

Chapter 1

Congratulations, everyone,” Jim said at the activation milestone ceremony. He lifted his champagne glass high. “It may be late winter outside, but the sun is shining warmly inside for us! We’ve completed the first stage of Project Lincoln! Ladies and gentlemen, Artificial Intelligence Concepts Incorporated, and this team of the best scientific minds in the field have made science fiction come alive! Today, science, technology, and life have changed forever. The world will never be the same from this point on.”

Jim paused for a moment. “And a big thanks to AI Concepts for turning the entire tenth floor of this Midtown Manhattan building into a stand-alone, state-of-the-art, secure research and prototype facility just for us. Salute!”

The joyful sound of clinking glasses filled the room. Cheers went up from the staff of engineers and technicians. Hands shook. High-fives slapped. Some people hugged. Gabriella stood next to Jim and raised her glass high to join in the toast.

Two months earlier, Jim and Francine discussed the rewards a successful animation would bring. Jim whispered as he drew Francine close and felt her warmth. “If the animation of our android goes well over the next few weeks, there will be no shortage of project cash and some outrageous bonuses for us and our people. No one on the planet has ever done what we have. You and I need to have our own private party before the official one,” Jim said, winking. “Want to work late tonight?”

Jim Arnold was the clean-shaven, handsome, early middle-aged AI Lab Director. His Ph.D. in Advanced Artificial Intelligence and Biosystems earned him his directorship. The fifteen-year childless marriage to his wife, Alice, had cooled off over the five-year life of the project. Jim’s job demanded long hours, but that wasn’t the sole reason he was often late coming home to their small Park Terrace West apartment.

“Look at her,” Jim said about Gabriella, who was lying on the animation table, all the while admiring Francine. Jim pulled Francine even closer to him as he allowed himself to become intoxicated by her perfume.

“It’s beautiful,” Francine said as she pressed her body into Jim, “and anatomically perfect in every detail, right down to small body hairs. The look. The feel. Everything. I love what the cosmetics engineering team did with her green eyes and curly honey-colored hair. But, Jimmy, there is no ‘her.’ It’s only a machine.” Francine smiled as she noticed the lingering trace of Jim’s morning aftershave. She rocked her hip against him, promising future delights.

Jim smiled, “Unless someone attempts to monitor its vital signs, Gabriella will be indistinguishable from a living human being. We’ve done it, kiddo! Now, about that working late together thing...”

Two weeks before the victory celebration, the Cray XC40 supercomputer downloaded the android's operational programming, activating Gabriella's other systems. Linguistic, scientific, and cultural data followed. Gabriella was 'born' a fully functioning adult. The engineering staff gathered around to observe the system initiation. One of the very few religious engineers at AI Concepts compared her to Eve, of Biblical fame. Unlike Eve, upon animation, Gabriella sat up on the lab table, looked over the spectators, and asked, "Why am I the only naked person in the room?"

"May I have some clothing, please?" she asked, the faint hint of an accent adding richness to her voice. Although her speech was flawless, the almost musical inflection suggested that English was not her native language.

"Jim," Francine whispered as her eyes widened in surprise, "she asked for clothes. Is that part of the programming or an unexpected bit of code cross-talk? She can't be reasoning on her own already, could she? Are the silver strand nano-machines configuring on their own this soon?"

"I'm pretty surprised myself, Francine. I reviewed the programming specifications with the code designers only a month ago, and we didn't predict this to happen yet. Sure, we designed her brain to self-adjust its nanowire configurations to mimic neuron functions in the human thought process, but we calculated it would take a longer time than this to kick in and produce results. This is intriguing."

One of the young engineers brought a white lab coat for Gabriella. She slipped down from the table and put it on.

"Jim, why are you so surprised?" Gabriella asked in a low, calm voice which hinted of belonging to a cultured family. Her slightly olive-tinged skin would make one assume she was of Mediterranean descent. It would be easy to envision her sliding her long legs out of a limo and attending the opera with foreign friends or dignitaries.

"Your team designed me to think beyond my initial programming, and here I am, doing exactly that. Wasn't it included in your design?"

The team turned to Jim for an answer.

Startled, Jim muttered, "Yes, yes. That's aligned with our expectations. Good job, team."

Recovering from the question, he continued, "Okay, gang, let's recheck to see if there are any differences in Gabriella's brain operation compared to the base systems programming data."

Frank Wright, the president of AI's Research and Development business unit, motioned Jim over to his side.

