

# The Nightingale

## Synopsis

In the near future the world is slowly but surely dying. Ovid and Kate are two childhood friends who witness its decay through the constant changes in their society and the people around them.

They grow up in a world that is divided in two parts by a war on resources, the previous west is reduced to secluded little isles that can exist only thanks to the war on the third world. However, the earth is plagued by natural disasters, which in the end no barriers can shield them from.

Kate grows up disillusioned. Her uncle is in the ongoing war, which provides them with the resources they need but also causes an influx of migrants, which she hates. Ovid grows up in a collapsing family with a traumatised mother who seeks his love. Their only connection to a utopian imagery is in the video games that they play.

Fifteen years later the state of the earth is at its end. In the year 2067, its population is down to about 3 billion and its surface is largely divided between flooded regions and deserts. At the brink of extinction, what's left of humanity now mostly lives in resignation while awaiting its fate.

Kate is working as a soldier in the other side of the world. But seeing the world outside of their goldfish-bowl is disheartening. Her meeting with what at first seems like misery, leads to her rethinking her core values. In the end she finds a way to carry on and adapt a new life. When all seems to be lost, in a bare landscape she sees and photographs for the first time in her life a real field of flowers.

Ovid lives in the abandoned premises of the TAL.OS Program, a government funded program for robotic engineering, in which he spends his time programming an android named Galatea. He eventually falls in love with her and tries to make her become alive. He stumbles on Kate's photograph of the flower field and inserts it into Galatea's programming. His desperate clinging to a dying way of life leads to his demise along with the whole of the world he knows. When Galatea finally manages to perfectly resemble a human she will insist on going outside, thinking that she sees a field of flowers, when in fact what she sees is a snowstorm. In the snow she cannot function, and she leads herself and Ovid to their doom.

The Nightingale is a dystopia, a parable with pressing urgency, a vision of a future which is not far away. It is told in parallel worlds, the dying western isle of Ovid and Kate's youth, the abandoned premises of TAL.OS where Ovid works, the war wastelands of Kate, and the video game world where they interact throughout their lives. It is a tragedy with a glimmer of hope: When the mother bird pushes her chicks out of the nest they either fly or die. In the end, at least a few of us will grow wings.

## THE NIGHTINGALE

Two childhood friends must discover their lifepaths as the world is coming to its end.

### ACT ONE

It is the year 2067, the earth's population is down to about 3 billion and a part of it's surface is covered in water. At the brink of its awaited extinction, humanity lives in a climate of resign while awaiting its fate. OVID (30), a depressive male with dark oily hair lives in the abandoned facilities of the TAL. OS project, a government funded program of robotic engineering, which was eventually abandoned after the mass destruction of the last decade. Having worked there once as a programming engineer and hoping for nothing, Ovid inhabits the deserted warehouse, awaiting his own end and keeping himself busy with what was once considered the greatest technological equipment available.

Ovid reads his newsfeed on his computer screen and stops at one entry:

"The most selfish act of all. Oh finally something to be selfish. What you truly deserve. I can see it coming towards me. Soon I will be a tree. Anyway. Fuck it. - K"

He becomes melancholy but doesn't react. He continues on his daily routine, inspecting the work that has previously been done and selecting parts. Suddenly he singles out GALATEA, one of the female prototypes of the series of Androids designed for the project. He attempts to enter her vocal settings and a horrible sound comes out, he realises he must repair her voice. He proceeds to default settings, the android lifts its leg to make a step and falls to the floor, it is obvious he needs to start from scratch. He terminates the testing temporarily until he figures out what to do with it.

2052: Fifteen years back. A school hallway floods with students as the hurricane safety drill alarm rings. A teacher arranges them in lines. All the students obey but YOUNG OVID (15), a neat, not particularly popular pale teen with dark circles under his eyes, who sneaks outside to meet his friends: SIMON, a Chubby teen with very short hair, MATTHEW, a thin blond kid and KATE, an opinion oriented brunette dressed in black, slightly taller than Ovid. Kate shows Ovid a live mouse crawling between her fingers. He's never seen a live mouse before. Simon shows the others a hologram of a dolphin diving into the sea through his TAL.OS device.

At home he lives comfortably next to a large dam that shadows over his street to keep the sea from flooding in. His MOTHER (48), a nervous anchorwoman at a major news station who once was attractive, greets him at home as he comes after school. She spreads powder on the veggies and makes a scene over him wasting drinking water. Young Ovid goes directly to his room ignoring her. She is screened on the television in the background talking about the influx of refugees after a major eco- catastrophe.

Back in 2067, the Android's presence becomes more and more notable in his lifestyle, while he eats alone, or throughout his casual occupations, it will always stand in the corner, almost watching him. He feels a little uneasy but at the same time intrigued.

Soon he decides to run a "behavior program" for Galatea titled "The Evening Hour". Inspired by the time he spends on her program in his lonely afternoons. Ovid performs testing sessions with Galatea day and night. She walks around slowly and avoids obstacles but she has trouble with identifying and grabbing utensils. He attempts to program her into making coffee for him but she fails to do so. She is still in a primal state.

At School the corridors are full of interactive boards from the outside world. A board labelled "News Time" shows footage of protestors on city streets holding placards of children and writing "Their blood is on our hands." Next to it a call for students to write letters to military soldiers in war zones to help them fight depression and show support. Young Ovid walks through the halls during his

break time at the sound of parents mumbling about high prices in medicare in the midst and happy students biking across them in between. He reaches an empty room and opens his TAL.OS device to work on his algorithms.

MOTHER (V.O.)

In China you know, the Emperor is a Chinese, and all those about him are Chinamen also. The story I am going to tell you happened a great many years ago, so it is well to hear it now before it is forgotten.

2067: In the laboratory Ovid accesses a database on his computer and types in a search engine: "top subjects of discussion," to program into Galatea. A series of titles from articles pop up: "Global Population Facing New...", "Is it the End?" "Nature takes a stand Man Kneels", "Political Leaders Join Forces in Attempt to...", "A Few Last Words". Ovid deletes his search immediately. He then browses his web and finds photograph of flowers on Kate's (30) profile. She hasn't visited it in a while.

Back in 2052, Young Ovid observes a class on global warming. MS CLEMENS (40), a short thin woman in bright colours directs a large interactive globe that turns into a map according to her gestures. The water levels change according to regions, rising in some as drought is introduced in others. During recess he walks into the boy's bathroom and washes his face. Kate behind him asks him if he is alright. At home his mother asks him again if he's alright, he seems very calm but is annoyed at the constant inquisitions. She asks him "if it's about..." he quickly dismisses her. She reads in secret on her device articles on calming anxious children.

ACT TWO

2067: Kate (30) a stark looking soldier now, walks along the remains of a bombed empty village, planes are heard squealing above her, she sees other soldiers waving at her.

As time progresses and his program develops, Ovid starts gradually giving Galatea a life of her own in his head, talking to her and imagining her answers. Ovid watches a melodramatic war film as Galatea stands still in her corner. Leftover's are left on the table. He wakes up by Galatea's gesture as she mimics the character's movements. He was grabbing her thigh as he slept. Ovid starts to clean up.

Training continues. He has imaginary conversations with her. He finally manages to give her basic facial expressions and slight interaction. Having more human-like behaviors, he gradually develops even more faith in her possibilities and forgets about the fact that he has no future, seeing in her a kind of future. His sessions come to last all night. He tells her he's always hated his mother's cooking and preferred ramen instead, even though he's always been afraid that it was toxic, but then again there's nothing left to eat these days. "Ramen is all that's left."

A warm plate of homemade food is placed in front of Young Ovid at the kitchen table. Mother and FATHER sit across him. Mother is very anxious about how he's doing with his psychologist, he seems reluctant and unwilling to answer. To reassure him she mentions how all his friends go to specialists and picks a line from one of the articles she's read: "whatever happens, at least we will deal with it together." She reaches for his hand, he forces a smile.

Kate, Simon, Matthew and Young Ovid watch a video of a large pouring of rain in some tropical island taken by two rich girls on vacation. In the video a huge wave hits a native man who tries to speak to the girls and falls over ridiculously. The four students laugh loudly. They discuss what they

would do in the event of a world - ending catastrophe during gym class and what people see after their death. A blue sky, a tunnel, some see gardens. In the background interactive screens talk about abortion. Another drill for a hurricane and the GYM TEACHER leads them towards the wall to perform the exercise.

