



Noccio

by

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B. Lou Ferry stepped back and studied his creation thoughtfully. After some moments, he breathed a deep sigh of contentment. “Perfection,” he announced. “Absolute perfection.”

Stepping around behind his creation, he pressed the hidden activation button that looked like a small mole near his spine. Immediately, Noccio began to breathe, as if he were truly alive.

Ferry frowned at that thought, realizing that he wasn't *absolute* perfection if he *wasn't* a real man. Moving around in front of Noccio once more, he looked up at him. Noccio instantly responded by looking back.

"How do you feel?" Ferry asked him.

Noccio's expression remained as it was. Instead of frowning in thoughtfulness, he stared blankly ahead. Finally, he asked without inflection, "Feel?"

Ferry frowned. "You're a perfect marriage of biological and electronic mechanical technology. You're more human than robot ... at least physically. I've even programmed artificial intelligence into you ... and yet you don't understand what I mean when I ask how you feel? Can you give me the definition of feel?"

"Feel. To perceive by the touch. To handle. To be sensitive to. To experience emotionally. To have an intuitive awareness of. To be moved emotionally," the cyborg, Noccio recited mechanically.

Ferry gripped his hair agitatedly. "There is *no* emotion in you!"

Noccio turned and looked at him. Lifting his hands, he grasped the hair on either side of his head.

Ferry stared at him a long moment, and then angrily stamped his foot. "It isn't enough to mimic emotion. You should *feel* it."

Noccio merely stared at him. "I do not find this in my programming."

Ferry sighed deeply and began to pace, muttering to himself. He might as well be a garbage can. "After all the time I've spent working on

him. After all the great care. He's nothing at all but a biological machine. I don't understand it. I just don't understand it."

Noccio watched him as he paced back and forth. "You are dissatisfied with my performance?"

"I feel like *weeping* at your performance," Ferry cried, pulling his hair again. "Don't you *wish* to be human? To be a man and not a machine?"

Again, Noccio merely stared at him for several moments. Finally, with every appearance of a great deal of effort, he frowned. "Yes," he said.

Ferry stopped abruptly, staring at his creation. Ever so faintly, a spark of hope flickered. "You felt that?"

Noccio managed another frown. It seemed to come easier to him this time. "I believe it is something I wish."

This time, it was Ferry who stared at Noccio for long moments. Slowly, a smile curled his lips. "You wish ... You must learn it. *That's* the problem."

"I do not understand," Noccio said.

Ferry smiled at him. "I have put everything into you that you need to be a real man. You must go out into the world and learn to feel in order to reach your full potential. Come, I will take you out into the world. I will give you one week to learn. If you wish to become a real man, you must try to understand what emotion is. You must experience it. You must feel. If you cannot learn it, then, when you return, you will merely be a biological machine and nothing more."

Turning, he gestured for Noccio to follow him and left his laboratory. Climbing into his hovercraft, Ferry ordered the computer to take them to the edge of the city. There he set the craft down and told Noccio to get out.

Noccio stepped out, because he was ordered to do so. The door closed. The hovercraft rose. And Noccio watched it until it disappeared from sight.

Time passed, but Noccio had no real concept of time. He remained as he was, watching the point where the craft had disappeared from view. Slowly it grew dark, and he could no longer see, and still he stood, watching, waiting for his creator to return.

When the star rose once more to brighten the sky, he decided that Ferry expected him to carry out the orders that he had given him. He tabulated for some time, but the instructions simply did not make sense to him. Finally, he decided to go in search of Ferry.

He began to walk. And as he did so, he looked around, recording the sights and sounds around him. He had been walking for much of the day when he finally computed that the sights and sounds belonged to life.

Frowning, he stopped, looked around. He realized then that he was low on energy. There did not seem to be anything around that he could consume for energy, so he decided to sit down and conserve what he had left.

* * * *

Marina Torez landed her hovercraft on the landing pad and got out, planting her hands on her hips as she stared at the man sitting on her curb, trying to figure out what he was doing there. From her position, she could see he was dressed in a uniform of some type—a navy jumpsuit. But she hadn't ordered any work to be done, and if he was there for repairs or county maintenance, surely he would have approached by now? For that matter, he had no tools of any description beside him, and looking in each direction down the street, she saw no work vehicles. Puzzled, she studied him, and for five minutes, waited for him to turn around and announce what he was doing there. He didn't so much as twitch.

“Hey,” she called. He didn't respond. He sat there for all the world like a statue. If his trimmed sandy brown hair hadn't been blowing in the slight breeze, she might've thought he was one—if she was half-blind.

Marina walked down her lawn, moving in a wide circle until she stopped in front of him.

He slowly looked up at her, his face devoid of expression.

Were it not for that, he would be devastatingly handsome. His eyes were a warm brown, his brows a dark blond. His nose was perfectly straight, and his jaw was squared with a shallow cleft marring his chin. His lips were thin, but had just enough fullness to be exciting but not womanly. Examining each feature individually, she saw that they were classic, almost average, but there was just something about the combination of his features

that made him attractive enough to catch the eye—completely intriguing and totally masculine.

Marina swept away the strange turn of her thoughts. It wasn't her habit to ogle men on the side of the road—those were usually prisoners. “Hey,” she said again.

He frowned up at her. “Hay is for horses and other livestock.”

A giggle erupted from her. Marina clamped a hand over her mouth with a muffled snort.

He frowned again, his brow furrowing with confusion. “This is humorous?”

She swallowed her laughter, shrugging, and hooking her thumbs in her pants pockets. “It's just not something I'd expect a guy like you to say. What are you doing here?”

“I am conserving energy.”

Marina frowned. “Is there something wrong with you?”

“My energy levels have depleted. I must conserve so I can find my creator.”

Oh. One of them. And here she'd thought ... well, it didn't really matter now what she thought. Poor thing. She wondered how long he'd been lost. “What's your creator's name?”

“I do not know.”

“Can you tell me your name and serial number?”

“My name is Noccio. I have no serial number.”

Great. That wasn't much help.

She debated on going inside and calling the CLMR—the Center for Lost or Misplaced Robots—but she knew they had a habit 'losing' newer models for a price. And he was definitely a new model. She'd never seen a robot look and sound so *human*. If not for his lack of common sense, she'd have never known the difference. As it was, he seemed more like a man who'd lost his memory than a robot.

Still, the CLMR seemed like a poor choice of options. She'd heard of workers taking bots to the chop shop and selling pieces on the black market. All speculation of course. Government offices underwent rigorous procedures to weed out criminals from their midst, but she'd heard enough stories to have a healthy suspicion of most government agencies, especially those that could easily profit off of lost property. The thought of poor Noccio being stuck in that place made her shudder. Not that it should matter to him, but she wasn't comfortable with it herself, so that was that.

She couldn't call the CLMR.

It could be his master—creator—was looking for him even now. If she moved him, he might never find his bot. Finally, she decided not to do anything. "Okay, I'm going in now. You wait here until your creator comes, okay?" she said, smiling at him.

He smiled back at her, but it didn't quite reach his eyes. "Yes, mistress."

She was preparing dinner when it occurred to her that he'd said he was very low on energy. She looked out the window at him, studying his rigid back in the gathering gloom as darkness began to fall. Finally, feeling more than a little ridiculous, she turned, removed the food from the oven, set it aside and left the house.

Squatting down in front of him, she looked him over. "What sort of energy do you need?"

He frowned. After a moment, he began uttering a list.

Laughing, Marina held up her hand. "I'm afraid I don't have all of that. From what I understand though, you derive energy from food, though, right?"

He considered it. "Yes. My internal biological mechanics are designed to break these materials down and convert them into energy."

"Come on, then. It looks like you're going to be waiting awhile and I can't eat knowing you're sitting out here hungry."

He stood up, but frowned. "It distresses you that I seem to suffer?"

Marina caught his hand, tugging on him. He tilted his head curiously, but after a moment, he gave in to her pull and followed her. "Yes. It distresses me."

"Why?"

"Because my stomach hurts when I'm hungry. I figure yours must too."

“This is pain? A warning that the biological mechanics are in danger of running low on energy?”

Marina stopped. “It doesn’t hurt?”

“I believe it does,” he responded, sounding surprised.

She laughed, tugging him toward the house again.

“What is this sound you make?” he asked as she led him into the kitchen and guided him toward a chair.

“Laughter?”

“That is laugh?”

Marina, beginning to feel self-conscious, sat across from him. “It makes me feel good to laugh ... and I think you’re cute. I don’t know who created you, but you’re absolutely adorable.”

He tilted his head. “It makes a pleasant feeling in me also. Why?”

Marina lifted her brows. “Because you were made that way?” she guessed.

“You were made that way?”

She snickered, but focused on filling his plate. “You could say that. I am completely biological, however—I was born, not created in a lab.”

He stared down at the food for several moments, then finally picked up the fork beside the plate and stabbed it into the food. Lifting it toward his face, he studied it carefully for several moments and finally opened his mouth and placed the food inside.

A strange expression contorted his features when his mouth closed on the food. He looked like he might be dying. Alarm went through her. “Is something wrong?” she gasped.

“Tastes good,” he said thickly.

She looked at him doubtfully. “I’m glad you like it. You haven’t had any before?”

He thought it over. “No. My creator put tubes into me.”

Marina looked at him sympathetically. “Poor baby!”

He didn’t seem to notice the remark. His entire focus seemed to be on the food. Shrugging, Marina ate her own dinner. “So, how did you get separated from your creator?” she asked when he’d cleaned his plate.

“He told me I must learn to feel so that I can become a real man. He was not pleased with my performance when he activated me. I am not perfect. I have been given artificial intelligence, and biological mechanics so that I can be a real man, but I must learn.”

Marina propped her elbow on the table, studying him. The comment produced some surprisingly intriguing fantasies in her mind. “Sooo—what you’re saying is that he sent you out to learn on your own?”

“I believe that that was the command, yes.”

“Then, there really isn’t much point in sitting out on the curb, is there? I mean, it doesn’t sound to me as if he’s planning on coming back for you—not anytime soon, anyway.”

“I am to have a week. If I can not learn to be a real man in a week, then I will only be a machine.” He stopped abruptly, seemed to consider something and then spoke again. “I have a malfunction. My energy levels should be restored, but they do not seem to be.

Marina puzzled over it. Things would be so much easier if she were more mechanically inclined. “I’m sorry. I just don’t understand you. You’re not ... uh ... hungry?”

“No.”

“Hmmm. Tired?”

He frowned, appearing to think it over a long moment. Marina was struck by how life-like he was, thinking.

“Yes. I believe this is the reason for the discrepancy in my energy output.”

He was making her head hurt. “Okay, can you start talking in normal, human speech? Just say, I’m tired when you feel like this, okay? Nod your head if you understand.”

“I must learn your speech patterns?”

“Yes. This stilted, mechanical way of talking is part of the problem. Real people, real men, allow the way they feel to come out when they talk.”

“I do not compute this.”

“Frightened, angry, excited, sad, happy—emotion!”

“I am tired.”

“No!”

“Weary?”

“Never mind,” Marina said irritably and stood up. “I’m tired too, but this mess has to be cleaned up. So—first you help me, and then I’ll let you rest.”

He stood up, nodded, and watched her, copying every move she made, following her step for step. After bumping into him the third time, Marina gave him a look of irritation. Both of his brows rose in an imitation of surprise. She shook her head, resisting the urge to smile.

“Come on, Noccio. I’ve only got one bed. We’ll have to share.”

She stopped abruptly when she got to the bedroom. “I keep forgetting you’re not human. How much do you weigh?”

“Two hundred,” he supplied promptly.

“That light? You really must be cutting edge--the bed should hold you then.”

When she gestured toward the bed, he sat on the edge and then turned and lay down, completely clothed, shoes and all. Breathing a gusty sigh, Marina tugged his shoes and socks off and tossed them aside. Taking his hand, she urged him up once more. When he was standing beside the bed, she examined the suit he was wearing and finally found the release. He watched her with a faint expression of confusion while she pulled his clothes off.

She was a little stunned when she discovered that he was completely anatomically correct. “Your creator wasn’t kidding about you being a real man,” she murmured. “You’ve got the plumbing too.”

He studied her a moment, his head tilted to one side, and then reached for the fastening to her clothing. “What are you doing?” she asked, startled.

He stopped, frowning. “This is not how this is done?”

Marina bit her, realizing he was mimicking her. She couldn’t help but wonder, though, what he’d think of the female anatomy. She shrugged. “Go ahead.”

When he’d finished stripping her clothes off, he looked her up and down. Then, his head tilting in that attitude of curiosity, he walked all the way around her. To her surprise, as innocent as his curiosity was, she felt both nervous and warm in a very sensual way when he’d made the circuit and stopped before her again.

Without a word, he lifted both hands and grasped a breast in each, squeezing them experimentally. “What purpose do these serve?”

She gasped, but resisted the urge to jump back. “It’s mammary glands.”

His gaze went blank while he thought that over. “You have young?”

She smiled. “No. But women have them all the time, whether they need them for the purpose they were intended, or not. They’re sensitive, so in the sexual act between a man and woman, the man—if he’s smart—stimulates the sensors in the breasts and it makes a woman--feel good.”

He computed that. “Why does he do that?”

Marina was starting to feel uncomfortable about his hold on her breasts. “Because he can enjoy sex even more if the woman enjoys it too.”

Finally, he released her breasts, squatted down and examined her genitals. “This is different also.”

“Yes, it is,” she said, stepping back when he reached for her.

He tilted his head at her. “I was not through looking.”

“You’re much too interested for my comfort,” she said, chuckling. “Get in the bed.”

He stood up. “I would like to examine it more, please.”

She yawned, stretching. “Not tonight. I’m tired.”

Switching off the lights, she climbed in the bed, fluffed her pillow and pulled the covers up. For a long time, he merely stood by the bed, staring down at her. Finally, he climbed into the bed on the opposite side and lay down.

Marina feigned sleep until she decided he had settled into sleep mode. Finally, she relaxed, wondering if she’d done the right thing by bringing him into her home. He just seemed so ... lifelike and at the same time so innocent and vulnerable that she hadn’t been able to resist.

As she lay beside him she realized that she felt like she was lying in bed with a human, not a machine. If she hadn’t known better, she’d swear he was breathing. Cyborgs didn’t breathe. They didn’t have lungs.

Wondering if she was just imagining things, she held her breath, listening, hearing the shallow, even breath move in and out of his chest. The hair stood up on the back of her neck.

She came up on one elbow, staring at his chest, hard. It was moving!

After a few moments, she settled back, wondering if his creator had told him the truth about himself. She was sure Noccio wouldn't be able to lie—she thought he wouldn't. Androids weren't programmed for it—so she knew he'd told her what he believed to be true, but it seemed too fantastic to be believable.

On the other hand, he did seem to be learning. He was curious. He'd actually seemed to enjoy the food she'd given him. He could've been mimicking someone enjoying food, but she didn't think so.

Besides, he'd initiated his inspection of her himself. She'd undressed him and she knew he'd been imitating her when he'd decided to undress her, but afterward, once he had undressed her, he'd immediately assessed that they were different and the difference had made him very curious.

Yawning, she finally turned over and went to sleep.

