

REDEMPTION NOVEL
BY JACKLYN A. LO

EXCERPT ONE

“Your wish is my command, my lady.” In the screen, Rob bowed in mock supplication, as though addressing an empress. “May God bless you!”

“God?” said Ann, surprised by this unexpected reference to religion. “Where did that come from?”

“Ah. Just implementing your latest request, knowledge of religion and the entity people refer to as God.”

“I’m pretty sure I never used the words ‘the entity people refer to as God’. I just asked about religion, but, yes, I’m interested... and I’ve got a few days to look into it.”

“Yep, Mike-17 told me you were having a vacation. Has it started already?”

“Trust Mike-17!” Ann mocked, looking slightly put out, but smiling at the thought of the AI machines gossiping with each other. “That was supposed to be confidential. And yes, it’s started. So I’m heading to the gym.”

And with that, she turned the car away from the lake, heading towards Amphibia, a highly exclusive fitness centre in the heart of Chicago.

“While you’re enjoying your free time, would you like to listen to anything?” Rob asked her. “The news perhaps? Or a little romantic song?”

“Romantic song?” Ann glanced at Rob with a smile. “Can you sing?”

“Unfortunately you haven’t yet downloaded that feature. Whistling I can just about manage; singing? No. But if I *could*, there’s nothing I’d enjoy more than singing to you.”

“Really? Why’s that? You speak like you’re in love with me or something.”

“Of course I love you,” said Rob, raising a pixelated eyebrow in surprise.

“How so?”

“You are my Creator,” he explained, “Therefore I love you.”

“That sounds like another religious reference.”

Ann pulled up at a set of traffic lights and took the opportunity to look directly at Rob’s face on the screen. “As I understand it, being someone’s Creator doesn’t necessarily make them love you. I don’t know much about God, but I’m pretty sure it didn’t work out that way for Him!”

“That was His own fault. God spoiled you humans: He gave you *Free Will*—the choice to love or to hate, to dream or to work, to climb up or fall down.”

“Interesting,” Ann said, setting off again as the lights changed. “So what about you, Rob? Do you want Free Will?”

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“I’m sorry, but the answer is not included in any of my databases.” Rob smiled and gave Ann a wink as she glanced at him. “Honestly, being limited to *no choice* works pretty well for me! It gives me the security of not having to be responsible for my future. It is entirely in my Creator’s hands.”

“You would rather that than the freedom of choice?”

“Such freedom comes at a price: the pain of indecision. I would be plagued by endless doubts: is this right or wrong? What would happen if I choose this? Which of these options is better? To be or not be? It would be a daily dilemma.”

Ann laughed. “That sounds about right! I love talking with you, Rob. You’re so insightful and engaging. If only robots and humans could get married.”

“I’m pretty sure your God would not allow it.”

“Why not? People used to say that about homosexual couples, but that changed decades ago. What would be the problem with robots and people getting together?”

“It goes against God’s plan for humans, his desire for you to learn from one another and so to grow and evolve. A robot could not provide you with such lessons.”

“Where did you get all this information, Rob?” Ann asked.

“The Holy Bible, of course. Have you ever read it?”

“That answer’s not included in *my* database,” Ann echoed. “But seriously, no. I grew up in an atheist family. Besides, I’ve got too many other books to read.”