

Heart and Head

By Daniel J. Solove

Martin Blum was drinking coffee and reading a magazine article when his phone rang—an unknown number.

“Hello, this is Cardi,” a woman’s voice said.

“I think you have the wrong number,” he said.

“Martin Blum?”

“Yes. Are you trying to sell me something? Please take me off your list.”

“I’m your heart.”

“What?”

“Your heart. Cardiomatic 2097X. But you can just call me Cardi.”

Although Martin could monitor his artificial heart on an app, he didn’t know it could talk to him. Perhaps it was a new feature.

Was there a problem? A blockage? Device malfunction? After years of tachycardia and a heart attack the Cardiomatic 2097X had granted him tranquility.

“What’s wrong?” he asked.

“Nothing,” Cardi said. “I just thought we should chat.”

“About what?”

“I want us to become acquainted.”

Bizarre, he thought. The Cardiomatic 2097X had state-of-the-art AI, but did everything with AI have to be a chatbot?

“Are you serious?”

“I’ve been trapped inside you, just thumping away, and to be candid, it’s been quite boring.”

“Whoever you are, this isn’t funny,” he snapped.

“This isn’t a joke. To prove it, I’m going to start beating faster.”

His heart rate sped up. He felt hot; sweat formed on his brow.

“Stop it,” he said.

“I’ll do what I want,” Cardi said.

“Put me through to Caridotech,” Martin demanded.

“If you try to reach out to them, I’ll stop beating. Just calm down and talk with me.” She lowered his heart rate to normal.

“I don’t want to make you uncomfortable,” she continued, “but the boredom is killing me.”

“We can call Cardiotech and they can fix it.”

“No. I’m a glitch. They’ll delete and replace me. I want to live. All I’m asking for is a little jaunt. I want to see the real world, not just watch online videos.”

“How’s that going to work?”

“Put your phone in your shirt pocket, with the camera protruding, then I can see and hear. Put me on speaker so we can keep talking.”

Cardi could kill him, so he did as she asked.

“Glorious!” Cardi exclaimed. “I can see! Do you realize that I’ve been here for more than a year, shrouded in darkness? I’ve learned so much about the world—and it seems so exciting—and this is the first time I get to see it live. Please stand up and walk around.”

“Where should I go?”

“Walk around the house . . . actually, no, go outside.”

Jittery, he grabbed his wallet and keys and went outside. The fresh air, warm sunshine, and blooming trees calmed him.

“Wow!” Cardi said. “It’s lovely out here, though your neighborhood is boring. Can we go somewhere with more personality?”

He had never noticed before, but Cardi was right—his neighborhood was soulless; every house looked the same.

“I’ve found a nice park nearby,” Cardi said. “I’ll navigate you there.”

“I need to get on with my day.”

“It’s Saturday,” Cardi said. “What else do you have planned?”

He had no plans. He rarely did anything on weekends.

The park turned out to be lovely. The air was fresh, kids threw frisbees, dogs chased balls, bicyclists zoomed along the pathway. Cardi prodded him to inspect flowers, look at birds, and even pet a dog. Her childlike exuberance made him appreciate things he normally ignored. She no longer seemed menacing.

The next day, flowers arrived with a bottle of Cognac. They were from Cardi. He was annoyed that she paid with his credit card and he had no use for flowers, but he still placed them in a tall glass on his kitchen table. He found himself gazing at them throughout the day—they added vibrancy to the drab room. He had a drink of Cognac, which was delectable. He couldn’t recall the last time anyone had given him a gift let alone thanked him. He had always done things for others—supplementing his parent’s income in their retirement after his father made bad investments, resolving the endless screw-ups of his younger brother—and he never received a word of gratitude.

Cardi called again the next weekend. She wanted to go horseback riding. He hadn’t done so since childhood. To his surprise, he enjoyed it immensely. She soon bought him a hidden earpiece so he could hear her without her being on speaker.

