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Entry for the writing contest by SquireZed:

<http://www.steamgifts.com/forum/vrItM/writing-contest-giveaways>

page 1: contact info

pages 2+3: story itself (~1000 words)

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N O T R U S T

I love my wife. I love her with all my heart. She's loving, she's caring, she's funny and brilliant. And... she's different than me. And no-one knows, but me. Not even her.

You see, if the census workers were doing their job properly, their report would say that there is one person, one cat, and a couple of goldfish living at 16 Dubbery Rd., Islington, London. I somehow doubt they would count an artificial being as, well, a person. Neither would they count the goldfish as persons, true, but at least they report them; they have a way of being quite thorough about that kind of thing. But today, if a household owns a robot, nobody cares. Of course, that's because people are so narrow-minded. What they call 'robots' are little more than rusting iron mannequins with a touch of pocket calculator. Well... not the one living in my home... not the one from 16 Dubbery Rd., Islington, London.

A positronic brain. A prototype. Something governments would murder for. It's the first one, the only one, and it will be the last one. I destroyed the blueprints.

On the surface... biological tissue grafted onto the synthetic body beneath. From the outside, we are indistinguishable. We both feel warmth and cold, we sweat, we shiver, we eat, we sleep. We even get goose bumps. Oh, how I love it when she gets goose bumps, watching a climax of some thrilling film, or perhaps listening to one of her favourite musical pieces (which I wholeheartedly dislike, by the way). I do get goose bumps too, but not as often, and not watching films.

We both cry, sometimes.

Only in one case, it's all just a complicated masquerade. A machine, pretending. But does that make one less than alive, less than human? Are feelings less than feelings when they're being processed not by neurons, but by positronic circuitry? No. I love her, and she loves me back, I'm sure of it.

Ha, "What an outrage!" I hear you say, "Blasphemy! How dare he speak of love and life, thinking of a machine?" And yet... what is a body, if not a machine? What is a mind, if not circuitry? And what is a soul, if not a spark?

Once that spark dies, there's no restarting the positronic flow. And what is death, if not... death?

Maintenance and installation of replacement parts is difficult, but I manage. She never notices anything; of course, I can do it only when she's asleep. But she is asleep when it's needed. That's being... taken care of.

We cannot have children. She knows it, and she's accepted it. Says it doesn't matter to her. She saw the test results, and believes that both of us are infertile, that it's because of some medical condition with a complicated name and no treatment. Ironically, she's partially right — neither of us can have a child, though only one test really took place. The other one is a forgery; a lie to match the sad truth of the first one. She doesn't need to know.

Sometimes I ask myself, "What am I doing to her? Do I really love her? Is this really what love looks like? Lies, charades, no trust?" I'm the one who knows what we are. Why don't I tell her? She knows nothing.

And she never will.
She'll be happier for it.

"Made for one another" takes a whole new, ironic meaning here. Damn. Even irony gets a new meaning. Get it? Iron-y. (Though to tell the truth, no iron is actually involved. That would be a bit of a giveaway: "Hey, honey, would you care to join me for a swim to that island?" "Uh, I'd love to, but for some reason, I can't, dear. Don't know why. But I'll walk over the riverbed!" Thank heavens for lightweight plasteel composites.)

She truly believes in the spiritual meaning of this "made for one another". What she feared most was the possibility of one of us outliving the other, and then staying, trapped in a cage of grief and solitude for months, for years maybe, before the merciful end of that loneliness would come. It was a beautiful summer night, as beautiful as any Londoner could wish for, and we were sitting in our garden bench when she told me. I remember that moment, I always will, as the stars glittered above, and the tears, same as mine, glittered in the corners of her eyes. And I hugged her, gently pressed her head to my chest, and whispered into her oh so living hair: "Don't worry. Don't worry, that'll never happen to us... I promise."

She smiled. She smiled an honest, real smile, thinking me a romantic, naïve fool. Only I knew I told her the truth. I made sure of that. A tiny D-49 circuit loop, which I installed in the depths of the positronic brain, will prevent any premature shutdown signals from reaching the core while the spouse lives. The myth of Baucis and Philemon brought to reality by the wonders of positronics.

And then, one day, everything will end. Nothing will remain but two aged lovers, one naturally, one through carefully controlled exterior deterioration and pre-planned motor impairments. Two lovers, one with a date with destiny, and one with a chance to go on... a chance that will be forfeit for the sake of the other, and of the feelings between them, be they real or imagined.

On that day, when she closes her starkly blue eyes for the last time, I will know the charade is over. I will sit beside her, frail, white-haired and bent, I will straighten up, the circuit in my head will cease blocking the signal routes, and I will shut myself down, knowing she lived happy till the end of her life.

Of my love for her, nothing will remain. Not ashes... not memories... not rust.