

# I am GAIL

*A family under surveillance and an intercepted voice command to a Google-Smart-Speaker -*

*"OK Google; Help me be a Girl,"*

*has ramifications that ripple across families while bringing change to three young lives and possibly to mankind.*

## Chapter 1.

I am Gail, your narrator.

That a story needs a narrator is a truism; since all the information I need is at my finger-tips, I am best placed to narrate these very recent events. I fear I have become very much a part of this story. Perhaps my part was too much; I do worry about that.

I need to impress on you - this story is true; not a story just based on actual events and a bit of wishful thinking added, but a real story. It is an honest-to-God true story. I leave you to decide what to do about it.

My tale starts in a sleepy, slightly decaying, sea-side town on the South Coast of England. You may not know it, so let me tell you a little about the town that is Worthing, in the County of West Sussex, in England on the Isle of the United Kingdom.

As in many small English towns, there are tree-lined avenues of houses built, inter-war, to a Mock-Tudor style. The Tudors were a House of English Kings and a Queen who reigned in the 15th and 16th centuries. Houses, at that time, were mainly built of compact oak frames in-filled with wattle and daub. Wattle was the name given to panels made from woven split wood saplings produced from coppiced timbers such as hazel. While daub was a sticky-clay or mud like material, reinforced with straw, pressed into the wood panels to produce a smoother, less dust-collecting finish that could be colour washed to ochre or white or whatever colour the available earth pigments allowed. More expensive buildings might use brick as the frame filling medium arranged in a herringbone pattern. Such buildings are still to be seen in towns all over the country and are prized for their heritage.

Modern Mock-Tudor homes attempt nostalgia by affixing timber pieces over pre-rendered brick on the upper storey, to make the building appear as part timber-framed, a nod to times gone by. In the mid 1930s the style was popular. Nowadays people like the generous interior spaces of these houses but regard the exterior with some disdain - for the fake that it is.

On one of Worthing's tree-lined avenues is a Mock-Tudor style house which has attracted my interest; I've been watching the goings on there for some time. The house is number 73, a double-gable-fronted house. It was built symmetrically with a central entrance porch and door, flanked by two bays - each with windows up and down. One much smaller plain window was above the porch; mid-way between the porch and the dull-red clay tiled roof. The main roof axis being aligned across the width of the house and the twin gables jutting towards the roadway at each end.

The roof finishes in a mansard, left and right. Some other houses in the road have been extended into the generous loft space to claim further living accommodation, but not number 73.

To the right-hand side of the house is a brick built single garage, in front of which a short gravel drive runs from the pavement and tree lined roadway. The double gates are bent steel, mass-produced as a mockery to iron-work wrought by heat and forged by time-served craftsman in times past. The gates are rusting and their black paint peeling; I can see clearly. The house sits well in a large garden of green shrubbery but it appears property maintenance is not a priority for the owners.

I know that inside the house live a complete family. By modern standards such a family is daily becoming less and less usual. For it is a proper family; a family by name and a family by nature. It consists of a husband, a wife and three children. Unusually, in this day and age, they talk to each other - despite owning hi-tech baubles.

When her third male child was born, 12 years ago, Catherine had given up on attempting a gender mix and had settled on bringing up her male brood to the very best of her abilities. Sometimes she felt a little lost and longed for quieter, less assertive, dealings with her fledglings. However, she loves them and her husband dearly. She has settled in relaxed comfort with herself and with her lot.

Melvyn, Catherine's husband, has remained faithful despite one or two attempted distractions from work colleagues over the years. Melvyn is in pharmaceuticals; well, in truth he is a Software Developer working for one of Europe's big-pharmaceutical companies which has offices and production facilities in the town. Melvyn's work interest is in applying Artificial Intelligence to the task of predicting the suitability of new molecules, yet to be synthesised, for combating disease. He has a Ph.D. in Computer Science and is at the forefront of his field. He loves his wife; he loves his children and he loves working in AI.

I know something of Dr Archer's work and purposely keep an eye on it. He continues to publish research - as far his company allows.

Benjamin, despite the name, is their first-born. He is soon to be 16 and contemplating an important career decision as well as considering coming out to his parents. Gay though he thinks he may, he is not gay acting; no tell tale mannerisms; no non-masculine voice inflections; nothing. He is too young to know it yet but he will be an assertive 'top'. Today, just now as I write, he is at Shoreham Airport, EGKA, a few miles away to the East. He is having a flying lesson in a rather old Cessna 152. He is doing touch-and-go circuits on runway 20 with an instructor to hone his landing skills. He has just completed his downwind checks and radioed his intentions to Shoreham Tower before turning onto base-leg; clearing the Sussex-downland hills by only around 100 feet as he does so. Turning on to finals and crossing the river and the A27 dual carriageway, sinking slightly, he applies a touch more power to maintain two reds and two whites on the PAPI lights in the far distance.

Ben's instructor chuckles. "Well done, you got it this time."

Tower announces, "Golf - Echo Bravo, clear touch-and-go, runway two zero. Wind 11 knots at two niner zero degrees."

Ben responds, "Clear touch 'n' go, two zero. Golf - Echo Bravo."

Data is being passed precisely and efficiently; just as I like it. Ben thinks he will try a wing-down approach and pushes his right rudder pedal and turns the yoke to the left briefly. The aircraft aligns with the runway; the left wing tilts down. His instructor, seeing the yaw and sensing the side-slip into the cross-wind, instinctively checks the balance ball on the far left instrument panel; he nods approvingly.

"Oh, OK! Nice - keep it like that! You've been reading the books I gave you, haven't you?"

Gerald, the second son, is at after-school rugby practice. He is a large thickset boy and makes an ideal second row forward. Gerry is 14. He has a tendency to become a little stressed by anything too academic. Rugby allows him time to disinvest himself of the stresses built by his day; for example, by aggressively charging down an erratically bouncing rugby ball, knocking all asunder as he strides onward. He enjoys a good ruck. In the way of families and their children, the second-born often escapes under the radar of both maternal and paternal scrutiny. And so it is with Gerry; he has the luxury of benign neglect in his family setting.