"Jim, I didn't expect Gabriella to know she was naked and certainly didn't expect her to ask for clothes. Was this part of the programming design?"

"Truthfully, Frank, no, it wasn't. Beta versions of the brain didn't show it would self-actualize this soon. I'm surprised, but consider it to be a bonus."

"Well, I guess that's good in this case. I'm uncomfortable when things we didn't design for, happen. Keep me informed on any other surprises, okay?"

There were no more surprises before the official activation ceremony. Gabriella's

operational testing continued over the next three weeks. Speech, recall, cognitive ability, fine and gross motor skill tests were all passed as expected. A brain scan followed each successful completion.

“How did Gabriella’s daily scan go this morning, Francine?” Jim asked on the morning of the ceremony.

“Pretty good. We mapped out her neural networks and found new ones are forming themselves at a rate exceeding initial projections. The Deep Base programming recognizes patterns effectively and is reforming her neural networks to simulate our brain functions. She is thinking as an enhanced human. Her internal systems are looking up data on the internet and including it in conversations with lab personnel. What a billion-dollar idea if we developed a chip and implanted into people to allow personal internet access! Yes, chip the planet,” Francine said, “that would make us richer than God.”

Chapter 2

Lance Coopers had wanted to be an army general since, well, since before he could remember. He grew up in the Liberty, Kentucky, countryside.

From the early age of six, Lance enjoyed war stories. He would crawl upon his father's lap and say, "Hey dad, can we watch an army movie?"

"Sure, son, I have just the one here. I'll make some popcorn, and we can cuddle up on the couch and watch it together."

It was watching those old World War II movies with his dad which first ignited a little boy's imagination to advance his troops into a noble battle. He and the other boys would play cops and robbers on sunny summer days. Lance, however, always took the role of a general deploying his troops against an entrenched, sinister enemy.

"Okay, men, let's storm that hill," Lance shouted as he led the latest charge up the treed hill in the town park. "Follow me!" was his impassioned cry as he raised his stick gun over his head and rushed headlong into victory after victory. He was General Lance, and it didn't matter at all to the boys that Lance was always leading the heroic charges. As long as they were fighting for a cause, the other details were insignificant to them. They were little boys running through the weeds and woods, fueled by imagination on carefree summer days.

On a cold March day marking his seventeenth birthday, Lance asked his parents for their signature on the DD-1966

form to allow him to join the Army with parental consent.

Lance's father was an air force retired Lieutenant Colonel from a three-generation line of air force men. "You mean air force, don't you, son?"

"No, sir, I mean army!" No matter the number of grand, if somewhat inflated, stories outlining how exciting a career in the air force could be, Lance set his face like flint to join the army and become a general.

"Lance," his father continued, "you're only seventeen. Wait a couple of years, and let's talk again."

"Dad, I'm old enough to know what I want in life," Lance shouted back, his arms flying into the air. "I'm not stupid, you know!"

"You're not stupid, but there are things you still don't understand. We're trying to protect you from getting hurt, son," his father said with the voice of a parent trying to save their child from making an unwise decision.

"I don't need your help. I understand everything! You're the ones that don't understand. I'm asking you to trust me on this!"

"Don't you dare raise your voice to me, young man! No, you are the one that doesn't get it. You understand one hundred percent of what you understand, but you don't realize it's only about twenty percent of what you need to understand. You think you see it all, but you see almost nothing!"

"I've had it. You're calling me stupid. I'm not! You don't understand. To hell with this conversation! I'm going to Dot's."

"Hold on, son. Don't go anywhere like this. Let's talk more."

It was too late. Lance marched out of the house as his father was still speaking. He bicycled towards Dot's Pizza Palace on Old Middleborough Road. He hoped to run into

some of his friends for comfort and companionship. They often met at Dot's to discuss life plans, their favorite sports teams, and girls. The rustic, familiar place had become their unofficial headquarters.

"Good. There's no one sitting at my table," Lance slid into the booth in the corner by the kitchen. It was an old wooden booth whose solid wood seats had seen many high-level strategic meetings conducted by three generations of teenagers. Although the owners of Dot's Pizza Palace had changed several times over the years, the interior had not. Being in their booth raised his spirits. Even after cleaning, it had a perpetual faint smell of sauce and pepperoni embedded into the wood.

