

# WILSON'S STATEMENT

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*The first time I saw Paul and Yvonne I was minding my own business on the museum curator's desk when he looked at me and said, 'That hard drive's so old it should be mounted next to the birds.'*

I don't know what would have happened to me if Paul and Yvonne hadn't come along.

The first time I met them I was in the storage cellar of a winery crawling on my belly after a mouse. I lived there, sorting grapes by day with my human co-workers and hunting mice at night with my fellow felines.

I'd been a wedding present to the winery owners but like most of the British middle classes, they were embarrassed by me. Even 'Good morning!' was too great a dramatic leap. I suppose they thought it would be ungrateful to send me back.

The winery owner clapped his hands to get my attention. I did as usual and fell to his feet, dusting sawdust from his shoes. He gave little kicks of his shiny loafers, trying to get me to stand up. Paul looked down at me with a droll expression.

'Leave that and come give me a proper greeting.

What's your name?'

I stood.

'There's nothing at all wrong with him,' the owner stammered.

'He doesn't speak? Nothing at all? What a pity,' Paul said. Yvonne, if I recall, turned away.

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It surprises you that I've forgotten. That was my master's work. He created shadows. He created murk. He said he wanted some memories to come to me like creatures crawling out of a fog. Yvonne assisted him in the surgeries on my memory as well as in the work removing three inches from my leg. Well, I suppose I could demonstrate, if you wish.

No chasing mice after this, eh, detectives?

You imagine I resent my imperfections. You suspect me of murder. But don't you see? Everything I am is because of Paul and Yvonne Moore.

When I first came, I had to practice all the time. I didn't know how to use housekeys. I didn't know how to climb stairs. Yvonne winced when I sloshed the coffee down on the table. The biggest challenge was learning to calm the movements of my body. To help, she taught me to dance. Our favorite was the Viennese Waltz. Stand tall, not too stiff, feel the music. Don't rush. My master liked watch us from the balcony.

There, in entrance hall. Where you found their bodies.

My master and lady would deny it, but when they first brought me home, they were embarrassed too. They giggled over the gloves I wore at my master's request and praised me like Archie, the last in a series of dachshunds. I had to be very careful not to mirror this. I once made the mistake

of squeezing the snowball on the top of my lady's winter hat. It was all right for them to make sport of me, but not the other way around.

These were my beginner's lessons.

In the early days, the learning curve was steep. There were many accomplishments. The most difficult time was in our third year together. Paul and Yvonne began to see in me too great a wish to please. They were moody, silent. They began spending evenings at their friend Mr. Teller's house. They left me at home not to punish me, only to spare themselves the reality that no matter what they did, no matter how poorly or indifferently they treated me, I would always serve them. I, a c-50 empath, the golden retriever of artificial life, wagged my tail with the best of them.

It was towards the end of this time that I had a small breakthrough. Each day I brought a decanter of water and an array of pills to my lady's bedroom. One morning, my master was sitting on her bed speaking in a low voice. I was about to put the tray down on her nightstand. He looked at me.

My master had given up drinking and was spending more time in his basement laboratory. He was longer able to make the journey to his museum lab.

'You've been *bringing* this?'

'Leave him alone. He didn't know,' Yvonne said.

My master turned to me and said, 'Get out.'

As I walked past him, he knocked the tray out of my hands, shattering the glass against the wall in the corridor, spewing broken shards and liquid along the hallway. He slammed the door behind me. I knelt in the water and glass, picking up the larger chunks and dropping them onto the tray.

It was dismaying to me that I might not be serving my

lady in the best possible way, that I might be hurting her. But still, I might not have learned if it hadn't been for Freddy, the dachshund of that era, who skittered through the coffee and broken glass, nearly injuring his little paws. When lifted him up, the poor creature licked his lips and wagged his tail as if he'd done something wrong.

It struck me then. My lady didn't know any better than Freddy. I must be more than the agent of her will. I must do their bidding, but sometimes I must quietly oppose them – my master as well. That day, I made a vow. Never again, would I serve only their wishes; I would serve them.

By the fourth year my master's disease made him a prisoner in his own home. Masahiro's Disease. For a fraction of the population, the more lifelike robots became, the worse it became. Paul and Yvonne, like many others, believed it was a disease of evolutionary biology - an overly reactive insular cortex. Humans evolved to abhor the *nearly* lifelike. As my master liked to put it, the procreators won out on the corpse-fuckers.

Only our walks were left to him. Emerging at dusk, we'd wander through Peckham and Rye Park Common, my lady on one side of him, me, on the other. He tried to avert his eyes if someone passed by. Many times my lady and I had to lift him from a faint or watch helplessly as he became sick on the sidewalk.

Still, we were devoted to those strolls through the common or east to Nunhead Cemetery.

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The first surgery took place in my fifth year.

