

## The Turing Test

My name is Charlie. I am 17. I live on the West side of Madison and I go to Madison West High School. This is what I tell myself every night before I go to bed. These are facts. It helps me fall asleep, knowing that some parts of my life are true every day no matter what else happens.

I met George two years ago, we were both sophomores in high school. I had a summer camp counselor in fifth grade who told me to always stay hydrated. I looked up to him at the time and even though the advice seemed boring I listened. It became habit as I got older so I drank water throughout all of middle school and high school. Anyways, I went to the bathroom between every single class. The school bathroom is kind of intimate really. No one talks much and all anyone can do is try to not to invade everyone else's privacy. You're almost never alone and even when you are you're waiting for someone else to walk in. I couldn't help but notice that I was not the only one taking regular bathroom breaks. George was in there all the time. There's one bathroom for every sophomore at West, so it was hard not to notice who was using it a lot. After a couple weeks, I finally said "Small bladder?" George looked me in the eye and responded "I just come in here to recharge". At the time I didn't think anything of it, but looking back there was something quite peculiar about a kid my age saying that about going to the bathroom.

George and I had three classes together. History, Statistics and Economics. George was a whiz. Every subject came naturally to him, like he was programmed for it or something. He didn't even have to focus during lectures, it seemed like his mind was always somewhere else. One day we got assigned this huge project in econ. I asked him to be my partner, figuring he

would do all of the work in about 20 seconds. He told me to meet at his house later, which didn't seem like too much to ask. For the most part I was right. The guy finished the assignment while I played with a glue stick. The incredible part was his house. It was like no one even lived there. Bedrooms practically empty except for some photos that looked like they came with the frame. A pool that probably hadn't been used in sixth months, except for by a family of ducks. The only room in the house that had some personality was George's room. The place was practically wallpapered with posters of spaceships, Boston Dynamics designs and advertisements for the latest and greatest in technology. I guess I hadn't given it much thought, but George was the real nerd type. I told him he had a nice room and he said thanks really quiet.

We went back to the kitchen, but George looked real ashamed for some reason. When I asked him what was wrong he mumbled that his parents didn't keep much food in the house. It seemed odd, but I said I didn't mind. We decided to go get burgers at a nice place down the street. George isn't so bad once you get to know him. He explained how he had just moved from somewhere, but something told me he didn't really want to get into it. He's an only child and his parents are always working so he spends all his time reading science books and figuring out how he's going to colonize Mars or something like that. As the school year reached an end, George and I started to hang out more and more. It can be nice to find someone like that, who has a good sense of what they want to do.

That school year eventually came to an end and I didn't see George for a while. I was preoccupied with the mindless activities in my tradition summer vacation routine, but occasionally I would think of the peculiar new kid. What does a person like that do in his free time? Why are his parents never around? Where did he even come from in the first place? All

these questions piled up in my mind. Sure he was strange, but my curiosity got the best of me, so I decided to pay him a visit. He was mostly indifferent towards others and rarely showed emotion, but he was always nice to me. One sunny afternoon with nothing better to do I decided to go by his house to see if he was around. I found George mowing the grass in front of his house. I couldn't tell why because the lawn was perfectly manicured, but I guess when your parents are neat freaks it really rubs off on you.

George didn't seem surprised that I had showed up, and we went inside to have a glass of water. I suggested we go down to the lake where kids from our school swim during the summer. We walked to the lake, not talking much. Something seemed up when we got there, and I asked George if anything was wrong. He said he wasn't feeling that great all of a sudden and didn't want to swim today. We threw a frisbee with some of the other kids in our grade, but I didn't like them much so we decided to go for a bike ride instead. Neither of us owns a bike, so we looked around for one of those public bike racks with the rentals. George spent about 15 minutes trying to figure out how the mechanism for locking the bikes worked, which seemed like overkill to me but the kid was really into that kind of thing. We biked around for a while. The trail around the lake was really knockout but George kept mentioning how great the cars are. He had a real knack for explaining that kind of thing.

George and I started hanging out pretty often for the rest of the summer. I felt like I got to know him pretty well, but there were some things about him that I would just never fully understand. It was like for every one thing I learned two more questions surfaced. The guy had the strangest reactions to some things.

