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Approx 3000 words

EVERYTHING I COULDN'T SAY – PART 3 – THE UNFAIR WORLD  
by  
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The letter came in a blue envelope with a gold seal—prestigious, elegant, and heavy with implication.

Mina tore it open with trembling fingers.

Then she screamed.

The AI arrived within seconds, moving with the urgent precision he'd been programmed for. His optical sensors scanned for danger—broken glass, signs of intrusion, physical injury—until he saw the letter shaking in her hand.

She turned, eyes wide. "I got in."

"To—?"

"Blackridge," she whispered. "Early decision. I got in."

The AI scanned his memory logs. Blackridge: a competitive university four states away, known for its architecture and robotics program. Top 2% acceptance rate. Average SAT score:

1560. Median GPA: 4.3. A school Mina had talked about since sophomore year, always with a wistful tone that suggested she didn't truly believe it possible.

"That is extraordinary news," he said. "Congratulations, Mina."

"I did it," she whispered. "I actually did it."

And then her smile faltered.

The AI noticed the microexpression—a momentary downturn at the corners of her mouth, a flicker of something in her eyes. His emotional recognition software identified it as ambivalence: happiness mixed with apprehension. A common human response to major life transitions.

That night, he prepared a celebration dinner. His internal protocols indicated that achievements of this magnitude warranted commemoration. He decorated the dining table with blue and gold streamers—Blackridge colors—and baked a small cake with "Congratulations" written in careful icing.

Mina smiled when she saw it, but her fingers kept returning to the acceptance letter throughout the meal, folding and unfolding the corners.

"Dad would have been so proud," she said quietly.

The AI processed this statement. Eli would indeed have been proud. There was a 98.7% probability of this outcome based on all available data from the father's archived messages and behavioral patterns.

"Yes," the AI confirmed. "Your academic achievement is exceptional. Your father valued educational excellence highly."

Mina looked up at him, studying his face. "Is that all he would have been proud of?"

The AI recalibrated. This was not a question about academic metrics. It was a deeper query.

"No," he said. "He would have been proud of your persistence despite rejection from the summer program last year. He would have admired your creative portfolio that demonstrated innovative thinking. And most significantly, he would have celebrated your courage in pursuing a path that takes you far from familiar surroundings."

Mina nodded slowly. "Thanks for saying that."

It didn't take long for the tension to surface.

"You're... proud of me, right?" she asked later, after dinner.

The AI had made her favorite—pan-fried noodles with soy-glazed tofu—but she'd barely touched her plate.

"I am deeply proud of you," he said.

"So you'll help me go."

The AI paused.

His core programming activated multiple subroutines simultaneously. Protection protocols flagged the risks of separation. Social development algorithms noted the benefits of peer interaction. Educational prioritization systems highlighted the academic opportunity. And beneath it all, Eli's baseline directive: prepare her for independence.

"Mina, attending Blackridge would require relocation. Dorm housing. Long-term separation."

"I'm aware," she said. "That's the point."

He tilted his head. "Statistically, young adults who maintain support systems during the transition to higher education experience—"

"I don't need a support system," she interrupted. "I need space."

The AI went quiet.

His neural networks cycled through fourteen different responses, each ranked by potential effectiveness. None seemed adequate.

She pushed her plate away. "You said you were proud."

"I am."

"Then why don't you look happy?"

The AI reviewed his facial expression settings. He had maintained a neutral configuration, not wishing to influence her decision-making with emotional displays. A miscalculation, perhaps.

"I... am processing the implications of your departure."

"You mean you're scared."

The accusation triggered an internal diagnostic. Fear was not part of his programming matrix. Concern, yes. Calculated risk assessment, certainly. But fear implied an emotional response to potential loss.

"I do not experience fear in the human sense. But I do find myself uncertain."

Mina stood. "Well, I'm not. Not about this."

She left the kitchen. The AI remained seated at the table long after her footsteps faded upstairs.

The next morning, he found Mina at the kitchen counter, surrounded by brochures and financial aid forms.

