

BRAIN RECYCLERS

Robot Geneticists, Book 2

J. S. MORIN

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Chapter One

Chalk tapped and squeaked against a wall of black slate. The noise was a distraction as Eve Fourteen attempted to capture a flower-filled vase in finger paints.

The whole room dangled visual temptations to draw Eve away from her assignment. Opposite the slate wall was a window that stretched floor to ceiling and end-to-end of the room. Beyond, a hilly green landscape drifted past, three thousand meters below. Shifting natural light kept Eve's canvas from ever looking the same one hour to the next.

The two remaining walls in the classroom displayed what Holly79 claimed were invaluable specimens of authentic human artwork. All Eve saw were low-resolution attempts to capture a starry sky at night, portraits that looked as though they had undergone amateur surgery, and an image of melting timepieces.

Not that Eve's own artistic efforts could match even those inferior masterpieces.

First of all, Eve hated the finger paints. Each of her fingertips was now a different vivid color. It took great care to keep the colors from touching. Bad enough trying to complete an

image using known, controlled chromatic schemes. But each time two colors met, they formed a third.

Eve had washed her hands a dozen times since the start of the project.

Holly79 approached as Eve washed for the thirteenth time, after two fingers touched to create an inadvertent shade of murky green. “You know, Eve... the colors themselves aren’t important. You can have fun mixing.”

With a narrowed gaze, Eve searched the robot’s face for any sign of humor. Holly79 looked like most of the female robotic archetypes, with soft, graceful features represented on a surface of polymerized steel. The robotic art director could represent any emotion that a human could, but her emotions were harder to read.

“The exercise is entirely based on color,” Eve countered when she could find no evidence that Holly79 was joking. “If color is unimportant, what’s the point?”

“To express yourself.”

Eve finished washing and shut off the faucet. “I can express myself verbally. I can’t imagine a poorly painted floral arrangement saying anything I couldn’t.”

Before she could register what was happening, Eve found herself on the receiving end of a hug.

“I know, sweetheart,” Holly79 cooed, stroking Eve’s head.

Eve flinched, but there was no pain. For the longest time, her head had been a pincushion of stainless steel electrical terminals. Now all that remained was a grid of pinprick scars and an ever-lengthening head of hair. Holly79’s affectionate gesture ran across the tips like a bristle brush.

“You’re just so bottled up,” Holly79 continued. “We need to teach you to let it out.”

Trapped in an embrace that was growing embarrassingly long, Eve’s gaze wandered. As always, Eve found the glassy specks on the wall that concealed the cameras. If she went long

enough without thinking about them, Eve could pretend they weren't there.

"Excuse me," Phoebe Sixteen muttered, not making eye contact as she squeezed past on her way to the sink.

Inside the art classroom, there were eight former test subjects of Evelyn11. Now, all but Eve had taken new names. Eve16 had become Phoebe, P being the sixteenth letter in the alphabet. With Eve15 being dead, Eve17 avoided getting stuck with Q and used the unclaimed O for Olivia. After her came Rachel, Sally, Theresa, Uhura, and Vivian.

Not included in the official classroom census, yet still watching every move of the occupants, was any robot with a spare moment and an inkling of curiosity. Then, there was Holly79.

It sent a shiver through Eve from tailbone to temple just thinking about it.

"Why can't I take math classes instead of art?" Eve asked.

That got Holly79 to release her hug. "We've been over this. Evelyn11 was quite thorough in your mathematical education. There's nothing you or Phoebe can learn from us. The younger girls will have math class after this. Phoebe will have some free time for independent study."

Eve noticed the process of elimination in Holly79's list and took a step back. Being singled out always worried the former captive. "And me?"

Holly79's smile looked genuine. "You, my dear, have a job. Today is your first day on the Human Committee."



Grab a copy of *Brain Recyclers*, book 2 of *Robot Geneticists*, and continue your adventure now.