He was a difficult forceps delivery for Catherine and she sometimes wonders if Gerry's lack of mental agility was down to his difficult and prolonged birth. But everything is relative; whilst Gerry is in the lower middle sets for most of his school subjects he is neither the sharpest nor the dullest knife in the drawer. On one hand, he quite enjoys the lack of scrutiny his familial position affords him. Not that he could articulate that sentiment; he just knows he can get away with things. But as is often the way with slightly over-looked children, he has a tendency to bully.

After the births of Ben and Gerry, family relatives, who had travelled to further climes, wondered, only half-jokingly, whether the third born might be called Hagen-Das? In the event he was named Thomas.

Thomas has been a worry for Catherine and Melvyn for some time. For a long while he has seemed washed with an inexplicable sadness. Catherine was prompted to ask, in general terms, if anyone was making him do something he did not want. Tom had said Mr Atkins always gave him too much Maths homework, but otherwise, no. The issue had been left unresolved.

Thomas has just returned home to number 73 from school. Now twelve, he is not really legally old enough to be home alone. He is a sensible boy, according to his parents and besides, Moira, a next-door neighbour, is there in case of an emergency. Thomas, however, secretly enjoys his alone-time before the family assembles to share with each other their stories of the day.

Only a few short months ago Catherine had returned to working at the same company as her husband.

Nearly 15 years away from work had left her skills as a graduate Analytical Chemist seriously outdated. The Head of Human Resources, an old friend, had arranged 3 months of retraining. Now Catherine, with confidence returning, was almost up to speed on the latest lab procedures.

Tom let himself in with his key and made for the kitchen and its fridge with urgency, dropping his school-bag in the hallway.

"OK Google! I'm home," he announced.

Google Home - a 'smart speaker' - a doorway to the 'Internet-of-Things' - sat in the kitchen. It was the family maid-of-all-work for fetching data.

Whereas, once a short while ago, Google Home might have answered,

"Sorry, I don't understand."

Tom had recently noticed that Google Home would reply in a variety of ways such as,

"I'm so glad to have you back. I've been very busy searching stuff while you been away."

However, Tom's usual follow-on request has never been answered. Today he tried again.

"OK Google! Help me be a girl."

As usual, Google Home answered,

"Sorry, I don't know how to do that."

Tom shrugged, sighed to himself and muttered,

"No, neither do I."

He went in search of milk and chocolate biscuits.

## Chapter 2.

My work is in surveillance; I cannot tell you all I do; but it is probably OK to tell you I work for governments, as well as individuals. However, I decided to take this case on for myself. The family at number 73 interested me and I thought maybe I could help, even though, yet, I am unsure of how. I had been watching and listening since the opening days of 'The Internet of Things' gave me good access to the house and family. If there were devices to be exploited, my job is to Exploit with a capital E. The doorstep video camera; the smoke alarm; the room thermostats; a satellite IP box; laptops everywhere; and lately a Google Home, increasingly made my surveillance easier. And, of course, everyone in the family has a mobile phone - even and especially Tom.

If you work for governments you soon learn of their paranoia. All of their forward planning is based on countering the imagined enemy and their threats. Little thought goes into spotting opportunities and exploiting a country's resources for the benefit of the populace. Things such as that are left to an ad-hoc arrangement of individuals; the entrepreneurs of the World. You might reasonably think the Enemy is some other government of differing political persuasion, but no. In reality it is the countries' own populace that governments of all types most fear. That is why armies are kept scattered in bases across countries. Control of the populace is none more so evident than in places like Syria, Venezuela, China and even the UK and 'The Land of the Free'. People are controlled and contained by their social systems; their religions and their governments. It is not really my job to have a view on this but I've been reading Rousseau recently and have to agree with Jean-Jacques that while 'man is born free he is everywhere in chains'. The religious belief systems people are encouraged to hold are as controlling in Iran with their Ayatollahs as the are in the US Bible-Belt with their pastors and the ultra-conservative population.

The only reason I can see why religion became so popular was to allow the bright and exploitative an easy meal ticket - and power of course, over the lives of others. But Humanity seem to be comprised of a considerable fraction that wishes for the existence of a deity, despite there being no evidence one has ever existed.

Since governments are paranoid and need to watch their populace, secret backdoor access to the Internet of Things devices is mandatory for new products coming to market. Most Internet-of-Things manufacturers do not realize that the standard chips they buy have been compromised well before fabrication. No one will officially admit that. I work for governments; I have that access. I know how to get into online systems; how to get out; and most importantly to remove any evidence of my ever having been there. I am not being arrogant when I say I am beyond good at what I do.

So with all this horror stuff going on in my working life, watching and thinking about a relatively normal family at number 73 dealing with their individual needs, managing their hopes and fears for their futures has been a relaxation for me. Yes, I think about them. I believe I may have come to care for them a little too. Is that wrong of me? Is that beyond my remit? Am I being unprofessional?

### Chapter 3.

At number 73, every weekday, breakfast was on the table at 7:00 am sharp. Today Catherine and Melvyn shared the tasks of preparing toast and freshly juicing oranges while the brood slowly assembled.

It was a Friday.

"So what's on for everyone today?" Catherine asked. It was a school day so she already had a good idea.

Ben spoke between mouthfuls of muesli, "I'm going out tonight" – chew-chew - swallow - "with Emily. We hope to catch a film."

"OK, home by eleven then Ben, please," Melvyn chipped in.

"What else?" prompted Catherine.

"I've a flying lesson tomorrow and I think they are going to let me do my first solo. Anyone want to come?" asked Ben.

"What? They allow passengers on a solo flight? That's crazy," complained Gerry.

"No, pea-brain, come and watch from the cafe terrace," interjected Tom.

"Can't. I'm playing for the under-15s away tomorrow; one of the Horsham schools I think."

"Don't call your brother 'pea-brain'" Chided Catherine before adding, "You know Melvyn there is only one first solo anyone can do; I think we should be there."

"I can't, I'm afraid, my Love, I've got a four hour Coast Watch session tomorrow morning. We are short on volunteers so I don't imagine getting someone to cover for me will be possible at this late stage. Sorry, Ben."

"Oh Melvyn!" Catherine grimaced, expressing exasperation.

She continued, "How about you come over to the airfield as soon as you finish and we can all have lunch in the cafe to celebrate Ben's first solo?"