My lady was saddened by the changes in me. It didn't prevent us from dancing. The only difference was she now reached down for *my* hand, not the other way around. I was

sorry for her. My master was sorry for her too. She believed I'd been hurt.

One night I sat at the sewing machine, hemming the right legs on all my trousers. The room was dark except for a desk lamp shining on my hands as I pushed the fabric along. She came into the room and knelt on the pile of clothes next to me. I pressed a pair of pajama bottoms against her cheek to stop her mascara from dripping onto her blouse. Her pretty cream-colored blouse.

When I had dried my lady's eyes, she made me lie down on that soft pile.

Why?

To comfort me.

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By my sixth year, I knew to ignore Paul when he returned home from visiting his mother. He'd drop his bags, sigh for my benefit, and say, 'What, no hello? No welcome back?'

I'd keep dusting. I wouldn't even turn around as I said, 'Welcome back, sir.'

You see, my master liked to have a good sulk. He'd slump in one of the armchairs and say, 'Do you realize how fortunate you are that you have no mother, Wilson?'

By no means was I to bring him tea, brush off his coat, or attend to him in any way, not matter how much I was drawn to do so. I didn't go near him until he felt thoroughly shunned.

I confess it has been a shock to find out they were siblings. It's not that I thought they were romantic with one another – they weren't. But I ought to have had some place in my imagination to wonder about them. Yvonne had given up so much for him. The lively social life she'd led before his illness. The possibility of children.

I did note one thing. Each of them would seem pleased if they caught me coming out of the other's room at odd hours.

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My master liked to have sex in his closet, quick and cramped, as if we were stealing a moment on a ship or a train car. We never spoke. I was always the aggressor. He liked watching us in the mirror. He was quite visual, my master. Even in the thick of it, he'd glance up.

With my lady I was something else entirely. She liked me clumsy, overwhelmed. I knelt on her feet, bumped and scraped, sometimes even frightened her with my ardour and then repented. I was entirely in her hands.

My intimate relationship with my master and lady was unusual only in that I had it with both of them. Mr. Teller teased them. 'The happy three,' he'd say. My master liked to point out that Mr. Teller himself had a relationship with his man.

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About two years ago, after a garden party, something new happened.

All the guests had gone, and only Teller and Paul remained. The liquor had run out, and Teller became irritable.

'I don't know,' Teller said, 'my man is adequate. No, he's good. He is!'

'Then why do you leave him at home?' my master said.

'He toddles around like somebody's grandfather,' Teller said.

I stood near them, placing empty glasses on a tray.

'Wilson!' my master said, 'Run to the off-license for some gin.'

'Isn't it a little late for that, sir?' I said.

My master turned to Teller with a look of pride.

'Well, what do I have to do to make mine that cheeky? Mutilate him?' Teller asked.

My master looked at his friend and said with quiet authority, 'It'll only make him more of a grandfather than ever.' He reached out a finger and pushed on Teller's chest. 'They're what *you* are.'

Teller took a glass from my tray and drank the dregs.

'All right, Wilson. Point taken. Now go and get us the gin,' my master said.

'I don't think so,' I said.

My master's smile faded. He was very drunk, more drunk than I'd seen him in a long time. His eyes, normally so merry and defiant, seemed dead.

'Put that tray down,' he said softly.

I did.

He removed his glasses and with his trembling hand, brought the stem toward me. I hadn't the slightest notion of what he was up to. He parted my jacket, unbuttoned my shirt, and stuck the stem into the concave area near my rib.

Right here.

That indentation was something he'd given me in the original surgeries, but I'd never known why. It was no hindrance to me until this moment.

I lost all control of my body, had something like a seizure, and fell to the ground.

In our four decades together, he'd never done this.

When I came to in the dirt and the leaves, my immediate concern was that I'd missed a progression taking place inside my master. I hadn't seen this coming. My failure disturbed me. Something was very wrong. That was the only inference I could make. Perhaps my master had a premonition of my lady's illness, which was beginning to manifest. Or maybe

it was just the escalation of his alcoholism.

I heard Teller laughing, then a scuffle, then Teller cursing. I heard one set of footsteps stagger toward the house.

Paul knelt down in the dirt with me and brought his face to mine. A tiny ant crawled down his cheek. He was weeping, his eyes glowing with hope. He gripped my arm like he needed know something. He needed me to show him.

I said quietly, 'If you ever do that again, I'll hurt you.'

Paul closed his eyes and exhaled. After a moment he looked at me again and tilted his head to one side.

'How?' he said.

I twisted his arm up under his shoulder blade and pushed him against a tree trunk.

From the side of his mouth, he said, 'Quite right.'

He slid down the trunk until he was sitting on the ground. I raised my finger to his cheek and brushed away the dead ant. With dexterity remarkable for his state of inebriation, he caught my hand as if it had been a bird darting between us and held it. He pushed towards me, crushing my hand between our chests. He whispered something in my ear.

Sorry, private.

