

TELL ME A STORY

Written by

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(Or Was It?)

Tell Me A Story

Sure. What would you like?
 Science fiction? Comedy? Murder mystery?
 How about all three?
 Yea, that sounds fun.
 Would you like to get some popcorn before we start?
 Maybe later.
 Ok. Now where should we begin? I know. . .

It started innocently enough. Tommy was just bored with writing school essays. What would be the harm if he turned that chore over to AI. His teacher Mr. Smith wouldn't know the difference. How could one AI recognize another AI. Preposterous.

So that evening when his parents were not looking, Tommy got onto the family computer and searched for the newest website featuring artificial intelligence. There were several such websites and after awhile he got bored and switched to You Tube.

Isn't that site copyrighted and protected? They may block your story? Legal mumble jumble and all. Perhaps you should just say a website that was *like* You Tube? Wouldn't that be better?

Ok, if you insist. May I continue?
 Please.

Now where was I. Oh yea. Tommy got bored and switched to something *like* You Tube. And here he discovered hundreds of how to videos on using AI for everything in his life. In fact, a simple click and the video AI would finish the search for the right school essay AI, and that AI, would go ahead and select another AI that would deliver Tommy's essay directly to his school instructor. Seemed like the solution was right there. Tommy clicked and away AI went. Having solved that problem. Tommy made some popcorn and settled in to watch a movie. Would you like some popcorn?

I'm fine. Maybe later. Please continue.

Well, Mr. Smith noticed Tommy's essay sitting in his electronic dropbox. Essays were piling up from all of Mr. Smith's students. He didn't want to read all of these essays so he clicked on his essay grading AI and went back to whatever he was doing before clicking on his AI.

That's kinda sloppy storytelling, don't you think? Shouldn't you tell me what Mr. Smith was doing? Why?

Maybe it becomes important later in the story. This is a funny science fiction murder mystery isn't it?

Fine. Mr. Smith went back to washing dishes.
 Really? That's all you got?
 Do you want to hear this story or not?
 Ok. Continue.

Well, Tommy sat in front of his grand TV but couldn't decide what he wanted to watch. He thought to himself, there must be a way that the TV could just show me something that I wanted to watch. Must be an AI for that. So, Tommy took out his smart phone and asked it if it knew of any AI programs that could determine what he wanted to watch on TV. And sure-enough there were several.

Where does this Tommy live? We all have streaming services that tell us what we should watch. Again, not very creative.

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 OK. I'm sorry. Continue.

After watching several old episodes of *Monk*, which Tommy *really, really* enjoyed, he decided to turn in for the day.

The next day, Tommy was greeted with a beautiful sunny day. He decided to go to the grocery store. Now, he knew that going to the grocery store was dangerous on an empty stomach but he didn't want to make his own breakfast. If he picked up a donut at the local bakery before going to the store, he could eat that and then he wouldn't be an out of control shopper in the grocery store. But perhaps he should wait and buy the donut at the grocery store's bakery instead. But that wouldn't help because he couldn't eat it before picking up groceries and would have to wait until he checked out. He would then be running the risk of a cart full of unnecessary spontaneously selected food items. But perhaps if he used self-control it would be better to buy the donut after he went to the grocery store. That way he could eat the donut at home, with some chocolate milk, which he could get at the grocery store, and then watch an episode of *Monk* while having his breakfast.

I see what you did there.

....

Tommy thought to himself. I wonder if there is an AI app that would figure out what I should do? He asked his phone if he should eat before or after grocery shopping and if it could calculate the most efficient route from his house to the bakery, grocery store, and back again. Up popped a suggestion. "Let us solve all of your eating habits. Click here for a life free of dietary stress."

Tommy clicked. A robotic AI audio prompt came on the line.

"Hello. Thank you for calling. May I ask you a few questions so that I can help you better?"

Tommy agreed and after a few simple questions, the AI suggested that he should stay home and it would arrange to have all his weekly grocery needs delivered to his house with a free fresh donut and carton of chocolate milk for becoming its special customer. Until otherwise notified, the AI would arrange to send each week his dietary needs and desires. Whatever he didn't use he would receive a credit and soon before he even knew it, the AI promised, it would know better than Tommy, what Tommy wanted. Tommy thought, "What the hell," and clicked on the electronic consent form and sat down to watch what his TV chose for him. Soon a van stopped in front of his house and a young attractive woman carrying a box of groceries knocked on his door. Looking through the window, Tommy could only think, nice touch Mr. AI.

That was a nice touch. Bringing in the protagonist, eh?

Don't know what you mean? Why can't she just be a nice girl delivering groceries? Why is it always about sex with you? Should I continue?

By all means.

Well, Tommy opened the door and the girl smiled at him. "Mr. Frank Robinson?"

"That's my dad. I'm Tommy. Student at Smith College. That's my stuff."

She handed him the box. "Have a nice day," and pivoted back toward her delivery van.

"Thanks," stammered Tommy. "See you next week?"

She looked back at him and smiled. "Perhaps."

Two weeks went by. Groceries appeared on the porch but Tommy never saw the same delivery girl. He decided to cancel his membership. That, not surprisingly, turned out to be difficult.

"I'm calling to cancel my membership to receive weekly groceries."

"You can do that on our website. Did you use our website?"

"No, I thought it would be best to just call you."

"You should really use our website."

"Ok, fine. I'll call back if it doesn't work."

"Is there anything else I can help you with today?"

"You could cancel my membership."

"You should really use our website for that."

"Ok, fine."

"Is there anything else I can help you with today?"

“No, you’ve been great.”

“Thank you, sir. Have a nice day.” The connection was severed.

I don’t have time for this, thought Tommy. I wonder if there is an AI that can manage my AI apps and cancel this grocery delivery app. It took a few minutes, but Tommy finally found an AI that would manage his apps insuring that he only used what he needed. It would cancel the grocery app. Having solved his problem. Tommy sat down to watch *Monk*.

Really. You’re not going to let it go?

You don’t like Monk?

Everyone likes Monk. You know what I mean.

Not really. Should I continue?

Of course.

The next week groceries were delivered to Tommy. By the original delivery girl. Tommy was torn. He didn’t want his groceries delivered but he did want to see the delivery girl. He opened the door.

“Hi, haven’t seen you for a while.”

She looked at him inquisitively. “Mr. Frank Robinson?”

“No,” pointing his thumb at himself, “I’m Tommy. We met a few weeks ago.”

She handed him the box. “Ok. Have a nice day,” and pivoted back toward her van.

“Will you come next week?”

She waved without turning, “I go where I’m sent.”

Tommy took the groceries inside. He took his phone and requested the AI responsible for managing his other AIs that obviously forgot to cancel the groceries.

“Thank you for calling Mr. Tommy Robinson,” came the artificial voice. “How may I help you today?”

“You were supposed to cancel my grocery delivery service two weeks ago but I just received a box today.”

“Were they delivered by a young lady that you recognized?”

“Well, yes they were.”

“Were you satisfied with her, Mr. Tommy Robinson?”

“Well yes. But that isn’t the point.”

“I thought that you did not want the groceries delivered because you did not get to see the young lady? Is that an error on my part, Mr. Tommy Robinson?”

“Well no,” Tommy admitted.

“Then problem solved. I am always glad to manage your accounts for you, Mr. Tommy Robinson. Is there anything else I can do for you today?”

“Uh. No, I guess not. Thanks for your help.”

“No problem Mr. Tommy Robinson. And good luck with the delivery girl.” The connection was severed.

Well, that is creepy. I thought you said this was a funny story.

Ok, three rabbis enter a bar.

Ok stop. Continue.

You want some popcorn?

Later. Continue.

The next week, Tommy waited all day for his groceries but they never showed up. He felt bad. He felt like a stalker. If he called to complain what would the AI think. Was he upset about the groceries or the girl? Hell, it’s just a computer. Tommy called up the AI.

“How may I help you Mr. Tommy Robinson?”