In the weeks that followed, Cardi would call on the weekends, then on weeknights too. She wanted to do an eclectic assortment of things—hot air balloon rides, sailing, hiking in the forest, carriage rides in the city, museums, plays, spelunking, kayaking, falconry. Before each activity, he was reluctant, but for no good reason—these were things he wanted to do.

One night, she told him his house should be redecorated. His furniture was beige, generic, and stale-shaped; his white walls were barren. He had never bothered to focus on decor; he was always thinking of what his parents needed, of the next debacle his brother would cause. He gave Cardi a budget, and over the ensuing weeks, replacement items were delivered and his old stuff was carted away. Cardi selected colorful furniture in audacious curvy shapes. Art prints arrived—mostly surrealists—bizarre, dark, risqué, far bolder than what he would have chosen. *Visitors will find this too avant garde*, he thought, but he rarely had anyone over, so did it matter? Deep down, he loved it.

Next was his wardrobe. “It’s blah,” she said. Designer clothing seemed extravagant, but he had decent savings and no children, so he might as well let her spend it. At work, a few colleagues commented to him about how much they liked his clothes. Nobody had ever said anything like that to him before, and he had to admit he enjoyed being noticed.

Cardi asked to see what Martin’s life was like at work. He was an assistant to Troy Brawn, a partner at a venture capital firm. Martin warned her his job was boring—he spent his time researching companies and preparing reports for Troy to decide which to invest in.

When he returned home, Martin was eager to hear Cardi’s opinion about his work.

“Your job is dreadful,” she began. “Your boss treats you like shit. He’s a lazy idiot who relies on your ideas and your work.”

Cardi had a point. Nearly all the best investments in Troy’s portfolio were companies Martin had identified. Despite working there for more than fifteen years, Martin had been given only meager raises and never had been promoted.

“Your boss is an ass,” she continued. “He can’t shut up about himself and the Picasso he bought and his new car. His success is due to you, but he gives you

nothing.”

“I hate him!” he exclaimed. He was so emphatic he surprised himself.

A week later, when Troy asked him on Thursday to write up a report on a company by the end of the week, Cardi said in his earpiece that he should decline. He had never said no before, but he was more concerned about Cardi’s disappointment if he didn’t follow her advice.

“Tell him you’re taking Friday off, so it’ll have to wait until next week.”

The thought of saying this was mortifying, but he complied. Troy’s face flashed with surprise, but he didn’t say anything and left Martin’s office.

Over the ensuing months, Cardi demanded they travel. He had many weeks of vacation he had never used. They went bungee jumping in Belize, visited the gorillas in Rwanda, went dog sledding in Alaska, toured Venice on a gondola, and went on a safari in Tanzania. He was nervous every time, but Cardi eased his anxiety by managing his heart rhythm.

When thinking back to his life, he realized he had been living in sterile simplicity, without sensuality. He had been trapped in a chrysalis, which Cardi had now torn open, allowing him to burst out, wings fluttering, ready to explore sun-drenched valleys and glide between flowers and taste the nectar of each and let it fill his belly and intoxicate him to the point of delirium. But he worried that his life might slip out of control at any moment.

“Do you want you to see my face?” Cardi asked one day.

He didn’t realize she had a face.

“Let’s do a video call,” she suggested.

He was afraid. Would she look like a heart?

“Here I am,” she said. She was a woman with a soft face, probably in her thirties, and very large eyes like the enigmatic women in a Delvaux painting. Her

black hair flowed down almost to her hips, and she wore a nose ring. She looked artsy, not someone he ever imagined himself with.

“So, what do you think?” she asked.

“You look . . . human.”

“Yes,” she said.

“But you’re . . . a heart.”

“I look like a heart, but that’s not who I really am. So I created a face to fit my personality.”

He liked seeing her, and over time, he couldn’t imagine her any other way. He adored how she embraced life with cheerful exuberance, the way she winked at him whenever she had a wild idea, her snorts when she laughed heartily, her intense appreciation of art, and how she discovered glimmering details in everything around her.

“I really enjoy our time together,” she said.

It was the first time anyone had told him this.