At night his mother is preparing dinner when the electricity drops. The lights go out. She calls for Ovid and Father, they check the fuse but nothing works. Outside the neighbours are out with flashlights, everything is down, no-one knows what's going on. The waves crash into the dam. Ovid and his Mother stay inside, she tries to bond with him by reminding him of the stories she used to tell him when they had similar issues in their old house. She's nostalgic for their old house. He makes an attempt to answer back but is very reluctant. Father comes back, the problem came from the power plant. They don't know when or how it will be fixed. They may have to move again.

That night Kate and Ovid chat online with what little is left of his battery in his device. She asks him if he likes her and if he thinks she's attractive, he takes the hint but avoids it. She gets upset and when he tries to change subject, she goes offline.

2067: Ovid opens the light, he gets off his bed and leaves his bedroom in the lab coming back dragging Galatea inside. He places Galatea on his bed and turns her on her side so she can look at him. He lies next to her and gazes at her. She looks at him back. He cleans her face from her hair and unbuttons his pants. He attempts to masturbate but then stops. He takes her hand in his.

In the bar of a seemingly large city, 20 year old Ovid waits for 20 year old Kate. She's late but extremely happy to see him. He has just began to work at TAL.OS, she just came for a little while from a humanitarian expedition from the other side of the country. She says things are terrible there but she feels content and seems hopeful for the future, he is not. She tells him new research suggests that the worse may be over and that there may be a way out of this. He tells her not to believe that kind of balderdash. She expresses her condolences for his mother, he seems to be handling it well but is quite dismissive of the fact that she couldn't find medication. They sleep together at his exceptionally neat flat. Through the windows a couple is having sex in the apartment across the street. He can't perform and feels terrible, she seems in love and holds him warmly, he doesn't respond.

2067: Ovid gazes at pictures of women on his computer and talks to inanimate Galatea. He tells her he once had a girlfriend online. He could tell she was overweight by the angle of her photo's that tried to hide it. They never met up close because he didn't want to. He hurt her because of that and he felt guilty about it. Now she's probably dead. He seems melancholy and puts on his V.R. glasses.

2052: Four military game characters venture into a war zone in a video game. They're Young Ovid, Kate, Simon and Matthew. Their avatars carry weapons and run along a shady industrial site. They gather water supplies and run from rebels. Ovid gives a "victim" a flask. As the rebels come closer they find an opening to outside, they run to it. A large field of flowers and a green meadow, a blue sky. Their task is "to find the fountain of youth," they mess around in it as if seeing something like this natural landscape for the first time. They behave childishly and as they come across a lake their characters jump in. Chorus music.

2067: Ovid's tests continue as he programs Galatea but still her progress is slow. She runs from her shadow, she mimics Ovid's expressions, she attempts to catch lighting when it strikes outside the window. Meanwhile Ovid tapes the lab windows. The wind whistles loudly from outside. The lights shut off, the whistles get louder as the glass trembles. A hurricane. In his bedroom Ovid turns on an emergency flash-light. Suddenly the windows break open letting in air and rain. Objects fly across the room. He runs to close the windows. Galatea comes to the entrance, he grabs her and crunches with her against the wall like in the exercises he learned at school. Silence. Ovid holds Galatea protectingly on the bed. Clearing her hair from her face he talks to her, telling her that

"when it happened" he felt like he should've reacted differently, that he didn't feel as much as he should, but he couldn't help it and deep down he felt everyone brought all this upon themselves. Terrified he asks her if that makes him a bad person. Galatea doesn't react. Ovid looks at her for some moments, he grabs her hesitantly and places her above him, stabilizing her on her knees and hands. He gazes into her eyes and sighs. Outside the storm continues.

Ovid (20) and Kate (20) meet in a museum. Large digital projections of whales and other extinct species are projected behind them. She expresses her love for him, he feels there's no point in continuing anything and lets her down.