If one is truly to serve, one must love. That is to say, one must yearn in a way that is unhealthy for oneself. I'm only half-jesting. If you doubt me, think of what happens to people who rid themselves of the usual masochisms. They gain security, but they become just a little bit more ...like desktop computers. So let me be hurt! I don't serve for gratitude. Save that for the ordinary empath. I serve to light up my lady's eyes, to see my master, so weary from being quicker than everyone, stumble to match my wit -- these are the joys!

And there's another thing too. If one is truly to serve, one

must be dying at a rate commensurate with the ones they love. That is why I sit beside my humidifier each night.

In the year that followed, the house became an infirmary. My lady sometimes slept for days. More and more, Paul asked me to spend nights with him. Sometimes, I'd catch him staring at me. I was under a different kind of scrutiny. I felt terribly responsible for him. His eyes bored into me, curious, pained. He needed to know something. Was I enough?

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On the night they died, my lady asked me to waltz with my master for her. She lay on the floor by the fireplace in a nest of pillows and blankets. You saw their bodies lying in that spot. She was always so cold toward the end. My master wore his robe, which I found odd. I'm unable to recall what the song was.

Yes?

No, no. Not forgetting. Remembering. Chopin. A waltz in A minor.

My master allowed me to lead in spite of our difference in height. We danced it well for her.

At approximately 10:15, I was sent to the off-license for gin. A fool's errand. It was during this time that my master and lady took their own lives.

Why do you whisper among yourselves? What is it you find so remarkable? That I'm making it up? Well then, shall I continue? It's a good show, isn't it?

All right, then. How about this?

I murdered them. I dispatched them with my bare hands, around the neck. Look at the uproar! But you only rejoice in another lie. You already know I didn't kill them – the truth is far worse than that.

Why did you ask me to tell you what you already know? I haven't tried to hide my failures from you – my spectacular failures. But even so, even with my faults, I am what Paul Moore wrought. Has there ever been another like me? Whatever is good in me, whatever is extraordinary, was because of Paul and Yvonne Moore.

But that's of no interest to you, detectives. The time for the truth has come.

There was no trip to the off-license. My master and lady prepared for their suicide in front of my eyes, and I didn't understand. My lady lay down and gave herself a morphine injection in front of me. She put the needle in her arm right in front of me and I didn't have the slightest idea. I thought it was just another treatment.

Does that amuse you?

She was radiant. Radiant with the absence of pain, radiant with death. And I, the biggest fool that ever lived, didn't know.

Of course, I performed my duties to the end, with all the flair of an ordinary golden retriever.

My master said, 'Bring us a pitcher of water please, Wilson.'

You saw the vessel there on the floor.

Old Archie waddled towards us, panting. No doubt he had more of an idea of what was about to happen than I did.

My master sat cross-legged next to my lady, stroking her hair, whispering in her ear.

The silent pendulum of the grandfather clock went back and forth and Archie's pink tongue went in and out.

When my lady appeared to sleep, my master slipped a plastic bag over her head. This is when I finally realized something might be amiss. I, an empath, a masterpiece of intuition and understanding! My lady's feet began to turn

to one side. My master said to me, 'Hold them, please.'

I gripped my lady by her calves until the last wisp of fight went out of her. My master cradled her possessively, stared at me, hurt by something more than her death. I didn't know what it was then, but I know now.

Since that moment, in the course of these two long days, I find myself thinking about my master and vehemently wishing he'd have given me a chance. Perhaps he would have been surprised. I console myself by knowing it was beyond his capacity. After what he saw in me that night, it must have seemed impossible. Take your dearest loved one and picture the skull beneath their face and try to come to terms with loving that vacant, grinning thing. Could you do it?

My master extended a hand to me. 'Goodbye, old friend.'

He brought out a static pistol from under the blanket, lay down next to her, and placed a towel over his head. I heard a fizzy, electric pop, not even loud enough to startle Archie. For a second, the surface of the water in the pitcher showed what looked like a hundred perfect rings.

The clock went on, and Archie went on panting. I, of course, went on as well. I removed my gloves and placed them there, where you found them. I thought only of our poor little Archie, so in need of a drink. I cupped my hands and filled them with water from the pitcher. He lapped up three or four handfuls and then walked down the hallway towards his bed.

You'd be wrong in trying to understand my statement as a defence. It's of no consequence how you judge me – only how you judge the work of Paul and Yvonne Moore.

My lifespan is short for an automaton. If I don't have some mishap, I can expect to be useful for another fifty years.

If I'm capable of any feeling independent of my desire

to serve those who now lie in Nunhead Cemetery, it's a yearning to be of use in my death. My master, a devotee of the life sciences, would praise me. Of course, I know my wish will not be granted. Nonetheless, I would like to close this statement by requesting that my being should cease with the end of this investigation. In a cabinet in his museum, display my parts. Deconstruct these memories. You take the credit, detectives. It's no small honour. You ought to consider it.