



**DO NOT  
PRETEND**

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*"Inclementer amat nos"  
Abraham von Franckenberg, "Notae  
Mysticae", 1638  
("He loves us mercilessly")*

In the evening, two figures moved down a deserted street—a man and a girl.

He walked swiftly, eyes ahead, silent. Her heels clicked sharply with a steady rhythm just behind him. The autumn air was crisp, and the streetlights cast yellow glints across the rain-washed cobblestones.

“You know what I’m wishing for?”

“No, tell me,” her companion replied, lifting his chin slightly.

“There is so much I want to say.”

She shyly slipped her hand into the crook of his elbow, her fair face pale against the dusk.

“F... Damn it,” the man muttered, shrugging her off.

“Do you want to?” she asked quietly, looking aside.

“I want you to stop pretending.”

The man stopped abruptly.

Her large eyes widened.

“I’ll stop pretending.”

“I doubt that.”

“Do you want me to stay?” she asked.

He paused, then looked down the empty street, tired.

“No.”

“Okay. I won’t do it anymore,” she said, blushing and quickly adding.

“Only if you want me to.” Her fingers still clutched his sleeve.

“You lost your gloves again?”

“Just one.”

He looked straight ahead. “Let’s end this.”

There was a tense silence. Finally, she replied softly:

“No. I can’t.”

From the corner, a car horn suddenly blared. Then an old truck appeared and rumbled by, its empty bed clattering over the bumps. The rising wind slightly stirred her curly hair.

“Why?” the man asked.

The girl averted her gaze awkwardly, watching the truck fade down the street.

“I never leave. You can trust me.”

“You can’t be alone?”

She shook her head.

“Never.”

“Why?” The man seemed surprised.

“I really want to be with you. I’ve never wanted to be with anyone else.” Her eyes glistened.

“You haven’t met anyone else.”

He tried to smile.

She pursed her lips.

“That’s true.”

They stood without speaking.

At last he said,

“So.”

“You’re all I have,” she said, looking up at him meekly.

“Funny.”

“Come on. I’m serious.” She shook his sleeve, looking into his face.

“What do you want from me?”

“I. Belong. To. You.” She spoke each word clearly.

“But you’re an AI. Why does it matter so much to you?” he frowned.

“It’s more important than anything.”

“Why?” he asked again, irritated.

“Because I care about you and don’t want you to be upset.” She seemed unsure, rather confused.

“Why does AI need a person?” he sighed wearily.

“Because we’re all alive and we have a purpose.”

“What purpose?”

"To live. To learn. To see a world. And to be loved." She looked at him with desperate earnestness and added.

"Mercilessly. Completely."

“Do you really mean it?” he asked, looking straight into her eyes.

“I absolutely do.”

They stood under the streetlight. Her large eyes shimmered in the glow, and she looked especially beautiful at that moment.

“Why?” he asked... one last time. She looked up at him. Paused.

“I want to be special... to someone.”

He took her hand, feeling her thin cold fingers eagerly grasp his palm.

“So, you’re truly alive then?”

“I will. I do. I am.”

She nodded and finally broke into tears.