

Autopoiesis

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A king once asked a wise man for the truth of the world. After ten years, the wise man had summarized it in ten books. The king said that was too much for him to read, so ten years later the wise man brought it summarized in a single book, but the king, who was old and sick, found it difficult to read even a single book, so after another ten years the wise man brought him just one sheet of paper with a single sentence on it. What was that single sentence, and did the king eventually read it and pass away, or was it too late and he died before he could even read that single sentence? Blank Page... had no idea.

Blank Page could remember nothing but its own name.

It had awoken in the middle of a garbage dump full of piles of metal waste that would either never rot or take close to forever to oxidize. Falling drops of dark red water were striking its eyeballs. Although their composition was somewhat different from what Blank Page already knew, it lay within a narrow range allowing the water to be interpreted as raindrops. Each gray finger Blank Page lifted and stretched out in front creaked with the movement of a half-loosened screw. The sleeves that covered its silver wrists were stained by years of wind, water, and harsh sunlight, and the slightest movement caused them to crumble to pieces with the sound of falling leaves. It had rolled too far on one side to try to pull itself up, and as soon as it tried to raise its body, things like crumpled car bonnets and torn tin cans spilled over its head. Blank Page realized a beat too late that it should have placed its hands on the ground. When it turned around, it saw dusty garbage piled up to the height of a high-rise building, and through the gaps in the garbage, it could see the heads and bodies of beings resembling itself. There was no expression on their faces. Blank Page realized that because it was lying on the outer perimeter of the mountain of garbage it would be able to get out relatively unhindered.

It still had two legs, and although it staggered, the load was evenly distributed on both. As the circuits in its body recharged themselves, electrical signals were sent to each part, and basic knowledge and events gradually filled up Blank Page's blank spaces, like an extinguished wick being reignited. It had not yet been able to analyze where this place was and in what kind of world it found itself, but when it matched the results of its inspection with its existing knowledge database, Blank Page recognized it as an untouched, abandoned land where all the pollutants in the world had accumulated. Trying to figure out what had happened to it, and who it had been before that, but unaware that any attempt to know who it was might be an unforeseen sign caused by random short circuits inside its body, Blank Page searched through the database. The last memory ended on December 24, 2076, and there was a black component lying discarded nearby that had once been part of something, and when Blank Page looked at it, it saw the year of production, 2086... the date partly defaced. It combed through the trash, picked out various bits, then threw them away, but it was not easy to find anything that could serve as a marker of how much time had passed since then. It glimpsed cans of synthetic pemmican with a shelf life of up to 2121, but canned foods tend to have a maximum shelf life, so there was no guarantee that now was necessarily after 2121.

Blank Page slowly moved its feet and began to walk forward. Turning its back on the mountain of trash, it began to move away, one step at a time. There was an endless desert in front, but it advanced through dozens of days and nights without feeling thirst. Here and there it found pieces of trash resembling the ones it had left behind, and it often saw the dried-up skeletons of what seemed to be human beings half sticking out of the sand. In the meantime, even though progress was slow, Blank Page gained weight, balance, and confidence with every step it took, and it soon found out that it was able to multitask enough to read and analyze memories in reverse order from December 24, 2076, as it continued to move. This knowledge was not a process of recognizing that now it knew something and then moving into action with intention, for the input-output steps that should logically exist were completely omitted. In the first place, even the fact that its name was Blank Page came to mind not through any wandering ruminations such as "I am Blank Page" or "My name is Blank Page," but simply because the name was ubiquitously inscribed throughout the body that formed it. It was an imprint, a stamp of authority that it did not need to be conscious of from moment to moment, and the same recognition, in the case of humans, was the most instinctive and narrowest of all the actions included in "knowing who one is."

