

As soon as the main computer's internal chronometer indicated that it was 8 AM, the charged and ready fembots were activated. Rochelle walked upstairs to get dressed while Maria walked to an examination table to test the original Rochelle's data storage systems. The Maid vacuumed while Rochelle #2 got dressed according to her programming and got ready to go to work.

Light snow started to fall as Rochelle closed and locked the door behind her and got into her car. Neither she nor Robot Control had any idea what the day would bring. Giving up was not one of the options that had been considered, so Rochelle Prantov would have to improvise. This would test the limits of her AI software, but if she somehow was able to save the mission and steal 'Project H', the benefits for Robot Control would be enormous.

None of this weighed heavy on her head as she drove the car into downtown and toward the office building. She would have enough work to keep her visibly occupied while her sensory system did all it could to track down the real discs. Thomas King was likely to provide most of the clues she could use, whether he wanted to or not.

Rochelle parked in her usual spot in the parkade and walked the short distance to the elevators. She smiled as she greeted one of the security guards on the morning shift, and had a friendly chat with one of the young men from the mail room. She was fully charged and performing exceptionally well, giving a full impression of being an authentic human.

She made her way past hungover and sleepy coworkers to Mr. King's office. Kim wasn't in yet, and Rochelle's super-hearing couldn't detect anyone approaching. She used the time to quickly search through Kim's desk and the filing cabinet behind it. She found nothing during the quick search, and had to cut it short when she heard Kim coming down the hallway.

"Hi Rochelle!" said Kim, being her usual cheerful self. "Did you have a good weekend?"

Rochelle computed and returned a fitting greeting. She engaged her in a pleasant conversation while she took off her overcoat and hung it on the coat rack. She retrieved the memory files of Friday's work and figured out what she had to do while she kept on listening and speaking to Kim. She sat with her legs crossed, her manicured hands clasped over her knee as she pointed her head Kim's way and analyzed probability factors by the thousands.

When necessary, she nodded or made conversational contributions of her own until the moment that Mr. King arrived. Both girls immediately tried to look busy as he entered but it was obvious that they weren't yet working.

Thomas didn't seem to notice though. He wasn't his usual tipsy self this morning.

"Good morning girls." he said without looking at either of them. He made for his office door and quickly went inside.

Kim and Rochelle looked at each other for a moment. It looked like he was upset about something. With the mood now set, they were silent and got to work. They answered phone calls and did paperwork for about an hour until Thomas's voice came over the phone.

"Miss Prantov, I need to have a word with you in my office." he said.

Kim looked at Rochelle. She looked back at her.

"I hope he's not too mad right now." said Kim.

Rochelle stood up and shrugged. She walked into the office with her sexual systems coming on-line and ready to perform. She got into Mr. King's office and shut the door behind her. She made eye contact with him and made a full scan of the room while her body prepared itself for another series of sexual procedures.

Thomas took a noticeable breath and said "Have a seat Rochelle." He leaned back in his chair as the robot sat in one of the leather armchairs in front of his desk.

"I have good news and bad news Rochelle." he said. "Good news first. I've decided to give you a raise."

Rochelle's face showed a slight smile.

Mr. King continued, "You're fitting in extraordinarily well here, and you're a valuable member of our team."

"Thank you Tommy!" she said as she showed him a bigger smile.

"Now the bad news." he said. He leaned forward, looking straight into her eyes. "I'm afraid you can't call me Tommy any more."

He was silent for a moment as Rochelle's processors computed his statement.

"I have to end our little affair. I'm sorry." he said in a softer tone.

Rochelle's expression changed to show disappointment.

"It's got nothing to do with you. You're a beautiful, smart, classy lady. If I was ten years younger and unmarried we could have something special."

Regret showed in his eyes. Rochelle reflected that back to him. Her system showed him the best disappointed look it could configure while her sexual systems shut themselves down again.

"I'm grateful for every moment I had with you Rochelle, but I have to save my marriage. I don't see any reason why we can't be friends now."

The robot showed Thomas a confused look for a second or two, her eyes fluttering and growing a little moist. "This is so sudden." she said.

Thomas opened one of his desk drawers and pulled out a box of tissues. He handed it to her over the desk. She took a tissue and silently dabbed at the corners of her eyes. He put the box on the desk and waited for her to finish.

A long silence followed. After that long while, Thomas looked at Rochelle. "I hope you'll still choose to work here. You're one of the best workers I've ever had."

Rochelle nodded. Her speaker emitted the sound of her clearing her throat while mechanisms inside her neck made it outwardly appear that that's what she was doing. "I'll stay." she said.

"Are you gonna be okay?" he said.

Rochelle sniffed in. "Yeah." she said.

"I'm so glad you understand. Please, let's stay friends." he said as he stood up and offered his hand.

She stood up too and shook his hand in a ladylike way. "No problem here." she said, looking only slightly disappointed now.

Thomas merely nodded once and walked over to the large window behind him. He gazed through the forest of skyscrapers to the rolling hills in the distance as the robot exited his office.

She closed the door behind her and saw that Kim was looking at her, interested in what had happened. Rochelle sat down and got to work without saying anything.

"Well?" Kim said, being at the same time nosy and friendly.

"He gave me a raise." Rochelle said. Her facemask gradually returned to show a normal expression.

"Why you look so glum?" Kim asked.

Rochelle formulated an answer fast. "I also really screwed up the Walsh account."

Kim looked a bit puzzled. "Oh."