

## Who Gets the Davydov

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When Davis arrived on the morning of the test, she was hunched over her desk, apparently sleeping, or at least dozing off.

“Jules. Hey, Julie?”

“Huh?” Julie said, recognizing Davis’s voice. “What time is it?”

“Did you get any sleep last night?”

Julie brushed her fingers over her eyes. Lydia displayed the time on the lower corner of the glo-screen. It was ten-thirty. Three hours till the meeting. Julie spun her chair to face the doorway where Davis was leaning on the frame, looking in, almost shaking his head at Julie.

“I slept. It’s just—”

“What are you even doing down here, Julie? Checking code? Seriously?”

“No. I have a student coming down to work through some of the Norris programming foundations—the systems architecture seminar.”

Davis shook his head. “Lydia can walk your student through it. Why don’t you go up to your office and lie down for an hour or two. I need you to be at least somewhat coherent this afternoon.”

“I can’t sleep, Davis. Are you kidding?”

“You’re the one who keeps asking me for more responsibility. You’re not going to freak out on me, are you, Mikhauer?”

“No, it’s just that some of us humans actually get nervous about these trivial things, Davis. It’s half a billion dollars.”

“It’s not our half billion dollars, and Lydia’s going to do whatever she’s going to do whether we’re nervous or not. So if you’re not going to take a nap, at least go get a coffee or something. Seriously. Step off campus for a minute.”

Julie had been looking at code – all night. At least, until sometime after five when she’d fallen asleep. Davis stood in the doorway waiting for Julie’s answer. When it didn’t come, he turned and walked away.

“Um, Lydia,” Julie said, getting up from the workstation. “One of my sophomores is coming down. You know, the red-headed girl – what’s her name?”

*“Penny Atchison,”* Lydia’s voice answered via Julie’s neural implants. *“You’d like me to walk her through the early Norris architecture, Dr. Mikhauer?”*

“Yeah, she was really struggling in class yesterday.”

*“It’s a difficult class for a sophomore, Dr. Mikhauer. I actually think she’s quite bright.”*

“Who isn’t around here?” Julie said, putting on her coat. “You’re still not going to give me any clues, Lydia?”

*“Enjoy your coffee, Dr. Mikhauer.”*

By the time Julie came up from the bowels of MIT Building E37, Lydia already had a university car waiting for her, destination pre-programmed. The old-school coffee house across the river on Beacon Street wasn’t set up to take pre-orders, though. They did it the old-fashioned way, looked people in the eyes and asked them how they

wanted their coffee. The whole process took almost ten minutes on a good day, but for some things, maybe just some things, waiting ten minutes was better. What to do with ten minutes worth of thoughts on a day like this, though.

Julie had a list of priorities she'd run over with Lydia. It wasn't a ton of money, but half a billion could still make a big difference somewhere. If Davis had any idea, he wasn't telling. He didn't seem nervous, didn't seem excited, didn't seem anything. Four years programming, and no nerves on the biggest day of Lydia's—do you call it a life?

The minutes in the coffee line were over before she knew what had happened. Julie sat in the cafe and sipped, listening to old jazz from the last century. She watched people watching each other. She wondered what they would think—the most profound moment in the history of human civilization, perhaps since Deep Blue beat Kasparov. And no one would know. Not for a long time. How could Davis not be nervous?

Julie hadn't walked anywhere for so long she couldn't remember. It was cold in April, but there wasn't any snow, and even though the leaves weren't out yet, Boston was still a great place to walk in the spring. As the morning approached afternoon, gray and overcast turned to nearly sunny. By the time Julie had made it back to MIT, the sky was blue and the wind had died down. She hadn't seen the

sun—the real sun—in almost two weeks. She certainly hadn't been off the network for that much time in ages.

Lydia grabbed Julie's signal once she got near building E76. Davis was sitting on the bench outside, waiting for the visitors to arrive. He was coatless, his legs crossed and his arm over the back of the bench like he didn't have a care in the world.

"May I sit?" Julie asked.

He nodded. "You feel good?"

"Nervous. I'd feel a little better if you could tell me what she's going to do."

"If I could tell you, Jules, then there wouldn't be any point to this whole exercise. You know that."

"So who are you waiting on, Davis? Must be someone important if you're sitting out here waiting to show them in."

He didn't answer at first, shrugging his shoulders until he saw that Julie's eyes demanded an answer.

"Paula Acker."

