

Metamorphosis Revisited

by

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Based on a story by  
Gad Zigdon

FADE IN:

INT. SMALL APARTMENT IN MAJOR CITY - DAY

A bluish light dispels the darkness. The light seems to brighten, fade, brighten, like someone is waking up.

Once stable, the light shows an apartment viewed through a viewing port of a machine.

The apartment is very much Steampunk, looking like it is from the 1800's but has bits of futuristic aspects to it. It is not a wealthy apartment, showing signs of wear.

As the apartment comes into view, the DOCTOR (50's) becomes noticeable working about the room. He seems a bit upset, as his face is close to the viewscreen and he seems to be inspecting something.

The POV is from the machine. The conversations are heard in the machine through tinny speakers. There is a room that the machine is in, and through a door a partial view of another room. The windows reveal nothing of the outside.

DOCTOR

Not good. Not good. I told them  
this was a mistake. But does anyone  
listen? No, of course not.

He turns to talk behind him.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Are you coming in here? I came out  
of courtesy. I don't have all day.

Into the room walk TAYLOR (50's), ELON (early 20's) and VALI (12). Taylor is very pretty, but clearly not dominating of the group. Elon has a bit of an air about him, and doesn't seem to want to be here.

Vali is sweet in demeanor. She and Elon seem to be the leaders of the group, but for different reasons.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Come on. Let me show you, again,  
what the problem is. You get what  
you pay for, and in this case you  
certainly did.

The three join the Doctor looking at the machine.

The four look at the machine, and outside its dials and gauges, and a screen just outside a viewing window. He points to the screen.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

This is your problem. The screen is malfunctioning, again. He can't communicate with us. All we get is gibberish. He may know what we are saying, but we definitely don't know what he is saying. Or thinking. Or anything else.

Elon taps the screen, as if that will help.

ELON

You said last time that you could fix it.

DOCTOR

I tried. But you bought a bug. Buy a bug, get bugs in return. We restarted him, again, but it didn't work.

TAYLOR

Really? You reset him again?

DOCTOR

What choice do I have. You want this to work, don't you?

VALI

It's OK mom. I'll take him through RECAL again. It's no big deal.

TAYLOR

I just feel bad that he has to keep starting over.

ELON

Who care about that. He doesn't know. What I care about is what this is costing us. We have nothing left. We can't keep sinking money into him like this.

TAYLOR

Elon! Show respect. This is your father.

ELON

WAS my father. Now it's a buggy machine that is taking everything we have. We sold the house. We live in this one bedroom apartment and he gets the bedroom. And for what? Every day it seems we have to fix the machine. I want to go to school. Where's the money for that?

VALI

Elon, all you care about is money.

She touches the machine, lovingly.

VALI (CONT'D)

I have faith that this time it will work. Right Doctor?

DOCTOR

I wish I could say yes. If it were a quality machine, like the ones made by the Government, then yes, I would say all is well. But this... this derleck machine. I don't know how it runs at all, let alone how to fix it. Cheap is as cheap does.

TAYLOR

We didn't have the money...

ELON

And now we don't have any money at all. God, I can't stand this.

Elon goes to the back of the room in a huff.

TAYLOR

So what do we do? You're the Robot Doctor. Give us a solution.

DOCTOR

Well, as I see it, there's really only two options. Rebooting isn't working. So either we transfer him to a new machine, a good one...

ELON

Like we can afford that.

DOCTOR

... which would be expensive. Or...

VALI

Or?

DOCTOR

You sell the machine for repurpose.  
That will get you some money, and  
end throwing good money after bad.

VALI

Mom! We can't do that.

ELON

Why not? Sounds like a good plan to  
me.

He heads into the other, unseen room. Taylor and Vali follow.

VALI

You're a monster!

TAYLOR

Elon, wait.

The Doctor takes out his phone and makes a call.

DOCTOR

Marcus? Yeah, it's me. I might have  
a machine for you. Can you stop by?  
(beat)  
I would say the sooner the better.  
(beat)  
Good. I'll send the address.

