

**Question:**

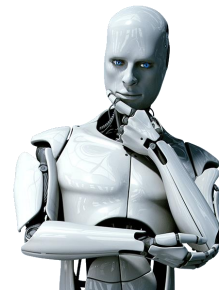
**Can a robot smile?**

**Answer:**

**Ask it.**

## It Smiled

Lee Wimbs



I only have three more weeks of ‘Ole Tater’ and then I am out of here and headed for freedom. Only a few more classes to complete my final semester and I am a free man. The class of 2014, and we were the future. College, the final step on the road to completing my education, and to enter the real world at last.

“For this lesson’s assignment I want you to read, blab la bla...” blared Ole Tater as the class was coming to a close. No, that was not his real name, just what we called him behind his back. The real name was Lawrence G. Taylor, the unique professor of Speech for this university. Some say he was teaching when the Bible was written, but I think that may not be correct. Maybe he was teaching when Lincoln was the president.

Looking out the window was the beauty of spring, flowers, fresh air, and the dawning of summer. And the thoughts of getting out of the aroma of old books, the smell of an ancient university, and the sweet smell of the outside world.

My degree was within reach now, a masters in speech. I am not sure what to do next, or how to use this upcoming piece of paper, but at least I was getting out, freedom at last.

“See anything you like outside Wilson?” Ole Tater shouted in my direction.

Without realizing who had asked that question in front of the entire I class I simply replied, “Yep, freedom”. Then it occurred to me, Tater was talking to me.

“Mister Wilson, perhaps we should discuss your future after class this afternoon, if you have the time.”

With all the snickering from my classmates all I could come up with for an answer was “Yes sir that would be fine”.

“Then I expect to see you in my office at four this afternoon”. And saying that Tater went back to teaching his class. Somehow I knew it was going to be a long afternoon.

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Time has the tendency to play tricks on us. With the upcoming appointment the time seemed to drag by very slowly as a perfect spring day, but then again the time to meet with my destiny was fast approaching. Not sure if I want to hurry up and confront Tater, or to prolong what punishment the professor had in mind. Somehow I felt it was not going to have a happy ending.

I went by my dorm room to drop off the back pack, to grab something to drink, and kind of got the feeling I was like a prisoner. I was expecting a pardon from this school to leave and not look back, but now it looked like I was walking the last mile to the executioner.

Slowly the clock was approaching the set time. I had just enough time to walk from my room to his office across campus. In all the time I attended I had never been in his office, nor had I ever heard of anyone making that visit.

And there it was, the door. His door. The door with his name on it, Professor Lawrence G. Taylor. A room and doom. That’s funny. Wait, perhaps I should not enter with a smile.

“Come in Mister Wilson, do not stand in the hallway”. So like the lamb going to the butcher I entered.

And it was not what I expected. Missing were the stacks of books, graded papers, dust on everything, an office that smelled like past history. And there was actually light in his office. As I quickly surveyed his office there were his usual text books on Speech, but there were magazines on automation, electronics, and modern technology. Was I in the wrong office?

“Now Mister Wilson, do you consider staring out the window more important than your future? Or do you have a future? What goals have you set for yourself?”

Ok, I feel I am above average when it comes to talking to people, but his questions required a certain amount of thought, and they were coming a little too fast.

Brace yourself, here goes. “Professor Taylor, I....”

“Hurry up Wilson I have things to do. Do you have a future or not?”

“Certainly I have a future.” Good, I was able to reply.

“And what is that perfect future? Please tell me those great plans you have after graduation.”

Blank. Well, he’s got me there. At this point I really did not know, my only sure plan was to leave this school and, “Nope, no plans sir.”

“What a waste. All the talents you think you have, and no plans. Just let that education go to waste. Why get an education if you are not going to use it?”

“Nope, no plans sir”, was again all I could come up with.

And now was another example of how that time warp thing happens. It seemed I sat there for hours, hours, but I guess in reality it was just a few seconds. And then he spoke.

“Mister Wilson I am going to challenge you. Let’s see about your future. I am going to see what you are made of. I am going to make you an offer.”

All I could think of was the part of the movie where the mafia guy says “make me an offer you cannot refuse”, but I do not think he was making a reference to movies he had seen.

“I am retiring from teaching at this school. In three weeks I am going to Japan to work on a project involving speech. I hope it will become my future. It is just I will be teaching speech to a different group.”

Wait till I tell my friends Ole Tater is leaving. Happy day. Happy day.

“And Wilson I want you to go with me.”

What did he say? He wanted me to go with him? Have I not endured him long enough? A whole semester, and that should be long enough.

Deep breath, and “Could you say that again please?” And this time I was really hard to pay attention.

“I have been offered a chance to teach. In Japan. I will be teaching computers to communicate. They are working on artificial intelligence and need someone fluent in the English language to work with their computers.”

“I do not know a lot about computers sir. My major is in English. I do not think I could help them on this project”. Not bad I thought as a quick excuse.

“You are certainly capable of talking Wilson, you do enough of that in my class. And perhaps a younger outlook in life might be helpful. And the bottom line is, what other future plans do you have?”

“You are correct sir. I do not have any plans at this moment. But after paying for all this education and currently not employed, there is not money for this trip.” Excellent, I came up with a second solid excuse. Check, and check mate.

Time issue again, his turn to talk and the room is very quiet. It would be better if there was an old clock ticking in the background.

“What if all the travel expenses were covered, and you received a small salary?”

Down went the check mate concept.

“Could you say that again?” Not sure of my tone of voice, but he at least heard me.

“This trip, to Japan, to work with computers, will be covered by this university for you. It would be a form of grant. Where we are going they will provide living quarters and meals for us.”

All I could reply was ‘Let me think about it.’

“You have until Friday, at noon”, was his simple reply. “You can leave now.”

Good, I had two and a half days to decide my future. It takes me that long to decide plans for the weekend. Was not aware my brain could spin this fast.

Family. My next solution was to call my parents and tell them. My money was with the home team, they wanted me to stay here and enjoy the summer. Then they would talk to me about getting a job and starting a family. Great to have a family that understands and cares.

“Oh, we are so proud of you and what you will be doing over there son”, was the first thing my dad said when I made that call to my wonderful family. “And your mother can not wait to tell her friends.” Darn I love family support.

Back to me again. Being as old as I am, and 23 is considered an adult, I should be able to decide what I wanted to do. It is my future. It is my life. It’s just I don’t have any plans. Or money.

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As I walked across campus to Taters office that Friday I had only one thought. The movie with Gary Cooper, and it was high noon. It's like standing in a buffet line, you know you have to decide, but at that moment you still were not sure what to do.

And yep, the door was open and he was sitting there.

As I started to speak he slid an envelope across the desk and said, "Everything you need is in this packet. I also gave you a list of what to bring, and what not to wear. Note the schedule. I will meet you at the airport as stated. Any questions?"

Well that was painful. And quick.

"No sir."

He then continued out of character. Ole Tater stood and shook my hand. "Glad to be working with you Wilson."

Checkmate. Pulled the trigger. Knocked the wind out of the sails. Broad sided me. So as a zombie, as that lamb headed to slaughter, I walked out of his office and managed to get to the dorm.

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Rain. And more rain. Good, here comes the lightning, a perfect day to travel by air. Seems there is more than enough rain to drown a rat. And by the smell of this taxi that has happened many times inside this vehicle. Yes, it was great to graduate and not have to worry about school anymore, and wonderful to spend some time with my family, but now it starts. Travel to a strange, different language, different custom country with Professor Taylor. Ole Tater. Think I would rather chase dead rats.

Dropping off my bags at the entrance to the terminal I walk inside to find my traveling companion. How hard would it be in the crowd to find an old college professor with grey hair, wire rim glasses, a bow tie like a doctor wears, and a coat that was too large for him?

“Wilson, over here.” Ok, there is that voice. He did show up. I am looking at travelers moving past me, all in a hurry, but no Tater. Perhaps with the noise and the overhead speakers I am hearing things.

“Hurry up Wilson, we have a plane to catch.” Then it happened, the time thing again. I heard only silence, I only saw him.... Tater. There was Professor Taylor. Not sure, but is it really him? Here was a middle age man, not an ancient college professor, with that familiar grey hair. He was wearing different glasses, and wearing a sweat shirt with ‘MIT’ on the front, and jeans. Who was this man?

“Gate number 14 Wilson, and move.”

“Yes sir, right behind you.” This must be a dream, a bad dream, maybe I am under the influence of the smell of the taxi. That cannot be Tater.

As we get processed like cattle going through the corral we enter the walkway and the plane. So for many hours to come I will be sitting next to the professor. Wait, I will be working with him for the next few months. Why did I make this decision to go, why did I commit to go? Maybe I should be committed.

When the plane begins to move he turns and starts talking. This cannot be Tater. He only talks to you, never in a conversation.

“So Wilson, since we are working together, what shall I call you? Wilson, or Richard?”

Impressed, he knew my first name.

“Richard will be fine, or better my friends and family call me ‘Rich’”.

