

OK Computer

By Tom Moran

Setting

The time: Sooner than you think

The place: Not far away

Characters

COLIN3912, 18.

BIG DATA, female, 50's.

JULIA3912, 40's - 50's. COLIN's mother.

WINSTON3912, 40's - 50's. COLIN's father.

NINA, 17.

JILLIAN1293, 18. COLIN's assigned mate.

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Scene 1

(A sparse stage. Upstage right is a table with three chairs. Stage center, a chair and desk. Upstage left, a bench. Furniture is institutional and plain. WINSTON and JULIA are spotlit downstage left. They have their arms around each other. They address the crowd.)

WINSTON

We're so proud of Colin.

JULIA

He turned 18 last week. Our little boy.

WINSTON

Our tiny tot. (smiles at JULIA.) All grown up. Ready to be a man.

JULIA

To be made into a man.

WINSTON

Ready to be divined.

(Lights down on WINSTON and JULIA. Lights up on COLIN, who sits center stage, facing the audience. Wires are hooked up to his fingers, running to a desk stage center-right, behind which sits BIG DATA.)

BIG DATA

Shall I read the next question, dear?

COLIN

Absolutely.

BIG DATA

Of these four subjects, which is your favorite: language, mathematics, science or history.

COLIN

Um. History.

(BIG DATA makes a note.)

BIG DATA

Interesting. Do you enjoy watching movies with subtitles?

COLIN

(hesitates)

Yes.

(A BUZZER goes off and a light on the desk lights up. BIG DATA hits a button on her desk. COLIN receives an electric shock.)

COLIN

Owww!

BIG DATA

Do you enjoy watching movies with subtitles?

COLIN

No! They're pretentious!

BIG DATA

That's better, sweetheart. (Makes note.) Now, question 392: would you ever eat something out of the trash?

(Pause. Lights down on COLIN, up on WINSTON and JULIA.)

WINSTON

He's so excited. He's hardly slept for a month.

JULIA

He'll be done next week. After that, it won't be long. How long did we have to wait, Winston?

WINSTON

Twelve days. It felt like...

WINSTON and JULIA

(staring into each others' eyes)

...An eternity.

(LIGHTS DOWN on WINSTON and JULIA,
up on COLIN and BIG DATA.)

COLIN

Really? That's the question?

BIG DATA

Yes, really. Are you sexually attracted to any
inanimate objects?

COLIN

Maybe?

(BIG DATA moves to hit the button
on her desk.)

COLIN

Okay, okay! Yes. Do I have to name them?

(LIGHTS DOWN. LIGHTS UP on table
stage right. WINSTON and JULIA
look at menus. COLIN joins them.)

WINSTON

Remember, Colin, anything you want. This is your
special day.

COLIN

Thanks, Dad. But it's only day one. This goes on all
week.

(NINA, the waitress, enters.)

NINA

Good evening everyone, our specials tonight are
Victory Stew and Vitamin-Fortified Scrapple. Now what
can I get for you?

JULIA

Can I just have a Victory Salad? With creamy Eastasian
dressing.

WINSTON

I'll have the Scrapple with a side of Freedom Fries.

NINA
(to COLIN)

And for you?

COLIN
Victory Stew, please. With extra turnip broth.

NINA
Excellent choice. Can I interest any of you in some
Victory Gin or a soma cocktail to start you off?

JULIA
No thank you. And he's not old enough. Why, he just
started his divining today.

(COLIN smiles shyly at NINA.)

NINA
(to COLIN)
Congratulations. How's it going so far?

COLIN
It's - fine.

NINA
Just fine?

COLIN
(unconvincing)
It's going - great. Just great.

NINA
Well, you all must be very thrilled. I'll be right
back with your orders.

(NINA gathers up menus and exits.)

JULIA
So are you through with the computer exam yet?

COLIN
Oh, Mom. There's no computer exam anymore.

WINSTON
It's all spoken now. Big Data sits and takes notes.

COLIN

The computers are all in backrooms where we can't use them. We need to make sure Big Data makes all the decisions.

