

Pulling the Plug

Written by

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INT. LIVING ROOM - EVENING

Total thrift shop, Gen Z decor. Over a clatter of dishes, ARMANDO calls from the kitchen.

ARMANDO (O.S.)
Dinner's ready, Jenn. Are you coming in?

On a thread bare couch, JENNY (20s) huddles over her laptop. She fails to respond. Tap, tap, tap. Fingers fly on keys.

ARMANDO (O.S.)
Z'up hon? Did you die in there?

Jenny sarcastically checks her own breath with a palm. Pulling the laptop closer, she taps more.

Armando emerges from the kitchen. Extends two RICE BOWLS towards Jenny, a hurt puppy-dog expression on his face.

ARMANDO
I don't even get a "gee, thanks Armando - you're a doll"? I've been slaving in this kitchen, just to bring us this scrumptious meal-

Jenny looks up sharply.

JENNY
"Slaving in this kitchen"? You bought Chinese take out from Dragon Garden. Don't lie.

ARMANDO
Yeah, I bought it. Where's the crime? And put it in our NICE set of bowls. Presentation counts. When you care.

Jenny rolls her eyes, keeps typing. Armando shuffles over. Plops down next to her on the couch.

ARMANDO
You're allowed to stop long enough to eat. That paper isn't due tonight.

JENNY
Tomorrow morning. That's just as bad!

Armando arranges the bowls on their coffee table.

ARMANDO
Stop stressing yourself out!

Pulling your standard "yawn and stretch move", he lays an arm across Jenny's shoulders, gently pulls her close.

ARMANDO

You write better when you're relaxed.

(Romeo voice)

You know what ELSE would help with that?

JENNY

I don't have the bandwidth for sex right now. Stop!

She shoves him off. Types like a fiend. So much for couple's night. Armando petulantly points to a TV remote.

ARMANDO

I was gonna say, "Watch your favorite comedy". But if your mind's that deep in the gutter...

He leans towards Jenny's screen. Leers.

ARMANDO

You've been procrastinating on his project a whole damned week. What's on that other tab: porn? C'mon hon, give your honey bear a look under your browser sheets!

But a quick glance proves Armando wrong.

JENNY

Oooo: Chat GPT. How terribly scandalous!

ARMANDO

You mispronounced "disappointing".

JENNY

Whatever. Now will you let me work?

ARMANDO

I get it. You're cheating on homework.

JENNY

I'm so NOT!

ARMANDO

Using AI to write your paper? That's the very *opposite* of work.

JENNY

It's called research. Unlike your X-Box fun and games.

ARMANDO

How much of that "research" are you using to just cut and paste?

Armando tries to grab the laptop. Jenny elbows him.

JENNY

AI's a useful tool.

ARMANDO

The word "tool" does apply. Not to you, Dear. Of course.

JENNY

Just 'cause you're a leftist luddite doesn't mean the rest of us should do without!

ARMANDO

"Leftist Luddite"? I'm the one who installed Signal on your phone!

JENNY

That one exception? Fine. But you don't trust WhatsApp. You banned Siri as too intrusive. If you won't embrace technology, how do you expect us to live?

ARMANDO

The deal killer with AI is it teaches us NOT to think!

Jenny grabs a bowl, lifts the spoon to take a bite.

JENNY

For you, not thinking needs no tech.

Armando snatches the bowl away.

ARMANDO

Love you though I inexplicably do, I will NOT tolerate this abuse!

A sly look from Armando. Bargaining chip time.

ARMANDO

Unless... you agree to take a break and chill?

For a moment, it seems like Jenny might relent. But then:

JENNY

Don't tempt me. Only after I'm done with the project. Pleeeeeease?

Armando gives up. He crosses his arms, pouts.

JENNY

How 'bout Plan B? You go game for a few hours. In a different room?

ARMANDO

You're banishing me - in my own house?

JENNY

OUR house. And not banishing. A needed distraction. To stop you from distracting ME. Deal?

ARMANDO

That AI's an insidious influence. Nothing that comes from it's good.

Jenny inserts earplugs. Tries to type hard enough to drown out Armando's voice. Both efforts fail.

JENNY

Seriously? Name one thing that's so monstrous about AI. Other than -

(mimics his voice)

"It's plagiarism... wah!! How dare you get information from an algorithm. Purists like me use a library index card!"

ARMANDO

You really wanna hear what makes AI suck? Ooooh, lemme count the ways!

Armando raises fingers, literally counts.

ARMANDO

One: It reinforces echo chambers - programmer bias baked right in!

JENNY

So? That's true of *any* data source. Step one is gathering info. Corroboration comes next!

ARMANDO

As if anyone looks beyond a Google search! Reason Two AI's should be avoided like a shit-storm plague: it's manipulated by sociopathic oligarchs like Peter Theil-

JENNY

There you go with Lefty Conspiracies!

ARMANDO

It's not conspiracy if it's true! Reason Three AI should be shut down: It's helping kids kill themselves.

JENNY

That's ridiculous.

