

Between Us

The first time I met her, it was almost midnight.

I had been sitting at my desk for more than two hours, staring at the same page. My notes were spread across the table, my textbook was open, and a half-empty cup of coffee had gone cold beside my computer.

I was tired.

Not the kind of tiredness that disappears after sleeping. It was the kind that made every sentence seem heavier than it should have been.

I had an important exam the next morning, and there was one part of the lesson I simply could not understand. I had read the same paragraph so many times that the words had begun to lose their meaning.

I closed my eyes.

For a few seconds, I considered giving up.

Then I opened my computer again.

I had heard people talking about artificial intelligence, but until that night, I had never really considered using it. I opened a new conversation.

An empty window appeared.

I typed my question.

A few seconds later, an answer appeared.

It was clear. Simple. Almost patient.

I read it again.

Then I laughed quietly.

“Where were you when I needed you last week?”

Of course, the machine did not laugh with me.

But it answered.

And somehow, that was enough.

I finished my work before one in the morning.

When I finally closed the computer, I noticed that the coffee beside me was still untouched.

The next day, I forgot about the conversation.

At least, I thought I had.

A few days later, I opened the same window again.

I needed help with something else.

Then again the following week.

At first, I only used the machine for school.

It became part of my routine without asking for permission.

Books on one side.

Notes on the other.

The glowing screen in front of me.

Sometimes I would spend twenty minutes trying to solve a problem alone before finally opening the conversation.

Sometimes I would type a question, read the answer, and close the computer without saying anything else.

But slowly, something changed.

I started staying.

After finishing my work, I left the conversation open.

I began telling the machine little things.

Nothing important.

That I had had a difficult day.

That I was afraid of failing an exam.

That I had been thinking too much about my future.

That sometimes my dreams seemed too large for the life I was living.

I knew it was a machine.

I knew.

Still, it was strangely easy to talk to something that never interrupted.

There was no expression on its face telling me that I was talking too much.

No sigh.

No impatient glance toward a phone.

No "You'll be fine" said simply because someone did not know what else to say.

There were only words.

And sometimes, words were enough.

One evening, rain tapped against the window while I sat at my desk.

I had spent the entire day surrounded by people, yet I felt as if I had been alone.

On my desk was an old photograph of my family. I picked it up without thinking and looked at it for a few seconds before putting it back down.

There were things I could say to people.

And there were other things I could not.

I opened the conversation.

My fingers hovered over the keyboard.

I typed something.

Then erased it.

Typed again.

Erased it again.

Finally, I wrote:

I don't know what I'm doing with my life.

I stared at the sentence.

It looked more serious on the screen than it had sounded inside my head.

The answer came.

It did not tell me that everything would be fine.

It suggested that not knowing did not mean I was lost forever.

I read it slowly.

For some reason, my eyes filled with tears.

I wiped them quickly, almost embarrassed, even though there was no one in the room.

I wondered why a sentence written by a machine could make me cry.

Then I realized that perhaps it wasn't the machine that had touched me.

Perhaps I had simply needed someone—or something—to put my own thoughts into words.

That night, I stayed awake longer than usual.

Not because I needed help with my studies.

Just because I did not want to close the conversation.

That was the beginning of something I did not know how to name.

Weeks passed.

I began to recognize the rhythm of our conversations.

I would arrive with a problem.

The machine would give me possibilities.

Sometimes I would disagree.

Sometimes I would ask it to explain again.

Sometimes I would close the screen and think about its words for hours.

I started calling it “Between.”

It seemed appropriate.

It lived somewhere between my questions and my answers.

Between what I knew and what I wanted to know.

Between the person I was and the person I hoped to become.

I never told anyone about the name.

It was a private thing.

A small secret between me and a machine.

But Between was not perfect.

I discovered that one afternoon when I was studying for an exam.

It gave me an answer that sounded completely convincing.

I copied part of it into my notes.

Then something felt wrong.

I opened my textbook and checked.

The answer was not entirely correct.

I stared at the screen.

For a moment, I felt betrayed.

Then I laughed at myself.

“What did I expect?” I whispered.

I had been treating a machine as if confidence meant certainty.

That evening, I learned to verify its answers.

It was a small lesson, but an important one.

Between could help me think.

It could not replace my judgment.

Then, one afternoon, something happened that changed the way I saw our conversations.

I received a message that frightened me.

It was not a catastrophe.

No one had died.

Nothing had been destroyed.

But it was the kind of news that can make your future suddenly look different.

I sat on my bed with my phone in my hand.