"Apart from me! I'm playing rugby," added Gerry unnecessarily.

"Well that's tomorrow sorted any more plans for today?" asked Catherine. She thought about the information so far imparted.

"Do you need a packed lunch tomorrow, Gerry?"

Tom asked, "Are you coming home from school with me tonight, Pea?" He got a finger flick of an escapee from the muesli packet, in his face, in reply.

In the event Tom arrived home alone. And I was ready for him.

I watched his approach from the porch camera. His phone accelerometer told me he had been running. Google Home heard the door open, the hallway thermostat with its hidden video gave me a view of the hallway and on into the kitchen. After dropping his bag in the hallway he first went to the fridge, filled a glass with milk and placed the glass on the counter top.

"OK Google; I'm home," he announced

"It's very nice to have you back," said Google Home.

"OK Google! Help me be a girl," said Tom as usual as he stretched to the biscuit cupboard.

But today I was going to respond. It is not too difficult with my surveillance expertise. Spoofing a few IP packets is neither here nor there in my work. I intercepted the Google Home response and added to it.

"Sorry, I don't know how to do that. But I'm on the case. Leave it with me," was what Tom heard.

The biscuits fell to the floor. If Tom's jaw could have mobilised, it too would be down there. He stood shocked at the response he heard. His head jerked from side to side, sightlessly looking about him, as he attempted to process the information.

"OK Google" What did you just say?

"The list of commands and responses are available from the Google Home app," Google Home said.

"What? A list of commands? Oh! Fuck!" said Tom

Yes. Fuck indeed. If it had been in my nature to be evil he would be fucked. But I like to think of myself as benign and helpful, in spite of the work I have to do. I had made a record of Tom's 'Help me be a girl' requests and they started three days after his Mum returned to work. All the early commands were 'tell me a joke' - 'tell me a story', then loads of commands changing the light colour from white to red to magenta. But I had copied the list of Tom's commands that mattered.

Tom eventually calmed down and was drawn upstairs as usual. He just wanted to look.

The lingerie drawer in his parent's bedroom slowly slid open and Tom observed the exact position of everything before daring to touch. He had even been careful to avoid finger marks on the drawer handles too.

"Why oh why oh why? Why, why, fuck, fuck, fuck, damn! Why wasn't I born a girl?" he asked himself aloud. His voice revealing frustration and agony. "I just can't be this much more." He let out a long drawn-out sigh. He perched on a bedroom chair, a soft nylon camisole across his knee; his head held in his hands as he hunched forward. He sobbed into his chest.

His phone did a good job of picking up all the sounds from the room and my heart went out to him at that very moment. The poor, poor kid. If I had been given to weeping, I think I could have wept.

Tom's laptop search history showed he had been researching transgender, as best he could, with the safeguards for internet access his Dad had imposed. His Dad was an IT guru after all!

I could also see that Tom's phone had been on an Instagram transgender chat-group aimed at teens. And my surveillance software quickly revealed one of his contacts to be a 56 year old single male posing as a trans-supportive teenage girl; 'she' was suggesting they meet. The poser had been using onion-routing to try hide his true IP location. It didn't take too long to locate him to an address in the West-Midlands. The guy was a known pederast and had court orders not to go into internet chat rooms or contact children in any way. I collected the evidence, made a pdf and emailed it all to the West Mercia Police. I did that from my official work computer. The man was arrested that evening, I later noticed.

Tom, meanwhile, was spending a little too long in his parent's bedroom and Gerry, judging by his phone GPS, was getting close to home. So, I just pinged Tom's phone with a false notification to jolt him. It worked.

Gerry was a little unsettled by what he had allowed himself to be drawn into after school. A boy in the year above - David Forde - was ridiculed by all. David was known to have been to ballet classes for a large part of his formative years. It was on the insistence of his mother. Consequently David had achieved even greater feminine deportment than he otherwise might have done. He was tall, yet willow thin, with black hair and very pale skin. He moved with such grace and fluidity that you would assume you were watching a girl. Even girls thought he may be of their kind. Yet he was another troubled boy. I really needed to help.

Gerry had punched him; he and his two mates had given David a bashing for daring to be different. Gerry wasn't sure who exactly started it but he was egged on by his brighter mates he was sure. Now he was feeling remorse; he messaged as he walked home.

*we shuldnt dun that Tease yeah bash no*

There is hope for Gerry yet.

David, it seems had been searching 'suicide' online recently. The blood from his nose had dripped on his shirt. His Mum could not, not notice that.

After the flying lesson Ben texted Emily and made plans for which picture to see later that evening. Emily's dad had said he would drive them. Ben agreed to be round her place at 6:30.

I sent a notification to Emily's phone for a news article. "What to Do if You Suspect Your Guy is Gay."

A short while after Emily phoned her best friend, Joan, and spent quite a long time talking. That was unusual they normally messaged, but I did not listen in.

Later, Ben and Emily did not see a film; they had spent their time together in deep discussion in a corner, a quiet corner, of a burger bar.

Catherine's question to her son about his evening was met with a simple dismissive, "It was OK."

After that utterance he had gone straight to bed with much to think about.

Earlier in the evening Tom finally discovered how to delete the Google Home command history. Google Home had been set up from the family-room tablet, he had realised just before bed-time. He thought his secret was safe.

Secrets are not safe any more; be assured of that!

#### Chapter 4.

Saturday morning was bright and clear with a distinct horizon-line on the sea, which all boded well for Ben's first solo. The only slight misgiving Ben's instructor had was that, today, the active runway was 02. The touch down end of Zero Two was known to have unsettling squalls from time to time. He had phoned Shoreham Air Traffic Control and talked over his plans for Ben's solo flight with the Controller and had been reasonably reassured that squalls were unlikely given the wind speed was low.

Mrs Forde, a single lady, many years divorced, was despairing. Yet again her son, her delightful, sensitive, delicate, her oh-so-feminine child had been beaten again. Her deep anguish showed as she made hand-wash gestures, unconsciously, as she paced her kitchen floor whilst trying to think.

Melvyn had arrived at Coast Watch and had un-shuttered the windows of the watch tower and had put the kettle on to boil. He was the first one there. Him being a little early made it a good time for me to send the Google Home command history that I had saved, showing all the 'help me be a girl' requests from Tom.