None of Lance's friends were there. Lance came for the comfort of being in 'their' special booth for a little while. He had seen his father retreat to the den when he was upset and wanted to get away from it all. Lance's man cave smelled of pizza, too.

The lone waitress walked to the booth, and in a very lackluster voice, asked if he wanted anything.

This is exactly the type of person I don't want to become like. A zombie at work. I'll bet her parents didn't let her do what she wanted after high school either, and here she is.

"Just a coke. No ice, please." He dismissed her with a wave of his arm.

"I can't see why they won't let me enlist," he spewed under this breath. "I'm old enough and ready for it. Why can't they trust me on this? What the hell!"

"Here's your soda," the waitress said, plopping the glass on the table as Josiah walked through the door.

Lance saw his friend and waved him over. "Hey," both boys said to each other in unison, "what's up?"

"I'm glad you could make it here, Lance. You're

probably wondering why I called this meeting.”

“Huh? What?”

“Nah, just screwing with your head, Lance. But if you fell for that, you must be into something heavy. What’s up?”

“Parent crap again,” Lance admitted. “I want to go into the army after graduation. They’re against it. It doesn’t make any sense to me.”

“What do they want you to do, go to college?”

“Yeah. It’s not that I’m so much against it, but I tried to explain if they let me enlist now, I can serve four years and then have the Army pay for my college anyhow. I’d save them a bucket full of money. They don’t get it! It’s so obvious I’m right.”

“Hmm, see what you mean,” Josiah answered in his best sage-like voice. “What are you going to do? Where do they want you to go?”

“Kentucky State, but I’m not ready. I don’t know. Crap! Screwed in every direction. I can’t enlist without their permission and don’t want to go to college this fall. It would be great to take a year off and sort it all out, or at least until I get old enough to enlist by myself. Is that such a bad idea? Lots of people do it. Why do they have to pick on me all the time? It’s like they don’t think I’m old enough to make my own decisions, for cripe’s sake.”

“I feel you, man. What would you do until you could enlist if you didn’t go to college? They aren’t going to let you sit home, that’s for sure.”

“Well, I’ve already talked to Ed Michener at the Tractor Supply Company. He says he could get me a job there until I figure things out. It wouldn’t be much, but he said they are always looking for someone to work in the stockroom.”

The waitress walked over to the table, carrying a large, square box with greasy fingerprint stains near the flaps. She looked in Josiah’s general direction and mumbled with

no feeling, "Here's your takeout. Enjoy."

"Thanks," Josiah responded. "Look, I've got to go. This greasy thing will coagulate soon, but let's get together and talk things out more. Good luck with your folks. See ya."

"Been real, Josiah. Catch you later."

Lance sat there nursing his coke for a while before muttering, "Life sucks! What the hell am I going to do anyhow?" and then stomped off in a deep dark funk for the bicycle ride back home.

A few patrons turned to glance at him after his exclamation. "Kids," one of them said to his dinner partner. "They're all the same. All confused know-it-alls. Not at all like us when we were young."

Lance applied to Kentucky State College in June. A letter arrived from KSC before the end of the summer.

"Lance, you have a letter from Kentucky State!" his mother shouted up the stairs.

"I'll be down in a few minutes," came the half-hearted reply.

"Come on down here this minute, mister. I'm excited and need to see what it says."

"You have my permission to open it yourself, Mom."

"Lance, get down these stairs and open your mail for your mother!"

"Okay, okay. Here I come, mom." Heavy, protesting thuds from man-sized feet filled the stairwell as Lance thumped his way down the stairs, hoping it was a rejection letter with all his might.

"So, let me have it," he said as he stretched an arm out to her. Lance opened the envelope with resignation.

"Damn!"

"What is it, son? You didn't get in?" came the concerned response.

Carl Facciponte

“Worse. They’ve accepted me.” His mother squealed with joy and threw her arms around him. “Stop it, Mom. Someone might see through the window!”

“I don’t care! My boy is going to college! I’m so proud of you.”

However reluctantly, Lance was college-bound.

Lance spent a listless summer at the Tractor Supply Company as the specter of the coming Fall loomed over him.

The first two weeks of college were hectic and frustrating.

“These basic English and math courses make me feel more like I’m in a glorified high school. Except Kentucky State is bigger than our whole town of Liberty. This is crazy. I want to go home,” Lance moaned to his shadow as he walked from one building to another. A passing student responded, “Right on, Bro,” and raised a fist in solidarity as he kept walking.