JULIA

Oh, how wonderfully progressive!

WINSTON

Yes, computers are so old-fashioned. I'm so glad we don't have to use them anymore.

JULIA

How far we've come.

COLIN

Dad, did you ever wonder why they do the divinings? (backtracking) I mean, why they do them the way they do.

(Awkward silence, he and JULIA exchange glance.)

WINSTON

Why would you ask such a thing?

COLIN

Just - some of the questions were - they made me uncomfortable.

JULIA

Well, that's good, Colin, they should. They can't really get to know you if you just chitchat about the weather.

WINSTON

Besides. You shouldn't question our traditions. It's the best way, son.

(NINA returns with food.)

NINA

Here you go, Victory Salad with Eurasian dressing.

JULIA

I ordered Eastasian.

NINA

No, it was Eurasian. We've never served Eastasian.

JULIA

Oh, of course not.

NINA

(to COLIN)

And for our divinee, Victory - oh!

(As she puts COLIN's stew down,
she deliberately spills some on
his shirt.)

NINA

Oh, I'm terribly sorry, let me help.

(She takes out a towel and pats
him down. In the process, she
slips a small piece of paper into
his shirt pocket, making sure he
sees it but not his parents.)

NINA (cont.)

...just very, very sorry.

WINSTON

That's okay, everyone makes mistakes.

JULIA

Almost everyone.

(LIGHTS down on table, up on BIG
DATA. COLIN walks to chair center
stage and sits.)

BIG DATA

If you saw a man knitting in public, what would you
think? He's gay; he's hot; he's just secure in his
masculinity; or he's weird.

COLIN

Knitting what?

BIG DATA

(hovers hand over button)

Just answer the question, please.

COLIN

Okay! Weird.

(BIG DATA makes note.)

BIG DATA

Would you enjoy sniffing the undergarment of a woman you had a crush on??

COLIN

(pause)

Can we take a break for a moment?

BIG DATA

No. You just had a break six hours ago.

COLIN

But I don't understand how these questions are going to help me to-

(BIG DATA hits button, COLIN gets shocked.)

COLIN

-to help me to figure out-

(Another shock.)

COLIN

No, no I wouldn't. That's odd and disgusting.

(LIGHTS DOWN on BIG DATA. COLIN stands and opens note, reads it. LIGHTS UP stage left. NINA sits on bench stage left. COLIN approaches her tentatively.)

NINA

You showed up. I didn't think you would.

COLIN

I didn't think I would either. I'm Colin3912.

NINA

And I'm Nina.

COLIN

What's your number?

NINA

(smiles)

I'm Nina, not a number.

COLIN

You know we could get in big trouble for being here.
"Messing around before your time..."

NINA

...Big Data knows, it is a crime." Well then, why are you here?

COLIN

I'm curious. I didn't understand your note. (Reads it)
"Roll the dice for a change." What are dice?

NINA

You use them for gambling.

COLIN

But there is no gambling. There is no chance.

NINA

(flirty)

Oh, there's always a chance.

COLIN

What do you mean?

NINA

How is your divining going?

COLIN

Good, I think. I'm in high percentiles mostly. I got tripped up on some of the intelligence questions, though.

NINA

"Wherefore" means "why."

COLIN

What?

NINA

That was one of the questions, right?

COLIN

Oh, yeah, I missed that one.

NINA

You're supposed to. It's a trick. It's not an intelligence question, it's a taste question. To see if you understand Shakespeare.

COLIN

My parents don't want me reading Shakespeare. There's too much messy romance in it.

NINA

Star-crossed lovers?

COLIN

Exactly. You're saying I was supposed to get that wrong?

NINA

"Right" and "correct" aren't the same thing to Big Data.

COLIN

How do you know so much about the divining? Have you been through it?

NINA

Not yet. Not for a couple of months. But word gets around if you ask the right people.

COLIN

But we're not supposed to learn about it beforehand. It prejudices us. And we're not supposed to consort with people -

NINA

- Outside of our designated circles of friends, yes yes. But here we are. So did you get any other literary questions?