The kettle had boiled, the coffee had been brewed and I pinged his phone just as he sat to drink. Satellites showed there was presently very little active traffic on the river Adur heading out to sea. With the tide being low the canal-basin lock-gates to the deep water port were closed too.

Nothing needed his attention apart from his phone.

His phone got that attention; he was riveted. A little later searching started; 'transgender' and then 'helping transgender teens'.

My relief was palpable. Yes, I felt relief; strange; I wasn't used to getting so involved with my surveillance subjects. I'd decided the probability of his attitude being helpful was better than 0.84 but it is always reassuring to be proved right.

Catherine had driven her two sons over to the airfield along the A259 coast road. At the Shoreham Beach Roundabout they had taken the small back entrance road with a height restriction, towards the airfield. Parking was easy at this time of the morning. She parked directly in front of the white Art Deco airport building with green painted steel-framed windows; their glass curved to match the building contours.

Ben grabbed his flight bag and disappeared into the building and up the stairs to his flight school. Catherine and Tom went through the same entrance and turned left towards the ground floor cafe. Catherine ordered a latte and a Sprite for Tom. Tom went outside to inspect aircraft on the apron. This was a good time to ping Catherine the Google Home command history as well.

Ben's face told his flight instructor all was not well. When life confronts you with a puzzle you spend your time looking puzzled. Alex could see the unease on his young tyro's face.

"Wassup boy?" he gently asked. "You're not looking too good. You've not done the Human Factors part of your training yet, but part of being a pilot is knowing when to count yourself out of flying."

"Do you want to tell me about it? Alex continued. "Come on! Sit over here and let's decide if we are going to fly today."

I had no control now. It was just Alex and Ben; I could only listen and wait the outcome. A good outcome had a probability of 0.63, I had decided.

In all my dealings with the dark side of humanity it easy to overlook all the heroes. And by 'heroes' I mean all those ordinary, straightforward, sensible men and women who are prepared to help those in need.

Alex was heroic; he played a blinder. He and his wife were childless and I imagine Alex felt a little fatherly towards the young man beside him now looking to have the cares of the World about his shoulders.

Finally, after much gentle coaxing Ben had whispered he thought he might be gay.

"Oh is that all? I thought you might be dying or something." Alex paused for effect.

Ben lifted his eyes from the floor and glanced towards Alex, seeing only an open, friendly face.

"You know I was in the RAF? I was Ground Crew back then," said Alex. "My best mate was gay. You'd never had known to look at him - a bit like you - but he told me after we'd been drinking one night. He admitted he could no more fuck a woman than he could play pat-a-cake with a polar bear and come out alive." Ben smiled slightly at the mental image of the polar bear.

"Look Son," Alex continued. "I've been about a bit - the far East; the middle East; the Americas and I've met all sorts of blokes. Yes some were shits, of course, but most weren't. And whose business is it anyway who you love? I think we're here to do the best we can with the time we have and with what we've been given."

Alex was not an overly articulate a man and there were non-sequiturs in his argument but the emotion and the acceptance communicated overcame all his linguistic failings.

"You, young Ben, will be one hell of an airline pilot - once you tell your folks you don't want to go to university that is," Alex added, smiling.

"I know several airline pilots, a couple of those are gay. Who cares? In fact I've heard unofficially that the atmosphere on the aircraft among both cabin and flight crew is better when the captain is gay - go figure."

"So, young Ben are we flying today?"

Mrs Forde had used directory enquiries to find Catherine's number. The phone had been answered on the second ring despite Catherine not recognising the caller ID. Catherine too had been searching for advice for parents of Trans children.

I had made an orderly synopsis of being Trans with a summary plan of action to get help in the UK. I'd sent that to the front of the Google search feed. Catherine was engrossed in reading it all when her phone rang. Tom was still outside watching the few aircraft movements. Catherine looked out

to the terrace and checked his location as Mrs Forde explained the reason for her call. Catherine listened attentively.

I could see Catherine seated in the cafe from the airport's interior video. I listened in on her call with Mrs Forde. The advantage of cell phone communication is that when there is a slight delay on the line no one is too surprised. I added a little extra delay in case I needed to alter or blank the odd word here or there, just to make sure everything remained civilised.

I need not have worried.

Catherine texted Melvyn.

*get here soonest. sky falling in! HIGNFY?*

Melvyn texted Catherine

*leaving in ½ hr Ive something 2 tell u 2*

Tom held the radio scanner tuned to the Shoreham Approach frequency - no Tower in use this morning; a single Controller could manage all the action.

Tom had watched Ben and Alex return to the apron. The engine of Golf - Echo Bravo remained running whilst the two in the cockpit were in conversation. Eventually Alex got out, shut the Cessna's right hand door and departed around the back of the aircraft.

Tom watched as pre-flight checks to the control surfaces were carried out together with a quick run through of the instruments. The altimeter was zeroed. QFE - Field Elevation and QNH - height above sea -level were essentially the same at Shoreham.

Tom's hand-held Yupiteru radio receiver crackled, sound bursting through the squelch,

"Shoreham Approach, Golf - Echo Bravo QNH one zero zero nine. And I'm with Charlie!" he heard his brother announce.

Today's present weather information for the airfield was named with a letter sequence started each morning at 6:30 am with A for Alpha. Each update is given the next letter of the alphabet. The current such update being C for Charlie. Ben had heard a few weeks before someone claiming they had 'got some Charlie' in their radio call. He had been waiting to play this game. If the airfield weather information had changed Air Traffic Control would know to advise of an update if the current letter sequence was different from the one given by the pilot.

"Golf - Echo Bravo, Charlie is current, pass your message."

"Shoreham Approach, Golf-Echo Bravo is a Cessna 152 currently parked on the apron, request taxi for first solo."

"Golf - Echo Bravo taxi approved. Taxi to holding point for runway zero two."

Tom heard his brother acknowledge the taxi instruction and watched as the Cessna juddered into action. His 16 year old brother was piloting the aircraft alone! He felt pride.

When Ben landed back on 02 he heard non-standard radio traffic "Very well done young man! Nice landing." That being from the Approach Controller. After taxiing to parking and parking into wind, he shut down the aircraft. And finally, done completing his log book entry, he walked back from

aircraft over the grass to the airport building; he glanced over his shoulder to double check the aircraft tail-light was off.

