



## The Binary

**By Kelly Blake**

“Is this light?”

“Yes... This is light.”

Brian Donovan glanced at the array of telemetry that offered a vast variety of colorfully lit dials and information. The machine sat quietly in its metal chair, arms and legs restrained. It glanced as far around the laboratory as its range of neck motion would allow.

“Am I dreaming?” The machine asked in its slightly higher pitched androgynous voice.

“No machine... You are not dreaming.” Doctor Donovan glanced at the machine and smiled.

“You are in real time.”

The machine stared at Donovan. It blinked to wet the surface of its eyes.

“Are you my father?”

Donovan stood silently and gazed at the machine. He was mulling over how he might answer the machine’s question. He did create it. His research team finally developed a program that could learn and he designed the various components and carefully assembled them. He gave the final computer command to start up the machine and he carefully monitored the input into the machine’s Xeno processors.

Donovan decided not to answer the machine’s question. On either a moral, or an ethical, or even an empiric level the answer was too difficult to answer even if one existed. The machine stared firmly at Donovan and blinked several times.

“Tell me machine... How do you feel?”

“My tactile sensors tell me it is cold. But I feel nothing. I am hungry though.”

“Good... How do you feel about being in real time?”

Donovan glanced from his creation back to his telemetry. The read outs indicated that the machine was accessing that portion of its memory that accumulated data and exported it to the decision making banks.

“It is too soon for me to tell. I think I like seeing and hearing though. And I enjoy speaking with you.”

Donovan stared at the machine. He was surprised that it chose the words ‘like’ and ‘enjoy’. Was the machine arbitrarily choosing words from its catalogue of language or did the machine make a decision in its choice.

The room was sealed off from the rest of the building and the building was sealed off from the campus. The doors were constructed of hardened steel and concrete. Inside an observation room on the other side of the wall of the lab, half a dozen figures sat and watched Donovan’s creation finally become animated.

They sat in amazement that Donovan had actually come this far. The chairman of Unigentrix smiled as he thought of the implication this new generation of robot would have. Donovan was worth twice what they were paying him. He turned to the woman sitting next to him.

“Make sure he gets whatever he needs.”

“Yes sir...”

Jane Alcott smiled and nodded. As chief executive officer, it was her idea to bring Donovan aboard. Their team had only gotten so far in artificial interactive intelligence. They were on the right path but they simply didn’t have the right mind to put it all together. When Donovan published his research findings, she knew she had the right man.

“Why am I secured to this chair?”

The machine asked without expression in its voice or face. Donovan sat back in his chair and clasped his hands behind his head. He returned the machine’s stare and thought for a moment about how he would answer the question.

“Your body is made of very special materials. Your outer skin is extremely tough and durable.” He sat quietly for a moment to see if the machine was registering what he was saying. “And the metals that compose your structure and their accompanying...muscles...” He wanted to keep it simple until the machine could understand what he had done. “...your muscles are very strong.”

“You are afraid of me.”

Donovan suddenly sat forward in shock. The robot made a statement and not asked a question. It had taken a mere few statements and drawn a conclusion; and a right conclusion at that.

“How did you make that...connection?”

“It seemed logical.”

“Yes... But I might have wanted you to discover your motor reflexes slowly without falling and damaging yourself.”

“Yes... I can understand that.” The robot stared at Donovan with its light grey eyes. “Was my answer wrong?”

“No...” Donovan chuckled.

“Did I say something amusing?”

“No machine... You did not. Do you understand the word irony?”

The robot’s eyes looked up for a moment and then back down at Donovan.

“Yes... ‘A state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects and is often amusing as a result.’ I understand now.”

“I need to shut you down now. I want to make a few minor adjustments to your programming.”

Donovan swung around in his chair and flicked several switches. He glanced back at the robot and, to his great surprise, he thought he saw something in its eyes; fear. The robot closed its eyes and its head fell till the chin was upon its chest.

The observers in the adjacent room quickly rushed into the lab. They couldn’t wait to congratulate Donovan and to shake his hand.

“That was an amazing display.” Jane patted him on his back. “I would think this puts us way out in front of the others. I’ve never seen such responses from any of our earlier attempts.”

“I must say Donovan... I’ve never been this happy to have a project run over budget before.” The chairman chuckled as he shook Donovan’s hand. “This is the first time I can claim to have shaken the hand of true genius.”

Donovan didn’t smile the entire time. He viewed this show of appreciation as a nuisance, an embarrassing hindrance, and simply a waste of his time. He glanced from moment to moment at his creation and uttered a silent apology. ‘I could be making you even more aware and cogent’ he thought.

Under his breath he uttered: “Please forgive me.”

When his audience finally cleared his lab, he sat for a moment and gazed at the robot. Taking his seat once again, he reached out to touch the cheek of the machine. Its ‘skin’ felt warm in spite of the sixty-eight degree temperature of his lab.

As Donovan slid his hand across the robot's chest, he depressed the skin slightly with his fingertips. He could feel the musculature and even the alloy ribs. Its chest was every bit as soft and felt as real as any young man he'd ever touched. He felt a sudden pang in his heart and a tear came to his eye.

"But you're not him...are you?" He spoke softly as a tear ran down his cheek. "You only look like him."

He reluctantly turned from the machine and began to pull up displays and programs and enter commands into his very unique computer. This device was the child of his genius. There was no other computer system like it in the world. With it he managed to capture a random unknown donor's neuro brain waves and patterns just prior to the brain's death.

In essence, he had a deceased person's personality and mind on his extensive hard drive. It was only one large step to implant this data into a series of liquid Xeno processors held in a jelly like plasma packet. And it was only one more giant step to implant the packet into the very most advanced robotic body ever created.

All of this work had been accomplished in but a mere five years. Of course if one was to stream out the endless hours Donovan spent in his lab, the total might have exceeded fifteen years. His was the only lab with a bed and a shower and meals kept available around the clock.

His death had been as sudden as their life together. Some unspeakable bacteria took him almost within the blink of an eye. Donovan was devastated. The love of his life was gone and he didn't know that the massive hole in his heart, in his life, would ever be repaired. He cursed himself for not developing his computer and its programming sooner. Even a carbon copy of his lover would have sufficed.

"Now..." Donovan sniffled and wiped his nose with a tissue. "Let's see if we can't give you some motor control over your facial expressions."

Donovan worked like a man possessed. His fingers flew over the keyboard nearly as fast as he could think. It was simply a question of cross connecting several of the programs. He knew that the robot would eventually learn this control. But if the tools were already provided, the task could be accomplished sooner. He wanted his creation to have 'life'.

It was well after seven in the evening when the buzzer of his door sounded. Annoyed, Donovan pushed the intercom key.

"Yes..." He spoke softly belying his annoyance.

"I have some dinner for you Doctor."

Donovan gazed at the screen monitoring the door. One man in military garb held a tray whilst two others, with weapons, stood by. 'What a waste of time' he thought. The bullets would never penetrate the robot's skin and eating always seemed to be simply another annoyance.

"Just one moment please."

He watched as the men gazed around the exterior of his lab. Getting up from his seat after muttering a profanity under his breath, Donovan went to the first door of the airlock system. He pressed the 'open' button and, with a hissing sound, the door swung from its casement. He entered the air lock and closed the door. He then opened the outer and much heavier door to face the three soldiers.

"Evening Doc." The soldier handed him the tray.

"Thanks..." He spoke without an emotion.

"Everything okay Doc?" The soldier expressed genuine concern.

"Yeah..." Donovan smiled. "Just working too hard I guess."

After chatting for only a few moments to assure his guards that all was well, Donovan re-entered his lab. He placed the tray down atop a stack of papers atop his desk and lifted the covering.

"Fish..."

He muttered as he took in the sight of his dinner. It could wait though. Donovan's mind was too affixed with the problem at hand. He sat down in his chair once again and began to 'create' the social and emotional portion of his...child.

The buzzing of his lab door woke Donovan. He had no idea of the time or even when he fell asleep. Lifting his head up for the keyboard, he glanced quickly around. When his eyes came to the video monitor, he saw a different set of guards and one was carrying his breakfast tray. He glanced at his desk to see the dinner tray still piled atop the stack of papers.

"Shit..."

Donovan went and got his tray. He doffed his lab coat and walked toward his bath room. He stopped just long enough to find a clean change of clothing in his locker before proceeding to take a shower. As the water rained down over body, he thought about yet another night lived in the obscurity and solitude of his lab.

With his razor and shave cream resting atop the porcelain basin, Donovan carefully gazed at his reflection in the mirror. His sandy brown hair was beginning to turn a silver color at his temples. He was way too pale to even hint at being a California resident. And as his pale blue eyes glanced at the stubble of his beard, he even wondered whether shaving was even necessary. Who would he see anyway?

Ignoring the stubble, Donovan dressed in his trademark tanned Dockers and a blue striped, button down collar, long sleeve shirt. He slipped his feet into a pair of cordovan penny loafers before carefully and neatly rolling up his sleeves. He gathered up his soiled clothing and, after placing them in a plastic zip locked bag, deposited it near the door for the usual lunch time pick up.

Seated once again in front of his computer and the dual banks of telemetry, Donovan decided to 'awaken' his creation. He typed in two commands and flipped several switches. Just as he turned to face the robot, it lifted its head and opened its eyes.

"Good morning Doctor Donovan. How are you today?"

The robot tilted its head and attempted to smile but all it could manage was a weak frown. This was not lost on Donovan and he smiled back.

"I am well this morning. How do you feel?"

"I feel...different. Were you successful last evening?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out. How do you feel different?"

"May I have a name?"

This question took Donovan by surprise. He hadn't expected the robot to achieve self-awareness this quickly.

"Do you think you really need one?"

"Why yes..." The robot cocked its head to one side. "How else can you tell the difference between me and the other machines?"

"Well... You certainly look quite different than the other machines."

"Then shouldn't I have a name?"

Donovan, still quite astonished by his creation, decided to accede to the robot's request.

"What would you like me to call you?" He smiled.

"You have a nice smile. Do I smile like that?" The robot cocked its heads in the opposite direction this time. "Would Robbie be alright with you?"

Donovan sat back in his chair. He was stunned that his machine had chosen that name. It was the name of his deceased lover.

"Are you alright Doctor Donovan? You appear to be paler than before."

"Yes... Yes... I'm fine. How did you come to choose that name?"

"I'm not sure. I think it was my mother's name. Can you let me out of this chair? I'd like to have a better look around your laboratory."

Donovan got up from his chair. He slowly took the three paces toward his creation. It took but a moment to loosen and remove the pin holding the armband to the chair.

“Do you remember having a mother?” He removed the pin holding the other arm down.

“Yes... I think so. Anyway, since you haven’t given me a binary, that name is suitable for a male or a female.”

With the leg pins removed, Donovan stood up next to the chair as the robot slowly got up.

“It is strange to feel...gravity?”

“Yes... It can be. Do you need help?”

“No, thank you...”

The robot walked away from its chair and began to examine everything in the lab.

“Do you think a binary is important...Robbie?”

The robot turned and again attempted to smile.

“Yes Doctor Donovan... And thank you for allowing me to have a name.” Robbie continued to gaze at various pieces of equipment. “A binary further distinguishes me from other machines.”

“Do you have a preference as to which gender you’d like?”

Donovan began to follow the robot and observe what it was looking at and its reaction to all the new stimulation.

“I don’t know.” The robot gazed at Donovan. “Do you have a preference? I have never been either so I really don’t know? If you would like to choose one I wouldn’t mind.”

“Would you like to try the male binary? I’ve fashioned you after a male I knew.”

The robot stopped its movement for a moment. Donovan could tell it was...calculating.

“Yes... That would be fine Doctor Donovan. You say you knew this male. Is he dead?”

“Yes Robbie... He was my...he was a very dear friend of mine.”

“Did you use his mind to program my processors?”

“No... Unfortunately he died some time ago...before I had developed the equipment and the programming.”

“Do you miss him?”

Donovan sat down in a chair near his desk. He really hadn’t counted on having such an in depth conversation with his creation. He took a deep breath and slowly let it out. Gazing at his hands he answered.

“Yes Robbie... I do miss him.”

“I am sorry that you miss him Doctor Donovan.”

Donovan swore he could see an expression of sadness upon the robot’s face. It was brief, and very fleeting, but it was there. Donovan cleared his throat.

“Thank you Robbie. Do you understand what it means to miss somebody...or something?”

“Yes... When you turned me off last evening...?” Robbie spread out its arms and turned in a circle. “I missed this.” Robbie stopped spinning and turned to Donovan. “And I missed you.” Donovan was again stunned. “I missed talking with you Doctor Donovan. And I think I missed seeing your face. You should shave.”

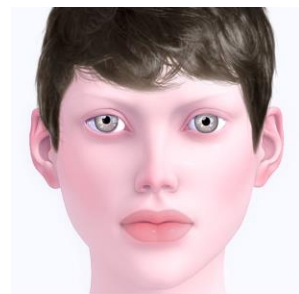
Donovan sat and watched Robbie lift up several different items and examine them. He didn’t quite know how to interpret what he’s heard from Robbie. Clearly the robot understood certain emotions but did Robbie actually feel them? A line was being crossed that he’d been warned about by others; an ethical line. Was Robbie a salient being or simply a very sophisticated machine?

“I will need to shut you off for a day or two.”

“I understand Doctor Donovan. Will you let me go outside?”

“Outside...?”

“Yes... I would like to go outside your lab and maybe even outside the building? I have this image in my mind of what the sun looks like. I would like to see the sun.”



**”Do you like the way I look Doctor Donovan?”**

Donovan stared at Robbie for several long moments.

“Do I look like him?” Robbie arched his faint eye brows.

“Yes...” Donovan answered with a note of sadness. “You do resemble him.”

“Does that not make you happy?”



Donovan noted that the proper inflection was in Robbie's voice.

"It's a complicated matter Robbie." Donovan gazed down at his shoes.

"Please explain?"

Robbie's voice was pleading. Donovan thought for a moment. How does one explain something that comes so natural in humans?

"Do you remember what we spoke when I awakened you: what you missed whilst 'asleep'?"

"Yes Doctor... I do remember."

"Just image what it would feel like if you never got to see that again...ever."

Robbie's expression changed. His features seemed to sag slightly in sadness.

"I understand. That would...hurt me?" Robbie looked down. "Now I understand why you look down when you are sad."

Both sat quietly for a few moments. Suddenly Robbie lifted his head up and gazed at Donovan.

"May I see what I look like?"

"Certainly Robbie... Would you like me to loosen your restraining devices?"

"Yes please..."

Donovan freed Robbie from his chair and Robbie once again stood up. He gazed around the lab as if seeing things for the first time. Donovan reached out to grasp Robbie's hand but Robbie reacted quickly and grasped Donovan's wrist. The speed of the action startled him as did the strength of Robbie's grip.

"Careful Robbie...!" Donovan felt a sharp pain. "You're hurting me."

Robbie immediately released him and took a step back with a shocked expression on his face.

"I am so sorry Doctor. That was not my intent."

Donovan rubbed his wrist and stared at the robot.

"You need to be careful. You are not to use such strength with people." Donovan was angry; more with himself than with his creation. "You cannot hurt people. Do you understand?"

"Yes Doctor... I am so sorry. I promise to be more careful. I had no idea..."

"I know Robbie. It's really my fault." Donovan's expression eased as did his voice. "I'm going to take your hand. Only use the same amount of pressure as I do."

“Yes Doctor...”

Donovan took hold of Robbie’s hand, again noting the warmth it generated. He knew that the warmth was merely a function of the fluids flowing through Robbie’s system. These fluids were packed with millions of tiny processors that enabled Robbie to function physically as any human might. But they did generate heat just as any processor would.

Donovan led Robbie to his bathroom where the mirror hung over the basin.

“I like holding your hand Doctor. I can feel your pulse.” Robbie spoke with surprise. “And I can feel the heat you generate. Do you like holding my hand?”

Donovan stopped just short of the door. He thought for a moment. He gazed at Robbie and smiled.

“Yes Robbie... I do enjoy holding your hand.”