2052: due to the power cut, there is no electricity in Young Ovid's school so Ms Clemens decides to talk about the refugee relief and the water crisis. She becomes annoyed at Kate who seems to be disinterested and insensitive on the subject. Kate responds by saying that interest isn't going to change anything and that it's quite ironic to hold refugee reliefs when in reality no one cares. They are partially at fault for all of this and simultaneously everyone is terrified of an influx within their borders because it would destroy their resources. Ms Clemens answers that things are complicated and that Kate speaks that way due to the fact that she cares. To that Kate answers that she hates them and finds no meaning in compassion. Clemens tries to deal with this with understanding but starts to get annoyed, Kate loses her patience, she starts to shout that all Clemens is doing is invoking within her a useless guilt for the fact that she's gonna live and the outsiders are inevitably going to die, so she can say she has done her bit in the world. "You knew, everyone knew and now it's too fucking late." Clemens is hurt. She tries to resume class but Kate continues, she seems out of order. Clemens turns to her fiercely and grabs her desk. She tells her furiously that she simply doesn't get to not care. "This is it alright? This is all you're stuck with. Maybe it ain't good enough, but then again it never was." Kate looks at her stunned and angry. After detention she stands against the wall enraged, her friends ask her what all that was about. She reveals that her uncle has come to live with her family after his last suicide attempt. A decorated army general come from the warfront on drinking water. He drives her mother insane.

Ovid spends all his time with Galatea. His programming becomes more intimate, he closes himself into his glass cubicle with his arms wired and mimics caressive movements from footage he's seen. He copies ballet movements, he keeps her clean and combs her hair. At some point at night, as he's about to fall asleep next to her he suddenly jumps off the bed in panic. Mice start running around his bedroom. Frisked out he attempts to kill them but to no avail.

Kate (30) walks along a large road, when she turns and discovers a large fence with caucasian refugee children grabbed over it looking at her from the other side silently.

Young Ovid wakes up, he looks outside his bedroom window, a terrible storm. He leaves his bedroom and attempts to go downstairs when he hears his parents whispering. His Mother is weeping in panic as his Father holds her in his arms, gently trying to reassure her. Ovid runs up again. He can hear his parents from the bathroom as he drinks his water. His mother cries, terrified of the storm. Ovid pours the rest of the content down the drain.

The next day the school is flooded with water and empty. Young Ovid walks through the water when he runs into Kate who's doing the same. They have to move again.

At the warfront Kate (30) meets a dark-haired man, they flirt and end up sleeping together. She asks him as they're have sex to tell her that he loves her, she asks him to lie.

In the laboratory, Ovid treats Galatea like a live person. He places a bowl of ramen in front of her at dinner time and tells her she doesn't need to watch her weight. He wants to take her to the beach. She cannot say anything, but he talks to her and she listens. At night they watch a film. Galatea leans on his lap while he caresses her hair. He closes her eyes with his fingers and gets up, placing her head on his pillow. He closes the screen and exits the room switching off the light.

Young Ovid is asleep in his bed. His Mother is leaned over him in the dark and gently caresses his hair. He wakes up startled and asks her what she's doing in his room. She's terrified of being caught and reveals to him that this is the only time she really gets to share with him. She begs him not to be angry with her and that she misses him and this is all she has. At the sound that she watches him in his sleep Young Ovid angered tells her to leave. She can't move. She doesn't know what to do. Everything seems overwhelming. She cries to him that she thinks he's very brave with all that's been happening. She's proud of him and she wants him to be happy even if now it's too much to ask. Young Ovid tells her to go to bed, she obeys but stands at the door. Gently and sincerely she apologises, Ovid doesn't answer, she leaves.

White clouds slowly drift along a grey sky. Pieces of thin ice slowly float along the water that mirrors the sky. A ballerina performs "The Dying Swan". The world around them is dying.

At the TAL.OS premises Ovid performs his usual testing session with Galatea but now she doesn't listen to him. He begs her to respond to his commands but it seems that she can't hear him and that something is wrong. He can't understand whether or not she's doing this on purpose or not. He begs her to give him her hand, she doesn't, he grabs it, she falls clumsily to the floor. He calms himself and tells her he must shut her off. She gets up again and leaves him. He starts kicking the doors of the premises and screams what the hell is wrong with her? Just then he freezes in realisation. She continues walking up and down around him.

That night Ovid cries deeply in Galatea's arms. He takes her hand and makes it caress his head in despair. He cries to sleep.