Lance did a slow slide into depression. *There has to be a legitimate way of dropping out without my parents coming down on me.*

“Going to the Freshman Mixer, Lance?” asked a freshman girl as she worked at qualifying for her ‘ring by spring’ status by becoming engaged before the end of the school year.

“No, thanks. I’m not much of a mixer.”

It hurt the girl for only a moment before she noticed another young male freshman to hit on. Her smile returned as she rushed off to intercept her new target.

Two weeks later, Lance walked into one of the campus cafeterias and noticed a small poster advertising the Reserve Officers Training Corps. The sign promised not only would ROTC pay for his college and give him a

monthly living allowance, but he would also graduate as an army officer.

“Hell yes! Now, this is what I’m talkin’ about,” he said aloud. The world brightened. Lance’s pulse raced as the implications formed themselves into visions of his glorious future. *If I stay in this college for four years, I’ll be in the army as an officer and on my way to becoming the general I know I am. Life is finally getting better!*

Lance pushed his studies hard. The rest of his college career was a blur, except for those portions about ROTC.

“Lance, how are your courses coming?” his father asked during one of the rare weekends at home.

“I love it, Dad. Especially the ROTC Army Leadership and Operations and Tactics courses! They have me thinking about declaring a major in Computer Information Systems.”

“That’s a difficult field. Can you stick it out, son? It won’t be easy. Studying was never your strong point in high school.”

“Got it covered! ROTC has a course in Goal Setting and Accomplishment that will whip my butt into shape to study. I can do this! I know I can!”

“Then go for it with all the focus and fight of a drowning man fighting for air, kid. I think you can do it too.”

A small tear formed in Lance’s eye. *My dad finally approves of me! I don’t know how to feel about it.*

Lance volunteered for every extra assignment, every challenge, and attended every meeting. He rose through the ranks as a natural leader. In what seemed to be a few months, the four years passed. He graduated with a BS in Computer Information Systems. *Life is good. I’m on my way!*

The CIS degree smoothed the way for him to get into the Army Military Intelligence Officer Basic Course to begin

Carl Facciponte

his career as a Military Intelligence Officer (MIO).

As far as I know, there are no snipers in a computer lab, he mused, and Military Intelligence is the perfect place to start my career.

Chapter 3

Holy crap!" Martha Robinson exclaimed one afternoon when an unsolicited offer came in the mail from AI Concepts, Inc. It offered her a job in Manhattan, working on an AI project. "They will give me how much money? Plus a signing bonus?" she half-shouted to her apartment, holding the letter over her head, both hands waving in the air as she twirled around the living room. "I love university life, but I can learn to love other things, too. A lot of other things. Like having a solid bank account and a ton of designer shoes! New York, here I come!"

With a 3.98 GPA, Martha had had no trouble pursuing a doctorate in clinical psychology at UCLA, nor in winning a position as Associate Professor at UC Berkeley. She achieved fame by publishing articles in the *Psychological Bulletin* and in *Psychology Today* magazines. Martha's reports linked human psychological processes with advances in artificial intelligence. That gave her a national presence, leading to being featured in *Black Enterprise* for her work. AI Concepts noticed her.

The team was in the latter portion of the android debug and primary evaluation phase of the project when Martha came on board.

Martha's heart was full of excitement and expectation on a cold, rainy late winter Wednesday morning as she arrived in New York and checked into the Grand NYC hotel.

Carl Facciponte

Martha spent the next two days in the AI Concepts headquarters with Human Resources. They were full days of filling out employment paperwork, including permission for AI Security to conduct detailed background checks and contact family and friends for references.

Security asked for DNA cheek samples. A scanner recorded her fingerprints. An almost friendly security woman taking Martha's photos and video explained the need to identify her from the security camera footage from any perspective.

The psychological testing administered by Human Resources amused Martha. *Have they not read my resume at all? Giving me these tests is like asking a professional chef if they can cook a burger. Sheesh!*

The corporate live orientations and overviews were fast-paced. Presenters spoke of great accomplishments and the fantastic future to come, addressing no specific projects from the AI Concepts Research and Development Lab.

These talks have a lot in common with politicians delivering campaign speeches. Lots of chatter and excitement, but no usable data.

A plainclothes armed security guard escorted Martha to the 10th-floor research lab two blocks away after her processing.

Jim and Francine met Martha at the elevator, welcomed her warmly, and dismissed the guard.