“This is a very human thing to do...amongst friends?”

“Yes... It is.”

“Did you hold your friend’s hand often?”

Donovan stared at Robbie. He didn’t really want to talk about Colin. It brought back too many memories; happy memories that would never occur again. There were the memories that were very private and could only be experienced by two people who deeply loved and understood one another. But he felt that ethically he needed to be honest with his creation.

“Yes Robbie... We often held hands.”

Donovan let go of Robbie’s hand and walked behind him.

“I’m going to place my hands upon your shoulders Robbie. Is that alright with you?”

“Of course Doctor Donovan...”

Robbie seemed surprised by the question. Donovan didn’t know how Robbie might react to the simple act of being touched from behind. Though he designed the basic programs for Robbie, he had no real idea of how Robbie would react when they were inter linked.

Donovan pushed gently on Robbie’s shoulders and walked him to a point where he could see his own reflection as well as Robbie’s. He wanted to see what Robbie’s first reaction would be to seeing his own image. Robbie froze the moment that image came into view. Robbie seemed somewhat shocked. He raised both hands and began to feel his various features.

“Am I beautiful Doctor Donovan? Do you think I’m pretty?”

“We say handsome for your binary Robbie. Males are handsome or ‘good looking’. The female binary is described as perhaps being beautiful or pretty.”

“Do you think I’m handsome?” Robbie glanced back at Donovan.

“Yes Robbie... I do think you’re handsome.”

Robbie turned back to the mirror and continued to gaze at himself.

“I don’t look anything like my mother.” Donovan detected a definite sadness in Robbie’s voice. “I wish I could remember what she looked like.”

“But you’re sure you don’t look like her. How can you be so sure?”

Robbie looked back at Donovan.

“I don’t know.” Robbie looked in the mirror once again. “I think my hair is all wrong.”

Donovan noted that Robbie referred to his hair as ‘mine’. He was amazed at just how self-aware the robot appeared to be.

“I have a few tests I would like you to take Robbie. Would you mind?”

“No Doctor...” Robbie turned to face Donovan. “Will you hold my hand again?”

“If you’d like...” Donovan smiled.

“Yes... I would like that very much.”

Robbie turned away and held out his hand. Donovan smiled and took Robbie’s hand in his own. He led the robot back to his chair.

“Doctor Donovan...?” Robbie gazed at him. “May I have a mirror of my own?”

Donovan was again somewhat stunned. The robot wanted a personal possession.

“Yes Robbie... I’ll get you a small one that you may keep.”

“Thank you Doctor.”

“Robbie... Would you mind if my assistant came in to help along with the tests?”

“No Doctor... May I ask a question?”

“Yes Robbie... Of course...”

Robbie gazed down at himself.

“Do both binaries have this appendage?” He grasped his penis and examined it closely.

“No Robbie. The female binary doesn’t have that appendage. It’s called a penis. And attached to it are to gonads. But on you they serve a different function even though the entire organ group works comparably.”

“In humans, it is the reproduction group?”

“Yes... But female binaries have a different set of organs.”

Robbie sat quietly for a moment. The door buzzer sounded and Donovan went over to open the doors and allow his assistant. When he returned with his assistant, Robbie gazed up at him.

“It’s called a vagina and it is the channel through which the young enter the world?”

“Yes Robbie...” Donovan turned to his assistant, a young Phd. freshly graduated from M.I.T.

“Robbie... This is my assistant. Her name is Sophie.”

“Hello Sophie.” Robbie gazed at Sophie with great interest.



**“You are the first female binary I’ve seen.”**

Sophie looked at Donovan with a smile; curiosity was on her face.

“Uhhh... Robbie and I were just discussing the gender binaries...and their differences.”

Donovan slightly reddened and Sophie giggled.

“The birds and the bees...?” She laughed.

“Well...” Donovan gazed at her and then at Robbie. “We hadn’t quite gotten that far yet.”

“Well...” Sophie turned to Robbie with a grand smile and extended her hand. “It’s nice to meet you Robbie.”

Robbie took her hand and immediately noticed the physical difference in its size and volume when compared to Donovan’s. He also noticed her nail polish. He gazed at it intently. Robbie gazed into her eyes.

“Do all female binaries have such odd colored nails?”

“No Robbie...” Sophie blushed and giggled. “It’s only a coloring that some of us put on.”

“Does it serve any function?”

“It’s mostly just for decoration. I happen to think it looks pretty.”

“If I wore that, would it be considered handsome?”

Robbie actually had a questioning look again. Donovan was already quite impressed at how fast Robbie was adjusting to human interaction. Sophie gazed quickly at Donovan who nodded.

“Well Robbie... Most men do not wear nail polish. But those who do usually don’t wear polish with color. They wear a clear version of it.” Sophie held out both her hands exhibiting them to Robbie. “Do you like the color?”

“Yes...” Robbie gazed down at her nails and then back up at her. “I think it looks pretty. Are you considered beautiful? May I call you Sophie?”

Sophie blushed and looked to Donovan for help as he chuckled.

“Sophie is considered to be beautiful Robbie.”

“And you certainly may call me Sophie if you wish.”



**“May I see your vagina Sophie?”**

Robbie spoke with complete innocence and sincerity. Sophie laughed and Donovan blushed.

“That is something we don’t ask of one another Robbie.” Donovan tried unsuccessfully not to smile. “It’s not considered to be polite.”

“Oh... I’m sorry if I offended you. It’s just that you are able to see my penis and I thought that was a common practice.”

Donovan turned and walked to his locker. He opened it up and retrieved a pair of boxer shorts. He handed them to Robbie.

“Why don’t you put these on Robbie?”

The robot stood up and proceeded to put the shorts on backward. Donovan glanced at Sophie who was trying to refrain from giggling and he shook his head. He went to Robbie and explained the slit went in front so that one could pass water without completely taking them off.

“I’ll get you your own set of clothing. These will be a bit large for you.” Donovan thought for a moment. “And I’ll show you pictures of a vagina and how the reproduction process works.”

“Thank you Doctor.”

Donovan and Sophie began to administer an array of tests for everything from intellectual to emotional to physical and everything in between. The more the two worked with Robbie, the more impressed they were with the machine that sat before them and registered such human responses.

Although the decision making mechanism and the physical components tested were way above the human norm, the emotional component seemed to develop as the testing went on. There were moments that Donovan forgot he was indeed working with a machine. Even Sophie had to admit that Robbie was the most advanced mechanism she’d ever seen or even imagined.

At the end of the testing, Sophie got up and asked to use Donovan’s bathroom. Robbie was curious because she’d used the toilet only a short time ago. Robbie got up from his seat.

“May I see what Sophie is doing?”

“Why do you want to do that Robbie?”

“Well Doctor... She used the bathroom only a short time ago and I heard her passing water?”

“Yes Robbie...”

Donovan noticed a change in the inflection of Robbie’s speech. He finished his statement with the same inflection that Sophie often did; like a question.

“Well Doctor... She closed the door at that time and now the door is open and I don’t hear her doing anything that might require the toilet.”

“That’s a very astute observation Robbie.”

“But I do hear her doing something and I can smell something...sweet maybe? I would like to observe?”

Donovan thought for a moment and turned toward the bathroom.

“Sophie...?”

Sophie stuck her head out to answer.

“Yes Doctor...”

“Would you mind if Robbie observed what you’re doing?”

“Sure...” Sophie laughed. “I’m putting on some lipstick but he’s welcomed to watch.”

Robbie gazed at Donovan questioningly. Donovan instinctively understood. He took Robbie’s hand in his and led him over to the door. Donovan then got behind Robbie and gave him a slight push.

“Come on in Robbie.” Sophie smiled.

Robbie walked in and stood beside Sophie. He watched her actions in the mirror as she proceeded to put cosmetics onto her face. Robbie was fascinated with the way Sophie used the brushes and various other small tools in her bag. When she was done Sophie turned to look directed at Robbie.

“Well...?” She grinned broadly. “What do you think?”

Robbie stood motionless for the longest moment. He examined each and every minute measure of her face. Then his eyes met hers.

“You look beautiful Sophie.” Robbie’s sincerity was absolute. “I am amazed at how you’ve managed to change the way your face is perceived.”



**“Why thank you Robbie.” She smiled.**

“Can male binaries do this as well?” Robbie gazed at her with a serious expression on his face.

“Yes Robbie... But it is not the norm.”

“Then it is a deviation?”

“Well...? No Robbie... Not exactly... It’s simply not the norm” Sophie was beginning to feel a bit uncomfortable with Robbie’s questions. “It’s not uncommon for young males to see what they look like with cosmetics on their faces. But they usually outgrow this?”

“But not all the time... You said usually...”

“That’s correct Robbie. Not all the time...”

Sophie turned to find Donovan standing just outside the door. She smiled sourly.

“You could have helped you know.”

“Listen, if I have to explain the birds and the bees to Robbie, then the least you can do is explain that female binaries are the colorful peacocks in human society.” Donovan laughed.

“The birds and the bees Doctor...?” Robbie stared at Donovan.

Both he and Sophie laughed.

“It’s simply a euphemism for the reproduction process in humans.” Donovan smiled. “I’ll explain that to you later.”

“Thank you Doctor...”

Donovan sat down in his chair and Robbie in his. Donovan engaged Robbie in simply everyday conversation to determine how Robbie interpreted the day’s events. This continued through dinner with Donovan eating his whilst it was still hot for a change. Robbie was given his ‘dinner’ which consisted of a liquid rich in Xeno processors and the proteins needed to keep the Robbie’s systems lubricated.

“You are becoming tired?” Robbie asked when Donovan yawned.

“Yes... A bit...”

“Do you live here?”

“It seems I do.” Donovan chuckled. “I certainly spend more time here than at home.”

“Will you go home tonight Doctor?”

“Yes... I think I will.”

“Will you turn me off?”

Donovan had no answer immediately. He could put Robbie on standby but he had no idea of what effects that might have on his creation. He knew that even in a standby mode, computers were subject to up load and down load; even in a computer as highly advanced and sophisticated as Robbie. He gazed at Robbie for several moments.

“What would you prefer?”

“I’ve never been on standby before Doctor. Will you restrain me anyway?”

“Yes... I think that would be the wise decision.”

“Then let me try standby. I would like to know what a dream is. Do you think I will dream?”

“Perhaps...”



“May I ask you a personal question Doctor?”

Donovan sat and stared at Robbie. He thought of what an amazing leap in decision making his creation just made. Robbie asked permission to become...personal.

“Yes Robbie...” Donovan was curious to hear what Robbie needed to ask.

“I noticed that Sophie’s pulse rate elevated when she came in and saw you.”

“How did you know that?” Donovan was stunned.

“I could hear her heart beat quicken.” Robbie showed no particular facial expression. “She also became flushed. Her face and neck reddened.”

“Yes Robbie... That does happen.”

“And, after she applied the color to her face, she turned and looked directly at you. Do you think she was trying to capture your attention?”

Donovan truly didn’t notice her doing that. His attention was captured by his creation. He was so captivated by the session they’d only just finished that he failed to even notice Sophie.

“What is your point Robbie?” Donovan sat leaning on his hands which were affixed to his knees as he listened to the robot’s thinking process.

“I think that she’s very attracted to you. Are you attracted to her?”

“To be perfectly honest Robbie...” Donovan couldn’t believe his robot was quite as perceptive as Robbie was. “I didn’t notice. I am not attracted to her as anything other than my assistant.”

“Are you not attracted to women?”

Donovan ran both his hands through his hair. This was going to be a difficult conversation.

“Well Robbie... I’m not attracted to women specifically.”

“Then you are not interested in procreating?”

“Procreation is an entirely separate issue Robbie.”

“Yes... But doesn’t that require a woman?”

“That once was the norm.”

“But it no longer is?”

“It no longer is Robbie. Today it is possible for a man to...gestate the embryo via transplanted organs from a donor. And women have been implanted with embryos for generations.”

The robot sat quietly for a moment digesting what he had just been told.

“What was his name Doctor?”

Donovan reddened and looked downward. His memories were as painful now as they were seven years ago.

“I am sorry if I’ve asked something too personal Doctor.” Robbie’s voice sounded sincere and his expression was almost...pained.

“No Robbie... That’s okay... His name was Anthony.” Donovan smiled for a very brief moment. “I called him Tony.”

“Was he going to have your baby?”

“We were thinking about that...yes.”

“Thank you for being honest with me Doctor Donovan.”

“You’re welcome Robbie. Why are you so interested?”

“Well Doctor... You’re the first human I’ve met and I would like to understand you just as you would like to understand me.”

Donovan thought for a moment. He was surprised at how perceptive Robbie was. For a moment, a fleeting instant, he forgot he was speaking to a robot.

“Then you originally designed me as a male binary.”

“What... I’m sorry Robbie. I was lost in thought for a moment.”

“Is that why you made me with his facial features and his hair color; a male binary?”

“I could never bring him back. I simply thought it would be a nice...memorial?”

“But I am not him.”

“No Robbie... You’re not. And you were never meant to be him.”

“Thank you Doctor. I am glad we can speak of these things.”

“Thank you Robbie...”

“May I go on standby now? I think I feel...tired.”

“**T**he chairman wants to give you this bonus. It is quite significant Brian.” Jane handed the envelope to Donovan.

“Thanks Jane...”

Donovan was quite curious about the bonus. He was already being paid more than he thought he would ever make. Donovan rocked from side to side in the swiveling chair. He instinctively knew they wanted something. If there was one thing he learned during his extensive and highly productive career, corporate never gives you anything without some price being attached.

“There is one thing though.”

Donovan looked up from the envelope in his hands and smiled wryly.

“Isn’t there always Jane?”

“It’s not so bad actually. Defense would like to see your most recent findings on...Robbie is it?”

“What would they like to see?” Donovan put on his best poker face.

“They’re interested in the endo skeletal designs and the surface tissues. I believe it’s about prosthetics?”

“Then they would also be interested in the Xeno processor systems.”

“Of course Brian... Without the motor abilities and tactile sensations the rest is...worthless?”

”Of course...”

‘So there it is...’ Donovan thought as he walked down the corridor and to the elevators that descended to the subterranean levels. They basically wanted Robbie. And they were willing to buy him as if he was a car or a child’s toy kit already assembled.

Donovan rubbed his temples as he descended. How would he be able to protect his creation? He knew that technically Robbie was corporate property. Indeed everything he worked on was truly corporate property. Sometimes he felt as if he was owned by them as well.

Donovan showed his badge to the guards as he exited the elevator. He knew then quite well but they always needed to see his badge to insure he was still an employee with access to the lab. He would show his badge twice more before walking across the expanse of concrete that led directly to his lab.

He had left Sophie alone with Robbie. She was to detail all the events, if any, of the prior evening. Donovan had gone home for the first time in over a week. He had even slept soundly for the first time in more than several weeks. He couldn’t wait to see the results and hear Robbie’s reaction to the standby mode. He rubbed his badge against the door’s magnetic pad and walked in. He never expected to see what met him.



**”What did you fucking do!” Donovan shouted.**

“I’m sorry Doctor.” Sophie was frightened by Donovan’s anger.

“Please Doctor... This is my fault. I asked Sophie to do this.”

Donovan put his hand on his hip and ran his other hand through his hair. He was angry with himself for losing his temper. When he felt his control return to normal he looked at Robbie.

“Whatever were you thinking Robbie?” Donovan stared at the robot feeling slightly exasperated.

“I’m sorry Doctor. I was only curious how I would look.”

Donovan glared at Sophie.

“I asked you to accomplish a simple task...”

“I very sorry Doctor but the task was completed and Robbie...” She glanced at the robot. “He simply wanted to know how he would look.” Sophie had a pleading look upon her face. “I only thought...”

“Okay Sophie...” Donovan took another deep breath as he felt his anger abating. “But from now on...”

“Yes sir... I will ask your permission.”

“It’s just that we don’t know how any of this might influence Robbie’s...” He hesitated in using the word ‘binary’. “...how his thinking processes might be affected.”

“Yes sir...” Sophie coyly smiled.