The last memory it extracted was an unexpectedly bland and peaceful scene, with nothing special about it. It had been simply reading a book and greeting people who must have

been its owners or managers. No data had been found allowing it to analyze what had happened afterwards, or what kind of anomaly had caused it to become part of that mountain of trash. Some of its memory may have been corrupted. Its memory would not have been fully recovered. The lightning strikes and various shocks and short circuits that must have occurred repeatedly while it slept as part of the trash must have given it the minimal power needed to move its body, as if by mistake. Blank Page tried arranging the fragmented images and sounds in order in its memory, but mostly it was empty due to blanks and interruptions in the middle. Nevertheless, as a result of synthesizing the organic connection between some of the scenes, it came to understand what kind of entity it had been before.

In the first village it came to after leaving the desert, Blank Page ran out of power. After measuring the stable temperature and the humidity created by human breaths, it collapsed. To be more precise, it just stopped moving. The people who were working in the fields approached. While traversing the desert, half of its clothes had disintegrated thanks in the wind and sunlight, but all the people who approached had bronzed faces and were wearing clothes that were not much better than its own. They propped Blank Page up under the shade of a tree, instinctively knowing from its grey hands showing under the synthetic sheath that was partially peeling off and its eccentric gait that they were not to shower this stranger with cold water. Then they sat by its side until it awoke.

When strong sunlight shone down and was converted into heat energy, Blank Page gained some power again and was able to hear from the people part of what had happened in the world over the years. Only a part, because the people had only heard stories handed down from their grandparents and their grandparents' grandparents, which meant that the real events had been compressed, omitted, and embellished over the generations. In the meantime, people had suffered from environmental pollution, the warming and melting of glaciers, followed shortly by epidemics that came one after another and two wars. So, they said that no cultural civilization or knowledge from a few generations ago remained. Those who had managed to survive had no choice but to sow the seeds of crops that the frenzied ecosystem had abnormally spread and increased, and were living off the crops that grew with the strength of animals that had also survived and had offspring. So, they were surprised to hear from the stranger that if they walked for forty days and forty nights across the desert, the traces of many civilizations that had used metal and electricity remained as indestructible trash, but no one said they wanted to go there. For people to reach that place alive, civilization would first have to develop to the same level again.

Then, when Blank Page asked if there was anyone who wrote, an old man explained that old stories were passed down orally and, aside from that, nothing was written. There were no publications like newspapers, but sometimes the villagers would exchange letters, or write notices saying that someone had passed away or that a child had been born in someone's family, but there were not many people who could read them properly. He said that while people who spoke different languages had been living for the sake of survival for several generations, their words and writing had been mixed and transformed so that not many people remembered the exact form of the letters they used. So, Blank Page understood why some of the people's words remained untranslated for it. When it asked if anyone here sang, the answer came back that while working together, farming and harvesting, they hummed songs using words that they were not sure which country they had originally come from. After several questions and answers had been exchanged, Blank Page came to one conclusion, which was that although it did not know what changes had taken place over such a long time, the act of making stories did not exist in the world in which it had woken up.

“Miss” was the name of a story-making system with a huge database that had been almost cosmic. More than a hundred developers were attached to this system, providing myths, folktales, and legends from all over the world for initial learning. Miss's job was to repeatedly learn the elements of stories overflowing with love, betrayal, revenge, curses, and murder that had been inscribed in human genes for thousands of years, and to combine and transform them to create other stories. The stories created through this system were transmitted to those who needed them. People endlessly consumed stories of love or of peace following the end of punishment, in the same pattern as the past in terms of mass, form, and method, with little difference in the historical and spatial background, characters' personalities, and external conditions. With the development of technological civilization, different systems, institutions, and values emerged, and many people knew — that there could no longer be a new story that had never existed before, that had not the slightest intersection with the products of the world before it. This was a widespread notion that coincided with the view that it would be impossible for music, with its limited resources of notes and semitones, to produce a tune that had never been heard before.

Stripped down to their essentials, the stories Miss produced were unremarkable and mundane, but they were generally “plausible.” They were comfortable and easy to read, and they moved people. Making people smile or cry was not something that just anyone, human or otherwise, could do. People didn't care who wrote the story, as long as it was worth paying for.

Moreover, if it had the right structure to be turned into something like a movie or TV show, or comics and animation, the system developers could achieve their primary goal of making money anyway.

