

Byron took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. He had been looking at circuitry and electronic connections for hours this day, and for days this week. As fatigued as he was now, he could feel clouds of doubt evaporate to reveal crystals of understanding.

To program the androids right, he had to know what chips performed what functions, and which instructions acted on which systems. The picture was becoming more and more clear to him as he nodded slightly and subconsciously in response to his own thoughts.

"That'll do." he said. He leaned back in the chair, expecting Heather to act, but knowing that she wouldn't really understand.

"That does not compute." she said, the exact same way he had been hearing it for the last several days.

"I'm finished Heather. You can put your facemask back on now."

The fembot reached over to the table beside them and picked the mask up with her feminine hands. With precision, she reattached it to her head and reintegrated it to her system.

Byron watched as she did that, and sat looking at her pretty face. Something had been brewing inside him for days - an idea - and now was the time to bring it out.

"Heather," he began. He paused to make sure he was about to do the right thing.

"Yes?" the robot replied.

"Heather I need to change you."

She just stared at him, ever so blankly. Her electronic eyes not so much watching as recording.

"I need to have you act like a person again."

Heather's chips made some computations, then she said "I am not a person. I am a humanoid robot."

"I need you back the way you were before, when we were back at the Archive."

More complicated calculations were fed through her processors upon hearing this. "Why?" she asked.

"Because... because it's easier for me if you're like a person, not a machine."

Heather paused. "My current configurations are set to enable you to view a Fembot Command unit in its default settings."

"Well, there are at least three other 'units' downstairs that are just standing unused in those booths. Can't we use them for that?"

Heather sat unmoving, just looking at him. "Processing." she said. After another long pause she said "I am not programmed to resolve this situation. You must ask Natasha. Natasha will interface with the Master Computing Device."

Byron more or less expected an answer like that, but nevertheless he was determined. "Let's go to the basement." he said.

They got up and walked out of his makeshift office and through the kitchen. They walked down the stairs and stopped in front of the wall-mounted scanner as it called out "SCANNING" in its harsh robotic female monotone.

As soon as they had both been scanned - a process which Byron was now used to - they walked through the opening sliding door and into the lab to talk to Natasha.

Byron strode past Heather and walked right up to the naked robot technician. "Natasha," he said, "Can you program Heather the way she was when she worked at the Archive?"

Just as Byron expected, the pretty blue-eyed android gave him the same type of inhuman stare he had received from Heather. He waited patiently for her logic circuits to be done with their calculating.

"Why?" Natasha asked.

"Because it would be easier for me to finish Project H if she acts like a person."

Natasha made no movements or sounds for a few seconds, then flatly said "That does not compute. Heather's current configurations are set to enable you to view a Fembot Command unit in its default settings."

Byron saw that coming. "Yes, I know." he said somewhat impatiently. "What about those robots there?" he said as he pointed to the three dormant and identical blondes waiting in glass booths along the wall. "Can't you get one of them up and running in its default settings?"

Natasha stood still for almost a minute, then walked over to press some buttons on one of the big lighted consoles. The Master Computing Device took over the calculations from this point, and in a relatively short time came up with a result to the matter. It beamed its instructions into Natasha, who walked gracefully back to where Byron was standing.

"The Heather unit will be reprogrammed the way you have requested." was all she said to him.

Byron smiled as Natasha turned to the lady beside him. "Heather, please sit down in the chair next to the data exchange console and open your chest panel."

"Yes Natasha." came the automatic sounding reply.

Byron followed and watched as the process took place. The Master Computing Device retrieved the appropriate files from within its massive memory banks and began to clone new personality and AI files from the old ones. After making minor adjustments and making the new code up to date, the computer waited for the cute brown-haired girl to be connected so it could begin the transfer.

As soon as the metal in the cord touched the metal in Heather's connection port, the electronic pulses traveled fast into the woman's chest and straight to her hard drives. Her processors began assimilating the new programming right away, changing settings and adjusting parameters to the dictates of the downloaded software.

The human stood by with his arms crossed and waited for some movement in the entirely still scene. He watched lights blink in Heather's open panel, visible between the partially unbuttoned sides of that same old silk blouse. He thought about just what kind of code would be going into the now semi-familiar circuitry of the Heather robot.

By this time he had some idea of which software controlled her movement, which controlled her AI, and which controlled her network links. He had also gained much knowledge about the way Project H was set up, and what it could and could not do. It was still quite obscure to him just what Fembot Command expected him to accomplish, but he had some ideas of his own. And those ideas, he would ensure, would stay his own.

He found himself lost in thought as he heard Natasha tell Heather to load and start her new programming.

"Yes Natasha." she said as the technician pulled out and packed away the black cable. "Program QR095.G38 installed and executed successfully."

Natasha asked "How do you feel Heather?"

"I feel fine." she said.

For a moment, all was still. Byron looked anxiously at Heather, waiting for her to do something that would give him a sign that she was back the way she used to be. Then she looked around.

"Are we all finished Natasha?" she said. She seemed to be a lot more animated than before.

Byron smiled.

"Yes." Natasha said.

"Good." she said. She looked down and closed up her chest panel, then buttoned up her shirt. "Let's get back to work." she said cheerfully as she looked at Byron and stood up.

Byron just smiled a bigger smile to Heather. "Thank you, Natasha." he said.

The naked fembot didn't respond.

Byron and the Heather robot walked back up the stairs. "So, are you happy to be back the way you were before?" he asked.

"I'm not programmed to be happy." she said. She may have acted like a human now, but she was still a machine, as evidenced by her statement.

Byron waited until they were in the kitchen before he talked to her some more. "That's okay, I understand." he said. "You look a lot more real now."

"Thanks." she said. She smiled.

That little smile was more welcome to him than she could ever know. "It's a relief to have you back the way you were before. I was getting tired of dealing with the mechanical you."

"I don't know what to say." she said. That response was so much nicer to him than a blank stare on top of silence.

"I'm going to have lunch now." he said. "Care to join me."

"Sure, but I don't need to eat, Byron." she said, still smiling her pretty smile.

"I want you to." he said. "Just like we used to. Just to remind me that I'm not alone."