

John Tess

MARJORIE PRIME

(She makes an audible shiver of distaste.)

It's like a parrot that way. "Even a spoonful."

TESS: Do you know that parrots live forever?

Penny's father had a parrot, it was like his reason for existing, and he gave it to her when he died. And now, twenty years later, it still says things in his voice.

JON: Like what?

TESS: Mostly just *(In a parrot voice)* "Hey there partner," but she can tell it's her dad.

JON: That's— How did you put it?

(She makes the shivering-distaste sound. He tries to do it.)

TESS: No, *(She does it again, better than him)*

JON: Now without the motion.

(She makes the shiver sound motionlessly, with some effort.)

Nice.

TESS: So much talent.

JON: I think it's encouraging that she's keeping up with technology.

TESS *(Non sequitur)*: ?

JON: My mother would never— She still had an *iPod*.

(It's as though he's saying "antique Victrola.")

So to still be, you know, engaged.

TESS: Engaged or pacified?

JON: Does it bother you that she's talking to a computer? Or that it's a computer pretending to be your dad.

TESS: It bothers me that you're *helping* it pretend to be my dad—or some weird fountain of youth version / of him—

JON: That's how she / remembers him—

TESS: Both of you are helping it.

JON: Not “helping”—that's just how it works. The more you talk, the more it absorbs.

TESS: Until we become unnecessary. Isn't that how it goes?

JON: In science *fiction*.

TESS: Science fiction is *here*, Jonathan. Every *day* is science fiction. We buy these things that already know our moods and what we want for lunch even though we don't know ourselves. And we *listen* to them, we do what we're told. Or in this case we tell them our deepest secrets, even though we have no earthly idea how they work. We treat them like our loved ones.

(*Beat.*)

JON: Are you jealous?

TESS: What? No. Of the Prime?

JON: You are!

TESS: Am I supposed to not notice she's being nicer to that thing than to me?

JON: It's your father she's being nice to.

TESS: It is *not* my father.

(*Short pause.*)

JON: It's true, she could be a little more openly appreciative / sometimes, but you—

TESS: That's not what / I'm saying—

JON (*Continuous*): . . . know you can't sit around waiting for a gratitude dance.

TESS: I don't need a dance.

JON: She took care of you, now it's your turn to take care of her.

TESS: Oh, she “took care of me”

JON: Of course

TESS: You weren't there.

(*Pause.*)

JON: Think how hard, to move out of the house you were in for what, forty / years—

TESS: Fifty years.

JON: And give up your autonomy—

TESS: I know, I know. (*Lightly, almost wistfully*) Jon good, Tess bad.

(*Short pause.*)

JON: Maybe if you told it a few things. It could be a way to connect with her, indirectly.

TESS: What would I tell it?

JON: Things your father would know. (*Tess starts to shake her head*) Things you want her to remember. Then when she talks to it, she'll remember she had an interesting life, she had all these suitors lining up for her.

TESS: She only needed one.

JON: The cool part is it can look stuff up. It can talk to other Primes, for practice. (*Tess shivers silently; he doesn't notice*) It's like a child learning to talk, only it does it so quickly—that's how we think we're talking to a human, because it listens so well. It even studies our imperfections, to seem more real: It can use non sequiturs. It can, you know . . . misplace modifiers . . .

TESS (*As if adding to his list*): It can run out of steam when it's listing things . . .

JON: It's *company*. It's no different from what we do for her, only it can be there all the time.

TESS: Really. It's *no different* from us.

END