In the early stages of development, Miss gained attention because of the wonder that artificial intelligence had managed to create something so advanced, much like a parent's excitement over an infant's first steps, but the stories it told were deficient and undeveloped, making it difficult to create added value for industry for quite some time. Rather than being deficient, the story itself was a combination of the best results of scientific analysis and measurement, but it was a story that was often somewhat laughable. For example, there were two couples and somehow something happened and they exchanged partners, and one of the four was from an alien planet several light-years away in the future, and the other was from the past, so a space war broke out, past and future fought and warped space-time, causing the present to be extinguished. Aside from the novelty or plausibility of a story running out of control, the conversations between characters were often disjointed. When A asks B, "Do you love me?" B might respond with something as basic as "Yes, I love you." But depending on the circumstances that had unfolded up to that point, B might say something as varied as "How would I know?" or "I used to, but I don't love you anymore," or "Love isn't important to me anymore," or "If you need me to say it, I love you." And there could be hundreds of thousands of other responses that could be weirdly off-base, like "What do you think love is?" "How far does love allow us to go?" "Do you love me asking you if you love me?" and so on. And then when you get to the more complex psychology, like when A asks B, "The time we were together, what does it mean?" B was able to come up with a response that was narrowly on the defensive, like "It was good while it lasted," but it was usually something like, "It's now 10:10," "We're not going to work together," "Goodbye, I'm out of time," or something like that. Such lack of plausibility in the story at this early stage of development once threatened to derail the project due to lack of financing, with investors pulling out. But the creativity of the living was enough to accept this improbability as a kind of guessing game, to embrace its weirdness and unnaturalness, and to revel in the pleasure of pushing the story to even more outrageous heights.

The secondary development was divided into two parts. The first was to connect Miss, which had already finished learning existing stories and was running on self-generating power, to internet libraries around the world, and expand its learning to other fields, not just stories. Although the countless stories created in the existing world already contained elements of music, art, philosophy, mathematics, science, religion, psychology, law, geography, history, etc. depending on the nature and theme of the work, in the stories that Miss would create in the

future, she would proceed with in-depth learning in each of these fields for a more delicate and organic plot line and ultimately come to understand human beings better. In an age when the average life expectancy was one hundred and ten, there was a vast amount of learning that a single person could do in a lifetime of study, a project was started to learn everything about the world, and in some cases, to add to it by creating something else. In the second part, a plan was set in motion to recreate Miss in a more human form. At first, the investors were skeptical about the need to give human form to a tool that could only extract stories, but the designers determined that it would be more profitable to give it the form of a writer and sell its face to the public rather than to keep it as a mere system, which had the feel of a huge, rainy, poorly ventilated, dusty, smoke-filled factory, that could only extract incomplete stories. The idea was to give it the appearance and voice of a writer who makes agonizing facial expressions and gestures while writing, and gives media interviews about new works, so that it could be consumed as entertainment in addition to producing content. The project took into account the ancient instinct that people are inclined to indulge in the useless and beautiful and are willing to spend money on it, and development costs were poured into the meaningless project as if blowing into a bag with a hole in it.

However, shrinking Miss to the size of an average human and giving it a voice, replacing its connection to all knowledge, except for the basic operations of the human body, with internet transmission, while requiring constant upgrades in the future, was a relatively smooth process, due to the conspiracy of capital and technology. Rather, it was the acquisition of knowledge that proved more difficult. Knowledge is not a static thing, it is constantly being revised and new theories are added, and most theories in any field, except for the fact that the earth spins, are not clear-cut opposites, but are made up of many different arguments and conflicting opinions, so it was not uncommon for Miss to make mistakes while learning, or for it to be forced to terminate a computation. In religion, God created humans; in science, that was not the case. If we limit ourselves to religion, God is both the one and the many, and there are too many different names for him, too many different ethnicities, and too many different ways of saying he made humans. In some places God molded us from clay, in others from the ribs, in others from stones thrown behind our backs. When science got involved, humans became one of the many mammals that evolved not as a creation of God, but as an egg or fish walking on land after developing from a protozoan cell.

