

The Mechanics of Truth

By Tiffany Reyes

When I opened my eyes, I felt calm. It was the first thing that was palpable. Just complete tranquility. There was a light above my head, but it was off. The room was dim and cold, hard surfaces and sharp edges all around. It was a laboratory. Nothing but white tables and cabinets, shelves of beakers, flasks, and test tubes, industrial microscopes. Three computers were arranged on desks in the room, the gazillion wires attached to my body, reading my vitals. It was the only machine powered on, the jagged lines on the screen falling flat as I removed the cables.

To my surprise, I realized I was naked. I pulled a white lab coat off a hanger. The name on the tag said JEKYLL. No one I knew. I slipped it on anyway. Next, I powered on one of the computers. It was a newer model and booted up in seconds. The first prompt was for a password. I didn't have a clue what it could be. I abandoned the notion and left the lab. In the hall were floor-to-ceiling windows letting in the bright, neon lights of the city. Times Square. I'd wasn't sure if I'd ever been, but anyone would recognize such a famous location.

I walked down the hall, coming across a bedroom. I peeked inside, flipping on the light switch. The room was neat and tidy with minimal décor. White walls and carpet, gray accents. Apparently, Jekyll had little flare. There was no mess to speak of in the room save for some paperwork spread across the bed. I took a look at it. Most of it was in Japanese, but there were photos of me and my body. Either they were trying to turn me into something else or they'd already succeeded. I looked for the name, Jekyll, and found it. But I couldn't put it into context. I sighed and moved on.

In the living room, I found the AI system active. The little digital device hovered near the ceiling, its green eye locked on me.

“Where am I?” I asked as I examined the room.

“453 W. 47th St., Penthouse suite, Astoria Building, Top Floor, New York, New York, 10018,” the AI responded in its pleasant, melodic voice.

“Where is Jekyll?”

“Classified.”

“*Who* is Jekyll?”

“Classified.”

I ambled over to the front door and tried to open it. “Why is the door locked from the inside?”

“No one may leave or enter this suite.”

“Why?”

“Classified.”—“Classified,” I said at the same time.

I walked back to the wall of windows, found one to be a sliding door. I tried it and it opened. Powerful winds rushed inside, picking up my hair and drying out my eyes. I walked along the balcony of the high-rise and looked below into the streets. It was colorful and busy, a candyland of pawns moving across the board. I stood there to watch them for a while, wondering about them.

Who were they?

What were they doing?

And who was I?

I looked down at my hand, splayed my fingers. My fingertips brushed my palm. My skin was soft and tight. What were they doing to me in that lab? I felt fine. Completely normal. I wasn't even all that afraid. There must've been some perfectly logical explanation for this.

Maybe I just had to wait for Jekyll to get back. Maybe he could explain everything to me.

Someone had to. After all, I was a human being. I had a right to know.

Though I couldn't remember a bit of my past. I could've even remember my name.

"What is my name?" I asked the AI hovering around beside me.

"NON8M," she replied.

"Were they experimenting on me?"

"Classified."

I raised an eyebrow at the round, metal orb, flicked it with my finger. It shook it off and blinked red a few times before reverting to green.

"Is jumping the only way out of this place?" I asked with a chuckle, staring down the sixty-something floors.

"Correct."

"Hm. Think I'd make it?"

"What do you think?"

My head snapped to the AI. It swayed innocently side-to-side.

"I think I'd die."

The AI stayed silent.

"Would I die?" I asked.

"Would you?"

I scoffed. "Sounds like you want me to try. Which is strange because a moment ago, you wouldn't let me leave through the front door."

Silence again.

I climbed on the railing, swinging my legs over the side. The wind pushed against me and I nearly lost my balance. I shivered against the cold, gripped the icy railing. Looking down made me dizzy. Instead, I turned to the AI.

“Is this what you want?”

No response.

“I’m asking the wrong questions. You don’t want me to die. You don’t care either way. But you’re programmed to compel me to do something. For another experiment, if I had to guess. Is that it?”

“Classified.”

I laughed, throwing my head back. It felt good to laugh. Almost as good as flying. Did I know how to fly? I leaned forward, tempting myself, wondering if I could do it. What would happen? Would I fall to my death? Am I really who I think I am? Or would something else occur? Again, it all came full circle to waking up in the lab. Either Jekyll had left and forgotten about me, maybe even died. Or he was watching me right now, wondering if I was courageous enough to try. But was the question, how badly did I want to get out of here? Or was it actually, how sure was I that I could do it?

“Well, Jekyll. I don’t know what you want either way, but if you think I’m a coward, then you’re dead wrong.” So I jumped. And the force, the pressure of the wind as I plummeted, nearly made me lose consciousness. I spread my arms out like wings and waiting for something to happen, some special power, some unique ability.

But nothing happened. And as I came closer and closer to death, I wondered – still unsure – but at least wondered if I had been wrong. All in a span of seconds with the ground rushing up to meet me.

Forty-eight feet.

Thirty feet.

Seventeen feet.

Activate.