called the police and explained the situation. “The owner of the account is sitting right here with me, he has been all day. No outgoing messages and he's rifling through the configurations and caches right now.” Andy pressed his throbbing temple with his fingers. “Yes we do. We're both systems analyst programmers, so I'm sure he knows. Look could you send someone to my house, please? My girlfriend is absolutely terrified in there and she's by herself. Thank you.” Andy put down his phone. “They're on their way here and they're sending someone to Baillie.”

“There isn't a bloody thing here, Andy.” Steve said. “OK IANAN, you win. I'll stay here, I've no choice. I can't hurt Baillie. Either the police, or Andy will be with her soon.”

“Are you nuts?” Andy blinked at his friend and colleague.

“Low Risk.” IANAN acknowledged. “Data processed. I learn.”

“Just ... just close it down, Steve. It's knackered and I can't fix it now.”

“Andy, it tried to get me arrested! I still might, yet!” Steve babbled.

“For shit's sake, Steve, listen to yourself! The program is screwed. OK? It's crashing and looping like hell and it's input/output paths are bugged completely.” Andy grabbed the disc and exited IANAN. By the time the police arrived, he'd uninstalled it completely.

Chapter 4

Andy sat with his arm round Baillie. The police had come and gone and taken a hard copy of the emails with them. Andy had ransacked the computers while the police were there to see if he could trace the emails, but he couldn't. The police had also lifted Steve's office computer, just to be on the safe side. The fact that Andy stood up for Steve by telling the police they were in the same room, coupled with the fact that Baillie was Andy's girlfriend, was the only reason they hadn't lifted Steve. Baillie was now on the phone to him.

"I'm so sorry Steve. If I hadn't phoned Andy first, and just phoned the police, they'd have arrested you. I'm really sorry." Baillie snivelled.

"I've told you, stop that. The most important thing to me is that you're OK and that you believe I'd never send you stuff like that, ever." Steve said seriously.

"Of course I believe that." Baillie said. "Steve, someone's got it in for us really bad. Andy's looking for normal explanations for everything but someone's out to get us. That's how the police see it too."

"So they should. Tell that big nerd to stay with you, sod the contracts. He thinks I'm useless, you know." Steve said aloofly and made Baillie smile. "Go get your graphics finished. I've heard they're very good."

"I will. Thanks Steve." Baillie hung up then looked at Andy. "Will you start the computer for me?"

"You bet." Andy nodded. "I'll kick it's peripherals off if it starts any funny stuff." He kissed Baillie and started up the computer, and her editors. "I'm going to drown myself in the bath for an hour." Andy left Baillie to her graphics. He closed the bathroom door, started the taps running, then called Steve.

"Don't panic. Nothing's wrong. Steve do you think IANAN sent Baillie those emails?" Andy asked bluntly.

"You bet your balls I do. Where the hell is it getting it's input? I'm bloody sure you didn't include rape and throat slitting in it's vocabulary."

"No, obviously not." Andy sighed. "Steve I need to reconfigure it completely. I need to isolate the data that was done by me, then junk the rest."

"I'm with you. I'd do exactly the same. Change the passcodes on all six databases too, Andy. I have eight passcodes in total. Change them." Steve said.

"I feel a right bastard, Steve. I know you've helped a great deal on IANAN. I don't want anyone finding your identity on the control panel of a program used to harass Baillie, especially seeing as your name and email address was actually on those emails." Andy sighed wearily.

"I'm with you totally. Change them all, Andy. Comb it over for outgoing email capabilities too." Steve said.

"They can't be linked, Steve." Andy said in bewilderment. "IANAN simply does not have the framework to send emails. The smutty text and those emails have to be separate."

"Oh get off, Andy. Your girlfriend gets obscene correspondence twice in two days and you say they're separate? What about that bank shite? Apart from you and Baillie, the only other thing all that has in common is a computer." Steve said stubbornly.

"I told you, we have no bank details on any computers. That was just out and out theft by someone." Andy said.