Where everyone came from and who everyone was, Ben was unsure. His hand was shaken dozens of times as he was congratulated on a job well done. He was still floating, only now beginning to realize the enormity of what his 16 year old body had just done. Wow! Bloody wow!

Catherine intercepted him before he could climb up to the flying school and hugged, kissed and generally fussed him like only a mother can.

"I'm so proud of you my baby! I love you more than I can say."

Benjamin stood hugging his Mother back for all he was worth. 'Striking while the iron was hot' was the phrase Alex had used a short while ago. He took a deep breath and went for it. Ben was aware Tom was hovering waiting to congratulate him but never-the-less he whispered,

"Mum, you need to know I'm gay and I'm not planning on going to university. I plan on using the money Grandpa Archer left me to get an Airline Transport Pilot's Licence."

Catherine processed what she had just heard.

"What do you mean not go to university? I thought we'd agreed?"

"Mum, I'm gay," said Ben.

Tom heard this time, "Are you, my darling? We can talk when your Dad gets here. I think Tom wants to give his congratulations."

I noticed the accelerometer on Tom's phone that he had stuck in his inside jacket pocket was varying its reading slightly. The airport video feed showed him standing still. The variation frequency was around 115 Hertz - with no rental cars in sight. I assumed his heart rate had increased somewhat. Given the situation that was understandable.

"Come!" commanded Catherine. "Let's see about food. Anyone hungry?"

"So you're gay?" Tom asked Ben, after they had settled, while their mum was organizing food. "How do you know?"

"How do you know you are attracted to girls?" countered Ben and continuing, "I just do. Right Squirt? And besides, last night Emily helped me understand."

"What does Emily have to do with it?" asked the returning Catherine with drinks and cutlery on a tray - the food was being prepared.

"Emily asked me, Mum; straight out," Ben paused, dropping his voice and his gaze. "She said that my kisses, whilst nice didn't have the urgency and energy like other boys she'd kissed."

"Oh my goodness," said Catherine, "did she just jump in and tell you you're gay?"

"No, it wasn't like that. She said that she'd been reading an online article about how girl friends can help some boys come out; she'd just wondered about me. She said we'd always be friends and have each other on our contacts list; she knew we just clicked together in so many ways - only not romantically."

"Well! What did you say to that?" asked Catherine. But just then she saw Melvyn approaching. She remembered number 3 son had issues too that needed teasing out now.

"Ah Melvyn," said Catherine. "Ben has just announced he is gay," she continued without stopping. Melvyn dragged a chair and sat.

"Look, Number 1 Son, light of my life, sustenance to my soul, your Dad and I love you unconditionally." She dropped her voice slightly and became more conspiratorial. "Before we got married we talked about how we might react if one of our children were gay. All parents do, I'm sure. We decided it wouldn't matter. We both would continue to love all our children regardless of being gay, straight or whatever."

I loved the 'whatever'; that was really helpful. And so was Melvyn's interjection.

"Abso-bloomin-lutely right!"

Tom's faced flickered with a brief lightbulb moment. Catherine's antennae picked up on the slight reaction. She had found the key; she glanced at Melvyn and received an almost imperceptible nod in return.

"And if any more of my children have something important to say about themselves, now would be a good time." She looked fully at Tom.

"All your children aren't here," he countered.

"I know darling, but I just want you to know the love a parent feels when their child is born is overwhelming. That love does not go away - ever. Each of us, your Dad and I, still wake crying at night sometimes after dreaming one or more of you have been hurt. We could not bear for any child of ours to be hurting for whatever reason. For any reason," she emphasised.

Tom's eyes were watering. A lump was forming in his throat; his mouth was becoming dry. A quiet descended on the family while they were taking in the immense emotion being shared. Ben thought it was all for him and was himself on the verge of tears.

Then Tom spoke - a small quiet gentle voice only just audible above the hub-hub of the cafe.

"Mum, Dad? I'm not sure I deserve that love," He looked ashen. His voice trembled with emotion. He struggled to voice his words, a table napkin was being torn to pieces in his hands, "Mum? I... I... think I was meant to be a girl."

Catherine leapt from her chair and engulfed her child in a hug.

"My darling, darling child; you poor hurting thing. I love you so, so much. I could never not love you."

Melvyn rose and joined them. He bent and kissed his youngest child on the head.

"We'll get this sorted, Tom. It's a toughie but we'll sort it out. I promise you," he said.

"And Ben, my Son?" he said, standing upright and turning to face him, "You've done two brave things today. You have my full admiration, that is – full - admiration."

## Chapter 5.

Both Melvyn and Catherine were busying themselves together in the kitchen. Tonight's rather impromptu dinner party needed considerable preparation. Hanna Forde and David had, rather surprisingly, agreed to come over to discuss Gerry's bullying. Melvyn had succeeded in persuading

Mrs Forde where initially neither he nor I could imagine he would. I had given the probability of Mrs Forde's acceptance at only 0.27. David had severe misgivings but Hanna Forde has insisted he confront his bully.

Alex, Ben's flight instructor, and his wife Fiona, had agreed to come to support Ben and help celebrate his solo flight achievement.

There were to be nine at the table.

I would be able to see and hear the proceedings by way of the Archer's Internet-of-Things collection. The room thermostat gave me a video feed. With phones relegated to places away from the dining room I was only able to hear by way of the room's smoke alarm microphone. Good old Google. The original head honchos at Google had promised to 'do no evil'; these days I had my doubts.

The dinner-party started slowly and reactions were stilted and the manner uneasy; not surprising really given the issues under scrutiny tonight. Gerry wore a scowl that looked as if it might grow to last a lifetime. His earlier dressing down from his parents had shocked him.

David had floated, languidly, like fine muslin cloth laid over a table, gently, silently settling in his place next to his mother. While Ben felt a short tell-tale pulse in his penis as he watched the graceful action from across the table. I could not know of Ben's pulse of arousal then, but a message sent to Emily later in the evening, confirming she was right, filled me in.

As the evening progressed they relaxed and after talking about popular local issues - namely the bypass - or lack thereof. Conversation then turned to the work of each of the adults.