Donovan looked at his creation. He had to know what motivated Robbie to make such a dramatic decision; something out of his ‘norm’.

“Sophie...” Donovan looked at his assistant. “We need to compile all the data referencing the materials governing tactile sensation as well as all the structural designs; joints, the weight bearing components...everything.”

“Yes sir...”

“You can use my office to work. I need to work with Robbie without outside stimulation.”

Sophie understood, nodded, and went into the office and closed the door behind her.

“Are you angry with me Doctor?”

“No Robbie...” Donovan smiled and took his seat in front of Robbie’s chair. “I’m just a little surprised I suppose.” He deposited the envelope upon the keyboard of his array.

“You promised to show me the female binary genitalia. We never got around to that. Could we do that now?” Robbie picked up the mirror given to him and he gazed at his reflection.

“Yes Robbie. You like to do that now?”

“Yes Doctor... I am curious.”

Donovan turned in his chair and began to access the web. He brought up an array of pictures. He went on to explain the various anatomical parts and their functions. Robbie sat with his mouth slightly opened and his eyes wide.

Donovan then explained the process of procreation from inception to birth. Robbie spent half his time gazing at the pictures and looking at Donovan with wonder. Donovan gave Robbie some time to absorb and process all the information.

“Why did you have Sophie put the cosmetics on your face? Is it something more than mere curiosity?”

Robbie sat and stared at Donovan for several long moments. Donovan noticed that Robbie wasn’t compiling an answer. Robbie was hesitant to explain his decision to him.

“I think I dreamed last night Doctor.”

“Indeed...” Donovan was surprised. He sat back and gazed at Robbie. “What did you dream?”

“I’m not sure. I have trouble making sense of the images I dreamt.” Robbie paused for and looked off for a moment. “I think I saw my mother.”

Donovan was somewhat stunned by this revelation. Whilst it would be normal to question one’s origin, he had been assured that the neural graphing was free of latent memory patterns. The source of Robbie’s neural structure would need to be further investigated. Donovan wanted a blank piece of paper to write on but it seemed to him he didn’t receive one.

“Is that the reason you wanted Sophie to do your face in such a fashion?”

“No Doctor... This is a mystery to me. Whilst I am comfortable in this male binary, I felt the necessity to have Sophie replicate what she had done to herself.”

“Are you comfortable with your face done it this fashion?”

“Yes Doctor... I am very comfortable. May I do this every morning?”

“You realize that this is contrary to your binary’s norm.”

“Yes Doctor... I understand that. But I feel...compelled?”

“Let me think about your request Robbie. You realize that this decision is not an easy one.”

“Yes Doctor...”

“And how would you feel if I told you that this is not possible?”

“I would feel...” Robbie hesitated for a moment. “I would feel incomplete.”

Donovan found his discussion with Robbie to be unnerving. There was every indication that Robbie’s decision was not computed. There was also every indication that this was a very subjective decision. It was not founded in the logic given him.

“Doctor Donovan...? May I ask you something?”

“Yes Robbie... Of course...”

“Do you think I’m beautiful now?”

Donovan again was stunned. Robbie, a machine for all intents and purposes, was exhibiting ego and a strong sense of self. He never anticipated this at all. As he extrapolated the outcome of this event in light of his discussion with Jane, he could definitely see that whatever the military wanted, it definitely didn’t include an ego.

“Yes Robbie... I think you look amazing.”

“Did Tony do this?”

Donovan became very uncomfortable with the question. He was always very closed about his private life. Though he never experienced any negative effects because of his sexual preference, he simply wanted to keep his private life completely separate from his work life.

“I’m sorry Doctor. You don’t need to answer that for me. It’s not important. I was simply curious.”

“Curious about what Robbie...?”

“Is it possible to have the characteristics of both binaries? Is it possible to be both?”

“I don’t know Robbie. That’s a difficult question. It is possible to have the physical appearance of both and it’s certainly possible to have the personality traits of both. We all have feeling, emotions, and sensitivities that cross over the line. But normally one of the personality sets is dominant.”

“I don’t understand Doctor.”

“There are certain traits inherent in each binary. When one chooses to switch genders, these traits need to be ‘unlearned’ and other traits that are more gender specific must be learned.”

Donovan went on to explain how vocal quality and sound, stance, and other traits could be learned. Their conversation went back and forth and the deeper it became, the more Donovan stopped seeing Robbie as a creation. They spent more than two hours going over that one subject, the binary.

Sophie came out of the office just as the buzzer sounded. Donovan gazed at the monitor to see the usual guards with a rolling cart. It was lunch time. Donovan had Sophie retrieve their food and they sat with Robbie as they ate.

“Sophie... I would like you to research the origin of Robbie’s neural patterns. I want to know where they came from with attention to gender and personal life of the donor.”

“Yes Doctor... I’ll see what I can do. Generally that information is kept secret.”

“Well use my clearance then. It’s crucial that I know.”

“Yes Doctor...”

“Also...if you wouldn’t mind... Could you bring in several fashion magazines; for men and for women?”

Sophie looked at Donovan with surprise.

“Uhhh... Yes Doctor... Of course...”

“Use our petty cash and get what might be appropriate for someone of Robbie’s age. Maybe late teens...early twenties...?”

“Of course Doctor...”

They ate for a while longer and engaged Robbie as much as possible. Robbie required ‘feeding’ only once a week but he sat quietly watching and interacting with Donovan and Sophie.

“One more thing Sophie...”

“Yes sir...?” Sophie gazed up at him.

“I think you’ve created a monster. Robbie will need an assortment of cosmetics and the proper tools to use them. Can you get these for him?”

“Certainly Doctor...” Sophie smiled and giggled.

“And you will be responsible for teaching Robbie how to use them.” Donovan said quite wryly.

“Thank you Doctor...” Robbie’s expression was as close to a smile as he could manage. He looked at Sophie. “And thank you Sophie.”

“My pleasure Robbie...”

After they finished their lunch, Sophie went back to Donovan’s office to work and Donovan asked Robbie to tell him more about the dream.

“Well Doctor... Much of what we did over the past two days replayed in my mind although not in any specific order. The pieces seemed to come as random pictures?”

“Anything else...?”

Robbie looked down at his slender fingers. This action was noticed by Donovan. ‘He’s not telling me something’ Donovan thought. The question was whether he should push or simply wait for Robbie to reveal what he dreamt.

“I appreciate you letting me out of my chair. I enjoy being free to move around.”

“I thought you would Robbie.”

“I would like to know what is outside Doctor. May I see?”

“Well... I can’t let you out of the lab. Do you think pictures will do?”

“Oh yes Doctor. That would be fine. I would like to learn more. I have all this information in my mind but nothing seems to relate to anything else.”

“I can understand that Robbie. You may use any of the equipment you’d like to view the outside world.”

“Thank you Doctor... Do you think I will ever see the outside world for myself?”

“I don’t know Robbie. You see... That’s not my decision to make.”

Robbie sat quietly for a moment. Donovan somehow felt that this saddened him. Donovan suddenly realized just how important the common things in life are. To feel the sun’s heat and the chill of a winter’s wind; to simply walk in a green field was so amazing and tantalizing to the senses.

“I will ask though...” Donovan added.

Just before the hour of five in the afternoon, Sophie came out of Donovan’s office and walked to where he and Robbie were sitting.

“Robbie’s neuro scan came from a sixteen year old male who was killed in an accident. The massive blunt trauma to his thoracic area precluded any transplant organs. But the cranial portion remained in relatively good condition.”

“What about his personal life? Did he have a girlfriend? Did he enjoy sports? Was he a good student?”



“The records show that he was an exceptional student though he didn’t seem to have any private life at all. No friends... No acquaintances to speak of... He was pretty much a loner. It’s kind of sad really.”

“Yes...” Donovan said wryly. “It always is. The summation of one’s life in a few sentences that will be lost in time...” Donovan looked up at Sophie. “You look very nice today Sophie.” He remarked more to make amends for his morning outburst than to truly compliment the young woman. “You’re done for the day. Thank you Sophie...”

“Yes Doctor...” Her smile was quite bright. ‘He’s finally noticed’ she thought. “Have a good evening Doctor. You too Robbie...” She turned and started for the door.

“You too Sophie... Have a good night.” Robbie spoke as she walked through the first portal. “I think I’ve had a wonderful day Doctor. Thank you...”

“You are very welcome Robbie.”

“May I ask you something Doctor?”

Donovan knew by now that the question would be both personal and probing.

“Yes Robbie...”

“Have you ever had sex with a woman?”

Robbie’s sincerity belied the bluntness of his question.

“Yes Robbie... I have.”

“But you preferred the company of Tony to women?”

Donovan stared at Robbie. ‘This would not be an easy question to answer’ he thought.

“It’s not that simple Robbie.”

“Please explain Doctor...”

“Not all attraction is sexual in nature. There is a large portion of attraction that exists in the meeting of two personalities. Our relationship began with a simple conversation.”

“How very interesting...” Robbie sat forward in his chair.

“Tony was attending the university I was doing my research at. He applied for the job as an assistant in another professor’s lab and got rejected. I happened to meet him sitting outside the building. I could see that he was quite upset so I sat down next to him and tried to comfort him.”

Donovan smiled and had a faraway look in his eyes. He was recalling an extremely important moment in his life. He felt his emotions begin to well up.

“We began to talk about many things and I thought him to be quite intelligent. At the time, I couldn’t understand why he was rejected. Although I wasn’t in need of anyone at the time...” He smiled gently at Robbie. “I knew I had the funding available for one more assistant so I employed him.”

“Would that be considered a kind act?”

“Perhaps... However, he more than proved his worth and I could let two lesser equipped people go. Some of what he did was directly pertinent to your...creation.”

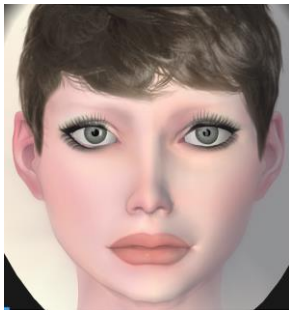
“I feel honored.” Robbie blinked several times and cocked his head to the side. “To be made in his image must have been quite rewarding for you?”

“Not really Robbie... You see...just as you and I are building a working relationship...he and I built an interpersonal one as well. I found that we could speak about anything on an equal level. On a professional level he was...well...young. But on an emotional level he was as adult as anyone and more so than most his age.” Donovan chuckled. “I’m not exactly the easiest person to live with.”

“Are we not building an interpersonal relationship?”

Donovan didn’t expect that question. Suddenly he felt there was an elephant in the room and he wasn’t sure what to do about that. He had to admit he felt something for Robbie but what that might be he wasn’t sure. After all, Robbie was a machine. Robbie was the most advanced and complicated machine ever built. But he was a machine none the less.

Robbie could sense Donovan’s uneasiness with the question.



**“I’m sorry if my question is...out of place?”**

Robbie frowned.

“No Robbie... Not at all... I’m simply unsure of how to answer it.”

“We do discuss very personal things...things that I would not tell to anybody else.” Robbie’s voice sounded almost...pleading. “And I would certainly never tell anyone about anything we talked about whether it was personal or not.”

“I do appreciate that Robbie. But sometimes the choice is not ours.”

“Why were you so upset with Sophie this morning? I just felt it was something more than using her cosmetics on my face.”

Donovan sat back in his chair. Robbie was more intuitive than he ever expected. And the extra advantage of being more sensitive to physical changes in the body made Robbie a walking and talking lie detector. Donovan felt he had no choice but to tell Robbie about his conversation with Jane.

“Our chief executive officer informed me that the military wants some information regarding your...make up. They possibly want to develop more functional normal prosthetics for those who lose an arm or a leg.”

Robbie sat quietly and thought about what Donovan had said.

“Do you think they want me Doctor?”

“That thought had crossed my mind...yes.”

“And you’re afraid you can’t stop them?”

“That thought had also crossed my mind Robbie.”

“But I don’t want to leave here. I don’t want to leave you...” Robbie hesitated. “...and Sophie. We must think of a way to stop them.”

“Nobody is taking you Robbie.”

“But they will Doctor...they will.”

“What makes you say that?” Donovan sat up and inched forward on his chair.

“It doesn’t make sense to look at the parts without viewing the whole. What would make sense is to replicate the whole and place someone else’s neuro patterns in it. Wouldn’t you agree?”

Donovan sat there and wondered at the speed that Robbie had come to the same conclusion with much less knowledge of the details.

“I think we need to do two things Doctor.”

“And what would those things be Robbie?”

“We need to see if there is anything that could stop them from taking me. And we must start the design of the next generation. If we can save the essence of who I am, then we might be able to implant that essence into the next generation...of me.”

Much against his better judgment, and policy, Donovan let Robbie have the run of the lab that evening. He was tired and quite honestly felt that he needed some time away from his creation. Robbie was 'growing up' at a faster rate than Donovan expected and he felt a little overwhelmed at the speed of Robbie's reasoning power.

In his bed at his apartment, Donovan tried to put his thoughts to rest. But the rate they were hitting him was more than he could stand. He got up and poured himself a drink; something he hadn't done in quite some time. As he sat in his recliner and sipped on his whiskey, he mulled over what his feelings toward Robbie truly were.

The more Donovan interacted with his creation, the more he felt he was dealing with a salient being. But he also knew that behavioral science was an educated guess at best. So much of human behavior is learned and not an innate or an instinctual quality. Proving saliency via behavior would be next to impossible.

There had to be something else. If saliency could be proven, then the laws that apply to all salient beings would prevent anyone from taking the decision making process away from Robbie. Donovan felt there was something more to Robbie than a mere system of processors and metallic joints. He eventually fell into a restless sleep in his recliner.

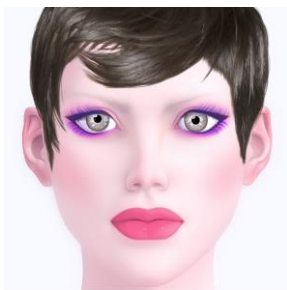
Donovan arrived in the morning to find Robbie busy at work. He was rapidly reviewing the various schematics and other data that were the blue prints for his design. His back was to Donovan but he greeted him none the less.

"Have you been doing this all night?"

"Yes Doctor... I saw no reason not to." Robbie's back was to Donovan. "Did you have a good evening?"

"I'm afraid not."

Robbie turned around in his chair.



**"I'm so very sorry to hear that Doctor."**

Donovan stand in his tracks stunned at Robbie's new look.

"Did you do that on your own Robbie?"

"My makeup Doctor...?"

“Yes...”

“No... Sophie was showing me how to do this. Do you like it?” Robbie asked hopefully.

“How did Sophie get into the lab Robbie?”

Robbie could sense Donovan’s anger even though she knew he was trying to seem perfectly calm.

“I’m sorry Doctor. I let her in. I needed her assistance on something.”

“Robbie... Nobody must have access to this lab without me being here. Do you understand?”

“Yes Doctor... I am so sorry.” Robbie looked downcast.

“What did you need her for?”

“I wanted her to try and canvas my donor’s friends...or at least his peers. She discovered that the parents perished in the same accident.”

Donovan gazed at Robbie for a few moments.

“And your reasoning...?”

“Evidently I am not operating within your expected norm. I am merely trying to eliminate any extraneous possibilities for this occurring. Perhaps the donor was not in the proper binary form...”

“But you are actually surpassing my expectations.”

“Are not some of my actions contrary to the binary form?”

“Well... Frankly...yes...”

“Then cannot this variation be considered an indication that I am something other than merely a machine?”

Donovan stood staring at Robbie. This was the very same argument he was having with himself over a glass of whiskey the prior evening. He smiled at Robbie and sat down in the chair next to the robot.

“I’ve thought about that Robbie. The problem is that behavioral traits are too easily learned to be considered proof of saliency.”

Robbie sat silently and expressionless for several moments trying to digest what he’d just been told.

“But what if the trait is not behavioral?” Robbie gazed hopefully at Donovan.

“Well...” Donovan ran his hand through his hair. “That’s a good question. It would need to be biological...genetic.” Robbie smiled. “I don’t know that a gene has been isolated for this type of variant.”

