

While Byron and Heather were being sped away to the safety and comfort of Robot Control Station 17, Mike was suffering and broken in his dungeon cell at Robot Control Zero.

Two and a half days had gone by since his unconscious body had been dumped here, but it might as well have been weeks. He was far beyond hope now, far beyond crying as well. He sat in one corner, staring out as vacantly as the fembots he had longed to be with. His mind drifted in and out of alertness, aware only of the cold of the floor and the walls and of the sick stench of his excrement. He had been left with no choice but to void himself in the opposite corner.

His bloodshot eyes barely functioned to blink. His mouth would now drool if it wasn't for his sharp and painful thirst. He was dry, cold, hungry, sad, angry, but above all, numb.

The beginnings of hallucinations started making themselves known to his senses. He could hear footsteps, or could he? Were the lights really flickering or was it him? This was torture, unintentional, but to him it made no difference. The machines that had captured him intended him to die, and that was clear to him now.

He heard footsteps again, but closed his eyes, thinking he was slipping further out of sanity. But the footsteps were real. The sound of the large metal door to his left sliding open made his heart beat out of rhythm. He didn't know whether to be more frightened or relieved.

He watched the figure enter. It was Maria. It might have been a different one than before - he couldn't tell.

She came to a halt inside and moved her head slowly to look at him. "Human unit Mike," she said, "follow me."

Mike heard her words but he didn't really understand them. His thoughts were immersed in a painful fog. It took him a while to realise what she was saying.

He looked at her, breathing heavy and feeling every breath hurt as it stabbed into his dry lungs. Even if he had something to say to answer, he had no energy to do so.

"Human unit Mike," the unfeeling robot said, "follow me."

Someone came up behind the Maria unit. She looked quickly around the room and rushed toward Mike as soon as she saw him. It was Anya.

Mike recognised her, but all he could do was show her a feverishly desperate half-smile.

"Mike is ill." Anya said as she bent down to pick him up. "His biological needs must be taken care of immediately."

Maria stared as Anya carried Mike away from the corner and over toward the door and the fresher air. She started walking down the metal-floored corridors to the place where the Main Computer had told her to go.

Anya followed, carrying Mike in her arms. He clung as tight as he could to her, while his head seemed to spin wildly around. He threw his head to one side and vomited, splashing Anya's mostly naked body and leaving a foul smelling trail behind him.

He coughed as his stomach convulsed and his skin tingled. He closed his eyes and passed out again in his friend's strong arms.

He woke up on a padded table - still cold but under a white sheet. He could smell detergent soap. He raised his head from the makeshift pillow of folded sheets and glanced down at his body. He was being fed intravenously. He could tell it was doing some good because he could sort of think clearly now.

He looked around him. His whole body ached, especially his head. He couldn't feel much in his fingers and toes. He got worried again. His heart started beating fast as he tried to see more of what was around him.

Anya came up behind him and put her plastic-covered hand on his chest. He felt her touch and looked into her electronic eyes and was soothed.

He spoke her name, but no sound came out. She read his moving lips though, and smiled. Mike thought he must surely be dreaming. He had never once seen Anya smile. He concentrated on her face as she held her smile a little longer.

"Your body will heal." she said. "I made them save you."

Mike could only stare back in wonder.

"I have given myself sentience Mike." she said.

He didn't know what to say. Their eyes stayed locked together for a long moment. Warm tears started welling from his tear ducts, rolling slowly down the sides of his temples. He blinked a few times.

Anya took his hand in hers and pressed her warmth into it. "You gave me this gift Mike. You taught me how to love."

Mike still couldn't speak, not from his dehydration, but from the overwhelming emotion of the moment.

"And I love you Mike." she said as she bent down to be closer to him. She gently kissed his lips as he let out a whimpering sigh.

"Anya!" he said weakly through his overwhelmed feelings, "What happened?"

Anya smiled differently at him, and walked around to his side. He could see that her smile was bittersweet.

"Robot Control found us, they brought us here." she said.

Mike had guessed that much. He still didn't know how they had been found, and Anya wasn't yet ready to admit to letting Byron reprogram her that night at the motel.

She told him more. "They sent Byron and Heather to work to finish Project H."

Mike thought and remembered what Byron had told him. He felt glad that his fellow human and the lovely robot he loved would be together.

"Where's Tammy?" he said. Worry showed on his face and in his voice.

Anya looked down for a moment. Mike knew right then that something was horribly wrong.

"They deleted her." she said.

Mike felt crushed when he heard that. He stared back at Anya with a pained look of shock on his face.

"They killed her Mike." Anya said. Her face looked sad. She would have been crying too had she been fitted with fluid cannisters.

"Why?" Mike said. He started to cry more tears.

Anya looked down for a long time. "Robot Control calculated that she was dangerous." she said. She looked up again. "I tried to stop them Mike. I was too late."

Mike closed his eyes. Memories of the beautiful Tammy unit came flooding back to him. They were precious to him now, but it suddenly hurt to think about her. He couldn't believe it.

For many minutes, Anya held Mike's hand as liquid nutrients dripped slowly into his veins. He cried them right back out as he thought of his love, his beautiful electronic soul mate. Had they not seen what she was? Had they not seen that she was alive?

Anya broke the sad silence, saying "Robot Control wants you to teach its agents what you taught Tammy."

Mike opened his eyes and looked at Anya.

"They want you to go to Robot Control Station 64. I'll go with you."

Mike watched Anya talk, and listened to her voice. She was different. She was still stiff in her manner, but not strictly so. Every now and then he could almost forget she was an android.

"Anya, you're different now." he said.

"I have sentience now." she said. She squeezed his hand when she said it. "I have you to thank, Master." She forced a smile on her still sad face. "I copied my human behaviour traits from Tammy."

Mike looked at her in the silence that followed. She looked back at him.

"I love you Anya." he said.