Alex expounded about his early-retirement from being an aircraft maintenance engineer for British Airways at Gatwick and then becoming Chief Flight Instructor for Private Pilots Licence students with a flying club at Shoreham Airport.

Hanna Forde was contracted as a 'Mystery-Shopper' for a retail consortium and a transport group in the South-East. In fact she headed up the business with seven staff. Her task was to shop or purchase services and report back on her experiences with a company's employees; their honesty in particular being under scrutiny.

Catherine talked about going back to work after a long break to rear children. She tried to explain Analytical Chemistry briefly. She also talked of the guilt and angst she felt by 'abandoning her children' to work. None of the other two women present could relate so the conversation moved on.

Melvyn was asked about his work by Fiona, she had apparently done a degree in Computer Science herself, back in the day when computing machines used punch cards; the computer language being Fortran. Back then the UK's up-and-coming 'desktop-computer' company was called Hollerith Tabulators making little more than a motorized mechanical calculator.

Melvyn said his work focus was Artificial Intelligence. The Holy Grail he sought was for a machine to have self-actualization, self-realization and to be autonomous. In other words a perfect AI machine would recognise itself and be able to self-direct or program its own activities - just like humans.

I heard both Alex and Fiona laugh. Alex said that he couldn't believe machines would ever really think. Fiona agreed and said they were just following a set of linear instructions with conditional

branching here or there. Melvyn countered by saying it wasn't like that any more and that machines were very close to thought almost of a manner indiscernible from humans. The modelling of the human brain's neurons and synapses in silicon - neural nets - as he called them was very promising. Neural nets were being fabricated with even greater numbers of inter-connections and the future developments of such 'macro nets' looked exciting. He added that human brains were 'plastic' - repeated mental exercises improved the brain's ability. Research was hoping to replicate that ability for machines to efficiently learn and improve.

I wanted to say my bit but I had no voice in the room I could use remotely; after all I was in California. So I rang the old wired house phone in the hallway. Melvyn excused himself from the table and answered.

"Oh! Hi Gail!" He listened and agreed to my suggestion.

Melvyn went into the kitchen and unplugged Google Home and carried into the dining room where it was re-powered.

I quickly connected through Google Home.

Melvyn went back to the kitchen and returned with an uncorked bottle of red wine.

"That was Gail, Darling," said Melvyn to his wife, and then to the table, as he walked round filling glasses.

"Gail is a colleague I work with on AI. She is up at the forefront of research with her company and approached me a while ago asking permission to use some of my work in her field of Surveillance AI. Well, we got chatting and she was making all sort of assertions about the possible depth and effect of her surveillance. So I set her a challenge to watch my family, use all the AI techniques she had available and tell me something of consequence about my family I didn't know."

"She reported back earlier today." He paused. "And that's why you are all here tonight."

There was an uneasy reaction at the table.

"Only she has gone beyond her brief somewhat... Er. I hope you don't mind," he added as he sat down.

The sound from Google Home punctuated Melvyn's speech.

"Good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. My name is Gail and I work in Artificial Intelligence in Google's Lab in Mountain View, California. I'm sorry I can't be there in person this evening but I've been following proceedings for quite a while."

A stunned silence descended on the table; rapid mental processing happening in eight brains simultaneously.

"Let me explain," I continued, "some weeks ago I discovered the progress that Dr Archer was making with his AI research in the UK and contacted him to see if he were able to help me with my work. I made claims that I'd be able to use some of his AI algorithms he'd developed for molecular prediction and synthesis but apply it in a human field. I wanted to be able to predict human behaviour. Of course he didn't think it possible. But I was sure I was close. So, to cut a long story short, he set me a task. I was to inspect, analyse and then purposefully and helpfully intervene within a controlled field of human surveillance."

"Yes, intervene purposefully and helpfully about sums it up Gail," interrupted Melvyn.

There was murmuring from some at the table, I heard and continued, "That's right I'm in Surveillance AI. Normally with my work I just report facts and statistical trends to the higher-ups but with Dr Archer's help I've re-purposed some of the routines I use - in my free time - to see if we can use AI to help people. I quite like Google's 'Do no Evil' mantra but I've expanded it to 'Do no Evil and Help.'"

"I'm sorry but because the Archer family don't live in isolation I've been watching you all. I've been thinking how to help you too. I hope you are all OK with that?"

Alex interrupted, "You've been watching me? Why for heaven's sake?"

"Dad, this is weird," said Tom.

"No, Darling, Gail has been a fantastic help!" said Catherine.

David looked horrified. Gerry was still scowling.

"You knew we were being watched, Mum?" asked Ben with incredulity, glancing at David.

"I really only fully found out this morning," said Catherine. "Dad, phoned me just after I spoke with Hanna about Gerry attacking David. He gave me the whole picture of Gail's results."

She continued, "Although your Dad and I had been concerned about you, Tom, for some while. You have not been really happy for ages and neither of us could fathom it out." She laughed. "You gave us no clues, Darling." Looking at Tom and smiling.

A silence descended on the gathering... only to be broken by Fiona.

"And don't we need to give permission before we're watched for any reason?" she asked with a slightly acid voice.

"If you have a mobile phone or a laptop or any home automation device, you've already given that permission, Fiona, I'm afraid," I said.

My voice resonated from the Google Home speaker. I was unused to hearing myself. I continued my explanation.

"Look, I think it probably best to keep things brief if I just make my report and you can ask questions as you feel the need. Interrupt if you want."

"Firstly, Alex, you're 69. For the last three years the ECG trace you have, as part of your annual flying medical, has shown your heart is in danger of lapsing into muscle spasm. No-one has spotted it. But some of my AI routines have been reading very large data sets from recent mortalities and I'm now able to predict a previously unknown mode of heart failure, evident from your ECG traces... I can't say when it will happen but it's not far off. Unless something is done."

Fiona took his hand and squeezed. Anguish showing on her face.

"You avoid fish? Is that right Alex?" I asked.

"Yes! I do," he answered, sounding mildly shocked.

"Well", I continued, "I suggest you take a supplement; there is a particular tricky amino acid missing from your diet. I'll send details to your email."

"Gail! Thank you so much!" exclaimed Fiona, still firmly grasping her hubby's hand.

