**The Brave Little Toaster**

Cory Doctorow

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One day, Mister Toussaint came home to find an extra 300 euros’ worth of groceries on his doorstep. So he called up Miz Rousseau, the grocer, and said, “Why have you sent me all this food? My fridge is already full of delicious things. I don’t need this stuff and besides, I can’t pay for it.”

But Miz Rousseau told him that he had ordered the food. His refrigerator had sent in the list, and she had the signed order to prove it.

Furious, Mister Toussaint confronted his refrigerator. It was mysteriously empty, even though it had been full that morning. Or rather, it was *almost* empty: there was a single pouch of energy drink sitting on a shelf in the back. He’d gotten it from an enthusiastically smiling young woman on the metro platform the day before. She’d been giving them to everyone.

“Why did you throw away all my food?” he demanded. The refrigerator hummed smugly at him.

“It was spoiled,” it said.

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But the food hadn’t been spoiled. Mister Toussaint pored over his refrigerator’s diagnostics and logfiles, and soon enough, he had the answer. It was the energy beverage, of course.

“Row, row, row your boat,” it sang. “Gently down the stream. Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily, I’m offgassing ethelyne.” Mister Toussaint sniffed the pouch suspiciously.

“No you’re not,” he said. The label said that the drink was called LOONY GOONY and it promised ONE TRILLION TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN ESPRESSO!!!!!ONE11! Mister Toussaint began to suspect that the pouch was some kind of stupid Internet of Things prank. He hated those.

He chucked the pouch in the rubbish can and put his new groceries away.

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The next day, Mister Toussaint came home and discovered that the overflowing rubbish was still sitting in its little bag under the sink. The can had not cycled it through the trapdoor to the chute that ran to the big collection-point at ground level, 104 storeys below.

“Why haven’t you emptied yourself?” he demanded. The trashcan told him that toxic substances had to be manually sorted. “What toxic substances?”

So he took out everything in the bin, one piece at a time. You’ve probably guessed what the trouble was.

“Excuse me if I’m chattery, I do not mean to nattery, but I’m a mercury battery!” LOONY GOONY’s singing voice really got on Mister Toussaint’s nerves.

“No you’re not,” Mister Toussaint said.

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Mister Toussaint tried the microwave. Even the cleverest squeezy-pouch couldn’t survive a good nuking. But the microwave wouldn’t switch on. “I’m no drink and I’m no meal,” LOONY GOONY sang. “I’m a ferrous lump of steel!”

The dishwasher wouldn’t wash it (“I don’t mean to annoy or chafe, but I’m simply not dishwasher safe!”). The toilet wouldn’t flush it (“I don’t belong in the bog, because down there I’m sure to clog!”). The windows wouldn’t retract their safety screen to let it drop, but that wasn’t much of a surprise.

“I hate you,” Mister Toussaint said to LOONY GOONY, and he stuck it in his coat pocket. He’d throw it out in a trash-can on the way to work.

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They arrested Mister Toussaint at the 678th Street station. They were waiting for him on the platform, and they cuffed him just as soon as he stepped off the train. The entire station had been evacuated and the police wore full biohazard containment gear. They’d even shrinkwrapped their machine-guns.

“You’d better wear a breather and you’d better wear a hat, I’m a vial of terrible deadly hazmat,” LOONY GOONY sang.

When they released Mister Toussaint the next day, they made him take LOONY GOONY home with him. There were lots more people with LOONY GOONYs to process.

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Mister Toussaint paid the rush-rush fee that the storage depot charged to send over his container. They forklifted it out of the giant warehouse under the desert and zipped it straight to the cargo-bay in Mister Toussaint’s building. He put on old, stupid clothes and clipped some lights to his glasses and started sorting.

Most of the things in container were stupid. He’d been throwing away stupid stuff all his life, because the smart stuff was just so much easier. But then his grandpa had died and they’d cleaned out his little room at the pensioner’s ward and he’d just shoved it all in the container and sent it out the desert.

From time to time, he’d thought of the eight cubic meters of stupidity he’d inherited and sighed a put-upon sigh. He’d loved Grandpa, but he wished the old man had used some of the ample spare time from the tail end of his life to replace his junk with stuff that could more gracefully reintegrate with the materials stream.

How inconsiderate!

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The house chattered enthusiastically at the toaster when he plugged it in, but the toaster said nothing back. It couldn’t. It was stupid. Its bread-slots were crusted over with carbon residue and it dribbled crumbs from the ill-fitting tray beneath it. It had been designed and built by cavemen who hadn’t ever considered the advantages of networked environments.

It was stupid, but it was brave. It would do anything Mister Toussaint asked it to do.

“It’s getting hot and sticky and I’m not playing any games, you’d better get me out before I burst into flames!” LOONY GOONY sang loudly, but the toaster ignored it.

“I don’t mean to endanger your abode, but if you don’t let me out, I’m going to explode!” The smart appliances chattered nervously at one another, but the brave little toaster said nothing as Mister Toussaint depressed its lever again.

“You’d better get out and save your ass, before I start leaking poison gas!” LOONY GOONY’s voice was panicky. Mister Toussaint smiled and depressed the lever.

Just as he did, he thought to check in with the flat’s diagnostics. Just in time, too! Its quorum-sensors were redlining as it listened in on the appliances’ consternation. Mister Toussaint unplugged the fridge and the microwave and the dishwasher.

The cooker and trash-can were hard-wired, but they didn’t represent a quorum.

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The fire department took away the melted toaster and used their axes to knock huge, vindictive holes in Mister Toussaint’s walls. “Just looking for embers,” they claimed. But he knew that they were pissed off because there was simply no good excuse for sticking a pouch of independently powered computation and sensors and transmitters into an antique toaster and pushing down the lever until oily, toxic smoke filled the whole 104th floor.

Mister Toussaint’s neighbors weren’t happy about it either.

But Mister Toussaint didn’t mind. It had all been worth it, just to hear LOONY GOONY beg and weep for its life as its edges curled up and blackened.

He argued mightily, but the firefighters refused to let him keep the toaster.