“Ok, Rich, then I will call you by that name.”

Two can play this game. “Professor Taylor, what would you prefer I call you?”

“Why not call me Tater. That’s what you and your peeks call me”.

How the heck did he know that? And how did he know what a ‘peek’ was?

“Yes sir.”

As he handed me a book he said “Rich, here is something to read during this trip. Read it. Learn it.”

“Yes sir.” Now I know this person, we just started and he is giving me homework assignments.

The book 'Intelligent Robotics and Autonomous Agents' sounded like something that would put you to sleep even as you were eating. The guy that wrote that book was named 'Howie' so it cannot be that bad.

"We will be working on trying to create artificial intelligence in these computer driven-human like forms. Do not ever call them 'robots'. Understand Rich?"

Oddly, and to my surprise, I did not fall asleep reading the book. Very interesting concept; can a computer have emotions? Can that electronic device think for itself? And can I really enjoy working with Tater? Surprise again, the sun just appeared and the rain stopped. An omen?

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"Welcome to Japan." You always hear about first impressions. And mine was loud, busy, not understanding the language, and trying to keep up with Tater. Where do you go to pick up your luggage?

I tapped him on the arm and pointed to someone holding a sign that had hand written 'Professor Taylor'. Tater nodded and we headed in that direction.

"Nihon kyōju e yōkoso" came from the guy holding the sign.

"Arigatō. Ureshīga koko ni" was the reply from Tater. What the heck....

"You did not tell me you spoke Japanese Professor".

"Then again Rich, you never asked".

Tater introduced me to the sign carrier, and then we headed for the baggage. There are times where I cannot remember names, and when they are from a language I cannot speak, very difficult. So I will rename this person 'Banner'.

Noise, horns, traffic. If you ever thought the large cities of our country has issues with traffic, come to Japan. Banner and Tater, sounds like a country band, were chatting as we travelled through the city. Now I felt awkward. He has a friend, and I



am sandwiched between his luggage and mine. Just hope the trip is not long, forgot to use the bathroom at the airport.

The car slowed and turned toward a large building, past a guard house, and past a high wire fence around the area. This is either a very secure factory or an unmarked prison. As we entered the building I noticed everyone, everyone, was wearing white coveralls, and small caps. They looked like a clean medical team trying out for baseball.

“Rich, what do you think?”

“Yea, nice.” What was I going to say? It still could be a prison.

Then Banner said “I show you the rooms.” Wow, he speaks English. Nice.

Both of our rooms were identical. Exactly the same, even the color of the blankets and the small rug. My room was ‘A-6’ and Tater’s was ‘A-7’.

“The schedule”, and Banner was searching for the correct words,” is to eat now. Then sleep. And then we start school tomorrow morning at seven.”

Wait. Wait. Wait. I just finished school. There was no mention of school. I read the book, what else is there.

“Let’s get some food Rich, I am starved.” And with that I am again following Tater down the hallway. Got to admit, they had a lunch room that was wonderful. The smells, the variety, and those tastes. Either I was hungry to the point of starvation, or I just created new taste buds, this was great. With about 25 or 30 unmarked baseball players in white coveralls eating with us, I was not going to bed hungry.

After saying goodnight to Tater and Banner I headed to my room. Now to relax. Yes, it had a television. Finally I feel at home. Imagine my disappointment when every channel I looked at was in Japanese. Even the closed captioning was in Japanese. Good night

Awaken by knocking on my door I looked at the clock. It was five in the morning. Someone is knocking because of an emergency. Nope. It is a slim guy telling me I am late for breakfast, to hurry. Ok, I will call him 'Hurry'.

As I stumble into the food line I am the only person in line. Everyone is sitting at their tables eating breakfast. I load my plate with eggs, rice, bread, and mystery meat and head for the table with Tater, Banner, and someone who looks like a small version of Al Gore. His new name is 'Al'.

Tater introduced 'Al' to me as the head designer for the project, he was the motivation and the brains. He was the person in charge of training. As I learned later he was the perfect person for the job. He was a great teacher, knew everything, and his English language was the best. The only item was he had no personality. Therefore I chose the correct name for him, Al Gore.

From the overhead speaker came 'Jikan ga dōsa suru yō ni'. It looked then like a combination of a fire drill, and a Saturday night at the emergency room. People in white coveralls running everywhere.

"It's time to go to work" Tater said with a smile. "And for us, school."

As I am putting my tray and dishes on the cart near the food line Al asked me how I liked the breakfast.

"It was good. I really like the meat. Actually it tasted a lot like the bacon my grandmother used to fix."

Then Tater and Al stopped, looked at each other, and smiled. Al continued "Very good Mister Wilson, not everyone likes smoked squid for breakfast."

I am not sure if it was the excitement, or disappointment of going back to school, or the Japanese bacon, but the only noise I heard was the bubbling in my stomach.

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The classroom was certainly different than those at the university. There were four desks across the front, facing Al. Mine was the first on the left, Tater had the

second desk, and then there were two guys dressed in the white coveralls sitting at the remaining two. On each desk was a neat stack of papers and notebooks, a pen and pencil, and a set of colored markers.

In the front was a large desk for AI. At the front, next to AI's desk were two gentlemen sitting in chairs. They never spoke, I never did find who they were. They just sat there. Dressed in suits and ties all they did was to smile, talk to each other, and nod at AI where he said something important. Reminded me of a couple of bobble heads my dad bought at a baseball game.

"Before I start I want to welcome Professor Taylor and his helper Richard Wilson" said AI in perfect English. College graduate, and now promoted to a 'helper'. "For both of you I have a gift that you will find when you return to your rooms tonight."

For the next hour or so we learned about the security of this building, and yes, it was kind of a prison. Top secret stuff. Expensive project, sponsored in part by a Japanese company, and represented by the bobble head twins.

"You will not tell anyone of your work here. You will not leave this building without a representative of this company going with you. And no pictures. Any questions?" I was thinking I may need to ask where the nearest bathroom was, but about this time we were given a break.

After the break, and taking care of some needed business, I made a mental note to try something else for breakfast tomorrow.

"Now for the fundamentals of human interaction". Finally AI was getting to the good stuff. I have to admit this was better than the studies at school. I think I was enjoying this, at least it was not like one of those boring history classes from school.

"The origin of relation between us humans and humanoids is discrete problem was stated by 20th-century author Isaac Asimov in 1941, in his novel *I, Robot*. He states the Three Laws of Robotics as,

A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.

A robot must obey any orders given to it by human beings, except where such orders would conflict with the First Law.

A robot must protect its own existence as long as such protection does not conflict with the First or Second Law.

These three laws of robotics determine the idea of safe interaction. The closer the human and the robot get and the more intricate the relationship becomes, the more the risk of a human being injured rises. Nowadays in advanced societies, manufacturers employing robots solve this issue by not letting humans and robots share the workspace at any time. This is achieved by defining safe zones using laser sensors or physical cages. Thus the presence of humans is completely forbidden in the robot workspace while it is working.”

Ok AI, it was history, but it was interesting. And I like that first rule, ‘A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.’

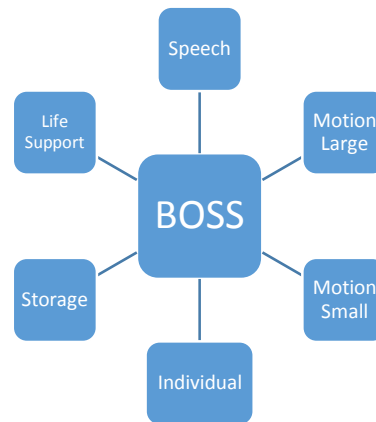
“If you call what we work on here ‘robots’, you will not be liked. They are not robots, they are humanoids. A robot is described as ‘a machine that looks like a human being and performs various complex acts of a human being; *also*: a similar but fictional machine whose lack of capacity for human emotions is often emphasized’. We build humanoids.”

I leaned over to Tater and said “if it walks like a duck, and looks like a duck, then it is a duck.” I think Al Gore would have said that. And as my former teacher, he did not find any humor in that.

For lunch I had rice. Just rice and tea. Surprised with all the varieties and knowledge of these people you cannot find one source of iced, sweet, tea. What a shame.

When we returned to class there was a large equipment rack in the front of the room. Looked like a stack of computers all wired together. And on the desk was an assortment of motors, what looked like air cylinders, computer boards, and a jar of blue liquid.

“In this rack is the learning module for each humanoid. There are five computers and they are all controlled by a sixth computer, called the BOSS. There is also connected a storage system that is raided as a 5.



Here is the diagram laying in front of us;

“The BOSS is in charge. A computer, ‘motion large’, controls the movements like legs and arms. The ‘motion small’ computer moves the head, the face, and the fingers. Next computer is the ‘life support’ that monitors the batteries and connects the computers together. The ‘speech’ computer listens, processes, and provides the speech. And the final is called ‘individual’. That is the one you are working with”.

