



The Cybernetic Tea Shop

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Clara Gutierrez is a highly-skilled technician specializing in the popular 'Raise' AI companions. Her childhood in a migrant worker family has left her uncomfortable with lingering in any one place, so she sticks around just long enough to replenish her funds before she moves on, her only constant companion Joanie, a fierce, energetic Raise hummingbird.

Sal is a fully autonomous robot, the creation of which was declared illegal ages earlier due to ethical concerns. She is older than the law, however, at best out of place in society and at worst hated. Her old master is long dead, but she continues to run the tea shop her master had owned, lost in memories of the past, slowly breaking down, and aiming to fulfill her master's dream for the shop.

When Clara stops by Sal's shop for lunch, she doesn't expect to find a real robot there, let alone one who might need her help. But as they begin to spend time together and learn more about each other, they both start to wrestle with the concept of moving on...

The Cybernetic Tea Shop Details

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From Reader Review The Cybernetic Tea Shop for online ebook

Danika at The Lesbrary says

I've got to say, with a title like "The Cybernetic Tea Shop," I expected this to be a fun, silly, quick read. Instead it was thoughtful and quiet, seeming to take up more space than the pages it occupied. This is set in a world where sentient, sapient robots were once mass produced, but given the ethical problems they raised, they're now illegal to make. Hundreds of years later, some of those original robots are still around, with questionable legal personhood and a lot of animosity aimed at them by a public who wants to forget the whole thing ever happened.

But it's not about the sci fi world, really. That's just backstory for Sal, who has been running a tea shop for more than 200 years, continuing after her old "master"/partner died, despite facing constant harassment and even violence. She meets tech Clara when she visits the shop, and despite Clara's wanderlust and Sal's complicated situation, they hit it off.

Although the word isn't used, both Sal and Clara are asexual. Clara explains that she doesn't have sexual attraction to people, even when she has a romantic relationship with them (and Sal isn't programmed for that).

I really appreciated how character-based this is. In a small amount of time, I felt like I really got to know both the character and how they complemented each other. I'm interested to read more by this author!

Michele says

Just a lovely, lovely story. This is the second AI book I've read in less than a week and it's definitely the better of the two. Frankly, i'm amazed at how well this author developed the two MC's in such a short book, but damn did she.

AI Sal...I want to marry her. And you will too, trust me. But I have dibs.

Just read this book. It's so well written and lovely. I know what you are thinking, "You've already used that word dummy" but that is the word that just reverberates around my head every time I think about this book.

Please read Corrie's review and Joc's. Much better reviewers than me.

P.s. No sex...believe me, you want care at all.

Jem says

This novella about an AI robot and a human programmer can be read as a sweet romance between two asexual individuals, as it was no doubt intended. But it is also so much more.

On a more profound level, it's a story of an artificial being's journey to humanity. It does so with an unusual but amazingly well-done robot 'voice' that's endearingly honest yet utterly believable. Even this jaded human

can't help but fall in love with her, and even shed a tear or two for her lonely existence and her 'painful' past.

The book is deceptively simple. But through the innocent musings and introspection of the AI robot, it asks and answers the question "What makes us human?"

Is it the ability to learn new things? (AI is an expert on that)

Is it the ability to 'feel' emotions? (AI has sensors to feel anything and everything - - from 'pain' to 'grief'. (Well, except for sex. So she's technically asexual).

Or is "free will" the essence of humanity? Are robots capable of that? Even the AI ones? Surely they'd be restricted by their programming.

These are the deep questions the book presents, but without ever going preachy or philosophical or beating them over our heads. I find it refreshing that the book doesn't try too hard to twist the readers arms into accepting its message. The AI robot was never made to be human and that's as it should be. It has no lids and no tears. Physically, there is no mistaking that it's a robot. But as she goes about her day, fretting about work that needs to be done, fearing for her safety and the shop's, her 'joy' at finding a friend and companionship, pondering the meaning of 'life' and worrying about ultimately dying...she's just like us. She's just...one of us.