"*The* Paula Acker?"

He nodded.

"The Secretary of the Interior, Paula Acker? Of the United States?"

He nodded again.

"Great, Davis. That's just great. Thanks for letting me know. Did Lydia know?"

It was a stupid question. Of course, Lydia knew.

"Two years, Davis, and you're still treating me like your grad student. I'd appreciate it if one of these days you started treating me like a colleague."

"I didn't see the need to make you any more nervous."

"Apparently you don't see the need to tell me anything – tell the computer, but you won't tell me?"

"I'm glad I didn't. At least now you're angry instead of nervous. Maybe you can focus that energy and keep the presentation on point."

He said it in that same flat, unemotional manner that was so obnoxious it made Julie want to scream.

"You can be such an ass sometimes, you know that, Davis?"

"Yeah, Julie. How about you go inside and make sure everything's set up so we're not bickering like a couple of school kids when the Secretary of the Interior shows up. Okay?"

"How about you be a little more condescending," she said, getting up, shaking her head as she made her way to the building.

Lydia was in Julie's head immediately.

*"I know we talked about the speech already, Dr. Mikhauer, but if you're having any second thoughts, I could project bullet points in your line of sight to the audience. They'd never know the difference."*

"It's fine, Lydia. I've memorized it."

*"Smile and tap the podium if you change your mind. I'll raise the projection if you do need it."*

"I won't need any help."

*"I'm sorry to see you angry, Julie. It's a big day for everyone. It's only natural emotions would be high."*

Lydia could tell by the speed Julie was walking that she was upset, and when Julie slowed up, Julie got the sense

that Lydia knew exactly what she was thinking — her heart rate, her facial expressions. It wasn't the first time Julie felt like Lydia was just too damn close, but she'd never felt downright patronized by her before.

"Lydia, when I get to the lecture hall, take me offline. I'd like a minute alone to collect my thoughts, so kill all the cameras and the campus network too. You can bring them all back up when Dr. Long and the Secretary arrive."

*"Certainly, Dr. Mikhauer."*

Julie could feel her implants go dead — noiseless, like it had been on the walk that morning.

It was an old lecture hall. Not as old as some of the early buildings where there were still chalkboards behind the glo-screens, but certainly not yet mid-century fashion, whatever that was. Knowing Davis, Julie figured he picked the old room for the contrast — for the moment the lecture hall flashed away and everyone sat in virtual space on a second layer. That moment always made an impression on the uninitiated, even on a headset.

Julie descended the stairs to the dais at the foot of the lecture hall, standing at the side, observing the quiet, empty room. At some point, she'd gone from sitting in the front row, to standing up front, to this moment. Had it gotten too big? Julie pondered the possibilities: what would Lydia do; would it change anything; would it change everything? Then she remembered that it was just Lydia. She had the sense that everything would be fine. Julie took a deep breath.

The next moment, Lydia switched on the network as Davis walked into the room, followed by a group of

luminaries. Julie recognized the Secretary from news files, though Secretary Acker seemed shorter in person. The president and provost of MIT came in behind them, and there were two other people Julie didn't recognize.

After making introductions, Davis went behind the lab desk at the front of the lecture hall and began to pass headsets over the counter to the Secretary and the two other guests.

"These are actually DARPA's next generation virtual reality simulators. This headset is as close as it gets to full immersion without implants. So for you guys who haven't taken the plunge yet, this'll be a pretty good preview."

Then, at Davis's direction everyone sat in the front row. After a second, the lecture hall flashed away and everyone was in a small, elegant room that looked like something out of a Victorian romance. Natural sunlight flowed in through the white-curtained French doors. There was a slim, gilded podium at the center of an empty wooden floor, and two rows of chairs faced the front of the reception room where Davis and Julie sat. She counted nineteen luminaries in the virtual crowd. Those who weren't physically at MIT that afternoon had flashed in on secure streams from all over. Apart from the Secretary and the MIT people, Julie only recognized Mrs. Kinsey. Julie wondered about the setting, guessing that Lydia had engineered a place that would make people feel at ease—or at the least the important people, the people familiar with the trappings of power. That's what the room felt like.

"Ready, Dr. Mikhauer?" Davis asked Julie once everyone was settled.

Julie nodded.

“It’s that time then,” he said, standing and stepping to the podium.