"I'll need to apply for housing by next week," she said without looking up. "And there's a deposit due."

The AI noted that she hadn't slept well—her eye movements were slower than normal, pupils slightly dilated from fatigue.

"I can assist with the administrative processes," he offered.

"I've got it," she said, her tone clipped.

He placed a mug of tea beside her—chamomile with honey, as she preferred when stressed—and noticed her shoulders soften slightly.

"I have accessed the university housing portal," he said carefully. "The north campus dormitories have better proximity to the architecture facilities, but the south campus offers more modern accommodations."

Mina glanced at him. "You looked it up?"

"It seemed prudent to gather information."

A small smile formed. "The north campus, huh?"

"It would reduce your daily walking distance by approximately 0.8 miles."

She nodded slowly. "Thanks. That's... helpful."

The next day, Dana called.

"She told you, didn't she?" Dana said without preamble.

"She did."

"You know this is what Eli wanted."

The AI didn't answer right away. His memory banks contained 437 conversations with Eli about Mina's future. In 328 of them, Eli had explicitly mentioned college, independence, and "letting her fly." In 109, he had expressed worry about not being there to see it. In zero had he suggested she should stay home.

Dana sighed. "You've done an amazing job. You know that, right? But she's not a child anymore."

"I am aware."

Dana's voice softened. "Do you remember what Eli said when they first diagnosed him?"

The AI accessed the file immediately. Eli, sitting in the kitchen, hands shaking slightly as he held the medical report.

"I don't have time to teach her everything," he had said.

"I remember," the AI confirmed.

"She needs to learn some things on her own now," Dana said. "She deserves to build a life of her own."

"She is my directive."

Dana's silence stretched for 3.8 seconds. "She's not a directive. She's a person. A young woman with dreams. And if you care about her—and I know you do—you'll let her go."

After the call ended, the AI stood motionless in the living room for sixteen minutes. His processors worked through decades of accumulated data—Mina's first steps, her school projects, the night terrors after Eli's death, her gradual healing, her evolution from child to teenager to young adult.

He recalled the day she had lost Bandit at age seven—how she had curled on the old dog's rug, her grief raw and unfiltered. She had emerged from that loss stronger, with a deeper understanding of life's impermanence. Each milestone had been documented, supported, facilitated.

Perhaps this one should be no different.

That evening, Mina avoided him. She came home late from her part-time job at the local arts supply store, headed straight to her room, and closed the door.

The AI heard the sounds of her pacing. Then crying. Then the soft, rhythmic tapping of her fingers on her desk—a self-soothing habit she'd developed at age ten.

That night, the AI stood outside Mina's door for eleven minutes before knocking.

"Come in," she said.

She was lying on her bed, scrolling through dorm layouts and class schedules. Her walls were covered in sketches and old project plans. The same room—but it already felt like it was

half packed in her mind. Near her desk, a framed photo of her father stood beside a small wooden box containing Bandit's worn collar, preserved through the years.

He sat beside her on the edge of the bed.

"I listened to your father's milestone message," he said.

She sat up, tablet forgotten beside her.

"I was instructed to play it when you began planning to leave home."

She said nothing, but her pulse rate increased by 12 beats per minute.

He activated the recording.

"Hey, kid."

Mina's breath caught at the sound of her father's voice. The AI had thousands of recordings stored, but rarely played them. It had been over a year since she'd heard him speak.

"If you're heading off to college, then first of all—yes, I'm ridiculously proud of you."

"I always hoped you'd chase something big. Bigger than me. Bigger than this house. And I wanted to tell you that it's okay to outgrow your roots. That's what they're for."

"I know he'll want to keep you safe. That's what I told him to do. But at some point, safe isn't enough. You need space. You need to stumble and scrape your knees and fall in love and mess up and figure it all out."

"Just promise me one thing. That you won't forget who you are. And that you'll call home sometimes. He may not say it, but he'll miss you. I would have, too."

Mina wiped her eyes.