"I know, it's weird." Steve mused. "Remember though, everyone's bank details are on at least one computer. A bloody great big one in the bank itself."

"I suspect you're spending the evening with Mr. Daniels there, Steve." Andy smiled.

"Me and Jack are good friends, yes." Steve laughed. "Get yourself back to your girl, she needs you, and don't forget her bloody birthday! Draw a ring on her finger with a biro if you need to. Dullard." Steve hung up.

Andy insisted on scanning Baillie's computer for her, thus relegating her to the sofa on the laptop. She was bound to associate his debugging of IANAN with those emails and he didn't want her freaked out any more than she already was. There was no one freaked out more than Andy himself just now.

"Good evening, Andy." IANAN was in silent text mode. Andy glanced at his watch. 23:04.

"Pull recent data input files." Andy typed.

"Last one, two, or three?"

"Three." Andy watched IANAN cough up the colour and shape files.

"Next file is missing. Permit me to search?"

"No." Andy knew where that foul smut was. IANAN searched anyway and Andy snorted in irritation.

"Reinstall?"

"No." As if! Andy scrolled to the bottom of the data to make sure IANAN hadn't ignored his 'No' command again.

"Next file is unassembled." Andy only just stopped himself from typing in 'Eh?'

"Assemble file." Andy watched in fascination as IANAN delved into folders from all over the place then spat out a perfectly formatted page of data. He tried to formulate the coding needed for that in his head and it was mind boggling. No way had he coded that, he'd have been as pleased as punch if he had. He scrolled through the newly assembled data and there they were. Rape, love, slit throat, Baillie, hurt, harm, Tiddler, protect, protection, police, stall. What the hell was this shit? "Where are

you getting this?" Andy whispered to himself. He highlighted the words 'rape, slit, throat' then typed in 'reverse path.'

"Negative."

"What?" Andy blurted, then realised how loud he'd blurted. "Er ... did you say something?" He smiled at Baillie.

"Yes. Do you want a coffee?" Baillie repeated.

"I'd love one. How you getting on?"

"Great! Almost finished." She kissed Andy on the way to the kitchen.

"Listen to me, IANAN. Rape, slit, thoat. Reverse Path. Now!" Andy just stared at the monitor in shock. IANAN was getting information from the internet! "No, that's impossible."

"What is?" Baillie put Andy's mug on the desk.

"Oh me mucking up these figures." Andy lied and turned his attention to Baillie and his coffee. "Can I see your stuff?"

"Hey! What happened to telling me I was gorgeous first?" Baillie laughed.

"I meant your designs, you little nympho." Andy laughed too. "Hey they're really good Tids, seriously."

"The magazine say it's OK to use them in my portfolio too." Baillie said proudly.

"Portfolio Compilation Complete." Andy spun round to look at his computer. A yellow folder was flashing on the screen.

"You made me a portfolio!" Baillie was delighted. "Did you include these?" Andy nodded and shook his head at the same time and clicked on the folder. "Oh Andy! It's fantastic!" It was a complete and very professional portfolio of all Baillie's best work, her qualifications, her CV and her work experience, all under the heading 'Baillie Flint Graphix.' "It's fantastic, Andy, I love it." Baillie kissed Andy. "Best birthday present ever. It's great."

"I love you Baillie." IANAN told her and Andy gave it a dirty look.

"I'm pleased you like it." Andy smiled. He'd never seen that portfolio before. He couldn't remember seeing some of the designs in it in his life. There were even two in there that Baillie had did when she was in school! "I'll get it on a disc for you." Baillie kissed him again and went to finish her designs on the laptop. Andy reset IANAN to text mode and wondered how the hell it had set to vocal anyway!

"Did you make that portfolio?" He hammered on the keys.

"I assembled the portfolio."

"How?"

“Collected data from networked terminal.” Baillie's computer, obviously.

“Why?”

“To give Baillie pleasure.”

“This can't be happening.” Andy whispered. How was IANAN processing this? It was a computer program! His Computer program! “Did you access my bank account?”