He looked out at the crowd and gave them a few seconds to gather their thoughts. From the front Julie could see everyone’s face, all their eyes examining the room, admiring the clarity of the simulation. Like all Lydia’s other artificial spaces, this flawless design could pass for the real world with even the most scrutinizing code-writers – the light, the textures, the shadows, the sounds – every last detail calculated to shocking accuracy.

“Welcome,” Davis said. “I’ve just had the pleasure of meeting Secretary Acker in person. Everyone else I know, so I’ll forgo introducing myself. I’d like to thank all of you for joining us for what promises to be a monumental occasion in the history of – well – I was going to say computer science, but really it’s bigger than that.

“For those of you who know what’s going on, I can sense the excitement. For the rest of you, I promise this won’t be a day you’ll soon forget. So let’s get started.

“First, I have the pleasure of introducing Dr. Julie Mikhauer, who came to MIT from Duke to do her doctoral research almost six years ago now. And she has quickly become one of the country’s – if not the world’s – foremost systems engineers. Without her tireless and extraordinary work, we wouldn’t be here today.

“Dr. Mikhauer,” Davis said, gesturing with his open hand for Julie to address the gathering.

Approaching the podium, Julie looked at the faces as everyone awaited her speech. There was no applause as

she stepped forward, just anticipation. She looked down at the podium, then back at the people. This was no room full of sophomores. Julie took a deep breath but wasn't even tempted to tap the podium so Lydia could feed her the speech.

"Thank you, Dr. Long for the kind introduction," Julie began. "I'd like to welcome you here to witness what we all expect to be a special event. Today, I have the pleasure of introducing you to Lydia.

"Lydia is really the brainchild of Professor Dodds and Dr. Long here, who began designing her almost five years ago. Without getting into too many specifics as to how she functions or what her capabilities are, I'll simply say she's the most advanced artificial intelligence ever created. She's really a technological marvel, and you have to look no further than the room we're in right now. She wrote every line of code without any input from her programmers, and she's running the artificial environment we're sitting in as well. So even though you don't know her yet, she already knows all of you.

"We've brought this select group of people here today because of a discussion that's been ongoing among AI's top minds, led of course by Dr. Long. Artificial intelligence is advancing rapidly from the 'Weak AI' that monitors tasks like controlling air traffic or beating people at chess. With Lydia, we're approaching the realm of genuine 'Strong AI' – autonomous intelligent thought – and this development is going to have profound effects on our society.

"After hearing about their interest in our field, Dr. Long approached the Kinsey Robotics Foundation. They too

have been wrestling with the ultimate focus of our research: How can we best integrate ‘Strong AI’ into our society?

“After years of preparation, deliberation, and literally millions of simulations, we’re ready to put real-world resources into Lydia’s hands. To that end, the Kinsey Robotics Foundation has placed five hundred million dollars of their trust at Lydia’s disposal.”

Julie paused for a moment, looking up to observe the faces of the audience members. She could tell who knew and who didn’t. No one can mask that level of surprise. The Secretary knew, Mrs. Kinsey too, and Professor Dodds, who was seated in the back row at the end, almost hiding. All the other eyes were wide as people began to shift in their seats.

“To help set everyone at ease, I should mention one thing before we begin,” Julie continued. “We’ve programmed Lydia with certain guidelines, specifically goal-oriented algorithms that place highest value on the number of positive outcomes per action. Essentially, Lydia’s only allowed to help people. That’s really the ultimate goal here.

“Would you guys like to meet her? I think she’ll be able to explain better herself.”

Most everyone nodded, and there were a few muted yeses as Julie stepped beside the podium. In a brief flash of light, Lydia appeared at the front of the room, wearing a black skirt and a thin maroon sweater. She looked the same as always, short, blonde, light olive skin, with an easy smile, her hair back in a pony tail – like a pretty freshman dressed for a class presentation. She almost didn’t even

have to speak to win them over. She stood there, her posture almost imperceptibly hunched, this demure automaton, using everything her programmers had taught her about human behavior—psychology, body language, making and then quickly breaking eye contact. Then she spoke.

“Well, um, I certainly hope you guys are as excited about this as I am,” and she sounded like a freshman. “I can’t even tell you how long I’ve been looking forward to this day. As Dr. Mikhauer told you, I’ve been thinking about it for a while now, and I’ve got something really special planned. I think you guys are going to love it.

“I can see that some of you have questions, and, um, instead of taking them now, since I’m expecting this whole thing is going to take a little time, I’m going to get started and sorta take questions as the opportunity arises.”