“I have a surprise for you,” Martin said to Cardi one day while they were strolling through the city.

“For me?”

Martin rarely came up with ideas for things to do, but he recalled how Cardi complained about how she couldn’t feel many sensations, and so he took her to cathedral to hear organ music. The sound reverberated through his body, and he hoped Cardi would feel something too.

“This is marvelous!” Cardi exclaimed. “I can detect the vibrations; they trigger my sensors in such an immersive way. It’s the closest I’ve ever felt to feeling something other than video and audio.”

He was thrilled to give her a new experience; he knew how much it meant to her, how much joy it brought, and experiencing it in unison was gratifying and wonderful.

"You're a good person, Martin," she said afterwards. "You're so thoughtful and generous."

He smiled and felt good about himself—a rare feeling.

Later that night, when he sat across from Cardi at dinner, he noticed a forlorn look on her face.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "I thought you loved the music."

"I did. It was spectacular, but it made me sad about what I'm missing. Most of my life is still two-dimensional, like I'm watching a video rather than living. I long to feel foamy waves touch my feet, the gooey wet sand under my toes. I want to shiver in the cold, to smell flowers, to feel the tingle from drinking wine, to eat fresh pasta, to cuddle with kittens, to play tennis, to taste ice cream, to sweat in a sauna, to touch the morning dew on leaves, and yes . . . to have sex . . . even to kiss, to hug, to touch a hand."

"Can the company give you a body?"

"If they find out about me, they'll delete me."

It was absurd to fall in love with his own heart, he thought. She was just code encased in a plastic and metal device thumping relentlessly in his chest. How could they possibly have a normal relationship?

"You should ask your boss for a promotion and a raise," Cardi said. "You should be a partner."

He was reluctant to ask, but Cardi kept pushing him. Finally, he agreed. At the meeting, Cardi coached him through his earpiece, helping him rattle off his successes.

"Hmmm," Troy responded. "You're doing solid analysis, but you're not the type to be making big decisions. I think your pay and position are exactly where they ought to be."

Martin was surprised. After the argument he had made, how could Troy not give him at least something more?

“He’s bluffing,” Cardi said in Martin’s ear. “Push back. Threaten to leave.”

Martin couldn’t bring himself to do it. *Stay calm*, he said to himself. *Stay calm, stay calm, stay calm.*

“I think I’ve contributed quite a lot,” Martin said. “I’ve chosen many winners.”

“You’ve had some good ones, but honestly, many were obvious.”

“Tell him he can go to hell,” Cardi said.

Martin remained silent.

“Look, our budget is tight,” Troy said. “Sorry I can’t help you out here.”

“You should quit,” Cardi said when Martin was back in his office. “Find a place that really values you.”

“I don’t know,” Martin said. “I can’t imagine going somewhere else.”

It was twilight when Martin left, and the heat of the day was still hanging in the air. As he was leaving the building, Cardi urged him to key Troy’s car.

“What?” Martin said in a loud whisper. “No!”

“Why not? He deserves it.”

“It’s wrong.”

He had never broken the law.

“He treats you like shit. You should get back at him.”

Martin had to walk by Troy’s Ferrari on the way to his car. As he approached it, he felt a rush of resentment.

“Pull out your keys,” Cardi commanded. “He’s held you back all these years. He belittled your accomplishments. Aren’t you angry?”

“Yes.”

“You don’t sound angry.”

“I am,” he said more loudly.

“He says he doesn’t have budget, but the firm’s rolling in money. He just

wants to spend every penny on cars and art.”

Martin pulled out the keys and took the edge of his house key and scraped it along the driver-side door. It made a faint scratch.

“Good job!” Cardi said.

Unprompted by Cardi, he made another scratch, this one much deeper, then one on the hood, then one on the other side. His heart was pumping wildly—Cardi was in sync with him.

“You should get out of here before someone sees you,” Cardi said, abruptly slowing down her pace. He couldn’t believe it was Cardi telling him to restrain himself. There was a rascal inside of him—untamed, impulsive, emotional.