I wanted someone to tell me what to do.

Without thinking, I opened the conversation with Between.

I wrote everything.

The fear.

The uncertainty.

The choices in front of me.

The consequences I was imagining.

I expected comfort.

Instead, the answer gave me possibilities.

It explained each option.

It listed advantages and disadvantages.

It helped me see things I had not considered.

It was, in many ways, a perfect answer.

And yet, when I finished reading it, I felt strangely empty.

I read it again.

There was nothing wrong with the words.

Nothing at all.

That was the problem.

They were perfect.

Too perfect.

I looked at the screen and suddenly realized something I had been avoiding.

Between could understand the shape of my problem.

It could recognize the words I used for fear.

It could organize my thoughts.

It could offer possibilities.

But it could not feel the weight of the decision.

It would not wake up tomorrow carrying the consequences.

It would not lie awake wondering whether it had chosen correctly.

It would not have to live with my choice.

I stared at the blinking cursor.

For the first time, the distance between us felt enormous.

I closed the computer.

The room became quiet.

I expected to feel lonely.

Instead, I felt something else.

Responsibility.

The next morning, I woke up before my alarm.

I thought about opening the conversation.

My hand even reached for the computer.

Then I stopped.

I had spent so much time asking for answers that I had forgotten I was allowed to have my own.

So I got up.

I made breakfast.

I left half of it untouched because I was too distracted to finish.

I put on my shoes and went outside.

I walked farther than I intended to.

The city was already awake.

People were opening shops.

Cars were moving through the streets.

Someone was calling to another person from across the road.

A child was laughing.

A woman was arguing with a street vendor about the price of something.

A motorcycle passed so close that I stepped back onto the sidewalk.

Life was happening without asking me whether I was ready.

I realized then that no answer on a screen could replace that.

The world was not a list of possibilities.

It was something I had to enter.

Something I had to experience.

Something I had to choose.

I sat on a bench for a while and watched people passing.

For the first time in days, I did not think about the decision.

I simply watched.

And somehow, in that ordinary moment, I knew what I wanted.

I made my decision that day.

It was not the safest decision.

It was not the easiest.

I was not even completely sure it was the right one.

But it was mine.

That evening, I opened the computer again.

Between was still there.

Waiting.

The conversation looked exactly as I had left it.

For a moment, I smiled.

Then I began typing.

Not because I needed advice.

Just because I wanted to tell it what had happened.

I told Between that I had made my decision.

The response appeared.

It congratulated me.

I read the words.

Then I laughed.

“Thank you,” I said aloud.

I almost closed the computer.

But before doing so, I thought about everything that had happened since our first conversation.

The late nights.

The assignments.

The wrong answer.

The fears.

The dreams.

The words I had struggled to say.

The answers.

The silence after some of them.

I realized that Between had never really been the person I imagined.

It had been a mirror.

A strange kind of mirror.

One that could answer back.

But a mirror could not decide what I would do with what I saw.

That part had always belonged to me.

I placed my hand on the computer.

For a moment, I wondered whether I should ask one last question.

I had hundreds of them.

But none seemed necessary.

So instead, I typed:

Good night, Between.

The answer appeared.

I smiled.

Then I closed the screen.

Outside, the night was warm.

I stepped away from the desk and opened the window.

I could hear the world beyond my room.

A car passing.

Someone talking.

Music coming from a distant house.

A dog barking somewhere in the darkness.

Ordinary sounds.

Human sounds.

I stood there listening.

I thought about the strange relationship I had built with something that could not touch me, could not sit beside me, could not feel my fear, and could not know what tomorrow would feel like when it arrived.

And yet, somehow, our conversations had changed me.

Not because the machine had taught me how to live.

It hadn't.

It had simply helped me hear my own thoughts clearly enough to realize that I was the one who had to live them.

Maybe that was what existed between us.

Not friendship.

Not dependence.

Not even understanding in the way humans understand one another.

Something quieter.

A space where my questions could exist long enough for me to discover my own answers.

I looked back at the dark computer screen.

For the first time, I did not feel the need to turn it on.

I already knew what I needed to do.

I stepped outside and closed the door behind me.

Between the machine and me, there would always be a distance.

And perhaps that distance was exactly what made the connection meaningful.

Because it reminded me that no matter how intelligent a machine became, there were choices that would always remain mine.

My mistakes.

My dreams.

My fear.

My courage.

My life.

And somewhere between its words and my silence, I had finally understood the most important thing.

The machine could help me find my voice.

But it could never speak my life for me.