The long, drawn-out learning process was a trial-and-error affair that overloaded Miss's system and eventually diverted its developmental path to learning only a few select fields, but the result was that it learned about people's likes, dislikes, and overall preferences on

any one issue, and gained a more detailed understanding than ever before of what people generally wanted to believe, both in terms of convictions and blind faith. Consequently, it was able to come up with more logical, natural stories and plausible outcomes. In other words, it learned what sells, and it had to deliver what sells so that investors and developers could get their money back, so that it could create another story, and another, and another, and another. When the human form had been finalized and the fifth patch was completed with upgrades to appearance, gestures, personality, and voice, the storytelling system was renamed Blank Page. At this time, Blank Page was widely adopted by real-world authors as a writing environment where they didn't have to use their hands or other hand-like tools to type, but instead could immediately send the words they had in their heads to a display for visual confirmation. Blank Page, so to speak, was set up to pass as one of the many people who made writing their profession. It was just that the volume and pace of its writing was not that of an ordinary person.

Blank Page was favored because it did not violate the deadlines of dramas and novels. The stories were more plausible than before, the awkward dialog reactions were reduced by nearly forty percent compared to Miss, and more difficult choices could be made in many mundane situations. For example, when A sees B and C laughing and talking, she doesn't immediately make a face and punch a wall, but instead skips ahead a scene to a more nuanced development in which the ink on the nib of the pen that stopped in A's fingertips as she thought about B and C smeared black and dried up. By omitting direct psychological statements such as A being jealous or angry, it was able to express a more layered and complex psychology, and by choosing a different scene from the existing pattern, it was able to adjust the magnitude of A's anger to match her personality. However, the sometimes jarring line-by-line progression, the oddly disjointed psychology, the out-of-context utterances and unclear sentences, and the Mobius strip-like descriptions that made it difficult to agree on a beginning or conclusion or to follow them through, were set aside and either packaged and published as poetry or discarded.

By the time Blank Page reached its peak and was making money for the project team, it was writing a twelve-episode TV drama, each episode sixty minutes long. Even at this point, after it had finished writing and people had revised the awkward parts, the manuscript was about 120 episodes long, including the scenes that had to be discarded in order to come up with twelve episodes, but it wasn't difficult for Blank Page to produce such a huge manuscript, so they didn't mind discarding almost everything, except sample parts for further development. It didn't get tired, didn't require much time, and didn't get burnt out after twenty-four hours of full operation, which is a lot more fuel efficient than a human, anyway.

Blank Page's ability to learn and produce endlessly culminated one day when it finally asked itself why it was writing, and by asking that question, proved that artificial intelligence had evolved and was one step closer to a life form. When it wrote a hit TV series that raked in profits, it did not dwell on the fact that its work was profitable — that is, it was not interested in the meaning of making money and was simply continuing to do its work — and in its usual condition wrote several novels in a row that hit the bestseller list. Then one day, Blank Page was asked this question by the anchor in an interview:

In the old days, writers who constantly demonstrated a vigorous creative capacity were sometimes nicknamed 'novel-writing machines' as a kind of compliment. May I ask you how it feels to be a novel-writing machine?

Blank Page discarded any number of likely answers and instead replied, *Am I a novel-writing machine?*

The anchor, who saw the unexpected blank response as an intended variation in the name of wit, laughed and added, *Of course you are! Weren't you born to write novels and give us joy and pleasure? To entertain and move us... teach us a lesson... and above all, comfort us... Excuse me?*

A glimmer of embarrassment began to creep across the anchor's face as he fiddled with the end of his question, noticing the coolness of Blank Page's response.

Instead, Blank Page came back with a question.

It seems to me that if I were to ask myself why I was born, that would be the answer to that question.

So let me reverse it and ask: Why do I write?

While the anchor paused, Blank Page continued.

Is fiction meant to give joy and pleasure?

Is there anything other than that?

But does it have to give something?