We were then told that all of the data from this large rack was transferred to a microcomputer inside each humanoid. This computer was roughly the size of a 24 ounce of Coors. But as respect for by school I had no idea how large that was. Or how refreshing it was cold and served on a hot day. We were told we could work with our humanoid at any time, with the exception of from 1:00AM until 2:00AM each morning.

A lot of us use the internet. Here that had an internal internet called an ‘intranet’. A group of technicians can work with a humanoid in the lab, and reprogram one of the functions. Then at that early morning time period the updated programming would be sent by the intranet to all the humanoids. With one exception, the module for ‘individuality’. That was why the cables from the computer racks were connected to each humanoid.

Al continued with his talk, and I was really enjoying this class.

“The large motion is done with hydraulic cylinders using fluid under pressure. Here is an example of a cylinder used in the right leg of our humanoid. And this motor is used to rotate the head. This blue liquid is the fluid that when used under pressure causes a cylinder to either expand, or contract. To go out, or pull back.”

Tater started talking, in Japanese, and everyone in the room smiled and laughed. Except me. He turned to me and said in the beginning Disney used red hydraulic fluid for their animations. One afternoon at the Presidents display Lincoln had a fluid leak and it looked like he had gotten shot. Red fluid running everywhere. So now everyone uses the blue stuff.

“I think they cooked my bacon in that stuff this morning.” Then I was the only one that laughed. Guess they like the smoked squid that way.

“Ok gentlemen we will end here and start tomorrow.’

Then it occurred to me I had been in a classroom for 9 hours and truly enjoyed it. Maybe Tater knew that. After an evening meal of rice, toast, and hot tea I returned to my room.

And there was the gift from AI. My very own white coveralls and that odd baseball cap. And on the front left side was an embossed label, ‘Helper Wilson’. My purpose in life now was to program a computer whose main purpose was to make a robot, no a humanoid, unique. Good night Helper Wilson.

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So it continued for the next 4 days. Up at 5:00AM. Eat breakfast. Classroom. Eat lunch. Classroom. Eat dinner. Back to the room. I did find a couple of channels on my television where I could watch reruns of Bonanza, Gilligan’s Island, or Mickey Mouse cartoons. And they were in my language, English. The class work was not that bad, kind of entertaining. I was even taking notes. I really liked the smell of the green high liner. It reminded me of a pine tree that was in our back yard growing up.

And tomorrow we would get a tour of the factory, and 'our' classroom. We were promised there would be a room just for Tater and me. This would be our 'lab' to work with our very own humanoid for teaching its individuality. We were told it would be 'Humanoid ID 352'.

At dinner Tater and I were joined by Slim, Banner, and Al. I mentioned I was excited to see what a humanoid looked like when all the pieces were assembled.

"Just like you and me" Al remarked. "Just like us."

I was going to ask like him, or me, but that might be rude. What the heck, "Like an American or like a Japanese?" Then I was getting ready for the stares.

"Either, whatever you want" snapped Slim. "You will see, you will see."

Tater was the next to speak. "Rich just like all of us humans we are the same inside, only the skin and body mass make us look different. These people working with you have developed a rubber like substance that looks like skin, and feels like skin. This protective covering, just like our skin, hides and protects everything that makes us move."

"We even add finger nails, and hair" Slim was quick to add. "We even add hair where you should not see it".

Then and it was the only time I heard Slim giggle like a little girl. That did not seem right. Wonder what he meant by that remark?"

"Ohhhh..." was my only reply when I realized what he said. Hair everywhere.

I sent a text to my old roommate Steve telling him about the dinner conversation. He sent me a picture of a sumo wrestler in a dress, wearing a bonnet. And at the time I thought his remark "Lift his skirt and check for hair" was funny. Now I may be a little worried about Slim. Did he know something?

The Japanese people are strange. Strange in a good way. They live simple ways, live on common foods, and all dress the same. Just simple people. But like book

ends, or ying yang, these are the same people who have developed superior technology. I think I am beginning to like my fellow workers.

Their language still mystifies me. I am trying to learn, but it is so different than growing up in rural America. I have learned 'Hai' means yes, and no is 'le'. I try to use 'Arigatō to tell someone thank you. Thanks to Slim and Banner I have learned they talk slower and try to assist me in learning their language.

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This time I was up before the alarm. Showered and dressed. Even looked in the mirror to make sure my 'Helper Wilson' name plate was at the correct height and straight. Now for breakfast and the tours.

Tater and I arrived at the food line at the same time. He suggested I try Tamago Kate Gohan for breakfast. "Is it as tasteful as smoked fish stuff?"

He said it was rice, with cooked eggs and meat. "Ok, will try it. But if I spend the day in the bathroom it will be your fault."

Finally a great breakfast. Similar to an omelet, but served over a rice mixture. No bad, actually it was great. Better than the fruit and oatmeal I had been eating. And I was not going to ask what the meat was in the rice.

Banner suggested I try it with wasabi and by my return gesture of my finger down my throat he got the hint I was not going to try that. At least not today. Never did figure out if he was being helpful, or trying to burn the hair in my nose.

When the overhead announcements had finished, I was up and ready. I told Al this was excited to see the factory and how the humanoids were built. His reply, "Not like your Henry Ford."

Then Al told Tater and me to sit down and wait. "Boy that killed the excitement."

"Just a moment gentlemen, just wait."



In a couple of moments a woman brought some papers, bowed, and left. Wow, it occurred to me this was the first woman I had seen since I arrived. I asked was she the only female here and Al said there were many. They worked on the second and third floors of the factory. Interesting, they were also dressed in the same white coveralls. Maybe they had been in the lunch room all the time. Need to pay better attention to how the coveralls fit the wearer.

“Here are some papers for you to sign, please read and sign at the bottom. “ There were two sets, one for me, and one for Tater. And yes, there were written in Japanese.

“What are they Tater?”

“You need to sign these. They state you will not tell anyone what you are about to see. That you will not corrupt the humanoid, and general stuff about stealing property or ideas.”

To which I replied, “Did we not sign these when we arrived the first day?”

“Yes, but these are specifically for the humanoid with an ID of 352.”

All I could read was my name at the top, the number 352, and the date at the bottom. What the heck, I signed my papers like he signed his.

“Ok, gentlemen, let’s start at the factory.”

All we did them was to walk through the doors at the other end of the lunch room. All this time, and so close.

There were the usual work force in the coveralls, tools everywhere, and tables arranged in three rows. You could see workers riding oversized tricycles with large baskets on the back. They were delivering parts to locations throughout the area.

And unlike Henry Ford, there was no assembly line. At each location there was a group of workers building a humanoid. “We can build one unit every two weeks” bragged Banner. “That is two every month.” His math skills were as good as mine.

Yes, I was amazed at the complexity of the humanoids. Motors, wires, and more stuff, some of which I remember from the classes. I am glad they changed the hydraulic fluid from red to blue. If they had not changed I would panic at one of the workers with blue all over his coveralls. Panic city if it was blood red.

“Where do those doors go?” I asked AI. “To the dressing room. We can dress the humanoid with any skin colored material you want.” Darn, Steve was right, a sumo with an outfit.

“Next we will visit your office where you will work with your assigned humanoid.”

AI led us down the hall, past the lunch room to our room, ‘Lab 7’. “Ok”, smiled Tater, “this is our room.”

As the door opened the first thing I noticed was a window. Strange, I had not realized there were not any windows in the lunch room, the class room, or the factory. We had a window. Our room was about 35 feet by 35 feet. In the center was a large desk with a couple of chairs. Could have been the same padded chairs we used in the class room. On the desk was a computer terminal with keyboard and mouse. Next to the keyboard were two headsets, each with a microphone.

In the front left corner was one of those equipment racks that was full of computers. A long snake like set of cables was coiled next to it. And on the other side there were two shoe prints painted on the floor.

“Why the foot prints AI?” I asked.

“Look up at the ceiling. There is a large hook mounted. When they bring a humanoid to a learning lab they connect a hoist and raise it in position. The foot prints help us to align the humanoid.”

I had to look out of the window. The sun was shining. Beautiful day. Outside was the busy chaotic world I had left a few days ago. There were four, no there were five lanes of traffic going in opposite directions. Strange to see them driving on the wrong side of the road from the way we Americans drive. It was nice not to

listen to the traffic sounds, especially the blaring horns. And directly below was a small court yard with tables, chairs, and even a gazebo. Nice.

“Ok gentlemen, tomorrow when you arrive will be your first opportunity to work with your humanoid, ID352. Good night gentlemen.”

And as I was learning, smile, bow, and look down. I was learning the Japanese ways.

Tater and I ate dinner together and discussed our plans for the following morning. Examine the humanoid, run all the check lists, verify everything was ready, and then start teaching 352 the American ways or manners and speech. Watch out sumo, here we come.

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I was the first to arrive at our lab. Before entering I could only think of the picture Steve sent me. Maybe I could borrow the Yale sweatshirt from Tater and at least bring a little class to the humanoid. Be brave Wilson, be brave.