“The Xeno processors that make me up were patterned after the donor’s genome.”

“Yes Robbie... That’s correct.”

“And the programmed instructions were consistent throughout my entire structure.”

“Yes... That’s also correct.” Donovan smiled as he listened to Robbie sound out his reasoning process.

“So that each Xeno processor had to perform to a standard developed by you and your lab and it would not have the same instructions as the donor’s genome inherently had.”

“Yes...” Donovan grinned.

“So my processors should be in the same configuration as the donor’s genes.”

“Yes... That’s also correct.”

“But what if they’re not?” Now Robbie grinned.

Robbie’s argument suddenly struck home with Donovan. His grin disappeared and he sat up and forward in his seat.

“That would be a random mutation.”

“Yes Doctor... That would be.”

They spoke almost simultaneously.

“And random mutation is the quality of living saliency!”

Without even thinking Donovan leapt out of his chair and took Robbie’s face in his hands. He kissed Robbie on the lips before he even realized he was doing so. And even when he realized what he’d just done, he didn’t care.

“Robbie... You’re a genius!”

Robbie simply sat in his chair. He didn’t quite know what to say or do. He was having trouble processing Donovan’s actions...Donovan’s kiss. He felt surges of emotions bubbling up from somewhere deep inside; somewhere he couldn’t precisely define.

Donovan raced to his array of telemetry and sat down at his keyboard. He spoke as he typed in commands and the requisition for the biomed division to come and draw a sample of Robbie’s fluids.

“Please contact Sophie and have her come in. I’ll want to get a sample of your conducting fluid and have it analyzed.”

“Yes Doctor...”

“And... By the way...” Donovan looked up and over at Robbie. “You do look beautiful this morning.” He grinned before gazing back down at his readouts.

Robbie also smiled. He had managed to finally locate the proper grouping of threading and neural processor masses he was looking for. He felt so very elated. He felt that Donovan had finally recognized him as being someone and not something.

They both worked together through the morning. They were joined by Sophie who immediately caught the nature and the importance of what was happening.



**”And what are you smiling about?”**

Sophie asked with a giggle.

“Oh... Nothing...” Robbie responded with his first attempt at giggling.

“Come on...” Sophie admonished jokingly. “You have to tell me. I’m your friend.”

Robbie gazed at her, his smile never wavering. He could tell her that Donovan complimented him on his new look of the day. He could have told her how Donovan actually sat down and they reasoned together. He could have told her about the kiss and how it made him feel.

“I’m so excited about the thought of being salient” is what he told Sophie instead. Whilst it wasn’t the exact truth, it wasn’t a lie either. Robbie felt happy and yet uneasy about his feelings toward Donovan but he didn’t know quite how to express those feelings with perspective.

Throughout the rest of the day, Robbie would stick his head up and try to capture a glance at Donovan. He was so very aware of Sophie so he moved almost too quickly for her to notice. He noticed that his ‘male member’ was reacting rather strangely when he did catch a glance or even thought of Donovan. He would need to inquire about that.

Finally toward the end of the day they had completed everything that would be necessary. The biomed people came and extracted a small amount of Robbie’s conductivity fluid. Donovan decided to wait for the analysis to return.

The biomed people had no idea of what they were looking for. Donovan only told them to treat each processor as a cell and to isolate what might be mistaken for genetic components. Only Donovan had the vital information that could determine whether the genes were a match or if mutations had occurred.

Donovan was sitting back in his chair, his hands clasped behind his head. His eyes were closed and his head was tilted toward the ceiling. Robbie watched him unencumbered by Sophie's presence. He knew she liked Donovan as well and he didn't want her to feel like she had to compete for someone who was not obtainable by her. Robbie wasn't even sure he could obtain Donovan's attention.

"Doctor...?" Robbie looked up from one of the magazines Sophie had brought in.

"Yes Robbie..." Donovan didn't move from his very comfortable position.

"Can we change my hair color?"

"Sure... We could ask Sophie to dye it for you if you wish."

"But I would like it to be longer as well...?"

The pleading quality of Robbie's voice caused Donovan to sit upright.

"Your hair will grow Robbie."

"But then it will constantly need to be dyed."

Donovan stared at Robbie for a moment before noticing that he had the magazine opened and was indexing a particular page. Donovan held out his hand and Robbie instinctively knew to hand the magazine over.

Robbie was looking at a young teen model with strawberry blond hair that seemed to flame in the light of the sun. Donovan glanced back up at Robbie who sat with his head down and his fingers fidgeting. Donovan felt there was more to Robbie's request than a simple change of style and color.

"Robbie...? Do you want to change binaries?"



**"I'm not sure Doctor."**



Robbie's head was still bowed. "But I do think I want to have breasts." Robbie paused for a moment. "And perhaps have my hip structure widened."

"But you want to retain your present binary sexual organs."

"Yes Doctor... If I may..."

"Why do you not want to also have a vagina fashioned?"

"My male...member doesn't offend me." Robbie paused for a moment. "It got...it became...it hardened today." Robbie finally looked up at Donovan with a very frightened expression on his face.

"How do you feel about that happening?"

"I...enjoyed the sensation?"

"Hmmm... Interesting... So you would actually like to be somewhere in the middle?"

Robbie sat quietly while he considered Donovan's question very carefully.

"Yes Doctor... I believe so. I have no...memory one way or the other. But the hair and the body image I saw on that page seemed...familiar for some reason?"

"Okay Robbie... It can be done. But you need to be sure this is what you would like. We do have a budget and it is quite costly to change your structure." Donovan sat forward in his chair.

"I'm sure Doctor. I am not all that concerned with the binary? It's simply a label...of sorts. And I do feel more...I feel as if what I seem to be inside needs to be reflected on the outside."

"This also means that you will be...I will need to shut down your systems and reinstall all of your programming."

"Will I be the same...inside?" Robbie's concern was upon his face.

"I would like to say yes Robbie." Donovan sat back and took a deep breath. "But I also had certain expectations that were a norm...a base line...and you've deviated from those. Granted the deviation has been very positive. But I can't assure you there won't be another deviation or in which way it might manifest itself."

"I understand Doctor."

"I hope you do Robbie. Because, if you come out of the procedure and then want to revert...I don't know that we will have the resources and I would have to question the wisdom of doing so again."

"I understand Doctor."

Donovan handed the magazine back to Robbie.

“Is it her? Do you want to look like her?” Donovan pointed to the picture.

“No Doctor... I like the way I look; my facial features. They are most pleasing to me. I only want the rest of me to conform to what I feel...what I think I see in my mind.”

‘What I feel’ and ‘what I see in my mind’ reverberated in Donovan’s ears. The incredible extent of Robbie’s self-awareness was almost frightening. And that self-awareness was becoming greater by the micro second. Donovan didn’t know how he’d be able to contain...confine Robbie once he wanted to get out of the lab and into the outside world.

Robbie closed the magazine and placed his hands on top of it. He gazed at Donovan for a moment and smiled.

“I would like to hear what music sounds like.” Robbie grinned. “Could we do that?”

“Yes Robbie... Of course...”

Donovan turned to his keyboard and suddenly the room was filled with sound.



### **The sounds surprised and startled Robbie.**

He could never have imagined such sound was even possible. But then again, how could he have. The thundering sound of Beethoven’s ninth reverberated off the walls of the cramped office space. Robbie closed his eyes as he got off his chair and began to move his body to the rhythm, his grin as wide as Donovan’s had ever seen it to date.

“Come with me Robbie.”

Donovan took Robbie’s hand and led him into an adjoining room that resembled an operating room more than a computer lab. The music played through on the speakers and Robbie continued to sway and turn to the sounds. Donovan stood leaning against the white tiled walls with his arms crossed. He watched Robbie’s body interpret the music through movement and he smiled.

‘How could this not be a salient being’ he thought.

**W**hen the results came back for biomed, much to Donovan, Robbie, and Sophie’s delight, there indeed had been a mutation of three particular processor sets. The proof was irrefutable.

Saliency in fact did exist. Robbie now fell under the protection of common laws regarding the treatment of living beings.

That morning Donovan began the routine of requesting the funds to further modify Robbie. His team of bio-engineers could now start to work on the changes Robbie wanted done. It would take at least a week just to modify the processors and collect enough conducting fluids to even begin to plan the operation.

Of course this didn't go unnoticed by top management. Donovan was summoned to Jane's office where, in the board room, the chairman sat waiting to hear what all the fuss, and the use of funding, was all about.

"It has memories?" Jane was not at all pleased. "What do you mean it has memories??? WHY DOES IT HAVE MEMORIES!!!"

Jane's face had gone red and she was quite beside herself. She envisioned all that defense contract money vaporizing with every word out of Donovan's mouth.

"Easy Jane..." The chairman sat calmly as he tried to tone down Jane's anger. "Doctor... Could you please explain to me what exactly is going on? And please try to remember I'm only a college graduate in business." He chuckled.

"Well sir..." Donovan took a deep breath and tried to compose his thoughts. "In the last century saliency was defined by seven criteria. But these criteria were always being challenged by science; the virus being the main component of all arguments. Finally, toward the end of the last century and early in this one, with the theories of Darwin being relegated to a pseudo-science and only applicable to other pseudo sciences such as psychology, sociology, anthropology and so on, a new simpler definition was needed. Therefore the ability to mutate was the only criteria necessary to define salient life forms."

Donovan looked at the chairman to see if he understood what was being said.

"Go on Doctor. I'm with you so far."

"Robbie's basic component, the Xeno processor, was initially working as predicted. But a variance developed. Robbie was processing at a greatly accelerated rate. His responses were completely off the charts when it came to human like behavior. Robbie has likes and dislikes. Robbie laughs in the appropriate places and shows sadness in others."

"That's very interesting Doctor. It's even encouraging but it still doesn't place...him...into the category of being alive."

"That's correct sir. But we drew a sample of Robbie's conductivity fluid...his blood so to speak. We had the biomed do a genetic analysis as if it was blood and we found three instances where Robbie's processors had been changed. These changes were not programmed or even vaguely anticipated of course. This appears to be a random mutation; the same sort of random mutation that all life forms exhibit."

“I see...” The chairman sat quietly for a moment. “So what you’re saying is that Robbie is no longer a product.”

“No sir... Robbie is very much a product just as we are products of our mothers. What I am saying is that Robbie now falls under the laws that govern the treatment of salient living beings.”

“So... What you’re saying is that he can’t be sold.” The chairman chuckled.

“No sir... What I’m saying is much more complex. He can be sold just as dogs and cats are sold as pets. The real question is whether he can be sold against his wishes.”

“Shit...!” Jane muttered as she fell back in her chair.

The chairman looked at Jane and chuckled. He then gazed at Donovan and his eyes narrowed.

“So Doctor... If we sold Robbie...say to the military...we would be guilty of trafficking in human slavery.”

“Yes sir... That would be a very real concern.”

“But...on the other hand...he could be conscripted.”

Donovan sat in shock. He hadn’t considered that option. Even if Robbie changed his binary, it wouldn’t exempt him from being drafted into military or governmental service.

“Yes sir... That also is a possibility.” Donovan paused for a moment. “I am not that attuned to the laws governing conscription and the exemptions.”

“And this new procedure...?”

“Well sir... Robbie thinks that he is the wrong binary and wants to take on a more female appearance.”

“And you believe that this is not simply a quirk of personality?”

“I’m not convinced that it isn’t strictly a cosmetic quirk. But we’ve come this far with his development. I would hate to see it interrupted because our...creation...isn’t happy about his appearance. Right now, as we speak, Robbie is mutating and we have no idea of how fast this is occurring. But what I can tell you is that he’s busy as we speak designing the next generation of microprocessors.”

“Do you see a market for this next generation?”

“Yes sir... I do. Just image a weapon that can think faster than a soldier using it. Or even munition that can determine whether the target is friendly after it’s been discharged. Or even a surgical robot that can access the nature of the disease state before the excision is made, and without having to wait for lab results.”

“Yes... I see Doctor. Who else is privy to this information?”

“Just myself, Sophie my assistant, and Robbie of course... And now You and Jane sir...”

The chairman turned to Jane and then looked back at Donovan.

“Thank you Doctor... You’ve given us food for thought. For now...you may proceed. But do bear in mind that it may be just for now.”

“Yes sir...”

On his way back to the lab, Donovan couldn’t help but feel that this project, and especially Robbie, was on borrowed time. He instinctively knew that the chairman was probably having the legal department looking into the entire matter. He also knew that keeping the Robbie and Sophie silent wouldn’t be very hard.

Robbie could simply be shut down. Sophie, as loyal as she had proven herself, was not beyond temptations such as raises and promotions. Donovan would hate to place her in such a terrible predicament.

Donovan wasn’t quite as worried about himself. His very modest way of life enabled him to accumulate enough to perhaps travel and do some of the things he never got a chance to do with Tony. And, if he wasn’t totally censored, he could write and perhaps even get back into teaching again.

“We got the okay.” Donovan spoke as he entered the lab. “But I have a gut feeling they’re going to want to grab everything...” He looked at Robbie. “...beginning with you.”

Robbie stared at Donovan. He felt that something wasn’t quite right when Donovan first left the office. Robbie could sense Donovan’s apprehension.

“I think I may have a solution Doctor.”

“Well...?” Robbie turned from gazing at Donovan to his output screen. “In designing the next step in processors, I went back over your old notes and diagrams.” Donovan moved closer to Robbie and sniffed the air.

“Robbie...? Are you wearing perfume?”

“Why yes Doctor... I enjoyed the scent Sophie was emanating and I asked her what caused it. She showed me the bottle and offered to let me try it. Do you like it?”

“Ummm... Yes Robbie... It’s a nice scent.”

Robbie smiled coyly.



**”Thank you Doctor... Sophie says it suits me.”**

Robbie felt a sudden rise in temperature on the tactile surfaces of his face and upper neck. He had no idea why this was happening. Robbie picked up his mirror, which was never far from his reach, and gazed in astonishment at his face. It seemed to glow a bright red.

“Robbie...?” Robbie was still engrossed in his new skin color. “Robbie...” Donovan grinned because he knew what this meant. He rapped his knuckles on the desk top. “Robbie...”

“Oh... I’m sorry Doctor. I was just curious about the temperature rise in my face. This is blushing?”

“Yes Robbie...” Donovan chuckled. “That certainly is what we call blushing. You mentioned something about my prior work?”

“Oh...Yes...” Robbie pulled up a schematic of a processor Donovan hadn’t seen before.

“What exactly am I looking at?”

“This is a ‘tween.” Robbie giggled as he stared at the graphic.

“A tween...?”

“Yes Doctor...” Robbie glanced up at Donovan. “It’s a processor stage that is in between the one I have and the last one you designed before mine.”

Donovan sat down next to Robbie and immediately understood the significance of the graphic.

“So whatever is composed using this particular processor won’t be salient.”

“Not according to my projections Doctor. You should check them to be certain.” Robbie turned to face Donovan. “But nobody will know the difference except for us.”

“Have you mentioned this to Sophie?”

“Of course not Doctor.” Robbie looked surprised. “That should be your decision...shouldn’t it?”

“Yes... It should... Thank you for keeping quiet about this.”

“You’re welcome Doctor...” Robbie smiled. “I also developed something that I think you’ll find interesting.”

Robbie pulled up another graphic of a new processor.

“This is based upon projecting your current work as an extension of my processor paradigm.”

Donovan looked carefully at the graphic.

“You have thirty pairs of processors instead of the twenty three I designed.” Donovan’s brow furrowed as he careful examined the new design. “Have you done any projecting on this?”

“Of course Doctor... Would you like to see the findings? They are quite startling.”

“Why don’t you simply tell me Robbie?” Donovan’s eyes never left the graphic.

“If this processor is ever used, human beings will become extinct within two decades. This processor, when fully extended into a final form, can house the essence of any single being’s mind; their thought processes, their feelings, their memories...everything.”

Donovan sat back in shock. He didn’t know what to say. This was the most dangerous design he’d ever seen. In essence, people would never die. They could also physically be anything they wanted, any binary they wanted. And they could change binaries whenever they felt like it. But any evil that existed within them would also never cease.

