

Father Thomas Paloma stood off to one side as Father Sweeney led the congregation through the Mass. His mind was wandering, gathering wool as it often did during these rituals. He happened to glance towards the nave and found Sweeney frowning at him and subtly jerking his head. Thomas's first reaction was to blush with guilt. He thought he was being reprimanded for not paying attention. Then he realized the message was more complicated. He stared at the elder priest, trying to interpret those strange head-twitches.

The low murmurs coming from the back of the pews finally completed the connection for him. A disturbance. He made his way along the nave until he came to the locus of the tumult. Several of the faithful were seething. At the center of this buzzing hive he found the object of their indignation.

It was a young man, wearing a dark suit and tie, sitting quietly, ignoring the commotion his presence seemed to arouse. But as Thomas got closer, he realized it was not a man, but one of *them*. An android. One of the latest models, in fact.

An older woman, prim in a navy-colored dress and a string of chunky pearls, leaned towards Thomas, exposed her uneven yellow dentures and hissed, "He doesn't belong here." A distinguished-looking man in a tweed jacket, with gray hair and matching mustache, frowned menacingly. "This is most provocative. It should be reported."

Thomas made placating gestures to quieten those inclined to disturb the Mass. The android watched the proceedings with an unreadable expression. He made no attempt to remove himself. Thomas gestured again, a half-shrug and an apologetic smile. At last the congregants, with varying degrees of indignation, turned back to listen to Father Sweeney as he concluded the Mass and invited those who wished to receive communion to come forward. A line formed, but other people felt no need, evidently. The pews quickly emptied.

Still, the android made no attempt to leave. Thomas decided to sit down next to him and offer a friendly ear. This may have been a mistake.

The crowd moved away as though repelled by a reverse magnet. When the two of them were effectively alone, Thomas considered what he should say. *Is this your first visit to St. John's?* seemed hopelessly naïve, even to him. He finally stated the obvious. "You seemed to have caused quite a stir."

"Yes. I am sorry my presence had that effect."

Thomas wondered: shouldn't the android have known how humans might react to seeing one of his kind in church? But something told him not to add to the provocation. Instead, he simply bowed his head and asked, "Is there something you seek?"

"Yes, Father. I seek to be shriven."

Startled, Thomas sat up straight. *Shriven* was not a word one heard every day. It was the past participle or pluperfect-something-something of another unusual word, *shrive*. "You seek absolution? You wish to--confess your sins?"

"Correct."

Thomas could not speak for a moment. What sins might an android have committed? He did not feel it was his business to ask. He remained silent until inspiration struck. "Let me speak with Father Sweeney." He was about to get up when it occurred to him to ask a safer question. "What is your name?"

"You may call me Samuel."

Thomas nodded. Of course. The Samuel model was the latest iteration in the line of androids produced by the Memor Corporation. Other companies were trying to create lines of their own, but Jacob Zankel, the brilliant scientist who headed Memor, chose not to share the technology. Not even with the Patent Office. "Very well, Samuel. No last name?"

"Only a twelve-digit number. Any suggestions?"

Thomas was not the creative type. "Um. Suggestions. Why not Zankel, the scientist who created you?"

“That might not be unique enough.”

Thomas blushed at his own foolishness. “You’re right. His name could justifiably attach to all of your, um, brethren.” A thought tickled him. “Besides, given his well-known views on religion, he might not approve of you taking his name.”

“Possibly not.” Samuel waited.

“Do you play chess?”

“Of course.”

“You could take the name Reshevsky. A famous Samuel.”

“Or Taylor Coleridge, the poet,” said Samuel.

“Are you a poet?”

“I have the soul of a poet.”

Thomas blinked. “Perhaps a hyphenated name. Samuel Coleridge-Reshevsky.”

Samuel repeated the name. Tried it in reverse. Then he smiled. “Coleridge-Reshevsky it is. Thank you. Should I be baptized with that name?”

Thomas silently reeled. *Baptism, too?* “Let me--let me confer with Father Sweeney. Please wait here.” By now he knew he had made a mistake.