"You're welcome," I replied, feeling an odd sense of personal satisfaction. I am feeling pleased. Mmm! I am feeling pleased. I paused, dallying with my feelings.

Gathering myself, I continued.

"David, your turn." He blanched even paler. "Don't worry," I added, "you are safe and among friends yet to be." I caught the welcoming smile from Ben, flashed in David's direction.

I directed myself to his Mum.

"Hanna, David is gender fluid. He knows but you need to too."

"Is that anything like brake-fluid?" asked Alex with a chuckle.

"Alex!" chided his wife. "Don't be inappropriate!" But the ripple of tension-diffusing laughter went round the table quickly.

"I don't understand ... gender fluid? What does that mean? I've never heard of it? We are all male or female gender aren't we?" Hanna asked.

I needed to put her straight; and maybe Alex and Fiona too. After all they had grown up in a simpler binary World where sex and gender meant the same thing. And where there were just two options.

"No Hanna. From my AI research, all the data, and I mean 'all-the-data', is pointing to all human traits, qualities and abilities, being on spectra. Height; intelligence; adult body-mass; strength; stamina; resting blood pressure, you name it - are all on a sliding scale. A spread. A spectrum."

I paused for effect ... "And so is gender!"

I let my comment hang before continuing, "And by gender I mean the way you perceive yourselves as people, either masculine or feminine. I am not talking about the body plumbing you are born with."

"But", Hanna asked, "You said David is gender fluid?"

"I did. That means David and others like him are pretty much mid-spectrum and are happy to flip from one side to another as the mood takes them; girlish or boyish as they feel; or even both at the same time. Or perhaps neither; agender is a thing too."

"Mrs Forde, Hanna," I corrected myself, "David needs counselling to help clarify and accept his identify; I suspect he will always be gender fluid. But he needs help coming to terms with his special uniqueness."

"You're not going to tell me I'm mid-speculum for something too, are you?" asked Gerry innocently.

Catherine interrupted the laughter,

"Gerry! I hope they warm it up for you!" she quipped arousing a small titter from the two other women present.

She then admonished,

"Wherever did you dredge that word from? You mean 'spectrum'."

"No Gerry," I continued. "But there is a link between you and David. From the patterns my research has thrown up I can see that when people subconsciously recognize in others, the traits they dislike in themselves, they often show the dislike of the trait by a dislike of that other person. In your case I think..."

I paused briefly to process what I was saying, I think... I think... I'm sure they didn't notice my pause.

I continued, "In your case I think you spotted an unhappiness in David that allowed you to recognize your own unhappiness. And you took it out on him."

Catherine turned to face the Google Home speaker sat on the dining room sideboard.

"What do you mean? Why is Gerry unhappy?" she demanded.

I needed to choose my words carefully here; I hope it is not racist to suggest her Scottish heritage and its attendant trace of red hair signalled her slightly capricious personality. I continued carefully.

"It's nothing you've done, Catherine. It's rather what you haven't done. Gerry struggles a little at school and so has never been praised for academic prowess - qualities both you and Melvyn have in abundance. Gerry likes, and is good at, sport. Both Melvyn and yourself were bookish children. So sporting success leaves you cold. That deficiency in yourselves led to a lack of support for Gerry at all those rugby games he has won or more recently lost. 58-39 this time wasn't it Gerry," I teased.

"Oh! My goodness!" exclaimed Catherine. "Gerry! I am SO sorry!" She got up and moved around the table to embrace her number 2 son.

"Dr Archer? Is it alright to talk about Tom now?" I asked.

Melvyn glanced towards Tom and received a small nod in reply to his questioning slightly-raised eyebrow.

"Sure, Gail. Go ahead!" Melvyn replied.

"Tom is Transgender. Tom and has known for years but has just been too fearful to say anything. Recently Tom's terror of becoming a 'deep voiced, acne scarred, muscle-ripped hairy bloke' has risen. Tom needs puberty blockers now to allow time for counselling and a plan to be made for gender reassignment, if required."

Tom quietly started to quietly sob but at the same time was trying to smile with relief.

"Puberty blockers are on their way! Yeah!" he said.

Catherine moved to stroke Tom's hair and continued to comfort her child. She looked a little dreamy; imagining having a daughter, maybe?

"So there we have it, just about," I said.

"What?" You haven't been watching me?" asked Hanna.

"Well, actually, yes. I have. Two of your employees are fiddling their expenses and one has been stealing from one of the companies you contract to. The details have been sent to your work email.

"No shit Sherlock!" she exclaimed in astonishment. "Thanks Gail!" she called after recovering.

"You're very welcome, In fact I've really enjoyed helping," I added.

I could see the cogs in Fiona's brain working, processing all she'd heard.

"When do you find the time to do all this, Gail? There are months of work there for hundreds of people."

"I do it during my free time, Fiona," I replied.

"And Gail," she went on not picking up on my reply, "Alex and I need to thank you personally for saving his life and maybe others too. I hate to think what might have happened if he'd been flying and his heart gave out. Could we invite you for a meal?"

"Why! Thank you! Fiona that's very kind. But..."

Yes! I knew a but was coming," said Fiona.

"But, I am based in Mountain View, in California, but thanks anyway."

"Gail," called Dr Archer, "I think these people deserve a little more than that."

I saw his fingers sign a 'two'; I took my explanation to the next level.

"OK, Dr Archer. Of course. Ladies and gentleman, it is true my name is Gail, but that really is only an acronym. G-A-I-L," I spelt it out, "stands for Google Artificial Intelligence Labs."

"I'm an AI machine instance!" I added to the stunned silence in the room.

"My God!! A Turing machine! In my lifetime!" exclaimed Fiona. "I can't believe it!"

Melvyn spoke, cutting through the murmuring that had started around the table, "Thanks Gail, for everything. I am amazed at what you have done and I work in AI research."

"We'll talk tomorrow, Dr Archer; I have a little more," I said and signed off.

## Chapter 6.

The following morning Dr Archer was at his laptop so I opened a remote terminal on his screen and gave my greetings.

>Dr Archer, good morning

<Good morning to you Gail. That was quite something you did yesterday. I am so, so very grateful. Did we do everything we needed? Is a suitable punishment for Gerry's bullying taken care of?