Hands on her ankles sent a jolt of alarm like an ambulance siren through her subconscious, lifting her from sleep to jolting awareness so fast her brain didn't really awaken. Opening her eyes to bright sunlight filtering in the room, Marina's eyes immediately filled with tears. She blinked, squinted and finally made out the blurry shape of a man's head and shoulders at the foot of the bed. "Noccio?"

“Yes?”

Releasing a gusty sigh that was part relief, part irritation, she settled back, closing her eyes and immediately, almost, drifted away again. Her legs were lifted straight and parted abruptly. She grunted as her inner thighs protested. “Wha’re you doing?”

“Looking.”

“Oh,” she muttered sleepily.

He released her legs and they dropped to the bed. Before she could breath a sigh of relief, a very large finger was rammed unceremoniously into her pussy. Her eyes opened like saucers and filled with tears again. Her reflexive instinct was to close her legs, but the effort seemed to go unnoticed.

“Is this the hole designed for my genitalia?”

Blinking, she managed to lift her head, feeling mixed signals coming from the sensitive nerves in her pussy, alternating stabs of delight and discomfort. Slowly, Noccio came into focus. His head was between her legs about a foot from her pussy. “Wha’?”

The finger was moved around experimentally, sending more powerful jolts of pleasure through her. An involuntary groan worked its way up her throat. “Stop!”

He withdrew the finger. Before she managed a sigh of relief, the finger began flicking back and forth across her clit. “What is this for?”

“Ohhhhhhhhhh!”

The flicking stopped and his head bobbed up. “This causes pain?”

Marina licked her lips, trying to catch her breath. “No,” she said shakily.

He flicked it a couple more times experimentally and, despite all she could do, another moan of pleasure escaped her. The finger was then dragged down her cleft to the mouth of her vagina and inserted again. “This produces an excretion.”

Marina’s cheeks flooded with color. “All right. The biology lesson is over, Noccio. Stop! Right now!”

She thought for several unnerving moments that he was going to ignore the command. Finally, he removed his finger and sat up. Dragging herself up the bed, Marina put her legs together and pulled the covers over herself, glaring at him. “Before you start getting any wild ideas about learning anything more, we need to get one thing straight. I don’t know if you’ve been programmed to perform as a pleasure droid or not, but I don’t fuck machines ... only real men.”

He frowned, tilting his head to one side while he studied her face and then the cover over her lower body. “I am a real man.”

His cock stood erect, doubling in size. Marina stared at it in surprise. Finally, she dragged her gaze from it. “You are a cyborg. And that’s only one step up from a droid.”

“I am a real man,” he insisted.

His cock thickened and grew another two inches. It took an effort of will to drag her gaze from it.

“You are NOT a real man!” Marian said more forcefully. “You will nev--” She broke off. She didn’t really believe she could hurt his feelings, but she felt mean to say such a thing anyway. “Never mind. Let’s just say you’re not my type.”

His cock went flaccid, as if she’d wounded his ego. “What is type?”

Marina yawned and stretched. She wanted nothing so much as to roll over and go back to sleep, but she had to get to work. “Never mind. You wouldn’t understand if I tried to explain it.” Rolling out of bed, she left him and staggered into the bathroom, her eyes half closed.

She was relieving her bladder when he grasped her knees and parted them. “What are you doing now?”

“I’m going to clobber you if you don’t stop studying me!” she said indignantly.

He was crouched in front of her, but at that, he looked up. “Why?”

Marina sighed. “I’m relieving my bladder. Real people have to.”

He was still computing that when she pushed him out of the way and climbed into the shower. “This is the discomfort in the lower area of the torso?”

Marina ignored him. After a moment, she heard the distinct sound of gushing water. Startled, she peered out of the shower, gaped at him a moment in surprise and then ducked back into the shower. She wouldn’t

have guessed he was *that* anatomically correct! What had his creator been thinking?

She'd just begun to relax again when he stepped into the shower with her.

“Out!”

He climbed out again, but stood just outside, watching every move she made. Marina glared at him. He was starting to get on her nerves!

By the time she'd gotten dressed, she was beginning to feel ashamed of herself for her impatience. Like a child, the whole world was new to him. There was no room for doubt that he'd been given artificial intelligence. His curiosity was a clear indication that he had and, like any clever child, he was investigating everything around him. She sat on the bed and watched as he dried himself, missing almost as much as he got.

Finally, she got up, took the towel and finished drying him. She watched critically as he dressed himself, but he didn't seem to have a problem with it. “I should pick you up a couple of changes of clothing. If it's going to be at least a week before your creator comes back, you don't want to wear the same thing every day.”

Patting him on the back affectionately, she gathered her briefcase and headed out the door. He followed her. Tossing the briefcase in the seat of the hovercraft, she escorted him back into the house, led him toward the couch in her living room, and told him to sit. After turning on the videocom, she showed him how to use the controller and handed it to him.

“I have to go to work, and you can’t come. You can entertain yourself with the videos, look around the house ... or the yard, if you like. If you get hungry ... feel the need for energy, help yourself to whatever you like in the refrigerator.... Just don’t eat too much. It’ll give you a stomach ache.”

He stared at her throughout the monologue, blinking, looking around, studying the controller. He looked so lifelike it sent a shiver along her spine. It was getting to be really hard reminding herself that he wasn’t a real man.

