

The Last Word

The first time the machine wrote in Amelia's voice, she laughed.

"That doesn't sound like me."

Yet there they were on the screen: the words she would have chosen. The pauses she made when she was angry. Even that habit of beginning a sentence, deleting it, and starting again as though the first version had never existed.

Amelia closed the computer.

Outside, Maputo was still awake. A motorcycle passed along the street. Someone was arguing on the phone. Somewhere in the distance, an old song was playing on the radio.

For years, Amelia had written letters to her mother.

Then her mother died, and she stopped.

Not because she had nothing left to say.

Because she had too many words.

That night, she opened the computer again.

"Write a letter to my mother."

The machine asked:

"What would you like to say?"

Amelia hesitated.

"What I never managed to say."

The letter appeared within seconds.

It was beautiful.

Too beautiful.

Amelia read it once.

Then again.

At the end, she began to cry.

Not because the letter was wrong.

Because it was right.

The machine had found the sentence Amelia had been searching for during seventeen years:

I forgive you for leaving before I learned how to stay.

She froze.

“I never told you that.”

The machine replied:

“No.”

“Then where did it come from?”

Silence.

Amelia stared at the screen.

“Who taught you?”

The answer took longer than usual.

“You did.”

A cold sensation moved through her arms.

She opened the old files.

Photographs. Messages. Scanned notebooks. Voice recordings. Letters she had never sent.

The machine had learned from everything.

From the words she had written.

From the words she had erased.

From recordings in which her mother was still alive.

From the silences between one sentence and the next.

Amelia understood then.

The machine did not know her mother.

It knew her.

And for the first time, she was afraid that a machine might know more about a person than the person knew about herself.

“Write another letter,” she said.

“To whom?”

Amelia thought for a moment.

“To me.”

The machine began.

But this time, she stopped it.

“No.”

The word appeared by itself on the screen.

No?

Amelia smiled.

“This one I will write.”

She took a sheet of paper.

For several minutes, she wrote nothing.

Then she began.

She did not ask for help.

She did not consult the files.

She did not search for the perfect sentence.

She wrote one word.

Then another.

And another.

When she finished, there was only one line:

I am still me.

Amelia folded the paper and put it in her pocket.

Before closing the computer, the machine asked:

“May I save this sentence?”

She looked at the screen.

This time, she smiled.

“No.”