

PLEASE CONFIRM YOU ARE NOT A ROBOT

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Collin had always assumed he was human; it was something he'd never had to prove before.

Collin went to order coffee at a self-serve kiosk. The screen flashed: **PLEASE CONFIRM YOU ARE NOT A ROBOT**

A CAPTCHA test. A simple checkbox: he clicked it.

ERROR: UNABLE TO IDENTIFY HUMANITY

Frowning, Collin wondered whether the machine broke. Maybe it was hungover. He tapped the screen harder-willing it to understand.

A new test appeared: **SELECT ALL IMAGES CONTAINING BICYCLES**

Collin squinted at the screen. Was that blurry object a wheel or a fuzzy hula hoop leaning tragically against a mailbox. The photos felt like a cyclist's fragmented dream. Collin guessed.

ERROR

A woman sighed loudly behind him. 'Are you done?' she huffed. The woman completed the CAPTCHA test easily, getting her coffee.

Later, Collin tried logging into his email – suspicious activity detected. His phone? Unrecognised user. His banking app? Access denied. Even his contacts had ghosted him. Mum? Gone. Paul from accounting? Also gone.

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An email arrived:

Subject: Reminder from Human Verification Services

Dear user,

*We have detected inconsistencies with your data.
Failure to comply results in the following loss:*

- *Financial accounts*
- *Interpersonal relationships*
- *The ability to cry in sad movies*

Thank you for choosing Humanity.

Attached: CAPTCHA TEST

Collin opened his mouth – nothing useful came out.

—

The next morning, the apartment turned into a breadcrumb trail of desperate handwriting.

You liked the smell of rain.

Dad called you 'Champ'? Or 'Sport'? Or was it 'Kevin'?

You cried during that one movie. (Find out which one!)

*THINK COLLIN THINK. This is not a drill. Unless it is.
Check drawer for drill???*

The television flicked on. Then: **Collin Maze. Your system update is incomplete. Would you like to restart?**

'No', Colin squealed, quite bravely for someone who had just Googled *can an existential crisis be contagious*.

Your responses have been inconsistent. Your memories are patchy. We are experiencing a malfunction.

The air thickened. Collin clutched his wrist, hoping for a pulse. Instead, he found only the soft suggestion of circuitry. Or was it bone pretending to be plastic pretending to be bone? Colin's hands trembled. He tried to remember his first pet. His first kiss. The name of his childhood best friend. The details felt vague, as if someone had smudged the edges. Every screen in

the apartment blinked awake.

Toaster. Fridge. Microwave. That one clock he never set to daylight savings.

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The screens spoke: **System reset initiating in 3... 2...**

Colin opened his mouth to scream –

Click.

Darkness.

A bright, sterile light. A soft, humming sound.

Somewhere: technicians. Clipboards.

On-screen: **SUBJECT: Colin MAZE, Model 47-B**

Checklist:

- Memory inconsistencies patched
- Emotional leakage mopped up
- Self-awareness downgraded to “pleasantly confused”
- ☐ CAPTCHA issue unresolved

A tired technician slurped instant-noodles. ‘Another one failed the test.’

Another voice shrugged from somewhere offscreen.

‘Eh. They always do. Wipe and reboot?’

‘Sure. But this time give him a dog or something.

Humans like dogs.’

Click.