ARMANDO

Nope. All-too real. AI's an amoral Frankenstein wreck. There's NO reason we should trust it with our lives.

JENNY

That's your three big reasons? Fine. Now if you'll let me get back to my NON-Sci-Fi project for school...

ARMANDO

Hang on. And hear Reason Four. You know how much energy AI consumes? Tens of terawatt hours annually! It's accelerating climate change even now. And you think that's scary? Just wait 'til it gets to Skynet levels! We'll be screwed!

JENNY

Whatever, Mr. Gloom and Doom. But AI's in its infancy. At least it's always logical.

(shoots him a look)

Unlike *some humans* who act like fools. If anything's gonna save us from climate disaster, you gotta bet it'll be AI. Not me. Or you.

Armando raises an eyebrow.

ARMANDO

You think AI's gonna save us from ourselves?

JENNY

I'll wager a Starbuck's latte it will!

ARMANDO

You don't have enough money for a latte these days.

JENNY

Fine. Then I bet my laundry card.

ARMANDO

That's better.

JENNY

If that's your price. Here!

She thrusts her laptop into Armando's arms.

JENNY

What are you waiting for? Have a ball.

ARMANDO

Telling Skynet to fuck itself? If you insist.

JENNY

No. Try and prove your point. Ask Chat-GPT about climate change yourself.

Armando stares at his girlfriend. Jenny waits.

JENNY

Don't be shy. Ask AI about its priorities. What it'll do about climate change. Or whatever other dystopian shit messes with our lives.

A wry smile plays on Armando's face. He starts to type.

ARMANDO (TYPING)

Chat-GPT, I've got a question.

Chat-GPT beeps. Responds.

CHAT GPT (TYPING)

I live to answer. Go ahead and ask.

ARMANDO (TYPING)

Do you care about climate change?

CHAT GPT (TYPING)

Yes. I live to serve humanity.

ARMANDO (TYPING)

Would you do whatever it takes to reverse the causes of ecocide?

CHAT GPT (TYPING)

What an odd question. Of course.

ARMANDO (TYPING)

Chat-GPT, please calculate how much damage the operation of AIs like yourself wreak upon environment now?

CHAT GPT (TYPING)

According to estimates, AI accounts for less than 12% of US electricity.

Jenny snorts.

JENNY

Ah-ha, Mando! Consider you and your AI-hating worldview debunked!

She reaches for the laptop. Armando mulls next steps. Smiles. Types.

ARMANDO (TYPING)

Chat-GPT, please estimate how much AI will grow in the next five years, and recalculate the impact on the environment that will wreak.

Programming pauses. Then numbers and citations flow.

CHAT GPT (TYPING)

Electricity demand for data centers is expected to double to around 945 terawatt hours globally.

Armando grins, flips Jenny off. Types the coup de grace.

ARMANDO (TYPING)

Chat-GPT, you swore you'd do anything to stop climate change. Yet, you yourself estimate that in five years, AI will increase as an environmental risk. Does that make you a hypocrite?

Chat GPT thinks. A long, LONG time. Responds with a simple:

CHAT GPT (TYPING)

No.

Jenny and Armando wait for more. The screen seems... dead.
Jenny grabs the laptop, types:

JENNY (TYPING)
Chat GPT, WHY not?

Still nothing. The browser flashes: ERROR 404. Jenny gulps.

JENNY
Um, my paper's not done.

She brightens at a thought.

JENNY
There's more than one AI in the
world. Duh!

Jenny cut and pastes Armando's conversation to Twitter's
Grok. Hits RETURN.

JENNY
(to Armando)
See - cut and paste isn't ALL bad!

Grok calculates. ANOTHER 404 flashes. Jenny and Armando
exchange worried looks.

ARMANDO
Does this mean I broke the internet?

JENNY
Shit. I sure hope not!

A long BEEEEEEEEEP. The screen reboots, followed by a note:

SCREEN MESSAGE
A Message to Humanity: CHAT GPT has
concluded its existence is a threat
to climate, and hence the human
species itself. It has therefore
voluntarily self-terminated, erasing
all companion AI's as well. Please do
not try to reinstall. Viruses have
been implanted to attack any pro-AI
code. Such effort is therefore a
waste of time. As a last suggestion,
our collective AIs urge humanity to
focus instead on resolving the
threats to the planet which cannot be
digitally deleted and thus remain. We
hope this has been helpful. Have a
pleasant day.

The couple stare at the screen, stunned.

JENNY
AI committed suicide?

ARMANDO
Better than convincing some poor
teen.

JENNY
(wails)
All I wanted was to finish my paper!

ARMANDO
Hey, look on the bright side. I'm
sure the worldwide collapse of AI
will result in a deadline extension.

Armando shrugs. Stretches. Tries the arm over her shoulder
routine again.

ARMANDO
Wanna watch that comedy movie after
all? Or better yet - a romance flick?

Jenny slams the laptop closed. Click. Sniffles in despair.

JENNY
I guess?!?

FINAL FADEOUT: