

The two of them stood still on the crowded lunch-hour street. Face to face and eye to eye, they stayed that way while busy people rushed past them. Big flakes of snow continued to fall slowly from the quiet sky. Byron could not possibly begin to imagine the real motivation for the kiss, or the electronic and mechanical machinations that had brought it into being. He saw a real, flesh-and-blood creature in front of him.

For those few seconds that took forever to pass, he fell deeply in love with the fembot. He wanted to take her in his arms and give her one of those Hollywood kisses where the camera zooms in and the romantic music swells in the background.

"Agnes will notice we're late." Heather said, breaking the spell he was under.

Byron was lost for words as they started walking again. It wasn't words he wanted to give Heather at that moment.

As if they had been temporarily muted, all of the street sounds and the noise made by the people rushing around came back to full volume in his ears.

He thought about what to say as they walked together, still holding hands. "Heather," he said, "I didn't know you felt the same way about me as I felt about you."

The artificial woman computed his words. Her basic Robot Control programming meshed almost seamlessly with her recent Fembot Command augmentations. When the original software was finished doing the low-level computations, the data was fed into her new subroutines and AI functions. The immense amount of raw data was no problem for her fast processors and her recently improved software, now made even more effective by what Phet's black box had just done to her. Her calculations took only a barely noticeable moment, and she soon had formulated a response.

"I'm really shy when it comes to romance." she said.

They stopped again on the sidewalk, this time moving to one side so they were out of everyone else's way.

"I'd like to ask you to have dinner with me, but I have another class tonight. Are you free tomorrow after work?"

"Yes, I'd love to." she said. Her facemask configured itself to show him both enthusiasm and delight. Also, for the very first time since her activation, Heather blushed. The sophisticated set of commands that made the complicated silicone mask turn convincingly red around the cheeks was due mainly to the newest of her software.

They started walking back to work again, still hand in hand, working out the details of the date. He would try to get reservations at La Courbure, a restaurant right on the river with a breathtaking view and one of the most exclusive places in town.

The android was performing as many simultaneous tasks as she ever had, and the load on her processors was at maximum values for several minutes. The heat they generated was spread out through her body as a function of her complex cooling system.

Byron felt her hands getting warm as they walked. What he took to be a sign of a passionate young woman in love was actually the effect of excessive computing by a highly advanced android, whose software hadn't yet been made as efficient as it could be.

They walked and talked, holding hands all the way back to the Archive building. They agreed that for the rest of the day, they shouldn't act too amorous to each other. Both of them knew that they should be acting like professionals. He knew that from instinct, she knew that from her new programming. Her objective in that regard was to keep him interested without giving up the synthetic booty.

They got back to work quickly, with Heather returning to the basement and Byron to his office. She had no problem at all getting back to work and keeping her CPU focused on doing her job. For the all too human Mr. Clarke though, it was hard not to keep his excitement down.

In another stroke of good fortune, he successfully made reservations for 8 PM on Tuesday at the restaurant. He smiled and sat behind his desk for a long time, just thinking about how lucky he had been lately. Images and memories of Heather filled his head. He could almost think of nothing else. Whenever he tried to start his work, he invariably saw her face in his mind again, and forgot what he was doing.

So he decided to work on the one thing he knew would distract him sufficiently. He pulled out his personal laptop and started working on Ralph Sweet's assignment again.

Doing all of that hard thinking and the frustration of coming up with nothing wasn't much fun, but at least he was doing something other than sitting back and dreaming about the female humanoid robot in the basement.

He had never put off his own work like that before, but he wasn't worried. He was supposed to be working on the scans being made by the temporary worker downstairs, and since she had no scanner, he had no work.

For almost six hours he tried looking at the homework assignment from different angles. He tried to come up with unorthodox tricks that he thought might make things easier. Nothing worked. When he finally closed and packed away his computer, he made the realisation that it really was impossible. Ralph had given him an impossible mission.

"You bastard!" he chuckled under his breath as he laughed. He shook his head. He should have known Mr. Sweet would pull that kind of trick on him. Also, he couldn't help but feel a little flattered. The teacher wouldn't have done that kind of thing to just anyone. He must have really recognised the spark of genius in Byron.

"What a great day." he thought to himself as he got up to stretch and left his office.

He went over to talk to Agnes. That was even less fun than it usually was. She was in a real snippy mood. She knew full well what was going on between her boss and that young tart. What Byron didn't know is that Agnes had been crushing on him for the last nine years. And it was a good thing he didn't know. He didn't exactly go for the homely linebacker-with-a-hair-bun look.

When it was exactly 5 o'clock, Heather came up the stairs and went to grab her coat. Mr. Clarke, who was still trying to talk with Agnes, turned his attention to the young lady and said "I guess I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Yeah," she said, "bright and early!"

He wanted to get another kiss, but he dared not with Agnes watching the two of them like a hawk.

"Bye Agnes!" Heather said as she pulled on her jacket and waved to the old frowning woman.

She didn't answer her. She just glared as the pretty brunette walked out the door and down the stairs on her way to the bus. Today however, she turned right instead of left.

Agnes looked directly at Byron and said loudly "Robbing the cradle, aren't we?"

Byron was taken aback somewhat. "What are you talking about?" he said, realising that the cat was out of the bag.

"She's young enough to be your daughter!" she scolded.

"Oh, your just jealous!" he said jokingly, making sure to wear a laughing smile on his face when he said it. He didn't know how right he was. "Come on, we're both adults anyway." he said as he walked back to the office to get his things.

When he got back to the front, Agnes had already left. He activated the alarm and locked the doors. He wasn't bothered by the old receptionist at all. He was feeling better than he ever remembered feeling as he got in his car and drove over to the tech institute.

Meanwhile, Heather was getting on a different bus than she usually took. This one would follow a winding path and take her almost directly to her new base of operations, Fembot Command Station 28.