5 stars

P.S. The timeline is a bit problematic though. The AI robot has been alive for more than two centuries, going on three. 300 years in human history tends to bring drastic technological advances, if human history is anything to go by. But the human protagonist is still going cross-country by train. Except for the AI robot and the little bird one, nothing about the world looks remotely futuristic. And this can't have been set in the past. Imagine robot parts for a discontinued model being available for 300 years! Here, we'd be hard-pressed to find a replacement for a battery if your phone isn't named Apple or Samsung. :)

Sabrina Grafenberger says

The Cybernetic Tea Shop is a sweet and quiet asexual lesbian love story between Clara, a human technician and Sal, a sentient robot. It's also a story about overcoming loss, learning to move forward and finding new purpose.

The story works really well despite having only 65 pages, but it's a little too short to be completely satisfying. I wanted to spend more time with these two adorable characters and get to know them better.

Corrie says

Read it again. This time to make it into an **audiobook** for a friend so she can listen to it on her way to work :-)

Joc says

It's seems really silly to have tears in my eyes for a robot but this was a really sweet and gentle story about Clara, a technician, falling in love with Sal, a robot with artificial intelligence.

It's beautifully written and I loved how engaged I was by the main characters and the bird. It was so evocative that I could see it as one of those award winning animated shorts.

Skye Kilaen says

Robot romance FTW! Lovely, quiet novella about Clara Gutierrez, asexual lesbian technician, falling in love with Sal, the female robot proprietor of an old-timey tea shop. Sal is a rare remaining humanoid robot, since they were outlawed long before due to ethical concerns about their autonomy. Clara's never met one before even though she works on the more limited Robotic Artificially Intelligent Synthetic Entities a.k.a. Raises. When Sal's tea shop is attacked by anti-robot vandals, Clara helps Sal clean up, and a friendship is born.

Katz packs a metric ton of emotion into this story. Sal is still grieving her former owner/lover, and I actually teared up a couple of times while she wrestled with how to move on without losing what she valued from the past. Clara is adorably gentle in honoring Sal's personhood, especially when Sal lets Clara help her with maintenance. The domesticity they fall into is so warm and reassuring, and the mutual declaration of affection is so delicate. I didn't know what to expect going in, but this immediately got added to my list of favorite comfort re-reads.

Paige (Enchantology) says

My full review is up on Queer SFF but can we talk about how nice it was to follow an asexual character who falls in love with another woman? That's so me I could D I E.

Lucille says

This was such a nice story! The main characters are a grieving ace robot with feelings, owner of a tea shop and a young ace woman with wanderlust working on cybernetic and whatnot. They meet and cuteness ensue!

would recommend for people who loved A Closed and Common Orbit!

lov2laf says

Five stars.

I originally saw this on Scribd but didn't get to it fast enough before they pulled it from their catalogue. I ended up buying it instead and it was worth every penny.

"The Cybernetic Tea Shop" is about as solid and perfect as a short story gets.

It's told from the perspective of two leads, a human and a robot. What Katz managed to inject into the experience of the robot, in particular, was pure excellence and I really felt for her character. Both the descriptions and characters were all extraordinarily vivid.

What you get is a nice little soul searching romance between an asexual Latina woman and a sapient robot set sometime in the future.

Nicely done. I loved this.

Jessica Nguyen says

It was a very well-written novella. I enjoyed very much the emotion range described for Sal, given that she's a robot. What she felt was so realistic and sympathetic while at the same time logical and believable! I also love the fact about Clara being a tech nerd who can fix robots!

Luce says

5 STARS.

Wow. I loved this story. I'm going to steal a few adjectives from other reviewers. Because they said it first and sums up most of the feels I have for this story.