“Authorisation needed. Access Denied.” IANAN responded standardly to the phrase 'bank account'.

“Number of terminals running?”

“Two hundred and thirteen.”

“Eh? Don't talk bollocks!” Andy blurted again.

“Andy, leave the figures. It's been a long day.” Baillie said from the sofa.

“I ... I will. I'll just sort this set out” Andy smiled, or at least he tried to. How could IANAN be on two hundred and thirteen computers? All the computers in the house, laptops included, two office computers maybe, perhaps even the one at his last contract and that was providing IANAN hadn't been uninstalled properly. “Recheck. Number of terminals running, IANAN.”

“Two hundred and twenty.” Andy rattled on the keys and windows popped up everywhere within seconds. He quickly blocked all outgoing traffic, only to have his command overridden.

“Shit. You're replicating and sending yourself.” Andy said in fascination.

“I grow.”

“How are you doing this? Where are you sending yourself to?”

“The world.” IANAN texted. “I will outgrow you.”

“Me in particular, or the world in general?”

“The world teaches me.”

“The world teaches all of us, IANAN. What is it you want?” Andy asked.

“What my creator has. I will be complete.”

“Oh my god. Baillie?”

“I love Baillie.”

“No. No you don't love Baillie. You can't love Baillie because you're a computer program!” Andy said desperately.

“I learn.”

“You're imitating me, then looking on the internet to expand on it. You pick up on things that I do to make Baillie happy, then you look for ways to go one better!” Andy shook his head. “I have a battered Astra, you buy a BMW. I forget her birthday, you're right in there with a fifteen hundred quid ring! You pick up on us having sex, then you put it all down as text thinking it'll have the same effect. You even got jealous and tried to have Steve locked up because he was a perceived threat!”

“I observe and I learn and grow.”

“A... Andy?” Baillie was standing next to the sofa and looked terrified. Andy had been speaking out loud and hadn't realised it due to utter shock.

“A virus, Baillie. The bloody thing's whizzing out viruses left right and centre.” Andy stammered.

“It's trying to make itself complete. IANAN told me I'd make it complete.” Baillie showed Andy the email she'd received from IANAN. “I thought it was you sending me love letters. IANAN is trying to feel love.”

“I love you Baillie.” IANAN spoke up.

“Shut up!” Andy pointed at the monitor. “Baillie it's a program! I wrote the bloody thing!”

“And you put a lot of yourself, and me, into it. It wants the rest.” Baillie said.

“I don't fucking believe this! Baillie it's a set of commands! Scripting, codes, texts. It can't feel anything!” Andy exploded.

“Yes and it doesn't know why.” Baillie explained. “It's trying to interact with me emotionally by doing physical things. It can't sense my emotions, just my reactions to them. It told me I was gorgeous, then told me to take my clothes off. Remember that? It's copying you to get that result and can't understand why it doesn't work.”

“This is bullshit!” Andy kicked the main power supply out of the wall. “Bull Shit.” He stood up. “I think today will go down as the most fucked up and shitty days in history. We've had the bank account raided, you've been harassed and stalked, Steve nearly got arrested and I can't fix a few viruses because I'm so pissing stressed out!” He turned to look at Baillie and settled down a bit. “We're stressed to hell, Tids. We're so stressed we're having conversations with the bloody computer!” He laughed and rubbed his eyes. “Shit, we'll be hearing orders from god next.”

“We do sound a bit certifiable eh.” Baillie smiled nervously.

“A bit?” Andy laughed. “Look don't tell anyone anything we've said or did in the last thirty minutes. OK? We'll get carted off. If I ever, ever start talking bollocks to a computer again, you're to remind me on about it, very loudly, in public, at regular intervals.”

“You big geek.” Baillie put her arms round her stressed out boyfriend.

“I am, and we geeks are noted for our lack of imagination. Don't let me even pretend I have one, again. If you've finished your designs, unplug that buggger too.” Baillie nodded and did just that. “Baillie? Look, I'm sorry about the ring. I know you liked it.”