The next day he connects her to the systems computer and enters her data, he is now determined to give her life, if anything to save what little sanity he's left with. He looks at her and proceeds to make one last behavioral program under the title "The Night Hour" for trial. Days pass by programming. He sleeps very little and is obviously a psychological wreck, talking to the Android while programming as if she was switched on, as if she was alive.

Flashback: Ovid is three years old. Christmas at his old house, in his mother's arms. His father is decorating the tree. She reads to him "The Nightingale" by Hans Christian Andersen. He creeps lovingly into her bosom.

MOTHER (V.O.)

Death continued to stare at the  
Emperor with his cold, hollow eyes,  
and the room was fearfully still.

Suddenly there came through the  
open window the sound of sweet  
music. Outside on the bough of a  
tree, sat the living Nightingale.  
She'd heard of the Emperor's  
illness, and was therefore come to  
sing to him of hope and trust.  
And as she sung, the shadows grew  
paler and paler, the blood in the  
emperors veins flowed more rapidly,  
and gave life to his weak limbs  
and even death himself listened  
and said, "Go on, little  
nightingale, go on."

Kate (30) wondering on her own in the desert suddenly starts to sneeze and she can't stop. Tears fill her eyes and she panics. Gradually she comes to and realises she has stumbled on a field of flowers. Shocked she takes her device and photographs them.

### ACT THREE

After exhausting programming Ovid finally finishes "The Night Hour". Ovid installs the program into Galatea and proceeds to activate her. She opens her eyes. He gets up and approaches her, gently presses his lips to hers and asks her if she can hear him. She touches him, he hears her voice for the first time, answering his questions in the exact same way he used to respond to them for her. He is overwhelmed, she interacts almost flawlessly. They proceed to live out the day as they usually would. He enjoys her every move, he talks to her for hours, sleeps with her and eats with her as if she could join him. She shows tenderness, acceptance and intelligence. She enjoys his company, she even seems to love him. Her interactions are perfect, and everything to him feels different. Eventually he forgets that she's a machine and treats her completely like a human. Every line he hears he's put into her programme, but he reacts as if he hears it for the first time. He seems to have forgotten about the world around him. She dances with him. He tells her he's never done this before. He falls asleep in her arms.

Outside the world is slowly collapsing. Large cities and monuments lay half drowned, not a live being in sight. The little electric lights on planet earth gradually shut off.

2052: Young Ovid and Galatea sit on his front porch. "I know you hate everything" she says. He resents that idea telling her he's fine and that he's sick of everyone always telling him that he's not ok. She answers that he shouldn't be ok then. They sit in silence. A glorious sunset, cut from the dam that stands in the way. "You always think it's gonna be a day or a week. Who'd have thought the apocalypse would take so damn long."

2067: Ovid awakes in his bedroom to loud banging. He takes off his V.R. glasses. Galatea is missing and he quickly realises there is no electricity. He runs up to the laboratory's fuses, there's nothing he can do. The banging continues. Something breaks. He runs down the halls looking for Galatea. The door to outside is wide open and he finds Galatea on the floor. As he picks her up she struggles to go outside, he tries to restrain her asking her what is wrong but in vain. Finally she stops and points outside, she says "flowers". He turns outside, thick snow falls gently on the bare white field that surrounds them. Galatea attempts again to make a step outside but she falls helplessly to the ground. She's not programmed to walk outside.

Ovid carries Galatea in his arms in the snow, she reaches to touch the falling flakes and accidentally closes the door behind them. He lets her down quickly and rushes to it but it's shut. They're locked outside, he panics. She plays on the ground ecstatically. He goes into a fit. He then looks around in realisation that he's outside. She notices the snow melt in her hands and becomes melancholy, he asks her what's wrong, she tells him how wonderful it is for one to have what they want and that he's a good man. She steadily malfunctions, he expected this. Proceeding close to her he switches her off.

2052: Young Ovid and Kate continue to sit at his front porch gazing at the sun, Kate gets up saying that she has to leave. He asks her if she knows where she'll be going next and if they'll stay in touch, she responds that they might if she finds a place with internet. She walks away joyfully into the coming sand storm.

Ovid walks along the field dragging Galatea behind him. Half frozen he leaves her behind. He screams in anger until he's too tired. The snow covers Galatea's body.

The planet earth slowly spins as it gradually turns almost completely blue. Silence, it continues spinning. Sounds of nightingales chirping.

THE END