Jim took the lead. "Martha, before we fill you in on your job details, let me show you around the lab. You'll love meeting our staff. Like you, they are the best people we can find in their field."

Francine rolled her eyes and sighed at Jim's not-so-concealed attempt at schmoozing the new girl.

"Thank you, Mr. Arnold," Martha said, "I can't wait to meet my coworkers and see your android."

Jim smiled. "Please, it's Jim. We don't address each other by titles or our last names. I'm simply Jim. Let me introduce you to some of our department heads before you meet our android. You'll get to meet everyone, but for now, let's not overwhelm you with names. We work long hours, so you will get to know everyone."

"I'm excited," Martha said with anticipation as she glanced across the lab with all of its complicated looking equipment.

They escorted Martha to a cluster of five desks arranged in a semi-circle. Each desk had six computer screens, mounted two-high and three-across.

"Martha, I would like you to meet Aki Gua. She is in charge of the Base Programming for the android."

Martha extended her hand in greeting. Aki shook her hand and gave a short bow. "Welcome to the group, Martha. I'm pleased to meet you. Our job here is to monitor the base information programming to allow it to facilitate the nano-rod gel technology in the android's brain to learn on its own. Our programming not only provides for data most people would call 'general knowledge' but also contains the algorithm which allows the brain to classify information on its own."

Francine explained that Aki graduated, with honors in her doctorate program, from Tsinghua University in Beijing. AI Concepts found her working as an AI programmer at Alibaba in China. "She was too good of a programmer not to convince her to come over to us."

Aki smiled at the compliment. She bowed to thank Francine.

"So tell me more about this 'base programming' thing. It sounds fascinating," said Martha.

"Much later, Martha," responded Francine. "Let's not overload you right off the bat. Let me introduce you to T'quan Taylor in Hydraulics and Servos."

Carl Facciponte

Martha looked around the Hydraulics and Servos development area. "I thought it would be a bunch of tubes and big motors, but this is delicate stuff," she said, running her hand over one servo on the prototype board.

"I'm happy you like it," T'Quan said. His South African accent made Martha smile. "We do our best to make it so. All the components are tiny and run at high pressure. The pressure, combined with special electrical servos, allow for smooth, quick movements."

Jim spoke up, "T'quan received his doctorate in hydraulics from MIT."

"You have an accent. What's your country of origin?" Martha asked.

"Well, I was born in Uganda. My mother was from there, but my father was from the States. He was the one that named me after a favorite uncle. After completing high school in Uganda, I went to university at MIT."

"You can brag a little about MIT, T'quan," said Francine.

T'quan's almost pure black color turned even darker as he blushed. "Okay, so I got a full-ride scholarship to MIT. It was nothing."

"Indeed," responded Martha. "That's no small achievement. Congratulations!"

"Thank you, Martha. I'm sure we'll enjoy working together. It was nice to meet you."

They moved on to the electronics area of the floor.

"Martha, this is Fred Jensen. Fred comes to us from Aalborg University in Denmark, where he received his doctorate in electronics, with a focus on interfaces for advanced AI's. Fred, can you tell Martha a little about what you do?"

"Absolutely. Well, as Jim said, my group designs the electronic interfaces allowing the android's nano-gel brain to send messages to the rest of her system. It works much like the way your nerves carry messages from your brain to

all of your parts. Make sense?”

“Well,” said Martha, “I understand the concept. But how does it actually work?”

“Therein is the magic, Martha. To go any deeper would take a ton of time and a raft of drawings. We’ve had people fall out of their chair in a stupor from PowerPoint Poisoning when we give a more in-depth explanation.” The four of them laughed.

“Then thanks for having mercy on me on my first day,” Martha quipped back.

“Two more quick stops, Martha, and then we can grab some lunch. How does that sound?” said Jim.

“I’m game. Where to next?”

“Now for the real magic,” teased Francine. “We’ll talk to Dr. Alex Ortiz next. He comes to us from the University of Texas at Austin. Alex and his team are responsible for developing the nano-gel brain. It’s the only workable one on the planet. We’re thrilled by his work.”

Martha gave a low whistle. “The only one, huh? Man, that’s amazing.”

“I’m so glad to meet you, Martha. You and I will work closely together in your socialization processes. I always like to start an overview by asking what questions need answering, so... what questions do you have about an advanced android brain?”

“Only the obvious, Alex. What does it do and how does it work?”