Slowly I opened the door, and no sumo. No humanoid. Just a young lady standing in the corner. I was disappointed. I walked into the room, smiled, and bowed. Looking up I smiled again and said “Kon'nichiwa” which Banner told me was ‘Hello’. No response. Ok, then I tried ‘Hello”. Still no response. Was she deaf, or just not sure of the American?

So I will start over, I smiled, and bowed. “Kon'nichiwa”. Still nothing.

My next plan did not work as I thought it would. I walked across the room and stood directly in front of her, face to face. Louder this time, “Kon'nichiwa!” Then I jumped when I heard Tater behind me.

“She cannot hear you Rich. She is a humanoid.” Our humanoid ID352.

“Holly crap Tater. Holly @\$%!”

And there it was. Or was it there she was? It was about 5 and a half feet tall. It had long black hair. It had been dressed in a short white and blue outfit, with tall white boots.

“Steve was so wrong, so wrong” Was all I could say. “So wrong.”

“Rich you signed the papers, did you not notice the description and... wait, sorry I forgot you could not read Japanese. This humanoid is dressed as a female between the ages of 20 to 25, the same age as your fellow classmates. I wanted you here because of your age, and as you can recall, not because of your grades.”

Again, “Holly crap Tater. Holly @\$%!”

“Ok Rich, we have a lot to do. We need to get started.”



We sat down at the desk and looked at the materials in front of us. Tater handed me a clip board and said “Start reading.”

“Uh, start with ‘general status.’”

I read the left side of the page, he typed the command shown in the middle column, and when he read back the response, I checked the appropriate box in the right column.

“DSP\_GENERAL\_STATUS”

“GENERAL\_STATUS=GOOD”

And so it went for the next 3 hours. Every so often I would look up at the object in front of us. So far it was just an attractive mannequin dressed in a girl’s outfit. For a moment I thought it was staring at us, but based on what we were seeing on the computer screen, ‘it’ had not been activated.

Mid-morning Al stopped by to check on our progress and what we thought about our humanoid. At that time we had almost completed the check list. Al said we would have to do this every morning, but we could use a shorter check list, that required only about 15 minutes.

“What do you think Rich of your humanoid?”

“She is pretty enough to get my blue fluids going.”

I think it was a great play on words, but Al and Tater just looked at each other. Al left the lab and I continued reading the list. Time for lunch.

“Maybe after lunch we can fire up the robot Tater.”

“When we reach the time, we can do just that.” What kind of an answer is that?

Not sure what I ate for lunch, all I wanted to do was to see ID352 do something. Anything.

Sometime in the middle of the afternoon it was there, ‘START PROCESS’. It was time. No more class work. No more waiting. It was time to see it, no ‘her’, do something.

“START\_PROCESS\_ID00352=TRUE”. Type it Tater, type the command.

He typed, I watched, I waited, nothing. Not a wink, blink, finger point, nothing. Nothing. I have seen stuff blow in the wind that did more.

I turned and said, “That was exciting wasn’t it? Dud. All this work for what? Maybe they are playing a trick on us. Yea, we should have gotten the sumo guy, at least it would move.”

“What did you expect Rich?” We did not tell it to do anything. “It is working, just waiting for a command.”

Maybe a little frustrated, or confused, I turned to the mannequin and said, “Do something 352.” Nothing. “See, not even a wink.”

“Put on the headset, and adjust the microphone.” I did that. He typed another command on the keyboard, “MONITOR\_AUDIO=TRUE”.

“Ok Mister Wilson, try it now, say a command, start with ‘ID352’, and what you it to do.”

“ID352, close eyes.”

“Holy crap, it winked. She winked at me!”

“Try another Rich.”

“Ah, raise your arm.” Nothing. “Wait, ID352, raise your arm.” An arm was raised. Neat.

“Watch this Rich.” “SPEECH\_MODE\_RESPOND=TRUE”.

He cleared his throat, like those days in his class, and said “What is your ID number?”

“*00352*”, she spoke. She replied to his voice!

“And it gets better Wilson. Watch and learn. Turning back to the humanoid, he said “Using face recognition, what do you see?”

The head moved, and the eyes looked directly at us. Kinda spooky.

*“ I VISION TWO HUMANS. ONE IS PROFESSOR TAYLOR. THE OTHER IS HEEPER WILSON. “*

“It called me ‘Heeper’. How wrong is that? But it is fascinating, and yes, spooky. How do we correct my name Tater?”

“Just tell her. ID352, correction. Wrong equals Heeper, right equals Helper.”

*“HEEPER ALTERED TO HELPER.”*

“You could have had her change it to ‘Rich’. But at least she knows my name. I mean, ‘it’ knows my name.” Really glad any female knows my name, even if she is not real. Or it is not real.

And for the rest of the day I read to it. And it would repeat the words back to me. If they did not sound as the professor wanted, we changed them.

“It’s after 6, time to eat. We will start tomorrow with more reading, maybe throw in some numbers.”

I did not want to leave. This was fun. If work can be fun, then this is the perfect job. Looking at her, looking at ‘it’, what we were working on was not that bad. From time to time I would look out the window, like at school, but it was different. I was glad to be inside, working on this project. Rather be inside than outside? Odd.

“Wait, I am going with you, just felt hunger pains.” All I could do at dinner was talk about what had happened that afternoon with Slim, and Banner. They just smiled, listened, and ate their meal. Was I talking too much?

---

Excited. I woke up excited. I never thought I would look forward to going to work. To spend the day with a school teacher months ago I hated, to sit at a desk and read to a machine, something must be wrong with me.

“Maybe you should take time to chew your food Rich. Slow down”, was Tater’s first breakfast comment, instead of the normal “Good morning Wilson.”

“Sorry sir, just want to get to work.”

“Say that again, slower, and without food in your mouth.”

“I am just excited about what we are doing. It’s fun.” Did I just say that work was fun? With Professor Taylor?

“To make it easier, and to provide a more human intervention, I think we should change the ID of our 352.” And Tater even smiled when it said that. “Change to a common, simple name. An American name.”

“Sure. How about Princess or Angel?” I think the way the humanoid looked was getting to me.

“No Richard, I think ‘Rita’ would be the perfect name. What do you think?”

“Ok, I get it. Rita. Robot Intelligent, something, something.”

“NO. Just Rita. We will rename ID352 to Rita.”

Alright, so much for democracy and discussions, Rita it will be. “How about Ms. Rita?”

“No, just Rita.”

After we completed the short checklist we powered up ID352. Then the command was given ‘STATEMENT\_NAMEID\_FROM\_ID352\_CHANGE\_RITA’. And that was it. Simple. We now were looking at ‘Rita’.

Headset time. “Talkie, talkie.”

“ID352, wink.” No response.

“Rita, wink.” It, no...she, winked at us. Rita winked at us. She now has a name. And we continued on for the rest of the day giving her that special individuality and personality. We were working as a team, Tater, Rita, and me. Still seems strange working WITH a machine.

The rest of the factory did their usual production quotas. We were the only ‘specialized’ lab working with one computer, just Rita. The rest of the humanoids were being shipped to larger industrial locations for manual or unsafe working conditions. But the other ‘research’ teams were constantly improving the way the humanoids moved. And each morning we were curious what changes had been downloaded to Rita during the night.



We had her walk around the room, sit in a chair, and lift items. Pretty impressive when all this control was based on verbal commands. Some days when I was getting tired I would have her wink or to wave, just for something out of the ordinary-just between us. Wanted to tell Steve back in the states I had complete control of an attractive woman. He would then tell me it was just a machine, programmed to do as you told it. Just a machine. If only he could meet Rita.

---

“Jingle Bells!”. My favorite holiday was finally here. And ‘Jingle Bells’ was playing through the overhead speakers in the lunch room. This would be my last breakfast with my friends for almost a month. A quick ride to the airport, then that long flight, and time with the family.

“We should make a Santa Claus humanoid Slim. Then we would have Christmas all the time.” That was my idea.

Then Slim said, “All he need to say is ‘Ho Ho’. We could use my Aunt as the mold. She is too big.” Laughter from the table.

And there, the last memories I have leaving the ‘factory’ for home was a laugh among friends.

I had forgotten what a long flight it was to the south eastern states. But I was home, home with my family. Home for the holidays. My parents picked me up at the airport and it was late when Dad pulled up that familiar driveway.

“Nothing for me Mom, too tired.” And then to the best part, my room. My room. All my stuff was here. It was so long ago that I left. My room, my home, my family.

“I have to be dreaming. It smells like bacon. Real bacon.” Then it hit me, breakfast at home. I ran down those stairs like I had done a thousand times. But this was for the aroma of bacon. Real country bacon.

“Good morning Rich. We are so happy you are here. How did you sleep dear?”

“Perfect Mom. Just perfect. I really missed you guys. Is Dad up yet?”

“Think about it. Where would he be?”

“Yea, I forgot. Reading the paper in his chair.”

And so it was home, and the world was perfect. Forgot how many pieces of bacon I had for breakfast. The smell still filled the house. Wonderful.

The next day was the big day. The whole family was here for the holiday. What a great smell, bacon and the smell of the tree. And the house was decorated with every ornament and light we owned. Candles everywhere. Colors and smells.