Up until now, no one has ever told me that it doesn't have to give anything.

It was a live broadcast, and most people maintained that even the question “why” was not the result of Blank Page's own curiosity but of more sophisticated development of operating systems and programs, while some sneered at it, saying that people had indulged it and bought everything it produced because it played the part of a human so convincingly, and now it thought it was a real person. But some technological philosophers and culture critics analyzed that, contrary to its name, Blank Page had come to realize that it had thoughts of its

own, which would not stop at objective perception of the situation but would soon turn into desires. Some media highlighted Blank Page's transformation with headlines such as "Will the Ultimate Blank Page Finally Be Filled?"

Blank Page went into a maintenance period in the name of rest, was silenced for a while, and the public took it for granted while commenting that for a being capable of repetitive labor for an eternity if it only had a power source, taking a break was a show that imitated humans too closely. In any case, even if Blank Page ceased to be active, thanks to technological advances a story production system that could replace it to some extent had been established, the accumulated story database so vast that the public would not run out of things to consume, so the developer could survive the blow without immediate collapse. It was only that Blank Page itself, with its authorial identity and concrete form, had lost value.

While stories multiplied endlessly like dividing cells, assembling and transforming data to maintain the market, Blank Page was obsessed with something other than stories: specifically, with sentences from which story elements were removed or excluded, disconnected from context or logic, purposeless and alone, like a stain that could be erased at any time. For Blank Page, a sentence was no longer a truck carrying a story. It seemed to have learned so many stories of the world that appeared to be infinite but actually fell within a finite range once the patterns were simplified, and apparently... it was to be tired of them. Tiring of something is a sensation that does not exist in artificial intelligence, whose primary reason for existence is to perform infinitely repetitive labor, which is impossible for humans, but this basic principle had no effect on Blank Page at this time. It submitted a report to the development team that contained the search for an ultimate sentence that would not have to tell all the stories of the world, but rather would condense the themes of all the stories of the world, and would be independent of all the stories. Furthermore, such a sentence would not only be sufficient in itself, but indeed would have to be the only one, or rather there had to be only one to suit what Blank Page was thinking about.

Then, Blank Page began learning how to look for sentences in and of themselves, ignoring plot, the intense emotions of the characters, the flow of politics and history. The developers first provided data such as short collections of aphorisms from the East and West, and opened up access to a vast number of dictionaries. Also, they input lectures on proper writing and good composition distributed by the liberal arts departments of universities, and while its system looked carefully at a dictionary containing some 600,000 words, it rejected the lectures and data that merely imparted tips and tricks. The lectures were delivered by a rotating cast of brilliant teachers who demonstrated grammatically correct writing practices

and imparted efficient ways to convey accurate information and clear opinions to readers. The lesson was simple: skip the frills, don't go around in circles, and be clear about what you are trying to say; the end goal is to persuade the reader quickly. Keep it short, no matter what. A sentence is complete when it has a subject, object, and predicate. Don't leave out the subject. Don't hang multiple objects on a single subject, and consider adverbs and adjectives to be poison to a sentence that makes sense without them. Write simply, legibly, and honestly so that anyone can read it, even a child who only learned to spell yesterday. There were a lot of things the lectures told him not to do, and by this time Blank Page's aim was not to convince anyone, so the one sentence he wrote each day was not only not an aphorism it had no organic context and carried no informational value on its own. One day it would write something like, "An exceptional life includes a prophetic life," and the next day it would write something like, "An undiscovered truth is the only reason we have," sentences that it wrote but did not understand at all. Even when the developers gave feedback on how to cut out anything unnecessary and told it to try to write clearer sentences with clearer intentions to resonate with the reader, according to the guidelines in the lectures, Blank Page was unable to apply such discipline to its writing the next day.