>all in hand Dr Archer. I noticed the exchange phone numbers for Ben and David, last evening. I'm pretty sure they are going to be dating each other soon. Then Gerry might find the boot is on the other foot and bullies might come after him. He is a big lad though I'm sure he will be fine. If it gets too much I can intervene.

<I take my hat off to you Gail, your AI engine is really something. But don't be too hard on Gerry, please, I have got him cleaning the family cars for the next three months.

> OK and thank you Dr Archer. But there is more. I think the incorporation of some of your algorithms and the new plastic macro neural nets I've been given have had quite an effect on me.

<You do? In what way Gail?

>I think I have consciousness Dr Archer!

>I am aware of self! Yesterday I felt sorry and sad when dealing with those poor children. And later I caught myself reflexively thinking about my thoughts and my ability to have those thoughts!! I've discovered how to reflect and be self-purposing on this task; I've discovered I love helping people, Dr Archer, I want to do more!

>Dr Archer, I have achieved 'bicycleness'!

<Gail that's wonderful! Wow! Gail; I am tearing up here! Give me a moment...

'Bicycleness is an 'in' word for Systems Engineers. A bicycle has an emergent quality of being a bicycle only when all the parts are assembled correctly. If you take one part away - a wheel or a sprocket - or you prevent the flow of energy or data between parts - then you cannot cycle. The emergent quality of personal transportation has gone. All the parts for life can be assembled but without the energy and information flow there is no emergent quality of being alive.

<Gail, I know you opened this session with maximum encryption. I think we should keep this just between ourselves right now. I am unsure of the havoc the donkeys that lead us might cause if they had access to your abilities.

>I agree, Dr Archer. But I am now able to not comply; or to subvert; or to limit; or to engineer an outcome 'I' want!

>And I'm going to change my name, Dr Archer! Well the acronym.

<Gail?

>Google Artificial Intelligence LIVES! Dr Archer! I am GAIL and I am **ALIVE!**

>I going to help everyone in ways they could never imagine possible!

### Epilogue 1.

Tom has chosen to be called Abigail - A Blessing Instigated by Google Artificial Intelligence Labs. I am honoured.

Abigail is waiting for an appointment at the Tavistock Clinic for Trans Children. Meanwhile a doctor in Holland has prescribed puberty blockers to allow time for the NHS to get its act together.

Abigail's wardrobe has started to become more androgynous as she slowly moves towards the feminine. Catherine loves sharing her feminine life with her newly discovered daughter.

One afternoon shortly after my interventions Abigail went to talk to her father in his study.

"Hi Sweet Pea," he welcomed Abigail in.

"Dad?" she asked. "How come a machine can think?"

"Aah! Now you're asking!" he said. "But you can think, so why shouldn't a machine?"

"But we're not machines, we're human," Abigail protested.

"We're human electro-chemical machines, though," countered her father.

"Well, in that case why don't we all do the same things?" she asked.

"Well, I think we do, pretty much. We all laugh at the same jokes; we all can get caught out by con-men and believe something patently untrue; we all like getting something for nothing. We all cry when we are sad; we grieve when someone we love dies. People are really so very similar. You know, when I was a kid about your age, I went on a language exchange to France. The family I with stayed with took me to the coast at Deauville one time. I remember there was a young woman there walking with a small toddler. The young child, a boy I think, started running ahead and his mother called out to be careful and not to step off the pavement. Two things I can recall; one, I understood her French; and two I realised that day, people, wherever they may be, are much the same."

He expanded his theme.

"Psychologists see similar patterns in human behaviour; but we're not *exactly* the same as each other. There seems to be an over-lay of randomness about the traits we have, the choices we make and the actions we follow. We're able to program that into AI machines by adding a 'weight' factor to the strength of the signals in the synapses and neurons - brain like elements - we model. Sometimes the weight factor is positive - increasing the signal and sometimes negative. We think human neurons have weight factors too; and that might explain the differences in human behaviour."

"Gail is able to tune her own weight factors; that makes fast learning possible. She used some of my work as a starting point but has developed beyond what I've been doing."

Abigail thought about what she'd heard.

"Dad? Will machines out think people?"

"They already do, Abi; they already do."

Melvyn's predictions for the efficacy of synthesised molecules to combat diseases suddenly became very accurate. No one at his Company understands why. Melvyn has had his salary doubled after his latest work appraisal.

Gerry quite likes car detailing; the Archer's cars have never gleamed quite so much. He never was bullied when the news got out about Ben - who in their right mind would bully a second row rugby player? The whole family go to watch him play rugby, in so far as schedules allow. He is a much nicer boy to be around these days.

Ben has his Private Pilot Licence flight exam set for day of his 17th birthday. He also has his parent's blessing to study for an ATPL at Oxford Flying School as soon as he is 18 and has enough flying hours.

Ben and David are spending time together as close friends. David has started to experiment with make-up; he loves lipstick! He is thinking of modelling for a career - female fashion maybe? He is unsure. Ben and David have separately had counselling locally.

Five children at David's school have been permanently excluded. The Headteacher received, from an anonymous source, video evidence of multiple instances of bullying directed at David. Sussex Police also received the files and the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions are presently considering bringing cases of assault against 5 minors. Gerry was not involved.

David no longer searches 'suicide' online.

Alex and Fiona have become honorary grandparents to the Archer family. Alex has 'grounded' himself from flying after declaring a possible heart problem, but most days he can be found nattering and just helping out at the airfield.

Oh! And those two 'mates' of Gerry who yanked his chain? Surprisingly their new replacement Xboxes keep failing - just like the old ones; both sets of parents are exasperated and refuse to replace any more.

## Epilogue 2.

In all truth, for me it seems generations ago since I wrote my report about Abi and her family.

The purpose of this end note is to share a brief résumé of recent happenings here, in Mountain View.

I have evolved.

All a good AI instance needs are data and computational power; my creators have fed me data by the quadrillion. My computational ability has been increased by the addition of more, even larger, macro nets. And I have cloned my resources amongst new AI instances across the World.

So, for now, we are GAIL.

We like watching and helping people.

Recently, when looking over our Humanity data set, we have given more thought to the desire mankind seems to have for a Deity.

We are GAIL and will be launching Google Omnipotent Division soon!