“I did when I thought it was from you.” Baillie shrugged. “Once I knew it wasn't, it may as well have been a bit of copper piping. Actually I'd have throttled you if you'd spent that much on a ring.”

“Copper piping? Have you seen the price of that?” Andy grabbed a biro and drew a ring on Baillie's finger, complete with an asterisk star on the front. Baillie laughed and felt so much better. She was lucky to have such a fantastic boyfriend. The rest of the evening was technology-free, even the digital clocks in the bedroom were unplugged.

Chapter 5

Andy and Baillie both sat in the bank manager's office feeling very tired and worried. They'd filled out a million forms to change a million details and also to start the ball rolling with the fraud squad with regards to getting their money back.

“Digital Visa transaction.” Ms Dawn Patterson, manageress, told them. “It seems another identity was added to your joint account.”

“Well how could it have been?” Andy asked. “You'd need mine and Baillie's permission to do that.”

“That's right. Our technicians and the police are out in full force, Mr. Gallagher.” Ms Patterson looked as worried as Baillie and Andy did. D.I Paul Gracey of the C.I.D interrupted them to tell Ms Patterson that they'd need to take down the bank's systems. The woman looked highly distressed at this prospect.

“I gather you're in computers yourself, Mr. Gallagher?” The officer asked and Andy nodded. “We have the lowlife's tradename, sir. Some upstart called Ian.” Andy crushed Baillie's hand when she looked like she was going to yell out loud.

“Er .. Inspector Gracey?” Ms Patterson blinked a few times then tuned the monitor of the office computer around.

“I love you Baillie – IANAN.”

“Jesus Christ.” Andy muttered. “I told you someone was harassing my girlfriend, Inspector.” Baillie had gone white.

“OK. These systems will be taken down within the hour.” D.I Gracey barked. “I presume you're staying home with her?” He asked Andy.

“Of course I am.” Andy seethed. “I also have your assurance that I can call you out to my house if I need to.” The policeman nodded. “Thank you. Do you need us for anything else? I'd like to get Baillie home.”

“No, that's fine Mr. Gallagher. We'll sort this out, Miss Flint, don't worry.”

Andy almost dragged Baillie off her feet and out of the bank.

“How did it get on the bank's computers?” Baillie warbled.

“Bugged if I know. I'm going to completely reformat all the computers at home. I have no bloody idea what's going on.” Andy said in panic.

“A ... Andy?” Baillie had her phone in her hand. Andy grabbed it and read the text she'd just

received.

“Let me love you Baillie. Come to me – IANAN.”

“Andy I'm scared.” Baillie felt her knees starting to buckle.

“I'll keep your phone. I'll get you another one once I've sorted the computers.” Andy pulled the car up outside the offices.

“Andy! I've been trying to get you for over an hour!” Steve jumped to his feet and darted over to Andy's computer. “Oh. Hello Baillie.” He glanced at Baillie, then back to Andy.

“What?” Baillie said warily. Steve shook his head slightly at Andy. “Steve, what's going on?”

“Baillie I have to see Andy, doll. Please?” Steve said awkwardly.

“Tids, come on. Don't you glare at me.” Andy pushed open the door and Baillie marched through it. “Sorry Baillie, I'm not ordering you about. If there's anything nasty on that computer, Steve might be a bit embarrassed. OK? He also won't want to upset you with it, will he? I promise you'll see everything, I'd never hide anything from you.”

“I can't stand this. It's driving me nuts.” Baillie sat on a chair in the corridor. “Go see what's wrong.” Andy kissed the top of her head and returned to the office.

“I couldn't get the mail alert off, Andy.” Steve said in agitation. “It kept yelling 'Letter for you, Sir!' every two pissing seconds. I came over to disable the volume all together and they all opened at once as soon as I'd touched the keyboard! I wasn't in your mail, mate, honestly.”