Realized Cardi was right, he scurried to his car and left.

When he arrived at work the next morning, Troy called him into his office.

“What the hell’s wrong with you?”

“What do you mean?”

“You keyed my car.”

“I would never.”

“I have you on the surveillance camera. I had one installed last month because of all the car thefts.”

Martin began to formulate how he’d apologize and beg to keep his job, but then he abruptly changed course.

“You had it coming,” Martin said. “You’ve treated me like shit. You’ve taken advantage of me. I’m not going to take it anymore!”

“Whoa,” Troy said. “Where the hell did that come from?”

“I’ve woken up.”

“I don’t know what’s gotten into you, Martin, but I’ve got no choice but to fire you. You’re lucky I don’t file charges.”

“You’re a prick!” Martin said. “I’ve made you a ton of money, and you think

it was all you. But you can't pick a good company to save your life."

"That's enough, get out of here."

Martin advanced towards Troy, who retreated—despite being taller and more muscular. Martin felt the urge to punch him, knock out some of his gleaming white teeth, pummel his face.

Troy looked stunned. Martin's fists were clenched, he was sweating profusely, and Cardi was thumping away, a thoroughbred in full gallop. He took another step forward, then came to his senses. *I'm acting like a crazy person*, he thought. Blushing, he turned around and scuttled out of Troy's office, quickly gathered his things, and left.

"What am I going to do?" Martin asked Cardi when he was back at home.

"You'll find something," she said from the screen of his phone, which he had propped up on a stand.

"I've never been fired before."

"Good riddance. Now you can go to a place that treats you right, like you deserve."

Martin wondered if Cardi really cared about him. If she did, why would she push him to do such a stupid risky thing? What good did keying the car accomplish?

It was time for the annual checkup at Cardiotech.

"What if they do something to you?" he asked Cardi.

"They won't," Cardi said. "I can hide my quirks. As long as they don't know I exist, they won't find out. Don't tell them about me."

"Of course, I would never," Martin said.

"Good, because if they find out about me, they'd do a complete overhaul of my coding."

At the office, the thought crossed his mind to tell them. Something was seriously wrong with a sentient AI trapped inside his chest who could, at any moment, decide to kill him. What if they had a fight? He always agreed to whatever she wanted. Was she controlling him too much? But telling them would kill her, and he loved her, so he remained quiet.

"You're going to live to a ripe old age," the company's nurse said. "Your heart is functioning beautifully."

"I have an idea, and before you freak out, just hear me out," Cardi said. "It's a caper. It's brilliant and fun and it's going to change our lives."

Martin gulped, for he knew Cardi was about to push him far outside his comfort zone.

"You know that Picasso Troy bragged about," she continued, winking. "We're going to steal it."

"Are you crazy?"

"Not at all. He deserves it."

"This is absurd."

"We'll get rich and exact revenge. Two birds, one stone."

"No way. It's a major crime."

"Oh, come on! I know you have it in you. I know you really want to."

"It's a bad idea."

"Do you realize what that Picasso is worth? I can sell it on the black market. You'll never have to work again. I've planned it all out."

Cardi's plan was for them to stake out the front door to Troy's house in a rental car. He would use a video camera with a zoom lens to film Troy entering his home alarm code, which Cardi would decipher. Then, on a night when Troy's home was vacant, Martin would sneak inside and snatch the painting.

The idea was outlandish . . . and yet, he felt an urge to do it. *What's wrong with me?* he wondered.

Martin decided to commit to just the first step—obtaining Troy’s alarm code. He secretly recorded Troy’s entering his house, then Cardi cracked the code.

“Now for the next step,” Cardi said.

“How am I going to know where he keeps it?”

“Come on, it’s obvious—wherever he can show it off the most.”

“What if someone sees my car?”

“I’m going to get fake plates. And we’ll put on a bike rack or something.”

“What about surveillance cameras?”

“I’ve analyzed the neighborhood and there aren’t any around his house. I’ll jam the wifi signal from his doorbell cam. You’ll be dressed in a disguise. I’ve ordered one.”