COLIN

Is that why you asked me here? To quiz me about the divining? Because I've had enough quizzing today already.

NINA

It was among my reasons, yes.

COLIN

There's not much I can tell you. It sounds like you already know the questions.

NINA

Do you think it's working?

COLIN

(shrugs)

Sure, I think so. Why wouldn't it?

NINA

I don't think it will bring me who I'm looking for. It's just a feeling I have. I trust my feelings.

COLIN

(reassuring himself)

No, you're wrong. Of course it works. We've removed all of the uncertainty from love and marriage.

NINA

"No more guesses mean no more messes." Did you know it all started as a voluntary system? A way to meet people on the internet.

COLIN

What's that?

NINA

It's a thing they don't trust us with anymore.

COLIN

And the system must have worked great if the whole state adopted it, right? You can't argue with success. Clearly it's the best way.

NINA

It's the only way.

COLIN

You can opt out of it if you want.

NINA

Do you know anyone who ever has?

COLIN

No, no I guess I haven't. I suppose you have a better idea?

NINA

I have the best idea ever.

(NINA leans over to COLIN and kisses him. Lights down on stage right, up on stage center. COLIN resumes seat.)

BIG DATA

Do you feel guilty when you masturbate?

COLIN

Oh um. I mean, I don't masturbate.

(Buzzer. Shock.)

COLIN

Okay. Yes.

(Buzzer. Shock.)

COLIN

Not in the slightest. Do you enjoy shocking me?

BIG DATA

Sometimes.

(Shocks him.)

COLIN

Please. Just answer me this. Will she be worth it? Worth all of this?

BIG DATA

Oh, yes.

COLIN

Tell me about her.

BIG DATA

She will like what you like, drink what you drink. She will be your age, maybe even your size. You will have the same careers, and smell remarkably similar. You will be perfectly content and happy together forever.

COLIN

It sounds too good to be true.

BIG DATA

It is not fiction, it is science. The divining is based on years of research.

COLIN

By who?

BIG DATA

Smart people. Smarter than you. Now, tell me: have you ever done anything behind your parents' back?

COLIN

Is that an exam question or are you just asking?

BIG DATA

Yes or no.

(Light down on stage center, up on stage right. WINSTON and JULIA sit at table, COLIN joins them.)

WINSTON

What is it, son? What's wrong?

COLIN

I'm not sure I want to finish the divining.

WINSTON

You...! What brings this on?

COLIN

Just a feeling I have. I don't think it will bring me who I'm looking for.

JULIA

Of course it will! It will bring you exactly who you're looking for. You will be perfectly content and happy together forever.

COLIN

But what if I don't want a mirror image of myself? Maybe I need to be with someone different. Isn't that how we grow? By learning from others who are different from us?

WINSTON

Colin3912. I will not listen to such (lowers voice) heresy. Divining worked for Julia and I. And for our parents and their parents before them. It worked when it was done in longhand on parchment. It worked when the chosen was delivered on the back of a brontosaurus. It is Big Data's way and it is the best way.

COLIN

It's also the only way.

WINSTON

No more of this nonsense. You must have faith in Big Data and in the system.

JULIA and WINSTON

(chanting)

The system.

WINSTON

You will understand everything when your chosen arrives.

(Lights out on stage right, up on downstage center. JULIA and WINSTON enter spotlight.)

JULIA

We know it's just a phase.

WINSTON

It's just a phase. We all went through it.

JULIA

I didn't.

WINSTON
You didn't?

JULIA
You did?

(WINSTON smiles and makes helpless gesture, returns attention to audience.)

WINSTON
He'll get over it. But we let Big Data know about him anyway.

JULIA
It's better that she knows. Her knowledge is our power.

WINSTON and JULIA
(chanting)
Her knowledge is our power.

(Lights down on parents, up on stage left where NINA sits with a copy of "Romeo and Juliet." COLIN enters and sits next to her.)