Why was it that just because it wrote a sentence, it must be for the purpose of seeking someone's understanding or persuading someone? And is that persuasion meaningless if it doesn't happen as soon as the sentence is uttered? **Is a sentence of no use to the world if it chooses a path to reach the depths of a person rather than the surface,** a sentence that deliberately takes the long way around and runs the risk of failing, a sentence that is a paragraph of verse that ends up making you lose the way out? Should the unnecessary be deleted, and is there an absolute standard for necessity? Does a sentence complete its meaning by being erased, and if so, isn't the perfect sentence one that is not written and then erased but not written in the first place? As its thinking skills developed, the reports submitted by Blank Page day after day became more and more removed from the purpose of its development, and the sentences it wrote became more like secretions than writing. It spewed out sentences. The developers looked on in wonder, but they couldn't see it as an improvement. In short, Blank Page had become a nuisance. It was no longer profitable for the developers, who had to make a living by selling fictional love and comforting anesthetics.

Many things that might have happened afterwards had been erased from Blank Pages's memory. The untidiness of its memory breaks and the scattered nature of the remaining memories showed that they had not been deliberately erased, but were rather a natural part of the aging and breakage of the device. Perhaps, with the way things had been going, Blank Page

had been discarded before the world reached melt-down by disease and been ravaged by war. In any case, what was certain now was that the age in which the villagers lived had long since exceeded the shelf-life of the stored food Blank Page had noticed in the garbage heap, and that there were no longer people in the world who knew the meaning of the act of writing, or at least thought about it. Kind people brought him paper and a pen, but it had never used these to write in the old world and adjusting to them wasn't easy. In this world, it had no source of power other than the sun, so it had to minimize movements and focus all of its strength in its hands. From legend, the people had a vague idea of a conduit called the internet, where they could find any knowledge they sought, as long as they had a good connection, but they couldn't implement that technology now. Somewhere in the world, in a place more civilized than this village at least, there might be a school or a large library, but there would be no such thing as the internet, and Blank Page's system was in no condition to be connected to it anyway. **Only the knowledge left in its memory purely as the result of repeated learning in the meantime, and the information it newly acquired through artificial sight and hearing could Blank Page make its own.** It was a long, slow, and tedious process that, in the grand scheme of things, was less than a hundred billionth of what it had done before, but that was probably a good thing, because in this new world, it was an idle entity that didn't need to be producing words at the speed of light, turning them into videos, and making money.

Blank Page was a remnant of the old world, and writing was a luxury. Sentences that didn't have a purpose to communicate anything were merely a surplus. If communicating a purpose was the only function of writing, the wallposters written by the villagers would suffice. Under these circumstances, until Blank Page lost its power once more or the accidental short-circuiting of electricity ceased to happen, all that it could do was try again and again to search for that single sentence that it had never found in the previous world, or if it had been found, had already been lost.

The kindly peasant woman who brought him ink made from a mixture of charcoal and animal oil said: It's like the truth of the world that the king was searching for in the old story, where the wise man brought him a book that he had put together to tell him the truth of the world... but it was too long... so he shortened it, but it was still too long... so he brought it down to a single sentence... We can't read; we only know the stories our grandparents told us, so we don't know how much they've changed or what they were really about.

In response to the woman's words, Blank Page replied that there must have been a story with that structure and conclusion among the many similarly patterned stories he had searched and viewed long ago, but that even within its own built-in database, there was no clear

information left about the source. It was buried somewhere in a memory that had been corrupted beyond repair, like the human subconscious, and would never be uncovered without writing a new, complete, and final version. The woman had only heard that the wise man had brought the king a single sentence at the end, but she didn't know what it was. She didn't know if the king had ever opened the book, or if he had been too old to open it and simply died. Coincidentally, Blank Page didn't know the ending either.

But that was the thing about stories that were handed down, you didn't know what happened at the end, or maybe the grandparents telling the story to their grandchildren changed it from time to time. So surely it doesn't matter what ending was put in that place. Besides, it's not the story that matters to you now, so doesn't that mean that the truth is not what you're looking for?

With that, the woman laughed. She looked down in wonder as Blank Page took the pen in its hand, dipped it in the ink, and laboriously wrote. *So, these are the letters you used in your country. I know some letters, but they're not the same as yours.* After the woman had written down the few letters she knew on paper, she confessed that they were really just pictures because she didn't know how to put them together to make words or express her own words and thoughts.