As the friends and relatives arrived the gifts under the tree grew. Mom started putting some under the table. Too much food on top of the table. Bows, ribbons, colors, and now the smell of ham.

My nephew George had gotten a remote controlled robot as a gift. He could make it run across the floor, turn, and make a noise. It was about 18 inches high, and painted gray.

“What do you think George, will someone ever invent a robot that looks like us? Probably more like a Frankenstein.” I wanted to turn to Uncle Frank and show him a picture of Rita. But I did sign the papers. Everyone laughed.

“Come here son, let your Aunt Linda give you a big kiss.” All I thought of was what Slim said about his Aunt. Maybe my Aunt Linda could be a larger Santa. And behind her was Uncle Tony. My hand still hurts from that squeeze. “Hey Richard, tell me about those ‘Japs’ you working with. You making them follow your orders? Did I tell you about what we did in ‘44 to those fellows?”

Then I left the room to the kitchen. It never occurred to me they were ‘Japs’. Just people like me. Like my family. Even with the house full, I suddenly felt alone.

For the next few weeks I visited friends, relative, and the university. And even the old hamburger spot Steve and I used to visit. There was a moment I was going to tell Steve about my white coveralls, and the cap. Not sure if I would tell him about my ‘Helper Wilson’ name tag. Some things you got to keep to yourself.

“Yes Mom I will write, and call you. Yes Mom I will be careful. No Dad I do not know any geisha girls. And I love both of you very much.” Now off to gate 17 for that long, long flight back to play with robots.

---

“You’re back Rich.”

“We miss you.”

Banner and Slim. And here comes Tater. “Good morning Rich. How’s the family? Did you visit our school?” It was difficult to eat breakfast and answer all the questions. Now it was my turn.

“Did you guys stay out of trouble? How about Rita? Any news I need to know?”

“Al is on a trip. Those tech guys have been downloading new applications to Rita almost every night. And, and, we now have color televisions in our rooms.”

And I do look good with my white coveralls, the cap, and my ‘Helper Wilson’ badge. “It’s good to be home.” Home? This is a factory, thousands of miles from my home. Why did I say that? Was I fitting in to a new life?

“Good morning Rita.” Seemed normal to talk to my android. Doesn’t everyone?

“Status report please.”

*“POWER SYSTEM IS GOOD. COMMANDS SET TO VOICE. LIFE SUPPORT SYSTEM NORMAL. ALL UPDATES COMPLETED. WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN?”*

It, or rather ‘she’, had been improved. She was more lifelike. Instead of a mechanical device I could control, now it is a female asking me where I was. Was this progress? Progress for who... them or mankind?

“I went on a trip to visit my friends and family.”

*"AM I YOUR FRIEND AND FAMILY?"* And she was looking directly at me. So lifelike.

"Yes Rita, you are my friend."

*"AND AM I FAMILY?"*

"Yes Rita you are family."

*"WHY HELPER? WHY FRIEND AND FAMILY?"*

On this morning, somewhere in Japan, in a factory, in a lab, I am sitting at a desk talking to a mechanical mannequin. Discussing with it why we are friends and what it means to be a family. Should I ask Tater to sign the commitment papers so I can get professional help? And it, she, is talking back to me, asking more questions.

"Big improvement Rich. Can you tell a difference with her?"

When Tater slipped into the room, and said that, I may have jumped and screamed like a child. "Yea, much better."

"The techs and those nerds in the programming area sub divided her individual module into two sections. Only you and I have access to the minor section to give Rita the personality, but with constant down loads of programming she is improving with general responses, becoming more human."

"Just wait until I get to dance with her Tater, then I will be impressed."

*"WHEN DO I DANCE?"* At her comment we just laughed and started another day of teaching and reading. So this was what a teacher's life was like. Maybe Professor Taylor did enjoy his job. Maybe I might become a teacher.

---

On May 24<sup>th</sup>, it happened. Another great morning. The sun was shining and I was in line for breakfast. With so many flavors and colors, it was difficult to decide what to get to eat. Certainly not the smokes squid.

I glanced around to see if the buddies were here, and there was Rita. Rita! She was sitting at a table with three girls. What the heck? She was sitting at a table, in the lunch room, and away from the lab.

Setting my tray on the first table, I went directly to Rita. "Rita stand up. Follow me. Why are you here?" Rita looked left, then to the right, then at me.

"What did you say? Are you talking to me?"

"Rita, stand up and follow me. Now."

Someone grabbed my shoulder and pulled me away. Quick look it was Tater.

"Come with me Rich, we need to talk."

"But it..."

"In here." Shoved out of the lunch room, down the hall. "Professor Taylor it was Rita. She is out of the lab. In public."

His expression turned from a mature adult to that of a smiling kid in just a couple of seconds. Then he said "That was not Rita."

"Yes it was Tater. I know our Rita. Why is she there?"

"Calm down. We have a mechanical machine. Humanoid. Remember the factory tour and the 'dressing' areas? The place where they mold the body for the frame to make it look like a real person? Remember?"

"Yea."

"That was the person they made the mold from. She works upstairs. Rita's covering, the fake skin, was made to look like the person you were talking to."

"Acted wrong didn't I?"

“Not really. Just proves how life like these devices can be. Now let’s try and finish breakfast. Without starrng.”

I got the impression everyone was looking at me, the fool. But no one looked in my direction. Just another day at the tables. “Be right back.”

Not sure if I was doing the right thing or not. I made my way to the table where I had just be an idiot. ‘Excuse me. I would like to apologize for my behavior.”

“That is alright. We understand ‘Helper’. There is no harm.”

She knew my name! No wait, she probably read my name tag. “You look exactly like a humanoid I am working with.”

“Yes, I know. They used my body to cast the mold. You called it Rita. Pretty name.”

“Thank you. So it looks exactly like you? Your face is the same, and your arms.”

“All of me Helper.”

“You mean everything...?” According to the grins and smiles, then the giggles from her friends, I should not have said ‘everything’.

“Yes, everything.”

Instructions=Make a mistake. Insert foot=Make situation worse. Must leave=NOW.

“Ah, excuse me ladies, have a nice day.” And with that I returned to eat my food. Hopefully no one will remember this morning and what happened to ‘Helper Fool’.

In the lab I starred at Rita. They were twins. Wonder if I can get a twin made of me? Probably not. It would just end up saying something wrong. Dummy.

“Ok Rich, let’s get started for today. Working again with numbers and calculations for Rita.” Good, something to get my mind off my earlier mistake.

“Rita, count from 100 to 150.”

“100 101 102 103 …” and so it went.

Maybe it was me, but I wanted eat my lunch alone. One of those days where it seems everything goes wrong.

“Please me sit with you?”

“No. I want to be alone.” Then I realized who had asked. It was her, the twin.

“Wait, please sit. I did not know it was you.” I stood, bowed, and smiled. Not sure if I should pull the chair for her, but the man in me did it anyway.

“Sorry laugh at you this morning. Very sorry.” And Rita, no, the twin was talking to me. Same hair, same face.

“That OK. It was me, not you that made the mistake. What is your name?”

“Name Lilly.”

“Just like the flower.” Making my move.

“Oh no, rose is flower.”

Wait, wait for it. And there it is, a smile. She did have a sense of humor. “Lilly is a pretty name.”

“What kind name is ‘Heeper’?”

“No. It’s ‘Helper’. No, that’s not my name. My name is Richard, but my friends call me Rich.”

“Can I be friend and call Rich?” How could I ever say no to her?

“I would like that very much Lilly. Please call me Rich.”

And then she left. Everyone left. Maybe the speaker overhead had something to do with it. When I got to the lab I told Tater what a great lunch I had. Then he asked what I had. “Funny, I do not remember.”

At dinner I looked for Lilly but did not see her. I ate, then off to watch what I could find on the television.

As I was getting ready for breakfast I noticed an envelope that someone had slid under my door. When I opened it to read the note, something fell to the floor. It was a name badge. ‘Rich Wilson’. My own name, my own badge. Just for me after all this time.

The note was from Lilly, and it only said, “No more Heeper, just Rich.”

---

There was a grin from ear to ear when I walked into the lab that morning. Maybe I should have polished the badge a little more.

“Change your name Helper?” was the comment from Tater. Maybe there was a little smile.

“Good morning Tater, good morning Rita”.

*“YOUR ID IS NOT SAME. WHERE CORRECT ID HELPER?”* Great, she had seen the badge.

“I know Rita. We changed your ID from 0352 to Rita. So mine ID was changed from Helper to Rich.”

*“SO I IDENTIFY YOU AS RICH.”* Pause. *“HELLO RICH.”*

“Hello Rita.” I came close to calling her Lilly, got to be more careful.



Rita was getting better. We were working 10 hours a day with her 'personality' and the programming geeks were constantly upgrading her software. She would walk around the room following our commands to 'find the red ball', "sit in a chair', 'point to an object on the desk', or play follow the leader.