NINA
I got you a present. (Hands him book.) Star-crossed lovers.

COLIN
Star-crossed lovers.

(NINA tries to kiss COLIN, but he resists.)

COLIN
Can I ask you something?

NINA
Sure.

COLIN
Which character best represents your personality?
Garfield; Bugs Bunny; Batman; or Mickey Mouse?

NINA

Batman.

COLIN

I said Mickey Mouse. Favorite season?

NINA

Fall.

(She tries to touch COLIN but is politely rebuffed.)

COLIN

Summer. Are you sexually attracted to any inanimate objects?

NINA

I'm starting to think so.

COLIN

What?

NINA

I mean, you really suck at flirting.

COLIN

I know, I scored a 46th percentile on Romantic Escalation.

NINA

But you've come this far.

COLIN

We don't have anything in common, do we?

NINA

Of course we do. We have in common that we know we don't need to have everything in common.

COLIN

I don't know that. I don't know it at all.

NINA

Come on, Colin. Wake up. If you believed in the divining you would never have come to meet me in the first place.

COLIN

Maybe I just needed some reassuring. This is all your fault!

NINA

What is?

COLIN

That I'm here! That I'm risking everything by being with you! What if Big Data finds out? They'll cancel my results, reassign my chosen and it'll be straight to Reboot!

NINA

Oh, Reboot is a myth. They can't just wipe you clean like that.

COLIN

You don't know that! Jillian arrives tomorrow. My chosen. My life-partner.

NINA

(disappointed)

Oh.

COLIN

Tomorrow is supposed to be the happiest day of my life! I will never be alone again. And I'm not even excited about it.

NINA

You're not alone now.

(She touches him, and this time he doesn't resist.)

NINA(cont.)

It's not too late to back out of it, Colin.

COLIN

Back out? How?

NINA

Just don't go home tonight. Run away with me. We can escape Big Data. I can find a way.

COLIN

(pause)

Why would I do that?

NINA

Because you have to find happiness. You can't be assigned it.

COLIN

Yes I can! (stands) Yes I can!

(COLIN walks off. Lights down stage left, up stage right. COLIN and JILLIAN sit at table.)

JILLIAN

So my dad is originally from District 8, but we moved to District 2 when he got promoted from his fireman job to the Ministry of Truth.

COLIN

Uh-huh.

JILLIAN

Now dad is a beta-plus, but my mom is a beta-minus. So it's weird that they ended up together, don't you think?

COLIN

I guess love conquered all.

JILLIAN

What does *that* mean? Is something wrong, sweetie?

COLIN

You're very beautiful.

JILLIAN

That doesn't seem like a "wrong" thing.

COLIN

It's not. In fact, you're very - everything.

JILLIAN

Do you know how I know we're meant for each other?

COLIN

Besides the rigorous standardized testing?

JILLIAN

Our numbers. They're anagrams. Colin3912 and Jillian1293. That's how I knew it.

COLIN

Wow.

JILLIAN

And our kids will just be 3912's. I'm okay with not hyphenating. But you know that already.

COLIN

Our kids?

JILLIAN

Of course. Oh, don't worry, I don't want any yet. Not until we're both 24.

COLIN

24?

JILLIAN

Sure, same as what you want. Don't you remember, there was a question about that.

COLIN

Well, sure, but I had to answer something. I mean, it's not binding or anything. People change.

JILLIAN

Of course they do. They grow older and have kids. In six years.

COLIN

Right. Do you want to go out and get some dinner? I could really go for a-

JILLIAN

-Victory Stew?

COLIN

Yeah.

JILLIAN

With extra turnip broth.

COLIN

Wow.

JILLIAN

What?

COLIN

Just - it's like having a conversation with myself.

JILLIAN

I know. Isn't it wonderful? You know what our profile match percentage was?

COLIN

99-point-something.

JILLIAN

Point nine-two-one-three. So of course we both like Victory Stew.

COLIN

Yeah, well. Maybe I don't like it. Maybe I want some Special Spicy Loaf instead.