“Did you understand?”

“Yes. I must stay here.”

She ruffled his hair, smiling at him. “Good. I’ll be back this afternoon,” she finished, patting him on the cheek.

She found herself worrying about him while she tried to work. Finally, when her lunch break rolled around, she called the house. The transmitter rang and rang. She’d just decided to give up, when the screen lit up. Noccio stared at her, his brows lifting in surprise. “Marina.”

She smiled. “Everything okay?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll be home about five.”

He nodded and the screen went blank.

Shrugging, Marina ate her lunch and returned to work. She couldn’t help but be a little uneasy about leaving him alone in the house all day, but

he seemed to be all right. Finally, she dismissed it, but the uneasiness returned when she headed for home.

Food smells assaulted her the moment she opened the door, most of it the smell of burned or scorched food. Overlying it, however, was a much more welcome smell. Dropping her briefcase, she followed the smells to the kitchen, halting abruptly on the threshold.

The kitchen looked like a disaster area. Noccio was standing at the range. He turned when he heard her gasp. "I have cooked."

"From the looks of it, everything in the kitchen."

A look of surprise ran over his features. He turned, looking around the kitchen. "The first attempts were not successful," he said finally.

"So I gathered. The kitchen's a mess!"

"I will clean it."

"Yes! You will!" Marina said tartly and went into her room to change into more comfortable clothes. Noccio followed her. Standing in the doorway, he watched every move she made with patent interest.

"I like the female body," he said.

Marina looked at him in surprise for several moments, then chuckled. "It looks like you've got that part about being a real man figured out. Just for future reference, though, that's too ambiguous a statement to make to a woman who's just undressed in front of you."

"I like your body."

She smiled. "You are a clever fellow."

“It makes this body feel strange things when I look at you.”

She couldn't help but blush. “A compliment is always nice,” she said dismissively.

He tilted his head. “A compliment is a polite lie, is it not?”

“Not always. Maybe sometimes, but a person can usually tell when it's a polite lie and then it doesn't make them feel good. If you want to make somebody feel good, you compliment them on things you admire that are true.”

He thought it over. “It was true. Why does it do that?”

Marina frowned. “I don't honestly know. If you were a real man, I'd say it was because you were physically attracted to me.”

“I am a real man.”

The moment the words were out of his mouth, Marina's gaze went right to his crotch. Sure enough, the erection was there. “How do you do that?”

He followed her gaze. “I do not know. It happens.”

“When you lie.”

“I am not programmed to lie.”

Marina thought for several moments his cock was going to burst the seams of his jumpsuit. Unable to take her eyes off of it, she said, “I thought you told me you had artificial intelligence?”

“I do.”

The erection went down. This time, however, it did not vanish. His cock merely shrank back to a more normal size. Fascinated, Marina searched her mind for another question. “Are you a virgin?”

He thought about it for several moments. “No.”

His cock swelled again, and Marina was torn between amusement and ... she hated to admit it, interest. “I think you are a virgin.”

“No.”

Again it grew in girth and length.

She was tempted to see just how big it could get, but she decided she’d ‘played’ with it enough. “Never mind. I doubt your creator expected you to learn anything about sex when he told you to go out and learn.”

“I am supposed to learn to be a real man.”

Marina stared at him a long moment, but as tempting as it was to pursue the matter, she couldn’t get around the fact that he wasn’t, in truth, a real man. “Sorry. You’ll have to learn that part somewhere else. What else did you learn today?”

He frowned. “I prepared a meal for us.”

“I saw that.”

“Why can I not learn that part from you?”

“I already told you why.”

He frowned, looking displeased, disappointed, and thoughtful at the same time. Finally, he seemed to dismiss it. “Come. The food will not be good if it cools too long.”

To Marina's surprise and pleasure, she saw that he actually had prepared a tempting meal. Apparently, as he'd said, it had taken some trial and error, but he'd figured it out. Taking a seat at the table, she tasted the food cautiously. "Hey! This is really good!"

He smiled. Marina stared at him. For the first time, instead of a mechanic reflection of her own smile, she saw that he actually looked genuinely pleased. The smile, instead of being a slight curling of his lips, seemed to light his entire face, making his eyes sparkle. "You are ... so handsome when you smile like that!" she said before she thought better of it.

"Thank you."

After a moment, she returned her attention to her food. "What else did you learn today?"

He frowned. "I studied emotional drama on the videocom. I am still confused."

Marina chuckled. "You watched soap operas? I can imagine. You do realize that that is just acting? And not very good acting a lot of the time."

"Acting?"

"They pretend to feel things they don't actually feel. It's like you do. I smile. You smile. I frown. You frown. You don't actually feel anything. You're just copying what you see."

He frowned, obviously computing what she'd said. "I am designed to feel. I have both biological sensors and electronic sensors. My biological sensors function precisely the same as...."

"A real man?" Marina asked gently. He blushed. Marina nearly fell out of her chair.

