

On Thursday morning, recharged and ready, Heather got to work at five minutes to eight. Agnes had been there since quarter-to, and Byron since 7:30. Heather wiped the dirty snow from her shoes and hung her coat with the others. She made a friendly hello with Agnes, then Went to see Byron in his office.

"Good morning Byron." she said, her posture and expression showing the friendliness generated by her software.

"Hello, Heather." he said as he smiled and stood up. "I've got a couple of projects for you today."

"Oh, good." she said. "I was hoping there would be something for me to do."

"First we have to pack up that scanner so we can send it to get fixed." he said as he led her into the basement. He found a box it would fit into and gave her some old newspaper to pack it with.

Heather's facemask showed him an expression of slight confusion. The robot's AI didn't understand the purpose of the newsprint. Rather than risk overheating her circuitry, she asked him. "What do I use the newspapers for?"

Byron was a bit puzzled at the question. He thought it was obvious. He put an understanding looking smile on his face as he separated some pages and crumpled them up into a loose ball. He placed that in a corner of the deep box and said "Just fill a layer full of newsprint, put the scanner in the middle, and pack up the rest with newsprint."

Heather looked confused still. Her programming was basic, and couldn't make sense out of his instructions very quickly. "Oh. Okay." she said, still computing meaning from her collected visual and audio data.

"Just let me know when you're done and I'll have it sent out."

"Okay Byron." she said, her plastic face showing none of the confusion that remained inside her.

He went back upstairs as she pulled exactly three pages out of the broadsheet, just as he had done. Heather had never crumpled newspaper before. Her CPU was in danger of overheating as it tried to figure out how to do it. Three whole minutes went by before the pretty android made any movement.

Her first attempt was less than successful. The pages got more or less folded against themselves in a relatively flat shape. She placed that in the box, then reactivated her memory files to watch the way Byron had done it. A small screen opened up amid the quickly flashing binary data in her field of vision. The movie of Byron's hands shaping the paper into a ball appeared and replayed while Heather's processors studied the mechanics of his actions.

The whole time she did this, she appeared unmoving and staring out into space. It was a good thing she was alone down there.

After several repetitions of the video in her memory, she was ready to try it again. This time she made something that looked like what Byron had made. Making up for lost time, she filled the bottom layer of the box with paper at the fastest rate she could. If anyone had seen her do it that fast, they would have definitely suspected her of being a machine. So again, lucky for her she was alone.

The remainder of Byron's instructions were crystal clear compared to the crumple command. Working fast, she was able to have the scanner packed away in about as much time as a human could have done it.

As it so happened, Byron was returning to the basement just as Heather was folding over the top panels of the box. He had a clipboard full of graph paper and a pen in his hand.

"I thought of something you can do for me while the scanner's down." he said as he walked toward her. He held the clipboard and pen out to her.

She looked at the items and deduced that she should take them. The way her job was changing, she might need some more sophisticated programming to deal with it.

"We haven't been given any equipment to do it yet, but the audio archives are next on the list after all those clippings you were scanning."

Heather looked at him with those electronic camera eyes of hers, her processors desperately trying to keep up with him and follow the meaning of his words.

"What I want you to do..." he said as he started walking around the corner, "...is to write down the index numbers on all the reels on the bottom, the ones that got the most damage. We'll have to do those first. Then write the ones on the second shelf, and up, and up."

Heather looked lost. Her chips were running hot, and some were close to crashing.

"I don't understand." she said as her eyes pointed down to all the cardboard boxes containing magnetic tape reels. If she was given a few more minutes to compute, she would have understood, but that would have looked dangerously unnatural to the human standing next to her.

Byron explained again. This time she didn't listen, she only recorded the audio so it could be analyzed later. She was still shuttling billions of ones and zeros around between her millions of charged transistors to try and make sense of his first explanation.

Just as he finished talking, she completed her calculations.

"Got it." she said. The actuators in her facemask moved into a smile pattern.

"Good stuff." he said as he patted her shoulder, then held on to it for a while.

Heather kept smiling. Byron wished he could touch her for a little bit longer, maybe put his arms around her.

He snapped himself out of it and abruptly excused himself to his office. As he took the scanner and walked back up the steps, the brown-haired fembot knelt down with her mechanical legs and scanned the rows of boxes with her eyes. All it would take was one glance per shelf, and she could write every number on the pad exactly as they were on the boxes. But she needed to keep looking human, so she wrote them down one by one.

So as not to make her handwriting too neat and perfect, she had a device inside her arm that provided randomness to her writing. It pumped out instructions to the motors, levers and hydraulics in her wrist to give her her very own style. As she settled into that tedious task, her

processors cooled back down to normal operating temperatures, and she slowly analyzed what she hadn't paid full attention to earlier.

Meanwhile, Byron was in his office, trying not to fall too deeply for his pretty employee.