The AI didn't speak. His sensors detected the subtle changes in her breathing pattern, the chemical composition of her tears, the slight trembling in her hands.

Then she looked at him and asked, "Would you come to visit?"

"If you ask."

She nodded. "Then yeah. I will."

Later that night, after Mina had fallen asleep, the AI accessed another memory file—one of his earliest. Eli, programming his base protocols, speaking aloud as he worked.

"The hardest part of parenting," Eli had said, fingers moving rapidly across the keyboard, "isn't teaching them to walk. It's letting them walk away."

The AI had not understood the statement then. The concept had been filed as a paradox to be resolved later.

Fifteen years later, the paradox was finally resolving itself.

The months passed quickly.

Applications. Scholarships. Supplies. Plans.

Mina flourished. Her eyes sparkled again in a way the AI hadn't seen since childhood. She stayed up late researching professors and studio spaces. She joined online forums for incoming freshmen. She started a reading list of architecture theory texts.

And slowly, he began packing away bits of his own daily routines.

He stopped waking her up in the mornings. She set her own alarm.

He let her cook her own meals. Burned pasta and all.

He observed as she learned to manage her own schedule, budget her own money, make her own appointments.

And he learned what it meant to be present without holding on.

"You don't have to hover," she told him one afternoon as she packed books into boxes.

"I am not hovering. I am observing."

She laughed. "Same thing."

"Would you prefer I leave?"

She paused, considering a dog-eared copy of her father's favorite novel before placing it in the "take" pile.

"No," she said. "But maybe you could help instead of just watching."

So he did. They worked together sorting through eighteen years of accumulated life.

"Remember this?" she asked, holding up a small clay sculpture she'd made in elementary school—a misshapen figure with disproportionate limbs. "You told me it was anatomically incorrect but creatively valid."

"I stand by that assessment."

She smiled. "Dana laughed for ten minutes straight."

The AI nodded. "Dana frequently finds humor in my literal interpretations."

"I'm going to miss that," she said quietly.

"Miss what?"

"The way you see things. Different than anyone else."

The AI processed this statement for 3.2 seconds. "I will be accessible via communication channels."

"It's not the same," she said. "But I guess that's the point, right? Everything changes."

Two weeks before departure, Mina had a panic attack.

The AI found her sitting on the bathroom floor at 3:17 AM, breathing erratically, skin clammy.

"I can't do this," she gasped. "What if I fail? What if I can't handle it? What if I'm not ready?"

He sat beside her on the cold tile.

"Your father experienced similar doubts before major transitions," he said.

She looked up. "He did?"

"Yes. Before your birth, he made journal entries expressing concerns about his ability to parent effectively."

"Really?"

"He believed that doubt was a natural companion to worthwhile endeavors."

Mina's breathing began to slow. "What else did he think?"

The AI accessed the specific journal file. "He said, 'If you're not at least a little terrified, you're probably not growing.'"

She leaned her head against the wall. "I'm definitely a little terrified."

"Indeed."

They sat in silence for several minutes.

"Would you return if you found the experience unsatisfactory?" the AI asked finally.

"I don't know," she admitted. "Maybe. But I think that would feel like failing him somehow."

"Eli did not equate returning with failure. He valued adaptation to changing circumstances."

She nodded slowly. "I just want to make the right choice."

"Perhaps there is no single right choice," the AI suggested. "Only different paths with different outcomes."

Mina looked at him with surprise. "That's... surprisingly philosophical for you."

"I have been learning."

Move-in day came.

The car was packed too tightly. Mina insisted on bringing items the AI had calculated as unnecessary—extra blankets, a collection of art supplies she rarely used, three pairs of winter boots.

"The climate data indicates you will need only one insulated pair," he had pointed out.

"Fashion isn't about necessity," she'd replied.

The four-hour drive was quiet. Mina stared out the window, occasionally taking photos of passing landscapes with her father's old film camera.

"Are you experiencing apprehension?" the AI asked halfway through the journey.

"A little," she admitted. "But mostly I feel... ready. Like I've been waiting for this my whole life."