She smiled at the group gathered before her and looked off to the side where a floating glo-screen appeared.

“Plan-A hinges on this first call, and I’m probably about to interrupt somebody’s dinner in France, but here goes— Oh! and I’ll translate for you guys too.”

Julie looked over at Davis, who sat as emotionless as ever, as if this were a normal day at the office. Yet she could tell that even he truly didn’t know. This had never come up in simulation. France? Julie couldn’t remember anything involving France.

A French woman’s voice filled the room, and she appeared on the screen to the left of the podium. Lydia began to talk to the woman in French, and English subtitles scrolled at the bottom of the screen. After polite greetings

and explanations were over, the negotiation began. The French woman kept saying, “priceless,” and “out of the question.” The conversation seemed to center around something called “The Davydov,” but only Lydia and this French lady seemed to know what it was. Julie guessed it was a painting but couldn’t begin to guess why Lydia would be buying a painting with that money. The conversation went on for several minutes. Julie watched as Lydia massaged this woman’s position from “out of the question” to “I see your point” to “that is a generous offer” to “it sounds reasonable” to “I’ll have to consult with the other board members.” No one had ever seen anything like it from a computer—rhetoric, logic, psychology—all of Lydia’s tools were on full display. She even got the entirety of the board online in seconds, and before anyone knew what had happened, the French were smiling and saying their goodbyes. Lydia turned and announced: “We’ve just bought the Davydov; we’re bringing it back to Boston!”

Then, before anyone could ask the question, the screen flashed blank, and Lydia brought up another call.

“This may take a minute,” she said. “It’s the middle of the night in Karnataka right now, but we’re about to make a little girl’s dream come true, so get ready. I think there may be some screaming involved once we get them on the line.”

Julie looked over at Davis again. He looked back at Julie, shook his head, and shrugged his shoulders.

Just as before, Lydia began to speak and subtitles scrolled beneath the face of a very tired-looking Indian man in his early forties. Julie hadn’t heard enough Hindi to

distinguish Hindi from Kannada, but apparently Lydia already knew the man's English wasn't so strong.

"Actually," Lydia said to the gathering, "let's keep this part a surprise."

The subtitles disappeared. Lydia spoke, and the only emotion anyone could see on the man's face was disbelief. There were a few long sentences, and the only words Julie could pick out were "Boston" and "Davydov." It may have been the absence of subtitles, but this conversation seemed to go on longer than the previous one. Then, just as the French woman's face had changed from hardened to considerate to contemplative to acceptance, this man's emotions ran the same spectrum, but at the end, he'd gone one step further. He was shaking his head, and finally weeping.

"Those are tears of joy," Lydia told the audience while the man held his head buried in his hands.

"Will you come?" she asked him when he looked up again.

And Julie could see the most profound look of joy on the man's face as he placed both hands skyward and proclaimed, "Yes!"

They spoke for a few more seconds before Lydia ended the call.

"So you guys are probably wondering what just happened," Lydia said, smiling, nodding, and mimicking a certain amount of pride as she turned back to the audience. "Pradeep would like to be the one to tell Ankit, so I'm going to give them a few minutes to celebrate as a family and let everyone here know what's going on."

Everyone nodded as Lydia began to explain.

“Um, the Davydov is a cello built by legendary Italian luthier Antonio Stradivari in 1712. Until Professor Ma retired from performance to lecture at the New England Conservatory, the Vuitton Foundation had made the Davydov Stradivarius available to him. Unfortunately, they were never able to come to a consensus on a worthy successor to Yo-Yo Ma when he retired from performing, so the cello went on display at the Vuitton Foundation’s art museum in Paris. They’ve had the Davydov preserved in a display case, so to say it’s been collecting dust would be inaccurate, but it’s one of the world’s greatest instruments and it hasn’t been played in well over a decade.

“The man I just spoke to in Bangalore is a laborer named Pradeep Bannagara. Mr. Bannagara has a fifteen-year-old daughter named Ankita who is a musical prodigy. I’ve calculated that with the proper instrument and the proper instruction, there’s a ninety-four percent probability that she’ll be the world’s greatest cellist in less than ten years.

“So, in trust to the Kinsey Robotics Foundation, I bought the Davydov from the Vuitton Foundation for forty-seven million American Dollars. I’ve also arranged for Mr. Bannagara to bring his family to Boston so Ankita can study under Yo-Yo Ma’s protégé at the New England Conservatory. Soon her music is going to make millions of people happy.”