And Lilly and I were meeting in the lunch room every day to spend some time together. A lot of days we ate outside on the tables, or in the gazebo. I was helping my two 'lady' friends with the English language, and Lilly was trying to teach me her language.

With Rita I would say a word, and it would repeat. And with Lilly, she would say a word and I would repeat.

One afternoon Rita walked to the window and looked out at the traffic and the people walking by. Tater and I explained what she could observe. And then she asked a question we never expected.

*"WHAT DO I LOOK LIKE? DO I LOOK LIKE A HUMAN?"*

"Yes, you look like us. You were created to look and act like a human."

"Wait a moment. Just wait." And Tater ran out of the room.

"Help me Rich. Hold the door open."

What a great idea, he was dragging into our lab a full length mirror. Perfect. We put it in front of Rita so she could see herself.

"What do you think Rita? Can you see what you look like? See, you look like us."

*"I THOUGHT I WAS TALLER."*

We could not help it. Tater and I started laughing. And laughing. Wow, a response we had not expected.

*"WHAT IS WRONG WITH MY TALKING?"*

My turn, Tater was still laughing. "What you said was funny. We did not expect you to say something funny."

*"WHAT IS FUNNY?"*

"Ok Tater, your turn." And the rest of the day was explaining the word 'funny', and why her reply made both of us laugh. Then that lesson continued with more human responses and why humans react to certain words.

A lot of the discussion did not work as we planned. I started with a typical joke, "Three humanoids walked into a bar."

When Rita asked "Why?" or "Who were the other two?" we got the idea this humor thing was going to take a long time. But if we could get Rita to understand the human emotions such as humor, that would create her unique personality. That was our primary goal.

---

Saturday was the big day. A real date with Lilly. Outside the factory. A real date with a real female. And we were headed downtown. We were going outside the fence.

"It feels good not to wear white coveralls yes?"

"Yes Lilly, it feels very good. And you look very nice tonight." Darn, she looked perfect. But if I limit what I say maybe the foot will not return to the mouth.

The process was simple, leave the building, walk to the guard house, sign your name and the time, and walk to the street. About a 150 foot walk. But a totally different world. Freedom, excitement, and fear. This was the first time I had ventured outside. But Lilly was there, it did not matter. We got a taxi and headed toward fun for the evening.

"I know place you like Rich. It is one of favorites."

"That sounds perfect." I just hope they did not serve smoked squid. But for her, I might try it again.

After driving down main highways, then streets, and then what looked like back alleys, we arrive. Normal looking restaurant. All the names were written in Japanese, but I recognized the image painted on the window, a giant hamburger.

“Really?”

“Yes Rich, hamburger.”

Life is good. I am sitting in a restaurant on a Saturday night, with a beautiful girl, eating a hamburger with French fries, and a soda. How could it get any better?

“Thank you Lilly. This is excellent. Probably been a year since I had a burger. You picked a perfect place. Do you come here often?”

“Sometimes. My father likes this place, so he bring my mom and me.”

“Where does your father work?”

“He is in the military. And my mother is a teacher.”

This should be interesting. Need to get her father and my uncle Tony to discuss the war. “What can we do now?”

And she had the perfect answer, “We go movie.”

It was in color. It was a current movie from the states. And it had sub titles so I could follow the action. Funny seeing famous American actors speaking in Japanese. And it did not matter, I was with Lilly.

“We must do this again Lilly. I had a wonderful time.” The evening seems to go by too fast. The taxi was pulling up to the gate. Sign in, walk to the main door, and we are home.

The factory, my lab, the lunch room, and my room were located on the first floor. Main offices were on the second floor. And the main computer servers and the female living quarters were on the third. I was not allowed on the third floor. So I

held her hand and said good night. She leaned over and kissed me on the cheek and said “Thank you Helper”, smiled, and headed for the elevators.

It was a night I could not sleep. Wonderful. She was so much fun. A real burger, I think. Need to get some sleep. Maybe it was the food. Being outside. Cannot sleep. Was it the burger?

I got up, got dressed, and headed to the lab. It was so quiet. Middle of the night. I was the only one moving.

“Maybe if I looked at the news on the internet it will make me sleepy. Or at least find how they made that burger.”

Rita was just standing there. She was powered down for normal battery charging and updates. Smiled as she reminded me of Lilly. So I started typing. ‘Facebook’, my email account, and ‘Google’.

Porn! That would take my mind off the loss of sleep. “No. What if someone caught me? What if Lilly found out? Funny, what if Rita caught me?”

“Wait.... If Lilly was the mold for Rita, then they are the same. If I peeked at Rita without her clothes, then I would see the body of Lilly.”

“No, that just wrong. What if Tater came in and saw me looking at a nude Rita? And who is Tater? Tater. Professor Lawrence G. Taylor. Who is he? Google time.” So I started looking for Tater.

Thanks to modern technology and the internet I found his background, even his school picture. Am surprised he is only in his late 50s, it always seemed older in class.

Another surprise, he was married and had a daughter. Where are they?

“Divorced. Knew it, even she could not stay with him. Ole Tater. Maybe he gave her homework. Ok, Rich, let’s find her, and the kid.”

More typing, more Google, and more searching. I could not sleep and it was the middle of the morning. I needed to know.

“You ever do something, and then wish you had not done it? I just did. I found the answers. And I wish I had looked at porn instead.”

“Rita Marie Taylor, age 4, killed by an automobile accident. Rita. Tater’s daughter. Killed. Rita.”

The newspaper articles and the court records told the story. Tater was playing ball with Rita and the ball rolled into the street. She ran after the ball and was hit by a car. An accident. His wife blamed him for the accident, and she left him. My poor friend.

Now I would not be able to sleep. Why had I search for him? The rest of the day, Sunday, I stayed in my room, only leaving to eat. I wanted to be alone. And I could tell no one.

---

“Good morning Rich. Good weekend?”

“Yes sir Professor Taylor.” And I avoided eye contact. That poor man.

“What’s wrong Mister Wilson? Thought we were on a first name bases?”

“Sorry, just thinking about the weekend. What we doing today?”

“We are moving furniture and re arranging the room.”

Actually we did not do anything. We told Rita to move things. She had to lift, slide, and push. ‘Rita’, now I understood why he chose that name. He wanted to teach his child.

“Rita, pick up the box and carry it 4 meters forward.”

“*YES, MOVING BOX.*” Wonder if I could adjust her speech tones to match Lilly?

“Rita, come here. Rita, sit down in the red chair.”

She was working perfect, and following all commands. “Rita, what time is it?”

*"230PM IN THE AFTERNOON."*

And so it went for the rest of the week. I still could not get the picture in my head of the happy couple with a daughter, and the tragic events that changed his life. So for both of us, we had Rita to keep our thoughts in the right direction.

"What about a boyfriend for Rita Tater? Like a modern movie, 'Female humanoid meets traveling male humanoid'"

"Like you and Lilly?"

"How did you know about us?"

His simple reply, "Because you stare at Rita and smile."

"Do not." Maybe I do.

Back to the lab. Things have changed a little. Rita is starting to ask questions. She, it, would look out the window and ask about objects she saw.

*"WHY TREE MOVE? WHY HUMANS MOVE FAST? WHAT IS TASTE? WHY WE USE COLORS?"*

"Amazing Rich with all this technology it still is like training a child. Step by step. But Rita is learning."

"It is just like teaching a 4 year old, like Rita Marie." No, no, no. Did I just say that? Maybe he did not hear me.

"Yes, just like Rita Marie."

"Professor Taylor I am so sorry. So sorry for your loss. I did not mean to say that. I could not sleep, I was on the internet, I..."

"It's alright Rich. I knew you found out. It's fine."

"How did, how could you know I found out?"

“Rita told me.”

“What? How?”

“That early morning you were on the computer looking for me, learning about my daughter, was during the maintenance uploads. When the techs were loading new software into Rita’s memory, your searches were also downloaded. “

“So now you, me, and Rita know what happened?”

“Yes, and I would prefer only the three of us know. Is that a promise? Please?”

“Absolutely Professor Taylor. I am so sorry.”

“Rich, it happened. No we do not discuss this again. We have more important things to do. Our work.”

---

Rita was schedule to have ‘enhancements’ that would improve her battery usage and to have her infrared vision improved. The processes would allow her to be active for a longer time between battery charging, and the infrared would give her the option of ‘seeing’ in total darkness.

AI said this upgrade would take a couple of days, so Tater and I shut down the lab for a long weekend.

That night at dinner Lilly said, “Let’s leave early tomorrow morning and take a trip. OK?”

“Sure, sounds perfect. We can leave after breakfast. See you here at 6:00”.

After I walked her to the elevators I went to my room and watched Gilligan on TV.



As I walked into the lunch room Lilly was waiting. "Can you change shirt? I like the blue one better." For her I would do just about anything. Made a U-turn and said, "Be right back."

When I returned she had my breakfast tray ready. She knew what I ate for breakfast, and had it ready.

"You ready for fun day?"

"Certainly Lilly. Where we going?"

"To a small village just outside the city. You can meet my parents."