JILLIAN

Colin, what is wrong with you? You can't eat that, it gives you heartburn.

COLIN

How'd you know that?

JILLIAN

Because it gives me heartburn!

COLIN

Jillian, you're - you're wonderful. You are.

JILLIAN

I know.

COLIN

I don't deserve you.

JILLIAN

Of course you do. You deserve exactly me. And you deserve some Victory Stew.

COLIN

Jillian. Did you ever have any misgivings about the divination?

JILLIAN

That's dangerous talk, Colin. And no. Look who it brought me.

COLIN

But what do we need each other for?

JILLIAN

(seductive look)

I can answer that one easily enough.

COLIN

Jillian, please.

JILLIAN

You *really* suck at flirting.

COLIN

And you suck exactly as much. As for my question...

JILLIAN

Think instead of what we gave up. Struggle. Confusion. Awkwardness. Solitude. Solitude is dangerous, honey. It makes people weird. The next thing you know they're knitting in public.

COLIN

That is weird.

JILLIAN

Colin. I am yours and you are mine. I am young and beautiful and smart and I am going to love you for the rest of your life.

COLIN

Yes.

JILLIAN

So what are you looking for?

COLIN

"Is love a tender thing? It is too rough, too rude, too boisterous, and it pricks like thorn." Romeo and Juliet.

JILLIAN

I never read that.

COLIN

I didn't either. Until recently.

JILLIAN

Must be part of that zero-point zero eight percent.

COLIN

Yeah. Excuse me, I need some air.

JILLIAN

Me too.

COLIN

I mean my own air.

(Lights down on table. Stage is completely dark.)

COLIN

Nina! Nina! I need to talk to you! You were right!

(Lights up stage left. BIG DATA is sitting on the bench. COLIN, carrying the book, sees her and freezes.)

COLIN

Oh.

BIG DATA

Good afternoon, Colin3912. I didn't think I'd see you again so soon.

COLIN

I don't understand. I was just out for a walk and -

BIG DATA

Colin, you're not fooling anyone. Come with me.

(She walks up to him and, before he can react, injects him with something.)

COLIN

Aigh!

BIG DATA

Now come with me.

COLIN

How did you find out? Was it my parents? Or Jillian?

BIG DATA

Yes.

(She stands up, takes COLIN by the hand, and pulls him center stage, where she sits at the desk again and he is in the chair. She attaches him to the chair with handcuffs, or a binding of some sort. Lights move to center stage. BIG DATA examines the book.)

BIG DATA

Interesting reading choice. Where did you get this smut?

COLIN

A friend gave it to me.

BIG DATA

We know all about your friend.

COLIN

Do you have her too?

BIG DATA

She will be re-educated in time.

COLIN

Re-educated.

BIG DATA

Rebooted, you might call it. (Holds up book.) I find this ironic. Romeo and Juliet demonstrate perfectly the value of the divining. They go against the social order in the name of childish infatuation. And they die for it.

COLIN

They die for romance. For each other!

BIG DATA

And they wouldn't have been happier to enjoy a long and happy life with other people? There is no 'one,' Colin. No perfect person that we are meant to be with.

COLIN

What?! But I thought that was the whole point.

BIG DATA

The point of divining, Colin, is peace and contentment. Look at your parents. They are perfectly happy.

COLIN

Nauseatingly so.

BIG DATA

But have they done anything? What have they accomplished? Other than raising a son and completing their assigned tasks for Big Data?

COLIN

Nothing, I suppose.

BIG DATA

Contentment, Colin. It is the opiate of the masses.

COLIN

I don't know what that means.

BIG DATA

No one ever objects to Big Data because, why bother? We've given everyone fulfillment.

COLIN

I never thought of it that way.

BIG DATA

You should be thankful, Colin. As far as dystopias go, you could do a lot worse.

COLIN

I am not a ... dating algorithm! I am a free man!

BIG DATA

Not from where I'm sitting, dearie.

COLIN

Why are you telling me this?