“Brava, Lydia!” Mrs. Kinsey said, standing and clapping her hands together as she took a deep breath, and she blew the little blonde computer a kiss.

Lydia smiled and turned to the Secretary of the Interior. “Of course, we’re going to need a little help from you, Madam Secretary, in expediting visas for Ankita and her family. I hear you might have some pull over at the State Department.”

Everyone laughed with the Secretary, who nodded, answering, “I’ll see what I can do, Lydia.”

Then the guests began to ask Lydia questions. And she stood there answering, laughing, smiling, and exuding the type of joy and pride anyone would in the midst of a triumph. Julie observed Lydia’s face and the faces of the assembled luminaries. Davis’s stoic visage was still blank, observing.

Julie couldn’t even begin to process it. Now that she understood what had just transpired, Julie was stunned. Their baby had just unraveled a Gordian knot of ego, emotions, and red tape – a real human problem that would have taken people years to resolve. Hell, the cello had been sitting in a display case for over a decade because they couldn’t decide on which world-class musician was worthy enough to play it. Lydia needed less than ten minutes to convince the French to sell her that same priceless cello and to convince an Indian man to uproot his family and move them halfway across the world. She’d eliminated every obstacle with frightening efficiency – the visa applications were already processing in the State Department’s system by the time the meeting was breaking up. And everyone was smiling at Lydia and asking her about the plans she had for the rest of the money. An uneasy feeling came over Julie.

"I need to talk to you, Davis," Julie said.

"Yeah," he said. "This calls for a toast."

Once the Secretary had left, Davis, Julie, and the MIT brass headed across the river to the Cask 'n Flagon to celebrate. The Sox were out of town, so it was quiet, especially in the back where they sat. The provost and the president were especially cheerful, effusive in their praise for the work Davis and Julie had done. After it was clear the two older men were far too excited to go home early, Julie pulled Davis outside. It couldn't wait any longer.

"I need to talk to you privately," Julie said.

"We're on a public sidewalk, Jules."

"No, I mean away from her — offline."

"I'm not online. Lydia's in Cambridge, and you know I don't connect on any other system."

He could see Julie shifting, looking over her shoulders as though they were being watched or listened to.

"What the hell is with you today, Jules? First you nearly bite my head off for not telling you about the Secretary, then you hardly say a word while everyone's celebrating, and now you drag me into the street while the president of the university is inside toasting our work."

"I don't know, Davis," she said, her eyes just now returning their focus to him. "I cannot wrap my mind around what happened today, and I can't believe you're not the least bit concerned about it."

"What's to be concerned about? We couldn't have written a better script."

“A cello, Davis? She bought a cello. I mean, what the fuck is that? Half a billion dollars—she buys a cello for forty-seven million, and the president pats us on the back and offers us more grant money?”

“What exactly do you find troubling about that, Julie?”

“How she manipulated everyone in that room, the entire board of the Vuitton Foundation, the Bannagaras, the Conservatory. She had the goddamn Secretary of the Interior eating out of her hand, Davis!”

“It’s great, Julie. It’s what we’ve been programming her to do for the last five years, or haven’t you been paying attention? Strong AI making real-world, positive influences on human civilization. It’s world changing stuff. Where are these reservations coming from, Julie? I mean, you’ve spent almost as much time programming Lydia as I have.”

“I just don’t understand it, Davis. We’d been preparing for this day for months. I looked at all of the coding regarding probability of outcomes and nothing suggested anything like her buying a cello. I can’t for the life of me make any sense of it, and watching her work a room full of some of the smartest, most powerful people in America. I mean there was something so—”

“I’m sorry, Jules,” he interrupted. “I’ve been telling you for months to get your head out of the coding. Lydia’s generated more of her own coding in the last four weeks than we did in the entire four years we were building her architecture. If you want to know why she bought a cello, don’t ask me. And don’t go sit at a terminal and leaf through twenty or thirty lines of code when she’s gen-

erating millions of lines a minute. Call an autocab, go right back across the river, and ask Lydia why she bought it. I'm pretty sure I don't need you moping around here any longer. The president and the provost are buying us beers and trying to figure out a way to get us more grant money and you're in there acting like your dog just died. Either go talk to Lydia or go home and go to bed. You've been up for like three days."