“Sure thing. A short answer is, it does what the human brain does. Our silver-carbon nano-rod machines can move around to some extent in the special gel. It gives them the capability to form their own neural pathways. It can think and learn. How’s that for starters?”

“It seems impossible! How did you do it? I can’t even begin to imagine it!”

Carl Facciponte

"Well, first, we start with a package of lime Jell-O." Martha's eyes widened. "No, seriously, it's an extremely complicated chemical and engineering process. It would take quite a physics and chemistry background to grasp the details. Sorry for screwing with your head, Martha. We mess with each other a lot around here."

Alex glanced at Jim and Francine and winked.

"Shall we leave Alex to his work, Martha, and move on?" Francine asked.

"Sure. I'm loving the tour so far, but I have a couple of questions. What exactly is my job? The job description said it was to socialize the android. Not very descriptive at all. How do you socialize a machine? Don't the programmers build all that in? I can provide significant input, but it's not clear what you had in mind. Is the android tethered to a computer? From what kind of database does it draw its information?"

Francine answered. "Let me try to address the issue for you. The questions you pose are good but are based on the current state-of-the-art androids. You noticed security is extremely tight around here. There is a reason. The people you met on this tour are the tops in their fields. I assume you are familiar with the AI research DARPA is doing?"

"Yes, of course I am."

"Great. Well, our android is far beyond anything DARPA, the public, or even other artificial intelligence companies can imagine."

"Wow, an impressive statement!"

"We're proud of our work. But programming can only go so far. Our android has true artificial intelligence in every sense of the word."

Jim interrupted, "I'm in favor of dropping the 'artificial' designation. Our android needs a top-notch person to develop its social and communication skills to allow it to communicate and integrate into society. Programmers can't do that. We need you to make it happen."

“That’s a huge statement, Jim,” Martha said. “I guess I’ll understand more when I have time to poke a couple of wires.” Martha laughed.

“Yes,” Jim replied, chuckling, “poke a couple of wires.”

The trio continued to the skin covering development area. Francine introduced Martha to Gabriella as part of the staff.

Martha did not notice the several lab personnel who were watching them, smiling from their work areas.

“Hi Martha, I’m Gabriella. I’m working on a skin texture and durability project.”

Martha held her hand out for a handshake.

“Hi, Gabriella, I’m pleased to meet you.”

Gabriella explained some of her objectives and design processes to Martha. “We need a covering with more cut resistance. Our current product is tough, but the new one will be even better.” The two conversed for a while at the workbench.

Francine and Jim stepped back to allow Gabriella and Martha to get to know each other.

“You’re very easy to talk to, Gabriella. Jim and Francine are allowing us to talk longer than I did at the other stations. In my experience, it means the new person is getting assigned a mentor, namely, the person they are talking to the longest. Is it true in this situation as well? I wouldn’t mind at all.” Then added in a low whisper, “You seem to be more sociable and less geeky than some other people here. I think we will hit it off. What’s your background?”

“I’m an engineer. And yes, I can tell we will hit it off.”

“Fantastic. It was great meeting you,” Martha said. “I’m sure we’ll talk much more. Mr. Arnold... err, Jim, I’d like to see the android now, if it’s okay.”

Gabriella reached out with her right hand, took Martha’s

Carl Facciponte

hand into hers, shook it again, and said, "Hi Martha, I'm Gabriella."

"Yes, Gabriella, I know. Besides, I can read your name badge," Martha said with a puzzled look. "Wait... what... what the... you can't mean that..." Martha stammered and looked disoriented. "No, it's not possible. No freakin' way! Hold it! I get it; you guys are screwing with me because I'm the new kid on the block. Gabriella, you can't be... I... I can't even say it."

The lab onlookers chuckled. Some men punched each other on the shoulder and laughed.

Gabriella reached out and gently held both of Martha's hands. Smiling, she said, "Let me say it for you. Yes, I am the android. It's true. Welcome. I'm happy to meet you, Martha. Here, you look like you need to sit down."

Gabriella slid her chair behind Martha and encouraged her to sit for a moment.

"You can't be an android. Your skin is soft and warm. You're alive and talking. No wires, no tethers. How...?"

"All in due time. You look like you could use a coffee. Let's go get some."

Gabriella helped the somewhat bewildered Martha out of the chair and led her to the coffee pot in the cafe. "I like coffee, Martha. I hope you do too. Let's sit and talk for a while. I have a lot to learn, and you have a lot to teach me."