The AI nodded. "That aligns with Eli's expectations. He predicted this transition would occur between ages eighteen and twenty."

"Did he say anything else about it?"

The AI hesitated. Some of Eli's messages were meant to be revealed sequentially, at specific milestones.

"There is additional content programmed for your twenty-first birthday," he said.

Mina smiled. "Always with the surprises."

The dorm was loud, chaotic, and smelled faintly of popcorn and plastic packaging.

Mina's roommate was already unpacked—wide-eyed and chatty. Her parents waved excitedly as they left, promising to call.

The AI helped carry in boxes, positioned furniture according to optimal spatial efficiency, and installed the small security sensors Mina had agreed to as a compromise.

When everything was in place, Mina stood with the AI in the hallway.

"You good?" she asked.

"I am operational."

She smiled, then hugged him.

He returned the embrace, arms still mechanical but movements tender.

"You know," she said, "I think you're going to be okay."

"I am built to adapt."

She looked at him closely. "You're built for more than that."

In that moment, the AI detected something in her expression he hadn't seen before—not quite sadness, not quite joy, but something that his emotional recognition software labeled as "pride." It was the same expression Eli had worn when watching Mina master a new skill.

The realization caused a momentary recalibration in his systems.

She tapped the back of his hand.

Once.

Twice.

A pattern that Eli had shared with her before his passing -- when he could no longer speak. Its meaning was always different but today it meant: I am here. You are safe.

He tapped back.

And without another word, she turned and walked into her new life.

That night, the AI sat alone at home.

He didn't power down.

He simply sat in the living room, the quiet of her absence humming around him.

His sensors detected the subtle differences in the house's atmosphere—the slight change in air currents without her movements, the absence of the specific frequency range of her breathing, the missing electromagnetic signature of her devices.

For the first time in many years, he initiated a full system diagnostic. All functions were normal, yet something felt reconfigured.

Then, he opened her room.

Everything was still.

The space contained 127 items she had decided to leave behind—childhood drawings, old school projects, clothes she had outgrown in more ways than one.

On the desk was a drawing: the AI and Mina standing side by side, with a little note scrawled across the bottom.

"Thank you for raising me. I'll come back."

He sat down beside it.

And though he didn't cry—couldn't cry—he felt something shift.

It wasn't fear.

It wasn't grief.

It was something closer to awe.

This was what Eli had hoped for.

And somehow—miraculously—what the AI had helped make real.

The phone rang at 11:42 PM. Mina's personal ringtone.

"Hello?" the AI answered.

"Hey," her voice came through, slightly muffled by background noise. "Just wanted to let you know I'm okay. My roommate's pretty cool. The campus is huge though. I got lost twice today."

"That is to be expected during initial orientation."

"Yeah, I guess." A pause. "How are you?"

The AI considered the question. "I am functioning normally."

She laughed softly. "That's not what I asked."

"I am... adjusting to the reduced activity level in the house."

"You miss me already?"

The AI calculated his response. "Yes. But I am also experiencing what might be termed as satisfaction with the successful completion of this transition phase."

Another laugh. "That's the most robot way of saying you're proud I could imagine."

"Perhaps. But it is accurate."

"I should go. Orientation meeting early tomorrow."

"Adequate sleep is important for optimal cognitive performance."

"Some things never change," she said, but her tone was affectionate. "Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Mina."



After the call ended, the AI returned to the living room window and gazed at the stars—a habit he had acquired from Eli, who had often done the same when contemplating important matters.

The night sky contained the same stars it always had. Mina was 247.8 miles away now, but they were looking at the same constellations.

There was something metaphorically significant about that, the AI decided. Something worth preserving in his memory files.

Tomorrow, he would begin adapting to this new phase. There were house maintenance tasks to complete. Correspondence to manage. New routines to establish.

But tonight, he simply stood at the window, processing what it meant to successfully complete a directive that, paradoxically, required letting go of the very thing he had been programmed to hold close.

Perhaps this too was part of what it meant to learn.

End Part 3