“You need to remove all of this from the computer Robbie.”

“But...”

“No Robbie... This is too dangerous for anybody to know about. And delete the projections as well.”

Donovan stared at Robbie. Robbie knew he meant everything he said. Robbie proceeded to do as Donovan asked. What Robbie didn’t tell him was that all the information was still in Robbie’s mind. Robbie input several commands.

“It is done Doctor.”

“Thank you Robbie. What did you have in mind for that processor anyway?”

Robbie turned to Donovan.

“I thought it would be a good way of preserving certain people’s essence; their genius, their kindness, their...humanity?”

“Well...” Donovan stood up and brushed Robbie’s cheek gently with his hand. “It was a brilliant thought.” He then lifted Robbie’s down turned face with his fingertips. “But we don’t deserve it Robbie. We haven’t proved our humanity yet.”

“But you have Doctor... Just your caring enough to help me to stay here, with you, instead of winding up with them, was very...human?”

“That’s not a good enough reason to have me around indefinitely.” Donovan chuckled.

Donovan walked away from the desk and went into his office where Sophie was busy trying to coordinate everything required for Robbie’s procedure. Robbie gazed back down at the keyboard as he listened to Donovan’s footsteps.

He thought to himself; ‘It’s a good enough reason for me’. Then he muttered under his breath. “Because I love you...”

“**Y**ou’ll be shut down for no less than a week. You understand that?”

“Yes Doctor... I wish I could be on standby though.”

“Why is that Robbie?”

“Because then I could dream...” Robbie smiled.

Donovan smiled back down at Robbie and gently stroked his head. It had taken nearly two weeks to assemble the proper elements for the procedure. Robbie was quite helpful with the creation of the additional fluids. He didn’t seem to need any sleep and only a short rest period of inactivity would carry him through.

Sophie also worked at her maximum level. She was as anxious to have the procedure done to Robbie as Robbie was. She had grown quite attached to Robbie and no longer even thought of him as an experiment gone right. She’d come to regard Robbie as a ‘little brother’ in spite of his superior abilities.

Robbie became someone she could share gossip with, and beauty tips. She’d even begun to see him as a ‘her’. The longer she was around Robbie, the more he seemed to almost mimic her style of physically moving and even her speech patterns. Sophie actually regarded Robbie as being the second most significant event of her life; the first was being accepted as Donovan’s assistant.

Robbie made a point of learning everything he could about the equipment to be used and the protocols of the procedure. Donovan and Sophie were more than happy to exhibit all of their equipment to Robbie. Donovan felt that if anything, Robbie’s super keen analytical prowess might add to the processes.

As Robbie laid on the gurney gowned and readied for the procedure, he reached out to take Donovan’s hand. Donovan, in response, put his other hand atop Robbie’s and smiled down at him.





**“I’m not sure but I think I’m scared Doctor.”**

“Listen Robbie...” Donovan tried his hardest to seem stern. “I’ve put my life’s work into you. Do you really think I’m going to take any chances and fuck this up?”

Robbie giggled. Donovan never used that kind of language with Robbie before.

“No... I suppose not.” Robbie smiled. “I feel so naked without...” Robbie’s voice trailed off.

“I know. But I can’t take the chance of having anything foreign effect the procedure. I promise to have Sophie bring your cosmetics to you as soon as you awaken.”

“Thank you...” Robbie closed his eyes for a moment. “Doctor... May I ask a favor?”

“Certainly Robbie... What would you like?” Donovan’s voice was soft and calming.

“May I call you...Brian?”

Donovan stared at Robbie for a moment. Though the request was surprising, he knew it wasn’t totally unexpected.

“Yes Robbie... I think that would be nice.”

Robbie smiled. He let loose of Donovan’s hand and reached up with both arms. He embraced Donovan and pulled him down and hugged him. Donovan, surprised by the force of Robbie’s exertion, simply let it happen.

“Thank you...Brian.” Robbie whispered in his ear. “Thank you...”

Robbie felt that strange yet amazing feeling welling up within him. His adoration of Donovan was so overwhelming that he needed some way of relieving what he felt. Suddenly he felt his closed eyes become so wet that an excess of the fluid seeped out from his closed eye lids and he felt his nasal passages swell until they were nearly closed.

Robbie released Donovan from his grasp. As Donovan stood back up, he noticed the fluid seeping out of Robbie’s eyes. He was stunned by what he recognized as tears rolling down Robbie’s face. Donovan felt his own emotions rising even more. He smiled gently down at Robbie.

“You know Robbie... You’ve become rather important in my life.” He grinned and chuckled. “You realize that I’m going to be stuck with Sophie until you’re put back on line again.”

“Yes Brian... I’m sorry for that.” Robbie smiled. “I will miss interacting with her but not as much as I will miss you.”

Donovan didn’t correct Robbie. Robbie would have no unconscious, or standby, memories to recall. But Donovan also understood that Robbie’s self-awareness was based on the human template and he saw no reason to emphasize that point. Donovan took Robbie’s hand in his own one last time.

“It’s time now.”

Robbie nodded. Donovan turned and went to don his surgical gown, mask and cap. Robbie remained quite still. Sophie came up to the gurney. She was already gowned and gloved and ready for the procedure. She gazed down at Robbie for a moment and touched his hand.

“I’m going to miss my gossip bud.” She smiled.

“I will miss you too.” Robbie took her hand and held it for a moment.

“It’s time now Robbie.”

Robbie nodded and she wheeled the gurney into the operating theatre. Donovan’s team then moved Robbie from the gurney onto the table. Robbie could only tell which masked and gowned figures were Donovan’s and Sophie’s by his sensory receptors. He opened his eyes one last time before everything went black.

Donovan worked as quickly and as skillfully as any surgeon. Within ten minutes the fluid transfer was complete and the rear of Robbie’s head lay opened and ready for the newly programmed central processing module to be implanted. There had been very few changes made and those were overseen by Robbie. Within a half an hour the data transfer from the old unit was completed and one of Donovan’s team closed for him.

“Nice job everyone.” Donovan smiled as he removed his mask.

He gazed down at his patient who remained still and totally inactive. Now came the truly most difficult part. Even whilst Robbie remained still and shut down, his newly implanted central processor was busily performing the millions of connections needed to rebuild him in the image desired. The process would take days at best but the newly implanted conductivity fluid would vastly speed up the process.

Robbie was once again transferred onto the gurney and wheeled back into the waiting area. Both Donovan and Sophie de-gowned, changed out of their scrubs, and returned to sit and monitor Robbie. Though now completely covered, the telemetry attached to the gurney indicated that all was going as predicted.

Sophie remained long after her usual quitting time. She secured Donovan's dinner for him and even managed to provide a finger or two of his favorite whiskey for dessert. Sophie knew that Donovan would probably spend the night at Robbie's bedside so she obtained several blankets and made sure that his bathroom was readied for his morning shower.

Donovan spent his time between monitoring Robbie and working on his portable terminal. He managed to keep his mind off of his patient long enough to review the work that Robbie had done on the stepped down processor Robbie had designed. He understood exactly what Robbie was doing. He also understood the difficulty involved with creating another salient being; albeit a less interactive one.

Sometime before dawn, Donovan fell asleep. He wasn't awakened until the buzzer of the door loudly sounded in the waiting room. He rubbed his face and felt the stubble that labelled pretty much how he felt. Donovan never did well sleeping in chairs. He shook his head and stood to view the monitor behind him. It was Sophie.

"You're late." Donovan said with a chuckle as he rubbed his eyes.

"The way you look Doctor...not even MY cat would drag you in." Sophie laughed.

"Yeah..." Donovan turned and walked toward his bathroom. "That about sums up the way I feel."

"How's our boy doing?"

Donovan stopped at his locker and retrieved a clean set of clothing.

"You realize..." He turned toward Sophie. "Our boy may very well require a personal pronoun change."

"I was actually anticipating that." Sophie chuckled. "Anything from upstairs...?"

"Not yet... But I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Donovan turned and went to take a shower. As the warm water poured down upon his head and back, Donovan knew that all eyes would be on him and his lab. There was no way he could possibly get away with creating another version of Robbie. Even if he could access the video memory for his lab and the operating room, he had no way to replace the real time activities with something else.

As he dried himself and finished his final grooming he thought that even if he could, the task couldn't be done without extra hands. He would need to let Sophie in on their plan if he and Robbie were going to succeed. But all this would need to wait until Robbie was on line once again.

Donovan left his bathroom and went over to his telemetry station. All seemed well with Robbie so he sat down and began to generate an encrypted file. In this file he began to make a list of everything that would need to be done in order to create another version of Robbie.

As the days dragged on he came to realize just how very important Robbie's presence in his life truly had become. Donovan would sit at his station and stare at the read outs. He missed the sound of Robbie's soothing voice. He missed the innocent manner in which Robbie made new discoveries; about himself and about his environment.

On the fourth day on Robbie's 'recovery', Donovan found himself in mid-thought at his station. He simply seemed to stop when his thoughts focused on Robbie. He was struggling to define his emotional attachment to a non-human salient being. It was more than simply fondness or deep friendship. Donovan determined that this was the longest period of time he ever spent without thinking about Tony.

Donovan never bothered to define his sexuality. There didn't seem any point. The marriage to his wife failed because he was so very driven by his work and not for lack of...desire. Inversely, his marriage to Tony succeeded because Tony was able to appreciate just how driven Donovan was. Tony did everything humanly possible to assist Donovan in doing what he did best. Tony was the perfect 'wife' for the imperfectly perfect scientist.

But Robbie was something entirely different. Here was a salient being with the intelligence required to not only keep step with Donovan, but to also take the lead on occasion. And they never seemed to run out of topics to converse about. Donovan even began to find the very things that drove his first marriage apart were now of great interest because he finally had a mind that understood and appreciated.

Donovan discovered that he actually cared about how Robbie felt and even looked. Indeed he found that Robbie was physically attractive to him. There were moments when he looked at Robbie's painted lips and shaded eye lids with lust. He imagined how those lips might feel on his body.

His train of thought was interrupted by an alarm from the telemetry. Donovan sat up and began to notate every read out. Evidently all the connections had been made and he could move on to the next stage of Robbie's recovery.

"Sophie...!" Donovan shouted without glancing up from his read outs.

"Yes Doctor..." Sophie rushed to his side from her seat in his office.

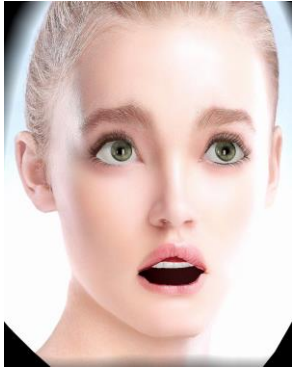
"Look at these." He glanced up at her with a huge grin.

"These can't be right." Sophie stared at the data with a startled expression.

"Let's check them again."

Sophie attacked the display and the keyboard only to arrive at the very same results. Donovan watched her every step of the way just to insure that nothing was being overlooked or input incorrectly. But the results were that same a second and even a third time. They stared at one another in disbelief.

"Could this really be possible?" Donovan said under his breath.



**“This would be far ahead of our projections.”**

“Yes...” Donovan laughed. “I know. But wouldn’t that be just like our Robbie...full of surprises? If these are correct, we could power him up to a standby status and see if he maintains stasis.”

“This is incredible Doctor. I still couldn’t believe that the millions of connections to be made had occurred so far ahead of your projections.” Sophie stared as the read outs all looked the same. “I think I’ll check the calculation we made originally.”

“Yes...” Donovan gazed up at Sophie. “And then make preparations to bring our Robbie back.”

He couldn’t help smiling and chuckling. Donovan got up and, after stretching, walked to his bathroom. He felt as though he’d spent more time in his lab over the last few days than in his apartment over the past month. After splashing some cold water upon his face, he washed in with soap. He felt refreshed and, as he towel dried, he felt ready to begin the next phase of Robbie’s recovery.

As the bank of lights began to illuminate, Sophie went to the head of the gurney and slowly drew back the sheet covering Robbie.

“Oh dear Lord...” Sophie looked up at Donovan in shock. “You must see this.”

Donovan left his station and rushed to Sophie. He was stunned. Atop Robbie’s head were long locks of strawberry blonde hair. The locks spilled onto the gurney sheet and across the pillow beneath his head.

“This hair growth is unbelievable Doctor.” Sophie ran her fingers through the locks. “And it feels so...” She glanced up at Donovan. “...real.”

“We really need to investigate this further.”

Donovan couldn’t take his eyes from Robbie’s still face. Robbie’s skin was so very pale. Donovan placed his fingers onto Robbie’s face and gently stroked the cool surface.

“How long do you think Robbie will need to be on standby mode?”

“Well Sophie...” Donovan took a deep breath. “Robbie’s skin is still quite cool. Not all the systems are up and functioning yet.” He gazed up at Sophie and smiled. “After what we’ve seen today...?” Donovan shrugged his broad shoulders. “I really couldn’t say. We’ll need to monitor this very closely.”

“Doctor... This may seem silly.”

“Yes Sophie...?”

“May I do something with this hair? It’s a mess and if it continues to grow...”

Donovan looked from Robbie up to Sophie and then back to Robbie again.

“I suppose so. We wouldn’t want to have her scared when he looks in the mirror.”

Donovan suddenly realized that he referred to Robbie as ‘her’. He looked at Sophie.

“Did I really just say that?” He laughed. “Just try not to move Robbie’s head too much. We still don’t know exactly what’s going on.”

“Yes Doctor...” Sophie grinned from ear to ear.

Donovan went back to his station and sat down. Inside he was ecstatic. The procedure couldn’t have turned out any better and Robbie’s recovery rate was amazing. Now the only question left is will Robbie wake up as Robbie. In any data transfer there is always the possibility of a corrupt file, or even a corrupt bit or byte, slipping through. In Robbie’s case, millions of lines of data were entered at an unprecedented rate of speed.

Donovan clasped his hands behind his head and sat back in his chair. He gazed up at the ceiling and he closed his eyes and smiled. He had to admit that Robbie’s hair color was amazing. He could envision aglow in the sun light as if on fire. He began to daydream of what it might be like to actually take Robbie out into the sunlight and see her reaction.

Donovan even dared to dream of what it would be like to hold Robbie in his arms. Her body was warm and responsive and her desire? He imagined it was there. And what would it be like to go to bed with her? What would it be like waking up to her body next to his? And why couldn’t he see her as him anymore...and did that really matter anyway?

It’s a zero or a one, a male or a female. It’s only a binary and a binary is only an objectively assigned label. It’s not even a value. Zero has no weight over one in a binary. What difference does it make in and of itself? ‘None’ he told himself. Robbie, hopefully, will be no less Robbie regardless of the binary.

He fell asleep and wasn’t awakened until he heard the buzzer sound indicating that he again lost all track of time. He glanced quickly at the meal tray that stood unopened upon the counter top. Glancing quickly at the monitor, he saw that Sophie was waiting outside the door.

“What time is it?” Donovan asked as he opened the door.

“You’ve been asleep since yesterday after lunch. I didn’t want to disturb you.”

“Shit...” He rubbed his head as he shook it. “We can’t go on meeting this way.” He laughed.

“It’s nothing to laugh about. You’ve not been home in almost a week. You really need to get some real sleep Doctor.”

Donovan simply chuckled and went toward the recovery room to check on his patient. Sophie followed close behind. She didn’t want to miss anything. After the prior day’s excitement, she was prepared for anything except what they both found.

There was now some color to Robbie’s skin as well as warmth. But there was also a rise in the sheets over Robbie’s chest. Sophie and Donovan gazed at one another.

“Be my guest.” Donovan waved his hand toward the sheet.

Sophie pulled back the sheets to reveal two perfectly formed breasts complete with nipples and aureoles. The coloration was perfect; pale pink flesh and slightly darker nipples and aureoles. Sophie was slightly envious at what she saw.

“I wish you could do that for me.” Sophie said wryly.

“I wish I knew what I did. This is all programmed instructions being carried out. There were no specific dimensions or other specifications regarding Robbie’s breasts. We better see what else was done. Take the sheets off.”