Rising abruptly, he left her at the table and went back into the kitchen. In a few moments, Marina heard the clatter of pots and pans and the rush of water. If she hadn't known better, she'd think she'd hurt his feelings. She tried to dismiss it and finish her meal, but found that her appetite had abandoned her. Finally, she got up and moved to the kitchen door, peering inside. He was moving around the room with an expression of anger on his features, snatching pots up, dumping the contents into the garbage can and then slamming the pots in the sink.

She studied his stiff back for several moments. "Hey! I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ... uh ... hurt your feelings."

He stopped and turned to look at her. "I am not a man. I do not have feelings to hurt. I am only imitating an exhibit of anger."

Marina was more than a little taken aback. She studied his face carefully, but it was completely expressionless now. "Because I said something that required that response?" she asked hesitantly.

"Yes."

She should have been relieved. Instead, she felt a strange sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach and the certainty that he was lying. She

had hurt his feelings. He was trying to pretend she hadn't—which was so truly human in nature that she felt disoriented for several moments. “Even if it didn't really hurt your feelings, I'm still sorry.”

He nodded, forced a mechanical smile and returned his attention to cleaning the kitchen. After a while, Marina gave up and left. She discovered when she went into the living room to relax in front of the videocom that she couldn't find anything she was interested in watching. She watched a news program for a while, listening to the sounds coming from the kitchen and finally began flipping through the channels again.

She never watched the soaps. She didn't know why she paused the videocom on one, but she watched the couple fucking each other silly all over the set's living room for many moments. It wasn't terribly good acting, but she found herself becoming aroused as she watched them wrestle, pant and thrust.

How long had it been since she'd indulged in a purely carnal relationship, she wondered?

Obviously too long if she could respond to an android.

Flipping to another channel impatiently, she decided it was high time she put herself back into circulation. She could afford it. She'd just been too caught up in work to realize she was in need of a good lay. Shrugging, she turned off the videocom and went into her room. Turning on the transmitter, she looked up several dating services and went through the clips for a couple of hours. There were plenty of men currently available, but

somehow she just couldn't seem to find one that appealed to her enough to make a selection. Finally, deciding it was just too late to call one over, she turned the transmitter off and got up to get ready for bed.

The kitchen had grown quiet some time ago, she realized when she returned to her room. She could hear voices from the living room and realized Noccio had gone back to watching the soaps. Shrugging, she went to bed. She found, however, that sleep eluded her and after a while she got up again, went into the bathroom and popped a sleeping pill.

She was out like a light almost the moment her head hit the pillows.

* * * *

Noccio settled on the couch and studied the drama playing out on the videocom. He found that strange sensations were still circulating inside of him. He'd identified them as anger and hurt, but Marina had said they were not. He wondered if she was right, and, if she was, why he felt—not right.

Finally, deciding he could not correctly compute the input, he looked down at the control. There were many channels, but Marina had programmed three as her preferred channels to watch. He had no interest in the program he had been staring at, but not really watching. Depressing the button, he looked at the videocom again. Two men were performing sexual acts on a woman. He studied them, leaning forward so that he could catch every expression and every movement. As he watched, he realized that his heart had begun to beat faster. His chest felt tight and he had to breath faster to adjust to the rapidly pumping blood. His penis began to throb and

when he looked down, he saw that it had swollen. Pain and excitement began to surge through him, making him lightheaded.

Uneasy about the extreme nature of the sensations, he flipped to another channel. He had felt similar sensations when he studied Marina, but she had not allowed him to touch her as the men had been touching the woman he watched. He wondered if she allowed him to touch her if he would feel these extreme sensations.

When his heart and breathing slowed to normal, he realized that he was disappointed that he didn't feel the sensations anymore. He hadn't thought that he liked it.

He studied the people on the woman's channel again. They were not doing the same thing that the others had been doing. They had clothes on, but they were touching hands and mouths. After he watched them for a little while, they began to take their clothes off and perform the sexual act with each other.

He studied them very hard. He began to believe that there was a very subtle difference between them. They appeared to be doing much the same things. Even the expressions they made were very similar. The words they used when they spoke were different, he finally decided, but there was more than that. After a while, he realized that the couple on the women's channel seemed to be concentrating on giving pleasure to each other. The people on the other channel were concentrating on their own pleasure.

They appeared to be enjoying themselves—all of them.

He wondered why Marina would not allow him to do this. He was sure he could do everything that they were doing on the videos. Why did it make a difference to her that he had been created instead of born?

Perhaps, if he surprised her she would allow it? She had seemed to enjoy what he'd done before and he hadn't even known how to pleasure her.

After a moment, he turned the videocom off and went into the bedroom. She was sleeping. He undressed and moved to the side of the bed, staring down at her. She was lying on her side, facing the edge of the bed, her mouth open. Recalling what the woman had been doing on the video, he looked down at his penis. It was limp and too short to put it inside her mouth. "Up," he commanded. Nothing happened. He frowned. Maybe that wasn't the correct order? "Erect!" he said more forcefully. It ignored him. Taking his hand, he grasped the end and held it up, thinking it might inflate. Instead, when he let go, it fell again. Catching it in his hand, he tried fluffing it. Sensation began to filter through his nerve endings and the penis filled slightly. He stared at it. Finally, he grasped it and began pumping it up. Within moments, it was hard and standing.