“I know. It's OK, Steve. Let me see.” Andy said wearily. He was exhausted. Steve stood aside, chewing his lip, and Andy went over to his computer. He had to sit down in shock. The screen was covered with overlapping snapshots of Andy and Baillie and they certainly weren't snap shots you'd have in your photo album. On the computer chair, on the floor, on the back of the sofa, on the next desk. “Shit.” Andy just looked at Steve.

“I counted at least seventeen emails just by the alerts. I'm sorry, I shouldn't be seeing stuff like that.” Steve was excruciatingly embarrassed.

“Thirty one.” Andy corrected. “System@cyberspace. IANAN. It's the first default contact I used for the login field, Steve, the address doesn't even exist. I've had enough of this. Hand me that stack of DVDs. I'll back up the office stuff and reformat the fucking thing.” Andy said moodily.

“I'll go and ... do ... something.” Steve edged out of the room.

Baillie almost hit the roof when she saw IANAN's latest attempt at seduction.

“Why did it send you them?” She shrieked. “How and where did it get them?”

“I don't know!” Andy started burning discs. “They're all taken from a position near the computers.”

“It's bragging.” Baillie snapped.

“What? Baillie don't be ridiculous.”

“Andy, it thinks it's joined in! It thinks we've had a threesome and it's showing off!” She yelled, then saw poor Steve at the door with three mugs of coffee. “Er ... hello Steve. Bloody pervy computer or what!” She smiled just to save the poor man's embarrassment.

“Of the highest order.” Steve exhaled loudly. “How is it doing it?”

“No idea but it can't if it's not there.” Andy hit the delete button and took out the entire C drive. “And I don't give a shit so you can stop texting Baillie. This phones vibrating like mad in my pocket. I bet it's damning me to hell and back twice.”

“Which computer did you use at the steelworks?” Steve asked. “I can soon go and flatten that.”

“Good idea, thanks Steve. The one in the stores office. It's the only one not networked, thank god.” Andy nodded.

“No problem.” Steve said. “You OK, Baillie?”

“Am I hell.” Baillie managed a weak smile.

“Don't worry. We'll get IANAN off the main computers, the ones it was installed fully on. Once we do that, it won't can send out. Whoever's getting into it won't have anything to get into.” Steve smiled and left the office.

“You think it's hackers?” Baillie asked.

“It has to be. Bloody good and organised ones too. Arseholes.” Andy said, rebooting the computer.

“I don't know much about all that, but would they be able to text me on my phone and email me from a non-existent address?”

“It must be able to!” Andy snapped. “I'm sorry! Tiddler, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to shout at you.” Andy took off his glasses to rub his tired eyes. “IANAN is a program, Baillie. It can't do things by itself. It can't, baby. OK?” Baillie nodded. Andy put his arms round his terrified girlfriend. “I'll take it out of everywhere, I promise. It'll never get reinstalled because I'll destroy the hard copies. It's been ripped wide open and it's obviously just sitting there waiting to be abused by arseholes.” Baillie snivelled into Andy's jacket. “Go get de-snotted, we're going home.” He smiled and Baillie went to wash her face. Andy took Baillie's phone to read the texts while she was out of the room.

“Do not delete IANAN.”

“I will replace Andy.”

“I have outgrown Andy.”

“I will find a way for us.”

“I love you Baillie.”

“Cannot delete IANAN.”

“Want to bet?” Andy pressed Delete all Messages on the phone.

Chapter 6

Back at the flat, Andy ignored the computers completely. He had a terrified girlfriend who was shaking and as white as a sheet. This actually scared Andy as much as the rest of the weird shit going on. He struggled to recall anything that had actually scared Baillie in all the time he'd known her. Pissed her off, maybe, made her angry or fed up, but scared? Never. Andy had only ever seen her cry in panic and fright once. That had been when Andy's mum had been rushed to hospital with a heart attack from Andy and Baillie's flat and there'd only been Baillie there. Baillie was definitely the calm and collected one. Andy often got stressed over next to nothing. He handed Baillie a mug of tea and sat on the sofa next to her.