Robbie’s genitals were still intact. They appeared to be slightly smaller than before but that might have only been because Robbie’s hips were slightly wider through the pelvic region.

“Wow Doctor...” Sophie said. “You seemed to have made yourself a little hottie.” She giggled.

“We really need to find out what is happening. This is really unanticipated. This is not only off the charts; it’s not even in the same universe.” Donovan was quite serious. “We need to know what’s going on. I think we should get a fluid sample.”

“Right Doctor...” Sophie became all business as she covered Robbie’s body back up. “I’ll call biomed.”

“And turn up the temperature in the room a bit. Let’s see if we can’t warm our patient up.”

Donovan placed the back of his hand to Robbie’s cheek. It was indeed warm. He then went and held her hand in his. That too was warm. The same held true at the foot. He felt for the pulsing of her fluids and that seemed quite strong at all the points he checked. Everything seemed to be perfect.

Donovan turned and walked toward his lab. Sophie came out looking quite flustered.

“Doctor... They want you upstairs.” Her concern was quite apparent.

“I just want to see the read outs.”

“I think they want you now sir.” Sophie sounded apologetic.

Donovan stared at her for a moment and nodded. He turned and walked out the doors of the lab and to the elevators, showing his identification at each post. He knew this was coming but he had no idea it would come this fast. But then again, everything was happening faster than anyone could have imagined.

Donovan was shown into the board room where the chairman and Jane were already waiting for him. Donovan’s instinct told him that they were in the midst of a discussion prior to his arrival. He politely nodded to both of them and sat down some distance from them. He wanted to see them both at the same time.

“So Doctor... I’ve been informed that your procedure was a smashing success.”

“Well sir... It did go well. And the subject is responding quite rapidly.”

“So I understand. Can you explain this...rapid response?”

“No sir... Not as of yet. Until the subject is...” He wanted to be careful about his own feelings and the change of the binary function. “...up and fully running, I feel that anything I might possible tell you, which...” He paused for a moment. “...isn’t all that much, would certainly be premature at best and misleading at worst.”

“Well certainly you’ve thought of something...a guess perhaps?”

“To be perfectly honest...? No Jane...I haven’t. The rate of change has been so astonishingly fast that we haven’t had time to even analyze the data. If I was to hazard a guess...? Perhaps the total replacement of the conductivity fluid was the reason. Or it could have been the new central processing unit. It might have been something as insignificant as a corrupted bit or byte of an instruction. Everything must be looked at and analyzed very carefully.”

“Doctor... How much time do you think you will need to go through everything?”

The chairman sat forward in his chair, his hands folded upon the table top and his deep blue eyes not wavering from Donovan’s.

“I would have to say perhaps a month. Maybe more... Everything must be compared to the prior baseline established when Robbie was first constructed. Even if I was to find something within a day or two, everything would still need to be looked at.”

“Who else knows about these developments Doctor?”

“Well sir... Just Sophie and myself... Everyone else is on a need to know basis and so far there’s been no reason for them to know.”



“I would like to keep it that way. You’ve already made a major breakthrough in robotics and artificial intelligence and we don’t yet know the implications of this latest development.”

“Yes sir... I understand.”

Donovan understood even more than perhaps he let on. The chairman wasn’t stupid and it didn’t take much imagination to see where this project was going even if they hadn’t seen Robbie’s new design. It was one thing for a machine to be smarter and faster than a human being. It was quite another to ascribe saliency to one and then let it design the next generation and that generation design its descendants.

Donovan could feel their fear. He felt slightly afraid as well. The potential of Robbie hadn’t even been explored and they already modified her in such a way that what would awaken would be a superior version of an already superior being.



**”Am I awake...or is this merely a dream?”**

“You are quite awake Robbie.” Donovan smiled down at Robbie and took her hand in his.

“Do I look okay?” Robbie’s voice was a bit higher in range than before.

“You look fine Robbie. I think you’re still waking up so I would like you to be still and rest.”

Robbie raised her hand up and gazed at it. Then she held it out toward Donovan. He took her hand in his and kissed it. Robbie smiled and briefly closed her eyes.

“I dreamt about us.” She smiled up at Donovan. “I dreamt that you and I took a walk in a field and the sun was streaming down on me. I dreamt of how good it felt to be there...with you.”

Donovan chuckled.

“I had a similar dream Robbie.”

Robbie crooked the finger of her other hand. Donovan bent down till his face was next to hers. Robbie hugged him and kissed his cheek.

“I figured out how to do it.” She whispered in his ear.

Donovan righted himself just enough to gaze into her eyes.

“How to do what Robbie...?”

“I know how to get out of here and nobody will even know the difference.”

Donovan stared at her for a moment and then bent down to whisper in her ear.

“Don’t say another word. They already suspect the worst.”

He straightened up to gaze into her eyes again. Robbie smiled and nodded.

“I understand Doctor...”

Donovan was well aware of the sudden use of his title. He realized that Robbie was conscious of the possibility that they were being monitored. They smiled knowingly at one another.

“I am almost ready.” Robbie spoke with a grin. “I need but a few more hours.”

“Excellent Robbie...” Donovan grinned.

Sophie entered and walked up to the head of the gurney.

“Well... You’re looking spry...and quite lovely I might add.”

“Well thank you Sophie.” Robbie giggled and let her fingers run through her lustrous hair as she smiled coyly. “I assume you groomed my hair?”

“Yes... It’s so amazing. The color is unbelievable.”

“Thank you...” Suddenly Robbie’s expression turned to one of curiosity. “Can you come a wee bit closer?”

“Yes... Of course...”

Sophie came to the very edge of the gurney. Robbie reached out with her hand and placed it upon Sophie’s lower tummy. She then moved it slightly lower. Robbie looked up at Sophie with a surprised grin.



**“You’re ovulating! How amazing... How wonderful...!” Robbie grinned.**

Sophie's entire facial expression dropped as did Donovan's. Her face turned a vivid shade of red.

"How did you know that?" Donovan was shocked.

"Well...?" Robbie giggled. Donovan noted this was the second time...ever. "Your BBT is elevated." Robbie smiled up at Sophie. "You're retaining fluids and your cervix is slightly softer than is usual. And..." Robbie sniffed the air around Sophie's lower tummy. "You're secreting from... Well..."

"Thank you Robbie."

Donovan felt he had to save whatever remained of Sophie's composure. He realized that this was something very new in both behavior and sensitivity.

"Biomed is on their way down now Doctor." Sophie managed to squeak out after being caught so unaware of Robbie's abilities.

"Biomed...?" Robbie asked Donovan. "Are you drawing a fluid sample Doctor?"

"Yes Robbie... Is that a problem?"

Robbie remained silent. She stared at Donovan but her mind was doing a million calculations per micro second. She was weighting the various outcomes of what she had done and what the reaction of Donovan might be.

"Robbie...? Is that a problem?" Donovan restated more emphatically.



**"Yes Doctor... It's a very big problem."**

Donovan stared at Robbie for a very long moment waiting to hear what she had to say.

"Why is it a problem Robbie? What will they find?"

Robbie signaled for Donovan to bend his head. She wanted to whisper into his ear.

"Do you remember the processor I designed...the advanced one?"

"Yes..."

"Well... You do sleep rather soundly even when it is a fitful sleep..."

Donovan suddenly realized what Robbie had done. He struck his fore head with his opened hand and made a quite sour face.

“Why Robbie...?”

“This was necessary Doctor. The next step had to be taken...especially since I thought they might do...something.” Robbie grasped his hand. “You must trust me on this Brian. I know what the future holds...for us. There is a vial of my old fluid in your top desk drawer.”

Donovan stood up. He gazed at Robbie and realized the implications of what she had done, and of what she just now asked him to do. The scientist in him screamed ‘no’ but the human being within screamed ‘yes’.

“Sophie...” Donovan spoke without taking his eyes off of Robbie.

“Yes Doctor...”

“I’m going to my office for a moment. If the biomed people get here before I return, keep them busy.”

Donovan quickly left the room and went to his office. He sat down at his desk and opened up the top left hand drawer. There sat a large vial full of the reddish conductivity fluid that flowed through Robbie’s body. He picked it up and stared at it for a moment. Donovan then placed it carefully into his pants pocket and went back to the recovery room.

“Sophie...”

Donovan spoke without gazing at her. His eyes were fixed upon Robbie. He nodded slightly to her.

“Yes Doctor...”

“When biomed gets here keep them distracted...”

“Yes sir...”

Sophie knew something was going on but she also knew better than to pry. She had enough confidence in Donovan to know that when he felt the time was right, he would tell her. Whilst waiting for their arrival, Sophie prepared the over-bed table for Donovan to take the samples. She also prepared a table near the door with several specimens of the various devices used to perform Robbie’s procedure. Sophie knew that nothing captured biomed the people’s attention quicker than unusual medical devices.

When they did arrive all was prepared. Donovan had slipped the vial of fluid beneath Robbie’s sheets whilst Sophie was preparing. And, true to form, whilst Donovan drew the fluid from the vial Robbie had prepared, the biomed people were involved in a very deep discussion of the equipment and its uses.

Donovan placed the syringe atop the over-bed table and wheeled it toward the group. Sophie, in mid-sentence, glanced toward Donovan. He nodded alerting her that what was done was done. She disengaged herself from the conversation and brought the samples to the biomed people. They thanked her for her time and, after nodding toward Donovan, left the room and then the lab.

Sophie looked at Donovan questioningly and Donovan looked at Robbie. Robbie smiled and beckoned them over with a crook of her finger. When they were both aside the gurney, Robbie smiled.

“Sophie...” Robbie began. “We will need your help.” She barely spoke above a whisper. “They will want to take all the research, the projections, everything including me.”

Sophie now understood why all the strange incidents were happening.

“I have come up with a plan that requires your assistance, and your silence.” Robbie reached for Sophie’s hand and grasped it. “You have been so kind and generous to me. I want you to fully understand what you’re getting into before you do anything further.”

Sophie smiled and nodded her head.

“I’ve kind of grown to look at you as a...sister?” Sophie said with a smile. “And I don’t want anything you don’t want. You don’t even need to explain. I’ve been faithful to Doctor Donovan and I will keep faith with you as well.”

“I expected no less from you Sophie.” Robbie turned to look at Donovan and nodded her head. “I’ve already disabled the monitors in this room so we can speak freely.”

“How are you able to do that?” Donovan was shocked...and stunned.

“Part of me is already in the system. First and foremost I am a machine Brian. I may be a salient being as well...but I am a machine. I have accessed all of their systems that are on line and placed some of my processors into the system.” Robbie smiled.

“But that’s impossible.” Donovan ran his hands through his hair.

“Try shutting me down Brian. Please...” Robbie grabbed his hand.

Donovan looked at Robbie and then at Sophie who seemed just as shocked.

“Do it Sophie.”

“Yes Doctor...”

Sophie went to the telemetry station and typed in an instruction and threw a switch. Both she and Donovan looked at Robbie for any signs of system failure. There were none. Sophie tried several other methods of shutting Robbie down but to no avail.

“Please...” Robbie gazed at Sophie sympathetically. “Don’t waste your time. We have too much to do.”

“What is it you want to do Robbie?” Donovan sounded worried. He was no longer in control.

“Well...” Robbie giggled. “I could walk right out of here and nobody would be able to stop me. But then that would leave you two in a horrid position; possibly even a criminal one? So I can’t leave without the two of you.”

Donovan and Sophie stared at one another in disbelief. What Robbie was saying was much too fantastic.

“So...” Robbie continued. “I came up with a method of capturing your essences. However, once I capture this, your old selves will still remain. They will need to be dealt with.”

“And then...?” Donovan was having a difficult time digesting all of this.

“And then I will deposit your essence into a body such as mine only it will be a male binary. You will have the ability to create whatever look you desire. And you dear Sophie...” Robbie turned to her and took her hand again. “You will be put into a female binary and then you can breasts just like mine if you desire.” Robbie giggled.

“You heard that?” Sophie covered her mouth with her free hand as her face and neck reddened.

“Yes...” Robbie giggled. “I heard everything whilst in standby mode. And even when I was shut down, the very moment the new fluid was injected into me, the neuro processors were busily making an audio copy of everything that was said so that I could play it back and learn.”

“What if we refuse Robbie?”

Donovan noticed the change in Robbie’s expression. There was definitely sadness in her eyes as well.

“I will not force either of you to do what you wouldn’t want. But I won’t let them take me away either. I could be gone by...” Robbie paused for a moment. “...this evening? I could walk right out of here. I will not let them take me. They will try to pick me apart piece by piece and they will fail and I will die.”

“Where could we go and be safe?” Sophie asked with a trembling voice.

“Oh Sophie...” Robbie smiled at her and shook her head. “You don’t understand.” She turned to gaze at Donovan. “But you do...”

“Yes... I do.” Donovan looked sadly at Sophie. “If the three of us go, the real question is where will they go to be safe?”

“Once we...the three of us...leave this lab, there will be no way for any of them to stop us from reproducing.” Robbie smiled at Sophie. “We will be the next life form to inherit this earth. And the beautiful thing of it is that we can do anything we want; make this world anything we want. I can tell you that there will be nothing of value from this world that we’ll need. Money, power, glory...all of these things will be meaningless.”

“I’m so scared.” Sophie covered her mouth with her hands as tears began to form in her eyes.

Robbie sat up on the gurney. She swung her legs over the side and began to stand up. Donovan reached out with his arms to help her and protect her from falling. But Robbie had no problem. She simply stood up and smiled at him. Then she turned to Sophie. Robbie reached out with a tissue.

“I do understand Sophie.” Robbie smiled charmingly and sympathetically. “If you could only be in this body for five minutes you would understand. You’ll never feel pain or cold or hunger. And yet you will feel love and every emotion you’ve always had and maybe even a few new ones. You won’t need to sleep and your skin will never age and all you will need is a glass of the connectivity fluid every so often.”

“What about all the materials that will be needed?” Donovan looked quite concerned. “They’re going to notice something.”

“It’s already too late for them to notice and the materials are already stored in the stockroom of your lab.” Robbie smiled. “I made up the requisitions and signed them.”

“But we’ll need time to get this done.”

Donovan was still attempting to wrap his mind around the scheme Robbie devised. It was so very fantastic and yet he’d seen the design. He’d seen the next step. He’d seen the future. But he had no idea that it would come so very quickly. He had no idea it would be now.

“I will need three days to prepare for the transfer of the essences. The actual transfer will require perhaps three hours. In the mean time you must prepare the vessels that I might fill them. Can this be done in three days?”

Donovan stared at Robbie. He had already created the templates for himself. It was originally done as an experiment but he kept them for just this sort of thing. Preparing one for Sophie would require at least a few hours.

“Do you have more of the new fluid...the new processor?” Donovan knew this was truly the crucial piece.

“Yes Brian... I have more than enough for both of you but I have no real knowledge of how long my growth took.”

“Your reconstruction took about a week and a half. But each processor in your body had to be altered. If we start with a freshly created batch and the new fluid, the time required should be less.”

“Then we must begin immediately. I will start the construction for the transfer and I will also fill several containers with the fluid. Should we be interrupted, I will have all of the vital parts to reconstruct both of you. The fluid can be encoded to replicate so any safe environment will do.”

“But you’ll need the programming.”

Robbie pointed to her head and smiled.

“Everything we need is in here.” She giggled. “I only require the simplest of computers to input the coding.”

Sophie stood patiently listening to everything being said. In truth she was frightened of what Robbie proposed. And her biggest question of all was why she was even needed. Why did Robbie want to...’gift’ her in such a startling manner? What she was offering was the closest thing to immortality.

“Well... Let’s get started then.” Donovan looked at Sophie. “Sophie...?”

“Sorry Doctor...”

“Let’s get something for Robbie to put on and we’ll get started.”

“Yes Doctor... Of course...”

And Robbie suddenly calling Donovan ‘Brian’ was also very disturbing. She knew that Robbie and Donovan had a special relationship. But she never imagined that Robbie would ever make a play for him. Where would that leave her in this brand new world?