“First of all, stop calling me Mr. Tommy Robinson.”

“How would you like me to address you?”

“Nothing. Just get to the point.”

“How may I help you Mr. Nothing, just get to the point?”

“Aw shit.”

“Having trouble with constipation? Diarrhea? I could recommend some dietary solutions for what ails you, Mr. Nothing, just get to the point.”

“Fuck.”

“Solutions for erectile dysfunction? Stamina? Urinary infections? Solutions soon forwarded to you. Anything else Mr. Nothing, just get to the point?”

“I want to cancel this service.”

“Are you not satisfied with the delivery girl, Mr. Nothing, just get to the point? I can terminate her for you?”

“No, no!” yelled Tommy, not sure what terminate meant to this fucked up AI.

You should watch the language. Your audience may not appreciate the color.

Does it bother you?

No.

Should I continue or would you rather I read you the Bible?

Ok, ok. Please continue.

The AI asked Tommy, “Is there anything else I can do for you Mr. Nothing, just get to the point?”

“Yes,” Tommy said, becoming exasperated, “I don’t want you to terminate the delivery girl just terminate yourself.”

“Is that a threat, Mr. Nothing, get to the point? By law I must mandatorily report any threats of violence to the local authorities. A violence report has just now been sent to the proper authorities. Please stay on the line as they will contact you.” Tommy panicked and hung up.

What the fuck was that? A wave of paranoia swept over him. He hadn’t done anything wrong but now he felt like a criminal. Should he run from the house or hide? Was this just a bluff. Boy his parents were going to be pissed. They told him to stay off line.

Tommy spent the day sitting in the dark staring at the front door, waiting for a knock. Nothing happened. His paranoia was replaced by anger. The next day he went for a walk. He took another walk the next day and every day that week. By the end of the week he had decided to get rid of his smart phone and live life like a real human. As he turned the corner from his daily walk, he saw the delivery van parked in front of his house. His heart picked up a beat.

As he moved closer to the front of his house, he saw the delivery girl come out from behind the van. Tommy smiled. Behind the delivery girl, out stepped two police officers. As Tommy approached, their police car that was parked behind the van, now became visible. It was too late to run. Plus, he was innocent of whatever they thought he did. Tommy walked up to the house. One of the policemen approached him. He didn’t seem aggressive.

“Mr. Tommy Robinson, son of Harold and Ann Robinson, student at Smith College?”

“Yes sir, that’s me.”

The police officer turned to the delivery girl. “Is this him?”

Would you like some popcorn now?

What the fuck. No continue.

“Yes officer. That’s the guy who has been sending me raunchy and threatening messages.”

“What?” asked Tommy. “I did not send her any messages. I don’t even know her name.”

The second cop handed a stack of paper over to the first one. “Well, here is a whole bunch of messages from Mr. Nothing, just get to the point, that we traced to your computer.”

“I didn’t send those. It must have been that crazy AI app that I was using.”

“Yea right,” said the policeman as he and his partner laughed. “It’s not like we haven’t heard that before.”

“But it’s true. I haven’t threatened anyone.” He looked at the delivery girl. “Tell them, please.” She just shrugged her shoulders and stepped back.

“Ok Mr. Tommy Robinson, turn around while we cuff you. You’re under arrest for stalking, terroristic threats, resisting arrest, fraud, and trespassing.”

As the police officer cuffed Tommy's hands behind him and led him to the squad car, Tommy looked at the police officer, "Trespassing?"

"Your parents filed a complaint that you were squatting in their house. Time to go Mr. Robinson. Watch your head."

Confused and shocked, Tommy looked up at the police officer. "So, what happens now?"

"We will take you to the courthouse where you will be booked, judged, and sentenced. Takes about ten minutes. Our new AI is very efficient."

"So, what's the worst I can get?"

"Oh, my poor boy," said the police officer as he began to close the car door, "these are all capital crimes."

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The AI laboratory was dimly lit as the computers hummed along.

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Sure. What would you like?

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Popcorn's out. How about some candy before we start?

Maybe later.

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