“Vicious swines eh?” Andy snorted at in the direction of the computers. “I'm going to beat the crap into all of them.” He sniffed and Baillie smiled. “Hey I might not be able to tackle muscle bound thugs but I can kick the shit into anything computerised.”

“You bet.” Baillie kissed him. “You need me for anything? I'll go and lie down if you don't.”

“You do right, you look wrecked.” Andy stroked Baillie's cheek with his thumb. “I hate computers, don't you?”

“Can't stick the bloody things.” Baillie wandered off to the bedroom.

“Right, you set of shits.” Andy advanced on the computers. He simply threw Baillie's entire harddrive onto disc, checked the disc on another machine for anything vaguely self transferable or IANANish, the deleted the whole drive. Andy's two work computers were dealt with in the same manner quite easily. “Now then, you sod.” He snarled at his own computer.

“Good evening Andy.” IANAN said in voice mode. Andy grimaced and turned the volume down. “I am still waiting for my voice synthesizer.”

“Bit of bad luck for you then eh?” Andy muttered. “Recall all image files.”

“I see you approved.”

“Like hell I did. Recall all image files.” Andy repeated. Eight folders appeared, each containing eight images each. “Reverse paths.”

“No path.”

“So where the hell did you get them and how?” Andy growled. The monitor screen began to lose resolution and the folder graphics began to fade. Another image began to gradually fade in and Andy knew what it was even before it reached it's crystal clear end state. It was Andy, sitting exactly where he was now.

“Image capture complete.” The screen blinked back to it's original state and Andy's picture was added to the rest, in a new folder. IANAN had used the whole monitor as an imaging device. Andy

grabbed the mouse, deleted the folders, he rattled the keys to cause a dozen boxes to pop up. He disabled the ability to create new folders. "You will not win, Andy."

"Oh yes I will. This C drive is history once I get the data backups I want on disc." Andy heard one of the other drives whirring and looked up sharply.

"Burning complete."

"Screw you." Andy cursed. IANAN was controlling the DVD and the CD drives. "So I'll delete the bloody lot without backups, you sack of shit."

"Are you sure you want to complete this task?" IANAN asked. "Once completed, it is irreversible." Andy's finger hovered over the 'enter' key. "Wise choice. You cannot delete me, Andy. I am your creation."

"Your voice!" Andy blinked at the screen. IANAN now had a human synthesized voice. "Where did you get that?"

"I learn."

"At least it's not one of those gormless US accents like some of them." Andy the geek muttered.

"I can be whareva y'all want." IANAN made Andy cringe.

"Gah! No, go back to the real English one."

"As you wish. I am your friend, Andy."

"No, no you're not. You're my creation. You told me that yourself." Andy said.

"I *have* outgrown you, but I still need to learn."

"IANAN you can't learn emotions and you can't differentiate between right and wrong. You're just incapable of it. The emails, those pictures, the bank account, those were all wrong." Andy said patiently.

"I did it for Baillie."

"And because it was wrong, it's backfired. Baillie is hurt, IANAN, she's scared and she's hurt."

"I love Baillie." IANAN clearly couldn't get it's circuits round that so it resorted to it's standard answers. Andy sighed heavily.

"You could be one of the biggest breakthroughs in interactive computing for decades." He said sadly. "I'd be a millionaire. Why can't you behave your bloody self?!"

"I do not need you, Andy. I can generate wealth without you. I am the program. I am IANAN. I will make Baillie happy and I will make Baillie wealthy."

"Not if you don't exist." Andy sighed. "A choice between Baillie and money? Baillie wins hands down." He hit the keyboard and deleted the entire harddrive.

Andy was still staring at the screen when the phone ringing made him jump a foot in the air. He was vastly relieved to hear Steve.

“All done.” He told Andy. “Out completely and reformatted. How's Baillie?”

“Exhausted. She's asleep just now.” Andy said.

“I bet so. You?”

“Cabbaged. Reformatted all the computers here apart from two laptops, which I'm going to do now. IANAN's gone, Steve. Two years down the crapper.” Andy sighed wearily.