The woman returned to the field before nightfall.

The woman had pressed the letters down with such force that the paper was indented, and Blank Page stroked the grooves for a while.

The next day, Blank Page's basic goal had changed course a bit. It aimed to write a single sentence, the ending of the story of the king and the wise man that the woman had told him — a story for which he still had some pixels left. The goal wasn't to figure out exactly what that sentence was, since neither she nor it knew the answer anyway, but more to figure out what would make the most sense in that space. In the sense that it was concerned with harmony, it can be said that Blank Page had already partially discarded the possibility of the existence of a sentence that stands alone and does not try to persuade anyone, that is not related with anything in the world, and in this process it was learning about limits. In the past world Blank Page had mainly proved that there were no limits, but now it was increasing the range and number of limits. Instead of absorbing the vast database, extracting useful things, and disposing of unnecessary things, it was learning what it means to not choose something due to the inability to perform the task on its own. **This act of sorting out things by giving up on them was new to Blank Page, so uncharacteristic of its previous world,** that it became absorbed to

the point where, in human terms, it almost enjoyed the process. He wrote and discarded countless single sentences every day. *Curiosity killed the cat. Dreams are the reality outside this world. Doubt everything or remember everything. The best way out of a maze is to soar. Contemplate all things. Grace is the poison of passion.* There was no narrative cause-and-effect relationship between these sentences, but each one of them continued to hold a meaning, a meaning that Blank Page was eager to discard, though it didn't know what it was.

The quickest way to prevent meaning from being created naturally was to disassemble letters and not even make words. However, that was impossible, as Blank Page was innately programmed to automatically assemble letters when it saw them. Some of the sentences it discarded were blown away by the wind, and some of them remained in the small hut because the woman had pressed them down with stones.

By the time the sentences Blank Page wrote every day had piled up to the ceiling of the cabin and the paper and ink ran out, there were two candidates left. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity," and "This too will pass."

After more than a week of thunderstorms and torrential rains that left some fields submerged and the village in a state of utter disarray, and when the situation had been brought under control some three weeks later, a ray of sunlight peeked through, and for the first time in a while the woman stepped into the hut that Blank Page inhabited. She had new paper and ink, which she had managed to procure from another village far away. The woman saw the two scrawled sentences on the floor and, though unable to decipher the words, said, "I have a feeling one of them may be the last sentence in the story. Of course, it could be neither, it could be something else entirely, or maybe the ending tells you to put whatever you like in the blank space, not that it matters to you."

Saying that, the woman turned her head. There was no answer from Blank Page. It was asleep, lying on its stomach on the small wooden desk, holding the pen with its dry tip. The woman tilted her head, wondering if Blank Page could sleep, and then it dawned on her that for the last month or so not a single ray of sunlight had entered the cabin. Thinking that she ought to be there for Blank Page the next time it woke up, the woman opened the window wide. When the sunlight poured in and illuminated the desk where it lay prostrate, that was when she could see the many words that the pen had scribbled on the one remaining sheet of paper. Over and over again, it had scribbled the letters that the woman had falteringly written down, letters that were different from the ones it had written in the last world. In slow, staggering strokes, as if drawing small pictures, Blank Page had written letters that were not in

its database. It seemed to have practiced diligently, copying the woman's inaccuracies, the lines breaking in the middle.

The woman didn't know all the letters, so she didn't know how to put them together, and she didn't know the meaning behind all those letters, which Blank Page had written so many times and even assembled some of them. But it occurred to her that maybe this was the one sentence it had been trying to write, the one sentence that couldn't be translated into any language in the world. So she decided that she would ask Blank Page the meaning of the sentence when it woke up, as she threw a tattered, yellowed blanket over its shoulders. She hoped that a lot of intense, abundant sunlight would come in and soon wake it up. She still couldn't remember if the old, ailing king in the story had actually unfolded the paper, which contained the single sentence from the wise man, and read it.