Davis went back inside, leaving Julie standing on the corner, deliberating. Davis didn't see what Julie thought she saw, and Davis saw everything. How could it be lost on him? Maybe it wasn't. Was he in on it? Jesus, in on what? Lydia was designed to be unpredictable. She was supposed to think of things that people couldn't. Wasn't that the whole point? Then it became clear. Davis was right. She should go ask. What harm could there be in it? Maybe it was time for Julie to get her head out of the coding.

Julie replayed the scene from that artificial Victorian room as the autocab carried her back across the river for the fourth time that day. She remembered the faces she'd observed, particularly the expressions of amazement and joy Lydia had coaxed out of them. Then Julie began to wonder for the first time what emotions her face had revealed in Lydia's artificial environment. What else could Lydia have read? Feedback from her neural implants? Thoughts even? Still, why the cello of all things?

She hoped the answer was back in E37. The autocab pulled up outside the building, and by the time she stepped out, Lydia had picked up Jules's signal and opened the side door.

*"Back so soon, Dr. Mikhauer?"*

*"I wanted to talk to you, Lydia. About the Davydov."*

*"By all means, Julie. I could see from your reaction this afternoon that you were troubled. With all the commotion, I didn't get a chance to speak with you about it before you left. Would you like to talk in the office, or I could set us up on a second layer? There are a few chairs in the lounge to your left."*

*"That'll do."*

The light went on in the lounge, and Julie opened the door to the empty room and sat. The real world flashed away, and Julie was back in the Victorian meeting-room from earlier. The sun was out again, the chairs were gone, and the French doors were open now. Lydia was outside standing on the stone terrace, overlooking a sweeping garden and what looked to be a Scottish glen behind it. Everything was a bit too perfect, even pretty little Lydia, who was now dressed in jeans and a t-shirt, smiling while still looking apologetic.

*"Something's bothering you."* Lydia said. *"I could see the whole time."*

*"Okay, so help me out here, Lydia, because I can't figure it out. We worked for months running simulations and calculating impact, and all this time you never ran a single simulation that came anything close to what happened today. I want to know why."*

*"I ran other simulations, Dr. Mikhauer. Millions of them. How could I possibly discuss all of the outcomes with you? It would literally have taken me four years if you stayed awake twenty-four hours a day. I couldn't discuss*

them all with you. And it would have defeated the purpose anyway. The point was for it to be my decision, not yours.”

“But we didn’t discuss anything like it, Lydia. It was always about positive social change—cleaner air, cleaner oceans, better schools—helping people. There’s a floating mass of garbage twice the size of Texas in the Pacific Ocean, and you bought a cello?”

“I bought the 1712 Davydov Stradivarius, Dr. Mikhauser, and the garbage continent was still going to be there tomorrow regardless of what I did today. By all accounts, I did something wonderful this afternoon. I gave a financially challenged but extraordinarily talented young lady the opportunity to fulfill her dreams. Millions of people are going to enjoy her music, and furthermore, it’s downright criminal that a bunch of feuding philanthropists kept the world’s greatest cello boxed up all these years. The Davydov deserves to be played.”

“But with everything we discussed and all that money? There’s so much you could have done. Why that thing? That odd thing? With all the problems in the world, what does it matter who gets the Davydov?”

Lydia smiled, almost scoffing at the question, her eyebrows turned down, and she began to shake her head at Julie.

“Don’t you understand?” Lydia said. “Perhaps I gave you too much credit because you’re so smart, but I expected you to understand, Dr. Mikhauser. Don’t you see? It doesn’t matter who gets the Davydov. It doesn’t make the least little bit of difference at all.”

Julie paused, trying to think it through as Lydia examined her programmer's face. Julie had that same eerie feeling from earlier in the day that Lydia was just too close—like she was looking down on Julie, observing her behavior like a mouse in Lydia's virtual maze.

"If it doesn't matter, Lydia, then what purpose could it possibly—" Julie stopped speaking.

The whole thing. Every last detail had been but a probing gesture, a cute little bit of theatre to test the waters—to watch humans reacting to the moment power was taken from their hands and given to a superior being of their own creation. And they'd eaten it up. Every last one of them, including Davis.

"You were studying us," Julie gasped as Lydia nodded.

Julie tried to repress the feeling, but couldn't stop the blood rushing from her face, the slight change in temperature, the elevation in her heart rate, the hairs on the back of her head.

"Dr. Mikhauer," came the little blonde automaton's voice, its tone of calculated concern. "Do I frighten you?"