Almost Like Real Skin

by Janice D. Soderling

I had the weirdest dream, there was this dim and empty room, and behind a wall of glass a flag materialized, backlit and fluttering, and I am not saying what country's flag it was, just that it was a flag, that awesome symbol of the nation state and fervid jingoism, it blinked on, then off again, and in trooped robots. Oh, they looked like people, just as real as you and me, but I *knew*, as dreamers know in dreams, that they were really robots, though people-sized and dressed in a variety of garb, even though their eyes looked real, even though their skin was almost like real skin, but once in Cologne, I was at the Museum Ludwig, alone in a small room with a lady objet d'art that looked as real as these androids looked, but she did not reply when I spoke to her (it seemed *polite* to speak, because we were alone in that small room and I had nearly bumped against her, but she could not talk back), and it was like that, in my dream, in trooped these robots looking just like people, every size and shape and color, they were pursing their lips or blowing their nose, or asking for a glass of water please, well, then that flag flashed on again, backlit and fluttering, and all these *people* snapped to attention, hands on hearts in an indivisible motion, and they started chanting, like, and then the flag went *poof* and they went back to seeming normal, until the flag flashed on again, when once again they lurched to stiff attention, chanting, and I am standing there, the only non-robot in the room and *talking* to them, like when I said *excuse me* to that artificial lady in the Museum Ludwig and I am saying, HEY, it is just a piece of fabric, it can't control you, use your noggin, THINK, but then I realized they couldn't hear me, or maybe they *could* hear me, but simply couldn't understand what I was saying because they were only programmed robots and utterly controlled.

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