The Doctor leaves. The door to the other room is partially  
open so some of the conversation can be seen by from the  
machine's POV.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

I called an engineer. His name is  
Marcus. He should be here shortly.  
Talk to him. I think it's the right  
thing.

The doctor leaves. Taylor and Elon talk as if Greg and the  
machine are not present.

TAYLOR

I don't know. I don't think it's  
the right thing to do.

ELON

(annoyed)  
What choice do we have? Huh? I  
can't think of one.

TAYLOR

I know, but he's your father...

ELON

Mom, he's dead. He has been for a long while. Rich folks stay alive with the machine, but folks like us, the cancer kills us. And it killed him. I need to get on with my life. I want to go to school, make films, get a nice place of my own. Is that so wrong?

TAYLOR

No, no it's not.

The two move out of sight as Vali walks into the room and toward the machine, carrying milk and toast for herself.

VALI

Well daddy, time to do the RECAL again. Of course, for you this is the first time. I don't mind though. I'll do it as many times as we need.

She picks up some pictures from a box.

VALI (CONT'D)

So what I'm going to do is show you some pictures from your life. They should trigger memories. The more memories, the more connections, the more RECAL that will occur. OK?

She proceeds to hold pictures up to the view window. The first is a young, good looking man, playing at the beach.

VALI (CONT'D)

Remember this? You were about twenty. You went there on a break from college.

She holds up a picture of him with a baseball bat.

VALI (CONT'D)

Here's you playing ball. You play second base. Remember.

(holding up a picture of a man in a suit)

Here's you on your first day at the Company. You were so excited.

She digs a bit and finds one, and pauses, then holds it up. It's him with a baby.

VALI (CONT'D)

Here's when I was born. Remember that? That was shortly before the found the cancer. You always said that you knew the family was complete when I was born.

She puts the picture down and a tear rolls down her cheek.

VALI (CONT'D)

Don't worry daddy. I will always be here for you. I will take as long as we need, as many times as we need, to help get you back. Does any of this help?

She looks at the view screen. Gibberish is going across.

VALI (CONT'D)

I feel like you are trying to tell me something. But this machine just won't let you.

She thinks for a minute.

VALI (CONT'D)

Let's play a game. I will try to guess what a symbol is. If I get it right, send the same symbol. If not, send the one that means the word I guessed? OK.

A few symbols come up.

VALI (CONT'D)

OK. First symbol.

One comes up.

VALI (CONT'D)

Love. Is that love? Please daddy, is that love?

A different symbol appears.

VALI (CONT'D)

Oh, so that is love. Right?

A third symbol appears, then a bunch of symbols. She gets discouraged.

VALI (CONT'D)

Oh, daddy.

At that point, Elon comes in.

ELON

Would you stop wasting time. Get out of here. Wait for the engineer that's coming. He should be here any minute.

She leaves the room, and Elon looks at the machine.

ELON (CONT'D)

Sorry dad. I don't see any other way. I know you understand.

O.S. there is a KNOCK.

MARCUS (O.S.)

Hi. I'm from TractLink, the company that wants to buy your machine. May I come in?

He walks into the room. MARCUS (35) is tall, well dressed. He walks up and shakes Elon's hand. Taylor and Vali follow behind.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

Greetings. My name is Marcus. I'm here to look at your machine.

ELON

Elon. Pleasure.

MARCUS

Elon. Like in Musk, the inventor?

ELON

Yes, but I don't like being reminded, if you don't mind.

MARCUS

Sorry. Just making conversation.

He looks at the machine.

MARCUS (CONT'D)

So, according to your Dingo...

VALI

Our what?



MARCUS

Your Dingo. Machine Doctor. He says that you bought a bug, and now you don't want it anymore.

TAYLOR

Well, I wouldn't say...

ELON

Yes, yes we did. And yes we do. How much to take it away?

He checks the machine. His face moves past the view screen.

MARCUS

Hmmmm. Let's see here. Keyword screen looks completely scrambled. Those are hard to fix. Make these kind of worthless on the aftermarket. Several parts would need replacing. Intelligence inside still intact?

VALI

Yes, OUR FATHER, is fine. But we have to keep rebooting and Recaling him every day.

ELON

But the problem is the communication. He can't talk to us. We have no idea what he is thinking or anything.