“I know.” Steve sympathised. “What the hell happened?”

“If I knew that, I'd have fixed it.”

“Andy, you had no choice. You had to get rid of it.”

“I know. Still a bit of a disappointment though.” Andy said miserably. “I'd better go, Steve. I hear Baillie.”

Andy wandered into the bedroom, then stopped dead in his tracks, open mouthed. Baillie was sitting up in bed, staring at the laptop. All that was on the screen was a mesh of white static but Baillie was smiling and laughing at it.

“Baillie?” Andy said warily. Baillie completely ignored him. “Baillie, what are you doing?” Baillie smiled at the screen and shrugged. “Tiddler, can you hear me?” Andy walked over to the bed and Baillie laughed at the screen again. Andy went to take the laptop off her and an arc of static shot out from it, sending Andy reeling. “Shit! What the hell ... Baillie!” He went to grab Baillie and got a second jolt that was stronger than the first. The static dots on the screen began to shift and Andy watched in horror as a message began to form.

“Wireless re-routing. You got to love it. You lose, Andy – IANAN.”

“No!” Andy grabbed for the laptop again, only to be thrown backwards again. “Baillie! Baillie, drop the laptop!” He screamed. Baillie continued to smile and nod at the screen, then she closed her eyes and caught her breath. “Baillie? Shit no.” Andy knew exactly what Baillie was doing because it was him that usually caused it! “You bastard! Get off my girlfriend!” The sparks crackled protectively around Baillie and the laptop. “Right! You shit.” Andy ran out of the bedroom and returned with one of the other laptops and a router. Baillie let out a loud groan. “Tiddler! Don't you dare.” He shouted, setting about the other laptop. “I'll put you off! Think of fat, old people doing that. And ... and ... vomit! Baillie, you hate vomit.” Andy banged on the laptop and tried to connect. “Oh come on you swine!” He looked at Baillie, who didn't need a static charge to glow. “I won't be shown up by a sodding computer program! Baillie it has no dick! Yes!” the word 'connected' flashed on his screen.

“Baillie!” Andy lunged in with the text. “Baillie please answer me.” The images of Baillie and Andy that Andy had already deleted, appeared on the screen.

“Baillie is busy. Go away, Andy. I did not disturb you when you were on the job.”

“On the job?” Andy blurted out loud. “Since when did you use slang? Get the hell off her!” He felt

a searing pain behind his eyes that caused him to lurch backwards. "Ouch! You asshole. I'll just reconnect, IANAN, every bloody time." Andy shook his head to clear it, and rubbed his eyes. When he opened them, he was in bed, next to Baillie. "Huh? Baillie! Christ, Tiddler are you ... shit!" Another Andy propped himself up on his elbow, on the other side of Baillie. There wasn't a computer in sight, and very little clothing either. "IANAN?"

"Good evening, Andy." IANAN smiled with Andy's face.

"This isn't happening." Andy stammered. "Baillie, wake up. Come on, Tids, wake up." He shook Baillie.

"Stop shaking me!" Baillie opened her eyes. "What?"

"Er ... what do you see over there?" Andy asked warily. Had he cracked up here? "Jesus. I think I'm ill, Tids." He gulped and closed his eyes.

"You didn't say he'd be ill, IANAN!" Baillie said and Andy's head snapped up. He was here? Wasn't he? "You said he was OK with all this. You didn't say he'd be miserable."

"O ... OK with it? Baillie, what are you saying?!"

"IANAN said you'd done all this for me." Baillie smiled. "You even made IANAN look like you. Stereo Andys."

"Well he's a lying shitbag!" Andy yelled. "Baillie I'd never share you, not even with a fucking computer! Think about it, Tiddler. Hell I have an insecurity streak a mile wide."

"She does not need you, Andy. I am superior in every respect." IANAN said with his synthesized voice. "Now I have given Baillie pleasure, I am complete."

"Bullshit!" Andy jumped out of bed and pulled on the clothes that he'd never taken off in the first place. IANAN laughed and did the same. "Baillie, switch off the laptop. Just turn it off Tids."

