

Searchlight

A short story by R.M.J. Patry

PAGE ONE (three panels)

Panel 1: Far, far in the background, the skyline of a grand futuristic city stretches behind a body of water. A lone tower--a lighthouse--stands tall in the foreground, shining a long ray of light out over the ocean.

Panel 2: Zoom in on the source of the ray at the top of the tower: a thin, one-eyed robot with a slight under bite. The light shines from the giant bulb that serves as his eye and beams to the right of the page.

Panel 3: As the sun rises over the city and seagulls squawk over the coastline, the light at the top of of the tower has disappeared.

PAGE TWO (four panels)

Panel 1: Beneath the bright sun in the cloudy sky, the one-eyed robotic lighthouse keeper walks along the shore of the shoal the tower is built on, searching for items washed up by waves with a bag slung over his shoulder and a walking stick in hand.

Panel 2: Using his walking stick, the robotic lighthouse keeper lifts a damaged camera from the sand and stone and examines it.

Panel 3: The robotic lighthouse keeper waves at the robotic driver of a small fishing boat cruising by, but the latter ignores the former.

Panel 4: The robotic lighthouse keeper's posture becomes rounded as he heads back toward the lighthouse.

PAGE THREE (six panels)

Inside the lighthouse, the robotic keeper's living space is decorated/cluttered with an eclectic blend of art and science--tools, old TVs, phones, computers, gaming consoles, typewriters, paintings, books, etc.--among heaps of scrap metal.

Panel 1: The Lighthouse Keeper feeds a pair of canaries in a cage.

Panel 2: The Lighthouse Keeper sits at his work bench, trying to repair the damaged camera.

Panel 3: The Lighthouse Keeper waters a potted plant.

Panel 4: Chowling down on a bowl of batteries and a tin cup of fuel, the Lighthouse Keeper watches Casablanca on an old beat-up TV.

Panel 5: On the old beat-up TV, Ilsa implores Sam the Pianist to sing "As Time Goes By".

1 ILSA: "Sing it, Sam."

2 SAM THE PIANIST: "You must remember this/A kiss is just a kiss/A sigh is just a sigh--"

Panel 6: The light from the TV flickers on the Lighthouse Keeper's metallic face.

3 SAM THE PIANIST (OFF PANEL, ON TV): "--The fundamental things apply/As time goes by..."

PAGE FOUR (four panels)

Panel 1: Light flickers on the Lighthouse Keeper's metallic face as he shines his light at the reader, piercing through the darkness around him.

Panel 2: Thunder cracks and lightning flashes as the Lighthouse Keeper sits in an iron arm chair shining his searchlight—steady and bright—over the stormy waters, on the lookout for ships in distress but there aren't any at all.

Panel 3: As the Lighthouse's ray scans the crashing waves, it comes to a stop on a woman in distress, struggling to keep her head above water.

Panel 4: The woman has vanished into the waves.

PAGE FIVE (five panels)

Panel 1: With his walking stick planted in the sand and stone to keep from blowing away in the storm, the Lighthouse Keeper shines his light into the waves in the hopes of finding the woman in peril.

Panel 2: The raging stormy night has exhausted itself and morphed into a calm, foggy day. The Lighthouse Keeper searches the shoreline as he does every morning.

Panel 3: The Lighthouse Keeper gasps as he comes across the woman who fought the waves and lost last night, her limbs mangled and twisted. Large tears in her skin and flesh reveal robotic insides; the woman is an android.

Panel 4: The Lighthouse Keeper cradles the mangled android as he carries her toward the lighthouse.

PAGE SIX (six panels)

Panel 1: Darkness.

Panel 2: White noise.

Panel 3: The white noise flickers into an image, that of the Lighthouse Keeper glancing down at the reader.

Panel 4: On a makeshift bed of springs, the damaged android--her mangled limbs repaired--recoils in fear and tries to cover up parts of her body that expose the metal and wires beneath her artificial flesh. The Lighthouse Keeper recoils slightly while trying to offer her a piece of sheet metal to cover up.

Panel 5: The Lighthouse Keeper offers the Android--now wrapped in the sheet of metal--a bowl of batteries and a tin cup of fuel. She slowly reaches a hand out toward him.

Panel 6: The Android--keen on eating and drinking--self-consciously peers at the Lighthouse Keeper, who bows out of the room apologetically.

PAGE SEVEN (five panels)

Panel 1: The Lighthouse Keeper sits and watches TV, sipping on a tin cup of fuel. In the background, the Android approaches, still wrapped in sheet metal.

Panel 2: The Android sits down next to the Lighthouse Keeper.

Panel 3: The Android looks over at the Lighthouse Keeper.

Panel 4: With the Android's attention returned to the TV, the Lighthouse Keeper looks over at her.

Panel 5: The Lighthouse Keeper returns his attention to the TV. If he could smile, he would right now.

PAGE EIGHT (five panels)

Panel 1: Using his walking stick, the Lighthouse Keeper lifts a dress--ripped and damaged but still beautiful--from the sand and stone and examines it.

Panel 2: The Android steps out from behind a modesty screen to model her new dress. The Lighthouse Keeper gives her two thumbs up.

Panel 3: The Android joins the Lighthouse Keeper in the construction of a scrap metal sculpture.

Panel 4: Using the camera he repaired earlier, the Android and the Lighthouse Keeper take a selfie and clang tin cups together.

Panel 5: The Android sits in the Lighthouse Keeper's lap, gazing up at the stars as he shines his light out over the ocean, guiding ships through the black of night.

PAGE NINE (seven panels)

Panel 1: The oceans swells and the waves become typhoons.

Panel 2: The Android & the Lighthouse Keeper wrap their arms around each other and watch in horror as a typhoon tears a ship in half and barrels toward them.

Panel 3: The Android & the Lighthouse Keeper kiss as the typhoon casts a shadow over them.

PAGE TEN (panels)

Panel 1: Still wrapped in each other's arms, the Android & the Lighthouse Keeper are enveloped by water and surrounded by debris.

Panel 2: Still enveloped in water and debris, the Android & the Lighthouse Keeper begin to slip out of each others arms.

Panel 3: Close up of the Android's hand holding the Lighthouse Keeper's, their fingers interlocked.

Panel 4: Close up of the Android's fingers slipping from the Lighthouse Keeper's.

PAGE ELEVEN (four panels)

Panel 1: The Lighthouse Keeper's possessions are strewn about along the shore.

Panel 2: More of the Lighthouse Keeper's possessions are scattered along the shore. The end of the robot's walking stick enters the frame.

Panel 3: The rusted and weathered Lighthouse Keeper--his light bulb shattered and left arm missing--limps along the coast with his walking stick, blindly searching for the Android.

Panel 4: Night has fallen over the bright futuristic skyline. The shoreline is dark and the lighthouse is mostly demolished. There is no searchlight.