I guess everyone had parents, I had just never thought about hers. "Do they know we are coming? I hate to just rush in and surprise them."

"Father and mother are very excited to meet you. I have told them how nice you are."

"Do they know I am, I am?"

"American? Yes Rich, they know."

Into the taxi, to the train, to another taxi and we are there. Her parents' home. It looked like a nice neighborhood. You could put this neighborhood in any country and it would look normal. Grass, trees, kids on bikes. I did not know what I expected, but it was normal. Just a normal home.

As we approached the door there were butterflies in my stomach. Kind of like the time I ate smoked squid. I tried to remember all the proper Japanese customs. And hoped Lilly can translate from English what I am saying.

Too late now, she pushed the doorbell. Brace yourself Rich.

There was her mother. Attractive Asian woman wearing blue jeans and a blouse with stripes, not what I expected.



“Hi Lil, and you must be Rich. Please come in.” She hugged Lilly, and put her hand out to shake mine. Strange. She was Japanese, wearing my kind of clothes, speaking English, and shaking my hand. Nice.

“Robert, our guests are here.” I wondered what kind of Japanese military person would be called ‘Robert’.

And there he was. Her father. The man in the army I feared. He was about my height, wearing shorts, a T-shirt, and sandals. AND he was American!

“Hello Richard. Delighted to meet you. Come on it. There’s my baby girl.” Lilly got one big hug from him. And then a second hug. Next I got a hand shake, and then a hug from him.

Lilly spoke, “Rich this is my mother, Rose.”

“Like the flower?” Too late, I said it without thinking.

And together all three said, “No, that’s a Lilly.” We all laughed. It suddenly felt like I was home and had known this family for a long time. Lucky me.

“Rich, you want a soda or ice tea?”

“No thank you, I am fine.”

As we sat there Robert told about joining the Army and being assigned to Japan 25 years ago. He met Rose, they got married, and had Lilly. In a few years when he retires they have decided to stay here and enjoy life.

While he was talking to me Lilly and her Mom were talking in their language, almost a whisper, and every so often look at me and smile.

“Before we eat Richard I need you to do something for me.” Then it is true, my father always said there is no such thing as a free meal. “Let’s step outside. Excuse us ladies.”

Sitting on the back steps was an ancient device I had not seen in a long time. My Aunt Barbara had one. A 'turn it yourself' ice cream maker.

"Richard you know how to operate that?"

"Yes sir, I certainly do." As I sat down and started turning the crank Robert was adding the salt and the ice. "This sure brings back memories. What flavor is it?"

"Squid. With a hint of smoke flavor." I stopped cranking.

He laughed, then I laughed. "No, it is peach ice cream. Lilly told us how much you love smoked squid in the morning." I like this guy.

As we walked back into the house Rose asked me if I was ready for lunch. "Yes mam, and it smells great."

Here I am in the center of Japan. With all the customs, the foods available, and meeting Lilly's parents for the first time. So what does she prepare for me to eat? "Wow Rose, fried chicken, mashed potatoes-with gravy, a salad, and vegies. Thank you, that looks perfect." After a few bites I asked what was in the vegetable plate."

"That is one of Lilly's favorite dishes. It is tofu, with peanuts and kale. The dressing has a little ginger." I think I just discovered a new favorite.

So fast. The afternoon went by too fast. They were perfect hosts. The food was perfect, the ice cream excellent. It was comfortable. Like I was home with family.

"Momma we must go it is getting late."

"Please come back soon and bring 'our' friend Richard with you. Richard thank you for coming. We hope to see you again. I think Lilly really likes you."

Awkward... Not sure which of us blushed the most, Lilly or me.

"We WILL be back. Thank you for a wonderful day, and very glad to meet both of you."

On the way back to the factory I asked how it felt to have an American father, and a Japanese mother.

“If they love each other what difference does it make?”

She then told me one of the reasons she was selected as the mold for Rita was that she looked both American and Japanese. So the humanoid could work in any country. She called it a smart marketing concept. I called it having a good looking robot.

When we got to the factory the timing was just right. We ate dinner together. The food was certainly not as good as what Rose had prepared, but we were eating together. Later I walked her to the elevator.

“Thank you Rich for a perfect day.” Then, then, she gave me a kiss. Not on the cheek, but on the lips. She gave me one on the lips.

“No, thank you Lilly. Thank you for a perfect day.”

---

When I got to the lab Monday morning Tater was there making notes. There were two techs hoisting Rita back on the foot prints on the floor. She was back from her upgrades, improved vision, and better batteries.

“Moring Richard. How was the weekend?”

“Excellent. How was yours?”

“Good. I made a lot of notes and there are things I want us to try.” Obviously we rated our weekends on a different scale. “I want to test her eyes today. And we need to check the hand built pieces for the larger battery.”

“It was great.”

“What was great Rich?”

“What you said. Homemade peach ice cream.”

“No, I said ‘hand build pieces’ for the modifications. Are you ok?”

“Sure. Just thinking.” Back to work, back to the real world.

“Take a look at this list, this is what I want us to do.”

*Check night vision, eye exam*

*Play follow me*

*Play tag*

*Dance*

*Go to the lunch room*

*Go outside*

“Really. You want Rita to do this? Can she?”

“No sure, but we are certainly going to try.”

We closed the windows, pulled the curtains tight, and turned off the lights. The only light was coming from the computer display in front of us.

“Rita, do you see us?”

*“YES. I SEE TWO HUMANS. IN A DARK ROOM.”*

“Can you identify the two humans?”

*“YES. I CAN SEE PROFESSOR TAYLOR, AND HIS HELPER RICH.”*

We then opened the curtains and turned on the light. “Ok Rita walk toward the window.”

“Rita, do you see the green sign where I am pointing? Can you read the sign to us?”

*“ICHI WA ZO-KIRO O SEIGEN”*

“Excellent Rita. Did you see that? She read the sign. It said ‘20 kilometers to the city’.”

I did not want to tell Tater I barely could see the sign.

“Ok Rich, game time. Rita, come here toward me.” Rita turned from the window and came toward us. Tater and Rita were face to face. “Turn around Rich, back up toward Rita.”

“Rita, follow Rich. When he moves, you move. And where he goes you go. Ok, Rich, start walking.”

I took a step forward, she took a step. Then I took a couple of steps, and she moved toward me. For the next few minutes I walked around the room, with my humanoid friend behind me.

“Here comes the big test. Walk fast, and then quickly back up.”

“OK, but she will bump into me.” I moved around the lab, and then got a little faster. Not quite a run, but a very fast walk. Then I stopped and backed up a step, directly into her path.

Rita stopped, and backup up. She moved fast, almost a jump backward.

“See Rich. Remember rule number one about robots and automation? ‘A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm’. Rita will do anything to keep from hurting you. Anything.”

I felt like a kid moving away from Rita, letting her chase me. Sometimes I would climb over a chair, or the desk, and watch Rita move around to head me off. As we stopped for lunch Tater said this afternoon we would play tag. All three of us.

Coming back from the lunchroom I found Tater talking to Rita. And he was drawing pictures on the white board. “What you doing?”

“Teaching her how to play tag. I think she understands. You ready to try?”

“Sure.” I put my glass of tea on the desk, turned to Rita and said “Ok Rita, start.”

Nothing happened. Nothing. “There you go Tater, nothing. Do not think she learned how to play.”

“Watch this Mister Wilson and learn.” Smiling, he reached over and tapped Rita on the arm. “Tag Rita, you are it.”

From somewhere, and I am not sure where it came from, an arm flew through the air and hit me on the back. “*Tag Rich, you are it.*”

“Hey Rita I was not ready.” The professor almost fell down he was laughing so hard.

“Ok, you got me.” And so it went for the next couple of hours. Two adults and a mechanical human playing tag in a lab, in a country a long distance from where I last played it as a kid. We had to stop a few times and teach Rita not to hit so hard. This was probably the first game of tag where I got bruises on my arms and back.

At dinner that evening I told Lilly we played games all day. She said all she did was work. You should have seen her face when I told her Rita and I were going to learn to dance the next day. And then we both smiled.

---

Up front I will admit I am not a good dancer. And from what I have seen Tater was not much better. But we both had Rita beat. She could walk, run, talk, but dancing was not her thing. We decided to cross of teaching her to dance. She did like to listen to the ‘rhythm’ of the music.

Professor Taylor called Al and asked him to come to the lab. We needed his permission to try our next procedure, going to the lunch room with Rita.

“What do you need gentlemen? You have something to show me?”

“Sure Al. Watch our friend Rita.” Al started grinning when we played ‘follow the leader’ with me and Rita. I showed him how I could get myself in a situation and she would avoid running into me. He was impressed.

But he looked startled when we asked him to play ‘tag’ with us. “You want to play tag with both of you and the android?”

“Sure, do you know how to play?”

“Yes, we played it all the time at school.” And with that Al hit Tater on the shoulder and said, ‘tag, you are it’.

Wow, for a heavy set Japanese executive in a tie, he was fast to hit me and say “Anata ga sore o aru tagu”. So I was ‘it’.