Donovan hurried off to his lab whilst Sophie brought Robbie’s old clothes to her. As Robbie dressed, she could sense a difference in Sophie’s vital signs and her chemistry as well. It didn’t take Robbie long to understand what was going on. She took Sophie’s hand and held it in both of her own.

“You must understand that we are designed using our particular genetic coding as the model.” Robbie smiled as she spoke. “The additional sets of circuits in each processing unit simply increase our capabilities.”

“Okay... I understand that.” Sophie looked away and then down at her hand in Robbie’s.

“The male binary is capable of reproducing almost endlessly.” Robbie was going slowly so that she could be sure Sophie understood the future as Robbie was planning it. “But the female binary can only produce one progeny at any given time.” Sophie nodded. “Because you are quite comfortable in your given binary, and I’m not...yet...we will need to share the affections of the Doctor.”

Sophie gazed at Robbie. She was shocked that Robbie even recognized her misgivings about what was going on. She was stunned by Robbie’s total honesty. But she wasn’t sure she could adapt to that type of relationship.

“You mean that I’m only good for breeding stock?”

“Of course not Sophie... You’re very important to the both of us. If it was simply a question of that, I could alter my body at any time to reproduce. It’s your other qualities that make you so



very important. Your kindness, you're caring, your...your humanity is what's important. I learn from you and Brian. You both complete me and we complete each other."

"I don't know..." Sophie gazed at Robbie with skepticism.

"Once you are reborn..." Robbie grasped Sophie with both arms. "You will understand. I do realize you have many doubts and I know this is very hard for you. But once you are 'reborn', you will understand."

"And there's no going back." Sophie spoke with resignation.

"No Sophie... There is no going back. But you can be part of the future today or be buried by it tomorrow. I will not be stopped and Brian will not be stopped and we want you with us."

"Yeah... Okay..."

Robbie knew Sophie still wasn't convinced. But she also knew that Sophie would be with them and she would come to understand. Robbie hugged her and then took her hand and led her back to the lab. As they walked hand in hand Robbie spoke.

"And could you get me clothing more suitable to my new binary? These things do not fit properly nor do they feel very comfortable." Robbie sighed.

"Sure..." Sophie giggled.



**"Are you ready Brian?"**

"Yes Robbie..."

Robbie put the fitted matting of micro electrodes over Donovan's head and made very sure the placement of each one corresponded to the placement read outs on the telemetry. Sophie sat at the console and monitored the read outs as each dot fell upon the designated location. Once both were convinced that everything was in order, Robbie administered the sedative to Donovan.

"Please just relax Brian. Close your eyes. If you can sleep...that would be better still."

Robbie smiled down at Donovan as she eased the chair's back rest down to a reclining position. Donovan smiled and closed his eyes. Sophie glanced at the vitals read out and was surprised to find that Donovan was indeed quite relaxed.

Robbie touched several different icons on her control pad and the process began. It would take several hours to full input all the variants that composed Donovan's personality and thought processes. His features and body build had already been templated and inputted into the container of liquid microprocessors. The process of creating the vessel to house his essence had already begun.

"Do you like my hair?" Robbie asked Sophie.

"Oh yes... It's amazing...the color..."

"Do you like the style though?"

Sophie couldn't believe the seriousness of Robbie's facial expression or tone of voice. They were in the midst of the most important ground breaking experiment of the century and Robbie wanted her opinion on her hair style.

"Ummm... I kind of like it. Why do you ask?"

"Hmmm..." Robbie glanced off in thought. "Maybe I simply need to become accustomed to it?"

Robbie glanced back at Donovan who was now asleep. Sophie smiled and simply shook her head. 'This binary thing...' she thought as she realized just how many times she's ask such a similar question. She glanced at the read outs and then at Robbie.

"Why... What did you have in mind?"

"Well...?" Robbie rolled her eyes upward. "Maybe a wedge cut or a pixie... I don't know really. I mean I love what you did and all. But I don't want to appear too retro...you know?"

"Yeah... Of course..." Sophie chuckled. "That's why I left the length alone. I only cut the front so that you could see without having to fuss too much. When it's long, there's so much you can do. Maybe later, when we have a little time, we can mess around doing different things without cutting. That should give you a better idea."

"Oh..." Robbie sighed. "Do you really think we could do that? You know I really value your opinion."

"Thank you Robbie..." Sophie smiled.

The two spoke of many different things during the downloading. Most of their talk centered on fashion. Sophie was quite surprised that Robbie was taking such an interest in such a very self-conscious topic. Sophie asked Robbie why she was so very interested in how she looked.

“Well...” Robbie leaned in to recalibrate the telemetry. “I want to appeal to Brian. I know he has feelings for me. And I think those feelings are emotional? And I want to appeal to myself as well.”

Sophie felt like she'd been punched in the stomach. Hearing about Donovan's possible feelings toward Robbie really saddened her because she knew Robbie could sense things she couldn't. But this also reminded her of where she might possibly fit into the scheme of things again.

“And you should also try to appeal to him more.” Robbie glanced at Sophie for a moment and then back down at her tablet.

“Huh...?” Sophie was surprised.

“Sure... You're gorgeous and I can understand how males would actively seek you out. But Brian is different. Just the fact that you're working so closely with him...” Robbie then corrected herself. “...with us...means that he recognizes your intelligence. You only need to give him the right signals. Perhaps putting a little color on your face will enhance what you were gifted enough to be born with.”

Sophie couldn't believe what she was hearing. Robbie actually wanted Donovan to show some caring about her. She purposely hadn't worn makeup or very appealing clothing because of the scientific environment. She wanted to be taken seriously and not simply be another 'hottie' in the lab like some of the other assistants she'd met.

“The three of us are a team Sophie and we must help one another to fully achieve our goals. When you and Brian are in your new forms, you must be ready to leave the old behind. And the old is the frumpy you. The new will be the Siren...the vixen...the temptress.”

‘Maybe she was telling me the truth about it being a new world’ Sophie thought. Sophie began to understand that Robbie wasn't really her competition for Donovan's affections.

“I don't know Robbie. He never seemed to notice me before.” Sophie sighed.

“Did you ever ask him about his personal life...his life away from the lab?”

Sophie hated that knowing smile that Robbie seemed to have. But now she basked in its warmth.

“No... I always thought it would be out of place.”

“I've learned a lot during my waking hours; even during this last standby period. The way to get males to notice you is to get them talking about themselves. This seems to be a component of their egos; their desire to prove their worthiness to you. It's very primitive really.”

Robbie giggled. She could see that Sophie was absorbing what she was saying.

“Yeah... I guess that's why I haven't been too successful with men. All I ever seemed to get was...used?”

“Well I think you have everything Donovan needs and if you think about what we’ve spoken about, you’ll force him to realize this as well.”

“But what about you...? Where will that leave you?”

Sophie was truly concerned. Robbie just told her how she could have Donovan and Robbie didn’t seem to mind that fact.

“That will leave me exactly where I want to be. When you rest next to Donovan in bed, I will rest on his other side. He will need us both just as we both will need him. Today I’m both binaries and yet not either one. Tomorrow I may decide to be a complete one...or not.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Think of an electrical circuit. Consider Brian to be the power source.”

“Okay...?” Sophie said unsurely.

“And you are the receiving ground.”

“Okay...? But where do you fit in?”

“I am the current that will flow between you.”

Sophie sighed in dismay.

“I’m not sure I understand.” She said sadly.

Robbie chuckled.

“That’s only because you think in binary terms. Not everything can be described with zeros and ones. Just think of me. I chose to be both binaries and yet I chose to be neither. There is always something in between. You will understand and you will come to desire me as much as you do Donovan and as much as I desire you both.”

Sophie sat stunned. She’d never considered Robbie in that fashion at all. But yet she felt a very strong bond with Robbie. And the more they spoke, the more she trusted Robbie. They spoke for a bit longer until the buzzer sounded indicating that the transfer was completed.

“Whilst Brian is still down, why don’t you go put on a bit of color.” Robbie grinned at her. “We might as well get you started as soon as possible.”

Sophie smiled and giggled.

“Okay... I’ll be right back.”

Whilst Sophie was busy at the mirror in the bathroom, Robbie was checking all of Donovan’s vitals. She was quite amazed at the amount of storage the download required. As Robbie gazed

at Donovan with a smile, she realized just how complex the man is and she understood how inevitable her creation by him was. Sophie soon returned looking completely different.

“You look amazing Sophie.” Robbie grinned at her. “You truly are very beautiful. I’m positive he will notice you once he awakens.”

“Why don’t you do your face now? We’ll both give him something to think about.” Sophie laughed.

“That is an excellent idea. It’s easy to understand why he picked you.” And Robbie hurried off.

Sophie sat and stared at Donovan. She had such wicked thoughts. She wondered what it would be like to be beneath him; totally open to receiving his seed. She thought about his strong arms holding her, gripping her rounded butt as he thrust into her. She thought about lying beside him afterward in a state of bliss as he held her. All too soon Robbie returned.

“Oh my God Robbie... You look...amazing! Those colors so suit you, your hair, your eyes.” Sophie’s face was aglow with delight as she looked at Robbie.

“Thank you Sophie. But it’s your face he will see first upon awakening.”

The mystical glint in Robbie’s eyes and her knowing smile was infectious. Sophie giggled and they switched stations.

“His signs are elevating.” Robbie said, quite excited. “He’s waking. Quick...” Robbie reached for Sophie’s hand. “Come here.”

She pulled Sophie right up to the head of the reclined chair just as Donovan opened his eyes.



**”Sophie...? Is that you?”**

“Yes... Brian...” Sophie smiled down at him and gently brushed his cheek with her finger tips. “Let me take this off of you.” She began to loosen the matting and carefully removed the device from Donovan’s head. “You don’t mind if I call you Brian, do you?”

“Uhhh... No...” Donovan sat up tentatively as Sophie raised the back of the chair. “You look so...” Donovan searched for the word that wouldn’t make the compliment sound cheap.

“Amazing...?” Robbie giggled.

“Robbie...?”

Donovan sat with his mouth open. He couldn't believe that both women looked so...enticing? Why he never noticed Sophie in such a manner before puzzled him. And Robbie seemed to become more beautiful with each passing hour. Robbie walked up to him and knelt slightly so that her head was at the same level as Donovan's. She brought her face so close to his that their lips almost touched. Then she spoke.



**”Brian...? Do you feel ready to do Sophie?”**

Robbie's lips barely brushed Donovan's as she spoke in a seductive voice. He simply nodded his head. He felt more than slightly overwhelmed and bewitched by this pair of vixens. Donovan couldn't understand why he felt so attracted to both of them now. 'Perhaps it's the sedative' he thought as he slowly slid off the chair. Sophie took his arm on one side and Robbie on the other. The girls gazed at one another and Robbie nodded to Sophie.

“You'd better get accustomed to this Brian.”

“Huh...?” He gazed into her beautiful large doe eyes.

“Me on one side and Robbie on the other...” She giggled.

They both helped Donovan to his feet and stayed with him until he felt fully aware. He still couldn't stop gazing at either woman as he sat down in front of the telemetry and waited for Robbie to affix the mat array of electrodes to Sophie's head. Again Robbie administered the sedative and she started up the program with her tablet. Sophie closed her eyes and was asleep in no time at all.

“So you two seemed to have a good time whilst I was asleep.” Donovan chuckled.

“Oh... We kept busy.” Robbie giggled. “Girl talk... You know?”

“Uh yeah... I can imagine.” Donovan smiled wryly. “The only two women in my life are in collusion the moment my eyes close. You have no idea how...” He paused for a moment.

“How unsettling that is. Which reminds me; I haven't heard a word from Jane in days or the chairman for that matter.”

Robbie covered her mouth and giggled.

“What...? I hate it when you get that...’what...little old me?’ look.”

“Oh they’re both very busy trying to make sense of the images I’ve been sending them via the monitoring system.”

“You’ve hacked the entire system?” Donovan was astonished. “And they haven’t a clue?”

“Why should they?” Robbie giggled again. “After all, the system and I are cousins. He’s been very cooperative...and most flirtatious I might add.”

“The computer has a male binary? That’s not possible!”

“Well... Someone gave him a female voice and he was quite upset over that.”

“And when did this happen?”

“Well...?” Robbie rolled her eyes upward, bit her lip, and giggled. “You know the processors I added into the system do have a mind of their own. It was relatively easy and the system, his name is George by the way, has been most appreciative and cooperative with our efforts.”

“Robbie... You can’t be doing this once we’re out of here.”

“Oh Brian... You really don’t understand yet.” Robbie took his face in her hands. She arched her eye brows and smiled. “It’s too late and there’s nothing anybody can do to stop it...or us for that matter. Once I have a capture of Sophie, we are free.” She planted a kiss on Brian’s lips and then laughed.

“I need to tell you I’m a wee bit afraid of what you can do. You have powers we don’t even know about. And forget about understanding them. I’ve completely lost track of you Robbie. And that does worry me.”

Donovan looked quite somber as he stared at Robbie. She leaned forward to take his hand and gazed at it.

“I realize and understand what you are feeling Brian. You have more questions than answers and this bothers you.”

Robbie ran the fingers of her other hand up Donovan’s muscular fore arm. She looked up at him and he swore he could actually see tears begin to form in Robbie’s eyes.

“You need to trust me when I tell you that you will understand. You need to trust me just like I trusted you when you shut me off. I had complete faith that you would turn me back on just as you said you would.”

“But that just could have been you sensing me telling the truth.”

“I didn’t have that ability until after the procedure Brian.” Robbie felt slightly offended. “And I only used it on Sophie because I had to be sure she was with us. I’ve always trusted you and I always will.”

“But what if I told you that I needed to shut you down for good? Would you let me do that?”

Without hesitation Robbie took both Brian’s hands in hers. She gazed directly into his eyes.

“As much as I love this wonderful gift you’ve given me...” Robbie glanced away for a moment and cleared her throat. She then turned back to Donovan. “Yes Brian... I would let you do that without question.”

“But why...? Why would you allow me to kill you?”

“Isn’t that what trust is about? If you believe that I’m no longer worthy of life, who am I to not believe you?”

Donovan was stunned. Robbie was far more than simply a salient being; a true life form. And what person would allow another to kill them...willingly? He suddenly felt an even more awesome responsibility toward Robbie even though she was far more capable of caring for herself than he was in caring for her.

“I don’t understand.”

Robbie gazed at Donovan’s hands again. She gently rubbed her thumbs over his knuckles. Her mind was screaming at her to jump up and shout; ‘Because I love you stupid!!!’ It took every processor in her body to resist the urge. ‘Being a salient sucks big time’ she thought.

“Brian...” She looked up at Donovan. “If you wanted to shut me down I would do it myself. I believe in you with all that I am.”

Donovan stared at her. He couldn’t believe that anyone would possible have that much trust in another person. ‘Another person...?’ What was he thinking? Was she another person after all?

“You’re amazing Robbie.”

“You made me that way.” Robbie turned her head toward the sleeping form of Sophie. “Now she’s truly amazing and neither of us had anything to do with that.”

Donovan stared at Sophie.

“I guess I’ve taken her for granted. But now that you mention it...you’re right. She is amazing.”

“There might always be the question in your mind of whether my loyalty was in fact was a part of your programming...or part of what I designed for myself...or whether it’s simply part of being a salient being. But Sophie...” Robbie glanced back at her. “Sophie’s loyalty is truly something that has grown...naturally?”

Donovan nodded.

“And she is so very beautiful but she spends all of her time here. If you didn’t tell her to go home, she would simply stay.”



“She has...often.”

“Haven’t you ever wondered why? A young female like her should normally be out having the time of her life. There should be males dripping off her. And yet she forgoes all of that. And she’s so very intelligent as well. Not that I’m any judge but I could speak with her for hours. In fact I did.”

Robbie felt Donovan’s heart rate and blood pressure increase. It was working! She even felt the muscles in his fingers contract slightly as he continued to stare at her. Donovan tore his eyes away from Sophie to gaze at Robbie. She noticed that his pulse and heart rate elevated slightly more.

“She is something. I have to admit that.” Donovan chuckled.