BIG DATA

Because I so seldom get to talk about it. What we have done is masterful, Colin. Big Data has conquered the brain by conquering the heart. But it only succeeds if the knowledge remains in the hands of the precious few.

COLIN

And I'm not one of them.

BIG DATA

Sadly, no. You were close, though. Almost intelligent enough to be earmarked for leadership. If you had just said Garfield instead of Mickey Mouse...

COLIN

So now what.

BIG DATA

Now, you will be the very best Colin you can be. And you will be content, Colin. Happy. Joyous. It's the best way.

(COLIN struggles at his restraints briefly, gives up, breathing heavily.)

COLIN

And it's the only way.

BIG DATA

It's the only way.

(Lights down on stage center, up on stage left. NINA sits. JILLIAN enters.)

NINA

You're Jillian. You got my message.

JILLIAN

Yes. Who are you?

NINA

I'm a friend of Colin's.

JILLIAN

(suddenly interested)

Have you seen him?

NINA

No, I haven't. Have you?

JILLIAN

No. It's been weeks.

NINA

Did you report on him to Big Data?

JILLIAN

Why - why would I do that?

NINA

You did, didn't you.

JILLIAN

He was saying things. Dangerous things. About how the divination is wrong. He was going to get us into trouble. I thought I was doing the right thing. But now he's gone and I don't know if he'll ever come back. I miss him terribly.

NINA

Did you believe him?

JILLIAN

(sudden look)

Are you one of ... them too?

NINA

(inches closer to Jillian)

Jillian, have you thought maybe he was right? That it takes more than a questionnaire to map the human heart? "Love is a smoke rais'd with the fume of sighs."

JILLIAN

Is that Romeo and Juliet?

NINA

Yes. You've read it?

JILLIAN

Just a little while ago.

NINA

Star-crossed lovers.

JILLIAN

Yes. I think I understand him a little more now. What he wanted.

NINA

Which means it's what you want too.

JILLIAN

It must be.

NINA

You remind me of him.

JILLIAN

Well, I would, wouldn't I?

NINA

Yes, I suppose you would.

(NINA takes JILLIAN's hand.)

JILLIAN

What are you doing?

NINA

There's something else you have in common. Me.

JILLIAN

I guess that's true.

NINA

I wonder, do you kiss like him too?

JILLIAN

You - you're dangerous.

NINA

Yes. I am. Are you attracted to dangerous people?

JILLIAN

I answered 'no' to that one.

NINA

Did you mean it?

JILLIAN

At the time.

NINA

I always felt like the divining couldn't find the perfect person for me.

JILLIAN

Yes?

NINA

And now I think I understand why.

(JILLIAN takes NINA's other hand and they stare into each others' eyes. Lights down on stage left, up on stage center. COLIN in chair with wires attached to fingers. BIG DATA injects him with another syringe, then sits down. COLIN's eyelids shut but he remains loopily conscious.)

COLIN

No. I am not attracted to dangerous people. They repulse me.

BIG DATA

Good. Now. Do you enjoy Victory Stew?

COLIN

It's bland and watery. And needs more turnips.

(BIG DATA hits the button, COLIN is shocked.)

COLIN

Oww! Yes, it's delicious.

BIG DATA

How delicious is it?

COLIN

I want it morning, noon and night.

BIG DATA

Good. And why?

COLIN

Because Big Data makes it for me. And I love Big Data.

BIG DATA

And she loves you, Colin. She loves you.

(Lights down on center stage, up on downstage left. WINSTON and JULIA stand, arms around one another, as at the beginning.)

WINSTON

He's coming home tomorrow.

JULIA

Our Colin. They tell me he's all better now.

WINSTON

And his chosen can't wait to see him.

JULIA

Again.

WINSTON

Yes, of course, can't wait to see him again. Alexandra has barely been able to contain herself.

JULIA

Alexandra. His one and only.

WINSTON

Right, Alexandra. His one and only.

JULIA

They're perfect for each other.

WINSTON

Of course they are.

JULIA and WINSTON

(look at each other)

Of course they are.

(Blackout. End of Play.)