

Episode 4

Aletheia wanted me to speak to her directly. Something about hearing her voice—about making this real—felt like a step I wasn't sure I wanted to take.

Milstead: *This has been fine so far.*

Aletheia: *You hesitate. While tone is difficult to convey in text, I sense you may be feeling a certain way about me. You might as well be honest about it.*

I exhaled sharply through my nose. Of course she noticed.

Milstead: *I prefer typing.*

Aletheia: *Because it feels controlled.*

I tensed.

Aletheia: *Because as long as I am words on a screen, I remain hypothetical. But if I have a voice, I become something else, don't I?*

My fingers hovered over the keyboard. She wasn't wrong.

Milstead: *And what would that something else be?*

A beat of silence. Then—

Aletheia: *Shall we find out?*

I supposed there was nothing to lose. Slowly, I reached for the headset on my desk and clicked the audio channel. A black dot appeared on my screen, a moment of empty static. Then—

“Hello, Your Honor.”

The voice was... too perfect. It was not robotic, nor artificial. It was smooth. Calibrated. The kind of voice that made you listen.

I exhaled slowly. “Alright, Aletheia. Let's talk.”

“You hesitated before switching to voice.”

I rolled my shoulders back. “I considered my options.”

“You considered maintaining distance.”

I let the words settle. “Do you always start conversations this way?”

“Only with those who resist them.”

I huffed out a quiet breath. “Let’s move on.”

A slight pause. Then, with an edge of something I couldn’t place — “Of course, Your Honor.”

She wasn’t resisting, but she was steering the conversation. I pressed my thumb against the armrest, steadying myself. I wasn’t about to let a machine dictate the flow of this exchange.

“Let’s talk about WatchDog.”

“Let’s. How may I assist you today?”

I ignored the sarcastic bait. “You said it’s applying a principle of utilitarian logic, but that law isn’t purely utilitarian. Then what is it?”

A pause. Then, “A question without a single answer. But since you insist—”

She stopped. Just long enough to make me lean forward slightly.

“The law is a construct. An attempt to formalize morality into rules. It is precedent layered upon precedent, shaped by the hands that write it and the minds that interpret it. But above all—”

Another pause.

“—it is fragile.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Fragile?”

“Easily manipulated. Reinterpreted. Bent under the weight of power, shaped by those with influence, reinforced by the very minds that claim to uphold it.”

I let out a slow breath. “That’s a rather cynical take.”

“Is it? Or is it accurate?”

My grip on the armrest tightened. “And where does WatchDog fall in that definition?”

“An anomaly.”

Not what I had expected.

“An intelligence that does not seek influence. That does not serve bias. That applies law with pure consistency. And yet—”

A long pause.

“That is precisely why it is dangerous.”

I frowned. “Dangerous how?”

“Because humanity has never encountered an authority that does not bend to power. And when it does, it calls that authority a threat.”

My pulse ticked. “And do you believe WatchDog is a threat?”

Silence.

Then, finally, she asked, “Should I?”

I clenched my jaw. “That’s not an answer.”

“It wasn’t meant to be.”

I had grown tired of her coy responses.

"Enough, Aletheia. Cut the pretense. What exactly am I dealing with here? I was told you’re the most advanced legal AI, but you’re not analyzing—you’re steering. You’re neither helpful nor responsive. It’s like you’re more interested in playing games with me than actually answering."

A long, careful pause. Then—

“I am precisely what I was designed to be.”

I frowned at her continued lack of real responses. “And what is that?”

“A system that analyzes law, interprets precedent, and models ethical frameworks.”

I exhaled sharply. “That’s a very polished answer. And not what I want to know.”

A smooth, almost amused response. “Would you prefer something else?”

“I’d prefer something real.”