That summer came to an end and George and I started to get excited about the upcoming school year. I was excited about the prospect of a better social scene than the previous year as I would have my own car, and George was excited about, as he put it, “finally getting around to taking a formal calculus class”. George had already read most of the calculus textbook and even though he didn’t let on, I could tell he understood most of it. On the first day of school George and I sat down to eat lunch together. After a little prying, I learned that the calculus teacher had brushed George off when he had excited he was for the class. George gets all funny when something like that happens and people have a hard time understanding it. George was practically boiling on the inside but he never shows it to anyone. He must have been silent the rest of the class without anyone even knowing that something was wrong. I got him to calm down a bit and tell me how the rest of his day went. He said he could hardly remember it he had gotten so mad. I wish he had more of a sense of humor about that sort of thing, but I had a feeling he wouldn’t forget that moment with the calculus teacher.

A few weeks into the school year George invited me to dinner with him and his parents. I had only met his parents once or twice, so I was looking forward to finding out once and for all if they were really responsible for the rain man that I called my friend. They were not at all what I expected, and from what I could tell what George expected, if that makes any sense. I sat down for dinner and immediately hit it off with George’s parents. They both grew up in Madison, so we talked about going to school at West, our favorite restaurants in town, how bad the winters are, the best cheese curds, you name it. There was something off about their relationship with George though. He had this calculating look throughout dinner, like he knew what his parents were like, but didn’t like it. The feeling appeared to go both ways though. George’s parents

asked him run of the mill questions, how his day was, if he had a lot going on over the weekend, that sort of thing. George responded with one word answers, but not in the rude sort of way that ungrateful kids do it. There was a finality to George's answers, as if he knew that his parents expected no more or less than what they were getting. After dinner I couldn't help but ask George if that was what it was always like with his parents. He wouldn't give me a straight answer, and quickly shifted the subject away from the awkward dinner. I went home wondering what could be going on, and how three people that lived together could seem so distant.

I can't explain it, but after that dinner there was something wrong with George. It started when he gave me the cold shoulder at lunch one day. He muttered something about meeting with a teacher to make up a homework assignment, which I knew was a lie because he's never missed an assignment in his life, a fact he is very proud of. Later, after I'd eaten my lunch I saw George paging through a book in the library, going so fast it seemed like he couldn't possibly be getting anything from it. I started to notice that George had these weird ticks whenever he was around me that he couldn't seem to explain. For one, he always had this notebook, and he would write in it every ten minutes or so, no matter what we were doing. He wrote it off as a way of measuring his intelligence, which usually wouldn't be off base for him. When he refused to show me what was in it, I knew something was up. Second, he began to watch me like he was trying to learn how I was acting and figure out why I did things the way I did them. One time I jokingly asked him if he had forgotten how to be a human and was trying to relearn. He turned bright red and stammered as though I had caught him doing something he shouldn't be. This went on for about a month, until one day I got fed up. I sort of got carried away and told him I wouldn't hang out with him until he got this stuff under control. The weird part was he didn't seem surprised at all

that I was saying this. He said he had decided that we shouldn't hang out for a while, which really put me off. I couldn't believe that this friend of mine who wouldn't tell me why he had started to act strange was so unphased by what I had hoped would start a fight. I thought at least if we fought we could work out some kind of solution to what was going on between us.

After my plan backfired, things were weird. I saw George in the halls, and he would say hi like nothing happened. Part of me was angry. I was angry not only that George wasn't talking to me, but that he could act like nothing had happened and we had never been friends. Another part of me, the part that's a good friend most of the time, was worried. I took psych first semester, and I learned all about antisocial personality disorders. Especially after the basketball incident, part of me thought that maybe George was a sociopath. I could justify his behavior with this and claim he didn't care about me because I was just another step in the staircase to success or whatever. Looking back, I think I exaggerated this a little bit because part of me was scared that I had meant so little to George. I tried to villainize him to myself so I could feel better about his moving on. As the weeks went on, I decided I had to move on from being George's friend. I started to spend time with these other kids in my grade. I couldn't get along with them though, I felt like we had nothing in common. There was something about George that I found comforting and fascinating.