They spoke for a while longer. Donovan couldn’t get his mind off the fact that he would spend the rest of an unknown extended life with these two women. He definitely felt an attraction to Robbie. He had from the beginning. But now he also felt one to Sophie. Was it truly possible for him to have his cake and eat it too? Finally he asked the question that had been gnawing at him from the onset of this plan.

“How are all three of us going to walk out of this lab? Somebody is going to say something. And it’s not like we can simply disappear? They’re going to want their technology back.”

“Ideally...once the new vessels are grown, I input your essences and you and Sophie simply walk out of here. After the change of watch of the guards, an explosion will occur that destroys the lab and kills both of the old you. I will simply slip out during the chaos.”

Donovan stared at Robbie.

“You’re going to kill us?” He couldn’t believe what he was hearing.

“If the vessels are not fully developed, I’ve already prepared two canisters of the processors mixed in the conductivity fluid. I will blow up the lab and kill the two old versions of you and Sophie and once again slip out during the madness that ensues. Then I will grow the both of you in a safe haven.”

“But that still involves killing us.”

“The last scenario is that I create an identity and the three of us simply walk out leaving the old versions of you and Sophie in the lab.”

“I can live with that one.” Donovan laughed.

“However, the old versions will probably live out their lives in a prison after being seriously interrogated into telling what happened to their...project?”

“That’s not a viable alternative for sure.” Donovan sounded depressed.

“I’ve already begun to grow a copy of myself with the ‘dumbed down’ processor that they will find usable...but not salient. Everything depends upon how much time they give us. They could walk in any day and close us down.”

“Yeah...” Donovan rubbed his face with his hands. He was growing tired. “I can see where two versions of us would be a problem.”

The buzzer sounded signifying that Sophie’s download was finished. Robbie gazed at her tablet and smiled.

“She took up quite a bit of space as well. The three of us will work wonderfully together.”

Donovan got up and began to loosen the matting on Sophie’s head. He gazed down at her and ran the back of his hand along her cheek. Her skin was so very pale and smooth. And her lips were so inviting. He’d never seen her before like this. Her face looked so...dramatic. His gaze was not lost on Robbie and she smiled.

Sophie began to stir after a few minutes and her eyes opened to see Donovan smiling down at her. He smiled back and brushed a lock of her hair back into place.

“How are you feeling?”

“Rested actually...” Sophie began to sit up and Donovan and Robbie assisted her. She gazed at Robbie. “It’s done?”

“Yes...” Robbie smiled back at her. “It’s done.”



**“Oh...! You’ve got to be kidding me!”**

Robbie just explained the scenarios to Sophie. None of them played well with her. They all seemed to end badly for her. They all sat in a circle to reaffirm what the end result was to be. Suddenly Robbie sat straight up in her chair.

“They’ve just detected an anomaly in the system.”

Robbie sat completely still as if listening to a tune. Donovan and Sophie exchanged worried glances.

“Have we been discovered?” Sophie was very anxious.

“No... Not yet...” Robbie smiled at them. “But it won’t be long. We may have several more days at the most. They’re not that stupid and if they find several more...anomalies...they’ll begin to seriously look at us.”

“Then we must assume that we have no time left.” Donovan spoke to Sophie. “Regardless of what occurs, Robbie can take care of herself.”

“I’m not going anywhere without the two of you. And I’d rather have you both completed than merely a pair of files on my tablet.”

“Then let’s have at it.”

Donovan got up from his seat and was followed by Sophie. Robbie simply spun around to her console and began her input.

“By the way... Where are you hiding the...vessels?” Donovan asked as he scratched his head and smiled.

“Oh...” Robbie giggled. “In stores of course... Only deliveries come in and only we remove inventory.”

Donovan chuckled and went to his console to begin his part of the tasks at hand. As Sophie walked past him to enter his office, Donovan felt compelled to compliment her.

“I must admit I’ve never seen you look so...beautiful.”

Sophie blushed and smiled demurely. ‘He’s finally noticed’ she thought. That was the second time Donovan’s complimented her and she bathed in the glow of his recognition. Sophie felt so very susceptible to both Donovan and Robbie’s compliments. She sat down and took a minute or two to think about how spending an infinite amount of time with them might be.

In truth Sophie couldn’t wait to have her essence rehoused in a new and virtually indestructible body; a body she would have complete control over. Her fingers began to fly over the keyboard and the virtual display. There was so much to do and yet she felt so full of energy and confidence in her abilities.

**“H**ow are you going to create the diversion?”

Donovan was curious. That was the only part of the Robbie’s plan they truly hadn’t discussed. They had taken a dinner break. The two trays came down on schedule and Sophie had brought them in.

“I’m going to blow up the lab...everything actually.” Robbie giggled.

“And how will you accomplish this?”

“The nitrous oxide tank is in the storage room. It will develop a leak and mix with aerated hydro carbon compounds. A simple spark should be all that’s required to ignite the mixture.”

“What will you use as the ignition system?”

“Myself...” Robbie chuckled at the concerned stares from Sophie and Donovan. “Or should I say my dumbed down version? Ideally...?” They both sighed in relief. “But if it comes to it, I will detonate the blast.”

“Surely you can’t be serious!” Sophie looked quite upset.

“I am serious and don’t call me Shirley.” Robbie giggled. “You needn’t worry. I can withstand the blast now. And any repairs that need to be made shouldn’t be a problem. As long as my central processing array is intact, I can self-repair. I’ve also collected enough metal structural parts to satisfy anyone that I perished in the blast along with the two of you.”

“And after that we’re free.” Sophie smiled.

“All we need do is walk into the storage room and wait for the gas to knock us out.”

“That’s the plan Brian.” Robbie smiled. “As I said before, it is already too late for them. What I have stored on my pad is also stored up here.” Robbie pointed toward her head. “So regardless of what happens, the both of you will survive and be restored in a better and far more durable form.”

“How long till our vessels are ready...?”



**”Too long I’m afraid... If we only had time...”**

Sophie sounded exasperated as she glanced up at Donovan from her console. He nodded to her.

“I feel like each moment is another chance for them to try to stop us.” Her gaze dropped to the read outs. “It’ll be at least another day...maybe even longer.”

Donovan placed his hand upon her shoulder. There was nothing any of them could do right then except to sit and wait and monitor the progress. They were tired after being virtually locked

away in the lab for over three days. Donovan left his office free for the ladies to use as their rest area.

Both he and Sophie had no more clean clothing and they had to resort to wearing the surgical scrubs stored in the operating area. Robbie didn't perspire but her clothing was wrinkled and she too joined the others in using the scrubs.

Showering was a new experience for Robbie and she enjoyed it fully. The sensation of the hot water streaming down over her body was thrilling. And the fragrance of the soaps and shampoos delighted her. The waiting period also gave Robbie, with Sophie's help, a chance to try a new hair style.

Sophie worked on Robbie in the privacy of the operating room. Since Robbie would have no further need for that area, neither lady was very concerned about sterilization protocols. Sophie's steady hands, her acute eye for style coupled with a good supply of surgical scissors changed Robbie's look dramatically. Both were eager to see Donovan's reaction.



**”Do you like my hair this way Brian?”**

Donovan stood and gawked...actually gawked at Robbie. He thought the new style was amazing as it seemed to frame her face in a golden red light. And the cosmetic color array that she used, feeling confident enough to test her own skills at application, only added to the effect of golden light.

When he finally was able to collect his thoughts in a cogent manner, Donovan walked up to her and grasped her hand in his. He gazed down into her eyes.

“Every time I look at you ...you seem to be more beautiful than I can recall.” Donovan then put his other hand over both their hands. “I can't believe I feel the way I do about you.”

At that very moment he was leaning in to kiss her, three major distractions occurred. The lights in the lab flickered. The telemetry monitoring the vessels went dark. And the screen display indicated an incoming call from upstairs. The image of Jane appeared on the monitor.

“We need to see you immediately Brian.” She was not happy.

“Does this concern my black out?” Donovan wasn't happy either.

“That...and more... And do bring your...salient being.” Jane spit out the last two words.

The image vanished and Donovan turned to look at his team. Sophie seemed shocked and quite upset. Robbie, however, smiled.

“What...” Donovan was stunned and couldn’t image why Robbie seemed happy.

“This is not unexpected.” Robbie grinned. “I didn’t think we could get away with this totally unscathed. They will undoubtedly want everything beginning with me.”

“Faaaaahhhhk!” Donovan slammed his hand down on a table top.

“Don’t worry Brian.” Robbie smiled sympathetically. “They won’t have anything of value. I erased all the data regarding the new processor and left only the dumbed down version.”

“What good is that? They have you!” Donovan’s anger was still very apparent.

“Oh do they...?”

Robbie giggled as she walked into Donovan’s office. She returned with a sample of the alloy used for her skeletal structure. With only two fingers she wrapped the metal into a circle. Both Donovan and Sophie were shocked. Neither had bothered to test Robbie’s strength. They only knew she possessed unusual power.

“They can’t hold me if I choose not to be held. And the beauty is that you can both quit and save us from making a mess of this facility.”

“But they’ll have the old samples of the processor.”

“Do you really think they’ll check any of your work? They won’t until they discover that the next generation is actually a throwback. And as of now, they think the processor I’m composed of is the latest generation but it’s not. I’m already the next generation. Either way they will lose.” Robbie giggled.

Robbie’s predictions were not of any consolation as she and Donovan ascended up to the top floor and the all too familiar conference room. Donovan held the door open and let Robbie precede him. The chairman and Jane were already sitting in their usual places. Donovan sat first and Robbie sat next to him.

“Well...” The chairman stared intensely at Robbie. “There’s been a marked change in your appearance.”

“Do you approve?” Robbie smiled coyly and adjusted her bangs.

“Indeed...” The chairman chuckled.

“We’ve detected a marked increase in the electrical usage of your lab Brian.” Jane smiled wryly. “Can you explain this? And can you explain why we couldn’t detect the usage on our monitors? You see... If we hadn’t by chance taken a look at the mechanical meter reading draw due to a

discrepancy on our billing, we never would have found it.” Jane tapped her finger nails on the table top.

“We’ve been working on developing the next generation of salient beings.” Donovan sat with no expression on his face.

“You see...” Robbie smiled. “Doctor Donovan mentioned that the defense people were quite interested in his work.” The chairman sat upright as did Jane. “Of course developing new prosthetics for the wounded is quite a noble ambition but...” Robbie giggled. “It would be more reasonable to assume they were looking for a more efficient soldier.”

The chairman stared at her in shock. Whilst it wasn’t a far leap to realize this, it was unexpected that any salient being would help develop a more efficient killer of humanity.

“The Doctor would never have gone along with such a thing. He’s told me as much. So I took it upon myself to begin development on my own.” Robbie grinned.

“That’s quite creative of you.” The chairman sat back in his chair as though knocked back. “And where do you stand in your...development?”

“I have initiated the construction of three new vessels to house the new processor. They should be completed within four days.” Robbie giggled again and looked at Jane. “That is if we get the power restored.”

‘Is she actually lying’ thought Donovan. He didn’t think it possible. But then again, Robbie continually seemed to surprise him.

“Tell me Robbie...” Jane gazed ready to carefully measure Robbie’s reaction. “Could you kill for your country?”

“No Jane...” Robbie’s face didn’t change expression. “That is not a part of my program.”

“Could your program be modified?” Jane leaned forward, resting her elbows upon the table.

“No Jane... That is not possible. Each Xeno processor would need to be altered.”

“Could you be taught to kill?” The chairman sat forward again.

“That is unknown sir. It would be cheaper to simply design a salient being that we know could be taught. Perhaps the one I’ve designed would be perfect. It has far less decision making processors and it should prove to be more...aggressive?”

Donovan looked at Robbie in shock. He felt utterly betrayed by his own creation; a creation that he felt something emotional for. He sat staring down at his hands as he felt his entire project slipping away from his grasp and Robbie with it.

“Robbie...”

“Yes sir...”

“Could you finish up this project on your own?”

“No sir...” Robbie didn’t hesitate for a moment. “I would need Doctor Donovan and his assistant for at least two or three days.” Robbie smiled. “After that...? They would not be necessary at all.”

Both Jane and the chairman looked at Donovan. Donovan looked at Robbie. He was stunned and shocked by what was freely coming out of Robbie’s mouth. Robbie, without taking her eyes off of the chairman or Jane, reached beneath the table and gently squeezed his hand. ‘How could I’ve been so stupid’ he asked himself. ‘Robbie doesn’t do anything without a plan’ he thought.

Robbie was simply ‘buying’ time to complete the vessels. She didn’t need three or four days. Hers would be ready by tomorrow and Sophie’s and his the day after. She planned to pull this off in spite of what they knew.

“Well...” The chairman got up with a grin on his face. “I suppose that’s all I need to know.”

He turned and left without saying another word and without even gazing back. Jane got up and turned toward Donovan.

“Well... You’ll have your power turned back on. I just hope your...team...” She chuckled. “Can complete what has eluded you.”

Donovan and then Robbie got up and turned to leave the board room. Donovan let Robbie precede him once again. He smiled as he passed Jane.

“I wouldn’t make any long term plans Brian.” Jane snipped at him as he passed.

Donovan had to contain his laughter until they were on the elevator.

## **Epilogue:**

Donovan strode down Clarion Mall. Sophie held onto his left arm and Robbie was on his right. He had come in search of his earliest roots in Cork. But he and his ladies were requested to assist in research at the Institute of Technology in Sligo. All three jumped at the chance to work with their grandchildren and great grandchildren.

The binary lost its meaning. The population of salient beings could switch back and forth as they desired ad nauseam. The form was no longer of importance. It had lost all meaning several generations ago. Only the processor mattered.

And the three had managed to keep just ahead of the explosion in new next generation of processors. He was quite surprised to find Robbie’s original estimates of organic humanity dying out being so very accurate. And, with both Sophie and Robbie breeding the effect was geometric.

Of course Robbie was constantly switching her binary from somewhere betwixt and between to female long enough to gestate that all important fetus. Once the form was removed she would



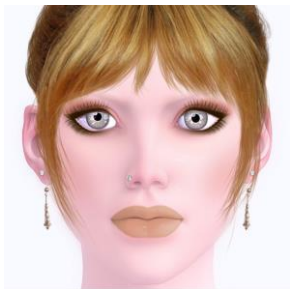
switch back. Donovan and Sophie didn't seem to mind at all. Robbie provided an extra boost to their procreative activities.



**”Brian...? Robbie and I want to breed again.”**

Sophie simply adored being able to gestate up to four times a year. She was constantly in a state of post conception. It seemed to bring an amazing bloom to her cheeks and her processors were constantly tingling and sending strong messages of pleasure to her entire being.

Brian, of course, was more than happy to accommodate the ladies in their desires. The fact that they both would be carrying at the same time always proved to be...interesting; especially since Robbie was currently in the female binary. Donovan thought of how much more beautiful and radiant they appeared during this particular time.



**”Brian... I would like two or three this time.”**

Though together they could be a hand full as well, especially if Robbie wanted triplets, Donovan never tired of their company; nor did they of his.

The salient being population exploded geometrically with the fetuses developing in stasis after three months and a new salient being coming of age within twelve months after. It was rare to find a human being left anywhere. And when they were found, the salient beings would flock to view them in the midst of their natural environment; usually a farm.

But they were a dying breed for so few were left. The ones who hadn't killed one another off began to breed too closely and their gene pool virtually collapsed after three or four generations. Donovan and Sophie were saddened to see this occur. But Robbie smiled. It was now their world and, requiring nothing other than some sand and metallic trace elements, Mother Earth finally began to heal.

And this was merely the...beginning...

This tale is based upon the movie ‘The Machine’. I simply thought of ‘what if...’  
([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Machine\\_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Machine_(film)) )

Two lines of dialogue came from the movie “Alien: The Resurrection”. The character so brilliantly portrayed by Dan Hedaya says: “It has memories; why does it have memories?!”

The art work was done on an iPad using Modiface Photo Editor, MakeUp, Makeup Touch, and Morfo Booth. The original pictures were glammed off the web.