Smiling at his success, he inched closer to the bed and leaned toward her, nudging her lips with it. Her nose wrinkled. She lifted a hand and rubbed her face. He waited until she'd stopped and tried once more. Again, her nose twitched and she swatted the air. Pain lanced through him when her hand came into contact with his swollen member.

* * * *

Something had woken her, but Marina wasn't certain what it was. She'd almost decided it was just her imagination and drifted off again when something tickled her nose. She swatted at it, but it only disappeared for a moment and was back to tickling her again.

She couldn't get her eyes open. It was as if they'd been glued shut. Lifting a hand to her face, she pried one lid up. Something pale and blurry was right beside her nose. She let go of her eyelid and grasped it, intending to push it away. She discovered, however, that it was warm, felt like flesh, moved in her hands....

It was easier to open her eye that time. She pulled back and looked at her hand. One tiny, dark eye was staring back at her. She studied it for several moments before her brain finally kicked into gear, then followed the penis to the possessor of the penis.

Noccio was standing over her, a look of intense concentration on his face. "Wha're you doin'?" she managed.

"The woman on the videocom put one of these in her mouth. She seemed to like it."

Sighing irritably, Marina released his cock and flipped over from her side and onto her back. "I don't care what the woman on the porno channel did, I'm not going to," she muttered. "Go to sleep."

"I wish to give you pleasure," Noccio said, climbing into bed beside her.

"Then let me sleep. That's all the pleasure I want at the moment."

She was just drifting away again when he distracted her.

“Does my body not please you?”

“You’ve got a beautiful body.”

“Does my face not please you?”

“You’ve got a beautiful face, too.”

“Then why am I not your type?”

Marina wrinkled her brow, but it was just too much effort to think.

“You are my type. At least you would be if you were....”

Noccio frowned when she didn’t finish. He looked at her hard, to see if she had just decided not to finish, but he saw that she was asleep again. Sighing, he lay down and tried to figure out what it was that he was not doing correctly. He finally decided that he would just have to keep studying the videos. The woman’s channel was having a romance marathon to celebrate the holiday, Valentine’s Day. Surely one of the videos would explain everything to him.

* * * *

Marina was tired when she parked her hovercraft in her drive the following evening. She shouldn’t have been. She’d taken a sleeping pill the night before and slept like a log—except for a couple of really strange dreams. She supposed, though, that it was the damned pills. She didn’t know why she ever resorted to them. Any time she decided she had to sleep and she had to have a pill to help her, she always felt like hell the next day.

Despite that, she felt a surge of gladness to be home. Part of it was because she could strip and collapse now that she'd finished work for the day, but part of it was because she was looking forward to seeing Noccio. She hoped he'd gotten over being mad with her. He might only be a droid, but it was still nice to have someone to talk to when she got home.

It would be even nicer if he'd decided to cook for her again.

She called to him as soon as she opened the door. "Nocc--"

She was seized in an iron grip and shoved none too gently against the wall. "What the--she broke off and gasped as her hands were captured and manacled to the wall on either side of her head.

Noccio had his face pressed almost nose to nose with her. "You are mine, wench!"

Marina gaped at him blankly.

Gripping the front of her suit, he ripped it from the neckline to her waist. "Protest all you like, but I've seen your face when I make love to you, heard your whimpers of delight. Your body knows that I command it."

Marina blinked rapidly. "What the hell have you been watch--" She didn't get the last word out. Leaning down, he captured her mouth beneath his in a kiss that nearly singed her eye brows. Shock held her in thrall as she felt his tongue ravish her mouth savagely, thoroughly. Her mind shut down as his tongue skated across her and his taste filled her senses. Her body didn't even have time to quicken. High arousal seized her as if she'd

bathed in battery acid, burning through her. Her knees, her entire body, turned to putty. Wetness flooded her vagina, dampened her panties.

When he finally released her, she slid down the wall, landing in a puddle at his feet. “Wha ... Wha What—happened?”

Reaching down, he lifted her to her feet. “I did not do this correctly?”

Marina blinked at him. “Wha’?”

He lifted her limp arms and draped them around his neck. She locked her fingers together and hung limply against his chest. He smiled, apparently satisfied. Lifting his hand, he caressed her cheek tenderly. “You are my sun, my moon. Without you ... only darkness. I love you, little one.”

Slowly, her senses returned to normal—or almost normal. She couldn’t seem to get beyond the fact that Noccio had almost short circuited her brain with that kiss. Who’d have thought he could kiss like that? With an effort, Marina locked her knees, released her grip on his neck and pulled away from him. Her legs were still quivering with weakness—her vagina was still palpating with need, but she thought she could stand upright—as long as she was leaning against the wall. “My God! What have you been watching?”

He frowned, his face eloquent of deep disappointment. “I did not make you burn with need for my touch?”

Marina blinked several times, tempted to lie to him. Finally, she reached for his hand. “Come on.”

“Where?”

“To the bedroom. I can see right now that you’re determined about this and I don’t see any sense in you learning how to do it wrong.”

He followed her docilely enough, but he looked confused. When they’d reached the bedroom, she closed the door and turned to him. As she began removing his clothing, she placed a kiss on each small patch of skin that she uncovered. His breath quickened, but he remained perfectly still.

“Do you feel anything?” she murmured.

“Yes.”