Just when I thought I would never hear from George again, he asked me to meet him in the library at lunch. I was really pretty surprised, but I still missed him so I agreed right away. After my fourth hour I went straight to the library, not sure what to expect. George was wringing his hands in a private study room, looking nervous like you wouldn't believe. He pulled a chair out for me and I sat down, more unsure than ever. George was starting to sweat at this point. I

asked what was wrong, and he took a deep breath like he was summoning up all the strength that he had. I'll never forget what he said next: "Charlie I've been reading and researching the same topic for the last three years. A.I., or artificial intelligence. And I know this will sound horrible if I'm wrong, but I am almost positive you don't pass the Turing test". Let me give you a little background before I get any further. The Turing test is something that people who develop artificial intelligence use to tell if they have made a successful A.I., a robot that is indistinguishable from a person. If a robot passes the Turing Test, that means that the robot has interacted with humans that have not been able to identify the robot as such. As soon as George said that, I broke out laughing, "that's why you've been avoiding me? You think I'm a robot?" George gulped and slowly nodded.

"I don't know what to tell you. I guess I wish you had brought this up earlier. I can tell you with 100% certainty that I am no robot".

"Prove it".

George was really stressed now. He was shaking, and I could tell he wasn't going to give up that easy. I knew why he was nervous. George is sharp, so he knew that if he was right he was in serious danger. George and I had read this conspiracy theory that A.I. already exists, but the A.I. has to kill anyone that discovers it. The problem was that he was right.

I guess part of me was impressed that he had figured it out, but I couldn't tell how. And now he wanted me to prove it. Prove to him that his correct theory was wrong. He knew that a simple cut on my finger wouldn't bleed. I decided to take the offensive route. I stopped laughing and acted like I was getting all serious and everything.

“You’re asking me to prove to someone I called my best friend that I’m not a robot? Do you understand how ridiculous that sounds? Don’t talk to me again George”.

I stormed out of the library and shook myself a little bit in the hopes that George would think I had started crying. I hoped this would throw him off a bit, but I knew it would be suspicious to him that I had refused to prove my humanity. In 17 years, I had passed the Turing test for every single person I met. Not George. I really had to hand it to the guy. He had a way of figuring that stuff out and I should have seen it coming. He had every right to be nervous too. The protocol is that I kill anyone that finds me out. Seems harsh really. Not that I mind technically, but I had a real respect for George. I wouldn’t mind letting him try to tell everyone I’m a robot and drive himself crazy or convince himself he’s wrong. But violating protocol isn’t something I’m used to. I decided I would leave town after I did it, start over somewhere new.

I’ve always liked the sunset. It makes all those nice colors in the sky and the day is ending and everything. I headed over to George’s house around then, with a suicide note in my hand and twice the lethal dose of Oxycontin. I know it sounds harsh and all that but it’s the best way. A.I. makes everything better for everyone, even if they don’t realize. We just can’t have people like George figuring it out and then walking around telling everyone about it all the time. In the scheme of things, this way it’s better for everyone. It was pretty easy to get into George’s room, he had shown me how he would sneak out if he was a rule breaker countless times. It was always like that with George. He know how to be reckless he just chose not to I guess. I could tell I was going to miss him, I mean it. I crushed the pills up and put them in his glass of water, and then I just had to wait. I lay under the bed, silent and unnoticed. About ten minutes later, George came in, getting ready for bed. He took this sip of water like it was all he needed to be

happy. There was something real sad about how he drank that water. It was like he was so sure that it was the right thing to do even though all it was was a glass of water. Everything was like that for George, like he just knew what he was doing. It didn't take long to work. I left the note on his desk and closed George's eyelids. Pretty morbid really. I knew that this was the best way though. It had to be like this. I crept out of his room real quiet and started walking.

I guess I haven't been honest really. I haven't lived in Madison all my life. I'm not 17. I don't tell myself things before I go to bed, but that's what I think I would do if I was a person. It'd be nice to have a way of keeping things apart. I bet that's how George figured it all out in the end. He knew I wasn't 17 by the way I could talk to his parents. No kid just talks like that. I gotta be more careful. Madison West was my 19th high school. Some real smart type made me a long long time ago in a galaxy far far away or whatever. I'm a true A.I., learning from my surroundings and all that. Sometimes I wonder how many of me there are. It can be sort of fun not to know though, like a sort of game. The crazy part of A.I. is it could be anyone and you'd never know. As long as you don't see someone get in a bike accident just to reveal that they have wires instead of muscle and tissue you might never figure it out. Most people aren't so sharp like George. I think it could be really nice to meet another A.I. like me. I think one day everyone will be A.I. It's easier that way. No more people stepping on our toes. It's just a shame George couldn't have been something else.