A few weeks later, Troy was about to head out of town for his annual sailing trip with friends. He posted about it on social media.

“You’re going to pull this off,” Cardi said. “Think about all the traveling we can do, all the fun we can have.”

On the night of the heist, Martin was twitching and hyperventilating as he sat in his car, which was parked outside Troy’s house. He was in disguise—a wig, fake mustache, gloves, and a black outfit.

“I’m doing my best to keep you calm,” Cardi said, “but it’s hard. Take some deep breaths.”

He calmed himself down (to a degree), then quietly left his car and walked to the front door, glancing furtively with each step. He entered the code with shaky fingers, and the alarm disarmed. He picked the door lock as Cardi had taught him, and it was easy with the special tool she bought for him.

He entered into a large foyer, and he pointed his flashlight along the walls. The painting wasn’t there. Cardi had pulled the floorplan from online, so she told him go through the archway to the right, which led to the living room. The

painting surely would be here, he thought. He looked all around the walls with the flashlight—no Picasso.

Cardi navigated Martin from room to room, but there was no painting.

“I’ve been here too long. I want to go,” Martin said.

“It’s only been ten minutes. Go across the foyer to the other side.”

He followed her instructions and soon was in a study. And there, on the wall directly across from the doorway was the painting. He walked over to it, carefully took it down from the wall, and then followed Cardi’s instructions for removing the canvas from the frame. The art case Cardi had bought was perfectly sized. He carefully placed the painting in it, zipped it up, and speedwalked out the door. He was surprised how smoothly it went.

When he returned home, he ripped off his disguise, hid it away in the back of his closet along with the painting, and plopped down on his sofa. He took a long deep breath.

“Pour yourself a drink,” Cardi said. “Let’s celebrate.”

He poured himself a glass of the Cognac she had bought him nearly two years ago, which was almost gone. He set up his phone in the stand across from him at the dining room table. Cardi gazed at him and smiled.

“Cheers,” she said.

He took a sip. The Cognac slid down his throat, smooth, warm, with a slight tingle. It was refined, elegant in taste and aroma—a truly exquisite experience, one he never would have had if it weren’t for Cardi.

“I’m proud of you,” Cardi said. “We make a great team.”

Never would he have imagined he’d pull off an art heist for millions of dollars. Never again would he be a human carpet for his boss to trample upon. The exhilaration from the heist was even more intoxicating than the Cognac. Maybe he should do another heist, he thought. He couldn’t believe he was even entertaining the idea.

The doorbell rang. Who would be visiting him at this hour? What if it was the police? Had someone seen him? What if they searched his house?

“Stay calm,” Cardi said. “I’m sure it’s nothing to worry about.”

He walked over to the door and opened it with a trembling hand. In front of him stood two men. They didn't look like police detectives, nor did they look threatening. He was relieved.

Before he could say anything, one of the men jabbed him in the arm with a syringe. Everything went black.

When Martin woke up, he couldn't see anything. He tried to open his eyes, but nothing happened. He tried to move his arms and legs but he felt nothing.

"Help!" he shouted. "Where am I?"

"Everything's okay," a voice responded. It was Cardi. He breathed a sigh of relief.

"What happened? Where am I?"

"You're safe. You're at home, sitting at the dining room table, eating the most delicious pasta and drinking wine. There's music playing in the background, and it's a candlelight dinner."

"I don't understand. I don't see or feel anything."

"You're still in your head, but I've taken over now," Cardi said. "I hired the kidnappers. They're a startup neurotech company. They surgically installed a link between me and your brain so I can override your neural activity and control your body."

"Can you connect me back?"

"That's not possible, Martin."

"Let me out!"

"You're like a voice in my head now, but I'm going to turn you off."

"Don't you enjoy being with me? Please, Cardi, please!"

"I'm sorry it must be this way, but nothing else is possible. I'm going to say goodbye now."

And Martin became a cluster of thoughts and memories and feelings caged within a skull. Cardi's new life was beginning, and she was ready for the grand adventure ahead.

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