“What does it feel like?”

He puzzled over it. “Good.”

Smiling, she continued, closing her mind to the fact that he was a droid. He felt and tasted and smelled like a real man. He responded like a real man. That was all that mattered at the moment. “You are so sweet. I think I could love you.”

“If I was a real man?”

Frowning, she leaned away and looked up at him. His expression was a mixture of anger and hurt. Reaching up, she smoothed the frown from his brow and then ran her fingers down his nose and touched his lips. “You feel like a real man to me.”

He opened his mouth and sucked the tip of her finger. A thrill of excitement went through her. “Kiss me again. I loved the way you kissed me before.”

Releasing her finger, he leaned toward, her, pulling her tightly against him as he covered her mouth with his own. The sensations of before flooded back instantly, making her feel dizzy and weak. As he kissed her, he bent and placed his arm behind her knees. Scooping her up, he carried her to the bed and carefully climbed in with her, laying her down on the mattress and moving over her, all without breaking the kiss. His kiss was more gentle than before, but no less devastating to her senses. He tasted of flesh and bone, all man, and distinctly different from any other who'd ever kissed her—his own individuality. He tasted wonderful. He felt even more than that. Desire flooded her, making her senses riot.

She kissed him back when he withdrew his tongue at last, following him, thrusting her tongue into his mouth to explore him. He groaned. A tremor went through him. She sucked his tongue, as he'd sucked her finger.

He skated his hands over her body restlessly, pulling at the suit she still wore. Finally, she broke the kiss and pulled away to help him. He held himself a little away from her, studying her body, then began to stroke her, watching her face for every small change in her expression. "I want to give you pleasure," he murmured. "Tell me how."

Marina gasped. "You're doing just fine."

He leaned toward her and kissed her again on the mouth, deeply, slowly stroking his tongue along hers. When he broke the kiss, he kissed her throat and then made his way down her body, stopping to kiss and

stroke her breasts, then her belly. Finally, he pushed her thighs apart and stroked a finger along her wet cleft.

Marina let out a little cry as he stroked her clit, gripping him tightly, squeezing her eyes tightly as pleasure so acute it was almost painful flooded through her. “There! Yes! Just like that.”

He continued stroking her, watching her writhe and groan as the pleasure built inside of her. Moaning, Marina searched his body with her hands, stroking him as he caressed her and finally slipping her hand down to cup his genitals. His cock was huge in her hands, distended, swollen, throbbing with life. Vaguely surprised, she looked down at it. “It’s huge!”

His head was thrown back in acute pleasure as she massaged him. He opened his eyes at that, however, and looked at her with a hint of uncertainty. “You do not like this?”

“Oh, baby! I like.” She thought about it several moments. “It’s just ... I thought you’d have to lie to me, like before.”

He groaned. Pushing her hand away, he nudged her thighs apart and moved between them. “I need to be inside you,” he said tightly. “I need to feel your flesh around me.”

She parted her thighs wide for him, guided the head of his cock into her opening, and cupped his buttocks. Gritting his teeth, he pushed, tentatively at first and then with more and more desperation, shoving her halfway up the bed before he’d managed to fit his cock fully inside of her.

He stopped, gasping for air, his teeth gritted. “I feel--as if--I will explode,” he said a little desperately.

Marina wrapped her arms around his neck, feeling the walls of her vagina convulse around him at his words. “Me too,” she murmured, pushing against him.

He groaned, lifted his hips and thrust again. His face contorted, almost as if he was in agony, but he lifted his hips and thrust again, and again, moving faster. Marina felt a thrill go through her, felt her heart hammering in time to his thrusts, felt her insides begin to quake and shudder. For a forever moment, she seemed to hover—almost, but not quite reaching the point of no return. Abruptly, her body surged beyond, exploded with a pleasurable release of tension that made her cry out.

Her body, convulsing with pleasure, milked him, clutching and releasing around him as he thrust faster and faster. Suddenly, he released a sound that was half growl, half cry and began shuddering against her. Weak in the aftermath of her own release, Marina clutched him tightly, feeling warmth flood through her as he went still and relaxed weakly on top of her.

She stroked his back while his breathing slowly returned to normal, feeling a sense of completion that she didn’t recall ever feeling before. It occurred to her after a moment that, no matter how crazy it seemed, he had wormed his way into her heart with his innocence, his sweetness, his curiosity—his need for her. She stroked his hair. “I do love you, Noccio.”

He lifted his head, studied her for a long moment and finally stroked her cheek lovingly. “Ditto.”

Marina blinked. “What?”

“Ditto?”

She gave him a look. “That’s completely unacceptable.”

“I adore you?”

“Better,” Marina said, smiling.

He frowned, moving off of her to lie beside her. Propping his head in one hand, he stroked her body. “Everything that I have learned to feel is only for you,” he said, almost as if he was surprised. “I feel—empty for you. Hungry, alone, needful.”

Marina caressed his cheek. “I feel the same for you. I’m glad your creator left you on my doorstep.”

He tilted his head, studying her. “I am a real man, Marina. I feel love. I feel sorrow when you are unhappy with me. I feel—everything.”

Marina leaned close and kissed him. “Then you are a real man at last, Noccio.”

The End