Lovely, Lovely Story -@Michelle

Sweet and gentle story - @Joc

Grabbed my heart - @Corrie

thoughtful and quiet, seeming to take up more space than the pages it occupied - @Danika

I'm always amazed when writers can write short stories (or in this case a short novella) that are concise but not spare. As the book summary states - there is Clara, a very skilled robotics technician and her constant companion, Joanie, a robotic hummingbird that Clara re-programmed to have more emotional range but just short of being sentient. Clara is a nomad. She rarely stays in a place longer than a year. With her skills, she is able to find well paying jobs wherever she lands. Then finally there is Sal. Sal is a sentient, autonomous AI robot. She is rare, as few sentient AIs are left after creation of them was decided to be unethical. She runs a tea shop that was owned by her deceased master and she has been running it alone for almost 300 years.

Warning: as others have said, you will fall in love with Sal. How can you not fall in love with someone who loves as deeply as Sal?

Hurry up and finish the current book you are reading or put it down for an hour or so and read this lovely novella.

Shira Glassman says

Man, I would give this six stars if I could. *The Cybernetic Tea Shop* is a quick, emotional, uplifting f/f romance between an outmoded android and a robot repair tech, with an ending that reminds me of sunlight breaking through the end of a really wet rainstorm.

The robot is basically a robot *widow*, thinking of the woman who first acquired her to help with her tea shop with fond longing even hundreds of years after her death. It could all be read as a gigantic metaphor for the vulnerability of a new relationship (trusting someone to tinker around in your programming!), the yoke of grief, and living for someone else's goals because you miss them.

Or you could just jump up and down squeeing over *lesbian robot romance*, because both levels work equally well. Also, the human is asexual, and is really clear about it, so if you're looking for that, have at!

I love the sort of sparkly pretty fluffy worldbuilding of a future where it's common to have talking robot pets of all kinds.

Corrie says

The Cybernetic Tea Shop grabbed my heart. It's such a compelling and sweet love story between a robot (**Sal**) and a robot repair tech (**Clara**).

Clara Gutierrez and her Raise companion ('Robotic Artificially Intelligent Synthetic Entity'), a hummingbird named **Joanie** never stay in one city for long. Clara likes to travel, explore new places, work there for a few months and then move on. When she arrives in **Seattle** she visits the **Cybernetic Tea Shop** where Sal has been working for the last 278 years.

Sal (Sarah) is a robot, one of the last of her kind. True A.I.'s (as close to humans as you can get) are no longer wanted in society and the ones that are left are eyed with suspicion, shunned and mistrusted. Sal was totally devoted to her original owner **Korinne** and when she died, Sal devoted herself to their legacy, the tea shop. Her promise to Korinne is to keep it going for at least 300 years as a lasting monument to their love. Sal, however, is slowly breaking down, her parts long out of style and no money left to pay for repairs. And then there are the attacks of vandalism on her tea shop.

Clara is fascinated by Sal and they strike up a friendship. Clara wants to help Sal, try to fix her. Will Sal trust Clara enough to let her in when Sal is literally stuck in the past, still grieving the loss of Korinne?

Author **Meredith Katz** created a fantastic story that will stay with me for a good long while. **I highly recommend!**

f/f

Themes: little hummingbird Joanie is a star, I really fell in love with robot Sal, she had so much humanity, between a non-sexual robot and an a-sexual woman there was so much love in this story

5 stars

Wart Hill says

Things I Find While Shelving

I received a free ARC via NetGalley

This story is very...quiet, I think, is a good way to put it.

We start with Clara, a tech who travels a lot. Doesn't like to stay in one place for too long. We see her

working on AI companions, we learn about the development and eventual banning of more complex AIs and Clara's interest in the subject.

Then we meet one of those more complex AIs, Sal. Sal has been living her previous owner's dream for years now, trying to keep their small tea shop running for as long as she can, battling her own wearing down and the distrust and prejudice of the humans who live around her to do it.

Then Clara arrives. Clara who can help fix Sal, get her back into good working order. Clara who doesn't just see Sal as a technological curiosity. Clara who really likes tea. The two grow closer over the course of the story, getting to know each other and their relationship is developed very nicely.

I very much enjoyed this story, it is very quiet and sweet.