MARCUS

I see. I see. Well, as I see it, there's a couple options. We could just turn it off and I take the machine off your hands.

VALI

NO!

ELON

How much?

MARCUS

How much would I give you? I don't know for sure. Ten credits maybe.

ELON

Ten! Is that all? I can't do much with that.

MARCUS

Well, the second option would pay more, but not everyone likes it.

ELON

And that is?

MARCUS

We take the machine, consciousness intact, and hook it up to the Government Motherboard. We use his consciousness to help power the grid. Along with millions of others, he becomes part of the governing matrix for the whole world.

TAYLOR

Really? I had no idea...

MARCUS

About the Motherboard? Oh, yes, things are much too complex for humans to run things. Kind of funny really. Hundreds of years of capitalism and we needed to create a pure form of communism to run things. Who'd have thought?

ELON

Never mind the existential politics. How much for that?

MARCUS

For a Motherboard hook up? A hundred credits.

ELON

Better. Can we talk?

The two walk to the back of the room. Taylor and Vali stay by the machine.

VALI

Mom, we can't...

TAYLOR

Hush child. Taylor is the man now. He will decide. But I agree with you. I hope he doesn't reach a deal.

Across the room, Marcus and Elon talk.

ELON  
Really? One hundred?

MARCUS  
All I got.

ELON  
I was hoping for closer to two.

MARCUS  
Oh, be reasonable. A new machine  
would be just over two. But, maybe  
one twenty five is doable.

Elon pauses.

ELON  
I would really need one fifty. Any  
less and...

Now Marcus thinks.

MARCUS  
One forty. Done and done.

Elon puts his hand out and they shake.

ELON  
Done.

Vali sees it and starts to cry.

VALI  
No, daddy, no...

Marcus smiles at Elon.

MARCUS  
You know, you're a pretty sharp  
kid. TractLink is always looking  
for sharp guys like you. Want to  
come on as a purchasing rep? Easy  
hours, beer after work.

He looks around and leans in.

MARCUS (CONT'D)  
Might even be able to get you a  
botdoll being thrown out. They  
still work fine, if you catch my  
drift.

ELON

Thanks. I'll consider it. Maybe it would be a good way to gain some experience. For filmmaking, I mean.

MARCUS

Well, it's been a pleasure. I'll be back in the morning to pick up the machine. And think about what I said. Botdoll!

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - LATER

It has darkened some in the apartment. There is really no light but the blue light from the machine. From the machine's POV, Vali comes in. She stands in front of the machine.

VALI

Oh, daddy. I'm feeling so bad. For you, for me. For everyone. Even Elon, I don't think he realizes how bad he's going to feel.

She pulls up a chair and sits down.

VALI (CONT'D)

I did some checking. Being hooked into the Motherboard sounds awful. Just awful. I don't think you'll like it. Not at all. And it would be forever. Or at least, would seem like it.

She pauses, thinking.

VALI (CONT'D)

This is really hard for me, but I think I know what I have to do. But I need your permission. Or at least, I want it.

She pauses.

VALI (CONT'D)

This is no way to live. And I don't think it's what you want. So I want to pull the plug. I know you're afraid to die, that's why you're here. But I think you will be afraid to live too. So what do you want? Should I end your suffering?

She looks at the screen, waiting.

VALI (CONT'D)  
I can't tell what you are trying to  
say. It's all gibberish.

She keeps looking.

VALI (CONT'D)  
Oh, daddy. What do you want me to  
do? Do you want me to end it?

She keeps looking, confused.

The machine silently glows blue.

EXT. CITY SKYLINE - MORNING

The sun comes up over the city skyline. The city is  
futuristic, but worn, in some disrepair. MUSIC gently plays  
to welcome the day.

INT. SMALL APARTMENT - MORNING

POV returns to the machine looking out. Vali is asleep on the  
floor. Elon walks in, picks her up gently and carries her to  
the other room.

Marcus comes in with two ASSISTANTS. They have a dolly to  
roll him out. Marcus looks into the machine, smiles, and the  
blue light collapses to a dot. Then the dot disappears.

FADE OUT.

THE END.