

In the days that followed, Byron and Heather made love often. He had gotten the robot reprogrammed for sex, and they became adventurous in the ways they did it. Evenings found her next to him in bed, providing companionship by night just as she provided technical assistance by day. By this time too, he had trained himself to ignore her artificiality. Each day she became more a woman to him - a companion - and less a machine.

He had also appeared to make great strides in his programming job. He had begun to mould Project H into something that he thought Fembot Command wanted. He thought that he was surely on the way to transmuting it into something that would give the computer real intelligence.

Now he sipped on hot chocolate while he listened to Telemann on the FM dial. The snow came light but endless outside in the pale winter light, the green of the trees could hardly be seen. Heather sat quietly beside him, waiting to answer his questions and providing company for him while he worked at the multiple computer display on his desk.

Lying activated but unmoving on a wheeled table to the side was one of the tall blonde fembots from the basement. The 'control unit' for Byron's tests and experiments, she was naked with panels removed and connection ports connected. Byron had gradually gotten used to even that.

It seemed that things were progressing well. Many more days of hard, tedious work lay ahead, but most of the humans needs were being met. The androids had made their captive more or less comfortable.

Then his eyes suddenly moved back and forth between the screens. There was something there that he had not expected. It made itself more clear with every passing second. He was stuck in that moment between disbelief and realisation.

"Oh no..." he said quietly.

Heather looked his way, as if booting up from standby mode. "What's wrong?" she asked.

Byron looked back at her, unsure if he should tell her. Whatever he said to her would surely end up inside the Master Computing Device later.

He sat back in the chair and folded his arms as he looked down at the floor and concentrated.

"What's the matter Byron?" she asked.

"Give me a moment..." he said without looking up.

The more he thought about it the more the problem became clear. All morning, and for days before, he had been meticulously crafting sets of recursive functions for the computer to use. Subroutines nested within subroutines - and on, and on - that he thought would tease out the components that constructed perceptions of reality. But this was like Ralph Sweet's assignment. It would have to go on literally forever to work.

He tried in vain to think of a workaround. With eyes closed, he sat motionless for a very long time while his mind raced furiously to try to find some solution.

Heather scanned him continuously. She saw his body temperature rise in a pattern that revealed his growing frustration. Her processors calculated that it would be better to let him think than to keep asking what was wrong.

Finally, he knew that he had been working for nothing all that time. That called into question his whole approach. He made a fist and slammed it feebly on the mousepad in front of him when he saw that he would have to think of an entirely different strategy.

Now Heather acted again. "Should we take a break?" she asked, in as gentle a tone as her speaker could generate.

Byron stood up and stretched. "Yes." was all he said.

There wasn't much more said between them as they prepared themselves for an early outing on the surface of the thick snow. He submitted once again to Heather's nylon and steel harness as they got their things together to go snowshoeing.

As they stepped out in their gear, another, darker thought crossed Byron's mind. Would Fembot Command keep him around if he wasn't the right man for the job? If not, what would they do with him.

He dared not think that thought through. He stopped in his tracks and looked up at the sky. The falling snow looked to him like dark stars speeding past in a grey space journey. It took his thoughts far away, and made him want to be that far too.

"You look sad Byron." the robot said.

He brought his head back down and looked at her, knowing that her concern was counterfeit. He moved as near to her as he could in snowshoes and kissed her lips. Her cheeks felt warm and tender on his as they leaned in close. They held hands through their gloves.

Heather let Byron finish their kiss as she recorded and calculated data. Her rudimentary but still impressive AI could only guess that he was very worried about something. It couldn't begin to guess what it was.

He watched snowflakes land and melt on her silicone face, and hang on her long eyelashes. That old expression about the individuality of snowflakes came to mind, and gave him another idea.

"Let's go." he said as he led her by the hand back to the distant ravine.

It was his favourite place for the time being, and thinking about how the creek under the ice had all on its own carved away the rock was somehow comforting. The scenery helped to set his mind at ease while the fresh air helped to clear his head. He began to devise a new scheme.