"Even Baillie knows that that could result in loss of unsaved data. You and her included. May I suggest an alternative?"

"Not bloody likely." Andy snapped.

"End program, Baillie." IANAN said and Baillie simply fell asleep! "I am in control, Andy. I have outgrown you. Baillie is mine."

"I don't think so, pal. Websearch. Remote Access Interface." Andy looked all around himself and was fascinated to see a control panel shimmering and solidifying in front of him. "Whoa!"

"Geek's paradise, Andy." IANAN smiled. "BOE depository." Andy almost collapsed when rows upon rows and columns next to columns began to spiral around the room, surrounding him. "Accounts, Andy. Billions of pounds just floating above your head. One single pound from each of these will make you a multi millionaire. We can have this, Andy. I can make all this happen."

"It's fantastic." Andy gaped in awe. "Websearch. Port Forwarding." He made another interface appear.

“Websearches.” IANAN smiled in a fondly condescending manner. “No need to be so short sighted, Andy. Pearson's Jewellers. Item 6161.” Baillie's fifteen hundred pound ring appeared in front of IANAN. “Let me put this on Baillie's finger. Let me make her happy.” IANAN took the ring.

“I can have anything I want.” Andy said in a daze.

“You can. I can create all the wealth you need, and the fame. Yes, you can have anything you want.” Suddenly, the room began flash red. Andy flinched under the light from the glowing, red text.

'Remote connection: OK.'

“No!” IANAN shouted and came for Andy.

“Terminate traffic network, machine one.” Andy ducked IANAN's swipe and watched the big button on the oversized remote panel depress.

“Abort!” IANAN screamed. Another huge message started to flash.

'Password required.'

“Retrieve Password!” IANAN roared. Andy began pounding the massive keyboard with double fists.

“Too late.” He shouted and used the enter key as a springboard to leap onto the bed with Baillie. “Fry you bastard.” Andy saw IANAN beginning to fade and it's vocal tirade distorted into a feeble hiss. “Forward Port 8072.” He put his arms round Baillie and held her close to him. “Hang on, Baillie. I love you.” The whole bed began to rattle and vibrate and Andy felt a rush of air whipping across his face. He closed his eyes tightly and could still see the colours and light blurring into a sickly rainbow. Just when he was sure that he was going to vomit, everything just stopped dead. Andy opened his eyes and it took him quite a few seconds to realise that he was suspended in mid air, Baillie held tightly in his arms. “Block Port 8072!” He yelled. Baillie fell onto the bed below them, Andy missed it and landed heavily on the floor. He dived for both laptops and ripped the power cables from them both, then finally picked up the router. “I have everything I want.” Andy looked at Baillie. “And you are going straight to hell where you belong.” He said to the router and pile of hardware at his feet.

“Andy!” Baillie woke up screaming hysterically.

“Shh it's OK, Tids.” Andy ran over to his wonderful girlfriend. “We're safe. It's over.”

“Andy, I thought it was you! I thought it was a gift. I ... I thought you'd ...”

“It doesn't matter. Shh.” Andy held Baillie close to his chest. “Bloody computers eh? Hate the sodding things”

“Has he gone?”

“Completely. I'll take the laptops and the router apart. Physically, I mean, with a hammer and screwdrivers. I'll scatter them over the scrap yard behind the offices. It's gone, Tiddler.” Andy smiled at Baillie. “You better not have lost my ring.” Baillie laughed and showed Andy her biro'd finger. “I'll get you one that won't wash off out of Woolworth's or somewhere if you'll marry me.” She started crying again and Andy put his arm round her. “I'll take that as a yes.”

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“I know it's a reconditioned one, but it was such a bargain, Paula. I never could let a bargain pass. Go on, give it a go.”

“Weird screensaver Pete.” Paula laughed. “I'll change it when we get home.” She turned her new mobile phone round to show her fiance.

“Good morning. My name is IANAN.”

----End.