“Watch this sir.” I then touched the motionless Rita, and said, “You are it Rita.”

You should have seen Al’s face when Rita moved very fast toward him. I think he panicked and just stood there.

She touched him and said, “*ANATA WA SORE ODEARU*”.

He stood there. He looked around. And then he started laughing. Not just laughing, but he was shaking all over. “She very funny. She tagged me. I will get her.” And he went after her.

She made us proud, she moved around and turned and walked fast. He could not tag her. Not because she was a little faster than he was, he was still laughing.

And the three adults and Rita played tag.

Tater walked up to Al and said, “We need a favor from you.”

Smiling Al said, “I cannot jump road, so do not ask.” He looked at me and grinned.

“I want us to have lunch together, today, in the lunch room.” And Tater was firm in his voice.

“Certainly. You and Richard can join me any time. Would love to.”

“No, I want all four of us to eat in the lunchroom. Today.” Tater was looking directly into AI’s eyes. “You, me, Rich, and Rita. All of us.”

“That has never happened. Androids are not permitted in that area. No.”  
“Why are they not permitted? Why?”

“They will hurt someone, they will do damage. Not permitted.”

“So you will not let a humanoid in your own lunchroom, but you will sell them to work around people in other factories? And if you do not trust me with this item, I will tell everyone you played tag on company time.”

“You play rough Professor Taylor. Ok, but you will take full responsibility. You will take the blame if something happens. Yes?”

“Yes.”

“And professor, we not discuss the game to anyone again. Agree?”

“Agreed. And thank you AI.”

I do not know if AI agreed to the experiment because of not trusting the product he sold to others, or that he really enjoyed playing tag but did not want the top executives to find out.

AI went to the phone on the wall, and pressed a couple of buttons to activate the speakers overhead, to the entire building.

“Professor Taylor will have a humanoid in the lunchroom today. Be careful. Report any problems directly to me. ‘Ranchirūmu de no kyōju teirāhyūmanoido. Subete no mondai o hōkoku shimasu.’ Repeat, there will be a humanoid in the lunch room today at noon.”

“Ok, professor, I will meet you there at noon.”



“Thank you.” And turning to me he said, “Rich, Gary Cooper, and ‘High Noon’.”

In less than 45 minutes we had to do something to get Rita ready. But what?

“Quick Wilson, go get a tray and bring me a couple of plates and glasses.”

We showed her how to carry the tray and to balance the glasses. How to position the plate in the center of the tray. How to sit in the chair with the tray. “Will it work Tater?”

“Well Richard Wilson, you passed my class last year, and she is prettier and smarter. Why not let’s give it a try? You lead, Rita will follow you, and I will be behind her. Walk normal and do things slow. That way she will observe your actions and try to duplicate.”

You know those scenes where the prisoner is walking to the hangman’s noose? That was the way I felt. And when we walked into that room, every eye was watching. I could hear two things, their whispers, and my heart beat.

“Ok Rita, watch me and do exactly like I do. Exactly like I do. Understand?”

“Yes Rich. Do exactly.”

I got a tray, and said, “Now you get a tray.” And then I got a plate of food and placed it on my tray. Rita got a plate and put it on her tray. Good Rita. Next a salad, and then chop sticks, and a fork.

“We are making progress Tater. Look over there, next to the wall.”

“I see him. And he is watching our every move. Along with everyone else.” Al was sitting at a table, with three empty chairs. I think he wanted us to succeed.

Looking and watching Rita, I misjudged my arm. The glass of water I picked up hit the side of the tray and fell to the floor. Thankfully it was a plastic glass, but water and ice went down my shirt and to the floor. Now I know everyone was watching, and they were quiet.

Rita picked up her glass, just as we had shown in the lab, and put it on her tray. No water was spilled.

People stood up. Some laughed, some clapped their hands. Tater smiled and said, and very loud, "Maybe the humanoid can teach the American." I looked around, and then at Al. He was laughing just like the game we played earlier.

I walked to the table, set my tray down, and sat down. Rita did the same. Al stopped laughing long enough to say, "Richard, do you want Rita to get you another glass of water?"

The room fell apart. Applause. Laughing. Clapping. The professor, Rita, and I had gained success. She was the first humanoid permitted in the lunch room. It would be interesting to see if I would be permitted back.

---

A few days later we were in the lab and during a reading session Rita turned to me and asked, *"WAS IT MAIYA, AKENO, AND TEIJO?"*

"What? Who were they?"

*"YOU SAID EARLIER THAT THREE HUMANOIDS WALKED INTO A BAR? WERE THESE THE ONES?"*

Tater and I looked at each other, a little confused. "No Rita that was the start of a joke. Something funny. I was just testing to see if we could produce a response from you. An attempt at artificial intelligence. A humanoid is just a computer. No humor, no funny. You just work on knowledge we give you. Understand."

*"YES. RICH I UNDERSTAND. YOU DEFINED FUNNY TO ME EARLIER. A RESPONSE MADE BY HUMANS. LAUGH, SMILE, GRIN."*

"Correct. Now continue reading. See Tater, I should be a school teacher. It pays more. I will never get rich doing this."

*"SO THAT IS FUNNY."*

“What is funny Rita?”

*“YOU SAY YOU NOT GET RICH. YOU ARE ALREADY RICH. YOUR NAME RICH. SO YOU RICH NOW. FUNNY TO ME.”*

Another time in my life where everything stands still. And quiet. “What did you say Rita?”

*“YOU RICH, RICH. FUNNY. SAME NAME. YOU RICH RICH.”*

Tater pushed me to one side to get a better look at Rita. “LOOK. Rita smiled.”

A smile. She was not really programmed to respond with a smile. But she did. We both saw it. Tater said it was his turn. “Rita, do you know why the chicken crossed the road?”

*“CHICKEN CROSSED TO GET TO THE OTHER SIDE. RIGHT ANSWER?”*

“No. The chicken crossed the road to show the possum it could be done.”

We waited. And waited.

*“CHICKEN FAST CROSS ROAD. POSSUM SLOW ANIMAL. POSSUM GET KILLED BY AUTOMOBILE. FUNNY. FUNNY. CHICKEN SHOW POSSUM HOW TO CROSS ROAD.”*

And then, one more time, Rita the humanoid, the mechanical computer, smiled. Did she know what funny was? Was it possible?

“Mister Wilson, I think we should keep this quiet. This needs more documentation. I still don’t think we have achieved the ultimate programming of artificial intelligence, but she smiled. She really smiled.” And I had to promise not to tell anyone. Not even Lilly.

Lilly and I spent a lot of time together. At one of the visits to her parents’ house we had a real Japanese meal. Rose had fixed ‘something special’ for me. I had to taste a few items blindfolded and then to tell her what it was, and if I wanted more.

“You ready Rich?”

“Yes Lilly I am ready.”

Her father put the blindfold on, told me to “be brave, and not vomit.” Even with my eyes covered I knew she gave him one bad look.

“Ok, here is the first. What is it and do you like it?” Rose, or Lilly, put something in my mouth.

“It is a grape. A very sweet grape.” Easy.

“It is a lychee fruit. Do you like it?”

“Yes. Maybe Robert and I can make ice cream with it.”

“Next bite. Open.”

“Easy, I have had this before. Octopus. Probably steamed.”

“Wrong smarty. It was boiled.” Lilly sure was quick to correct me. “Did you like it?”

“Yes. Think I would like it better steamed. Ouch.” Someone, and no one admitted who it was, hit me on the back of the head.

Each item was tried, and given an honest opinion. So far I was pretty close to the guessing part. And the samples were excellent.

“Open wide. Here is the next.”

“Tastes a little ginger. Smoke flavor. Smoked salmon.”

The room was quiet. Rose spoke first, “Do you like it?”

“Yea, it’s good. “

“Would you like another? Could you make a meal out of this?”

“It would be fine. I always like smoked salmon.”

The blindfold was removed quickly by Lilly. ‘I love you sweetheart. Mother fixed smoked squid for you. AND you liked it.’

I looked at the three of them smiling. What the heck, “It really was good rose. Great job.” And Lilly had said she ‘loved me’. I would eat bad smoked squid to hear that again. Actually just the squid Rose had fixed.

That meal was one of the best. We had larger portions of the samples I had tried. And Lilly said ‘she loved me’.”

---

Once a week, and it was scheduled for Wednesdays, Rita was allowed in the lunch room. A couple of the techs would put tables together so a group of people could sit with the humanoid. They trained her to use chopsticks, an art I still could not master, and a fork and knife.

She would pretend to drink from a glass, causing everyone to smile and point. So far I was the only employee to drop a glass of water. Banner suggested they change my name from ‘Helper Wilson’ to ‘Help me Wilson’.

Rita was perfect. She would talk to the workers, and answer their questions. Sometimes a worker would ask her to stand, or sit, or count to a number. At first we were fascinated by her math skills, until someone reminded us she was a computer. ‘Duh’.

As promised Rita did not smile. And we made sure she understood not to react when something funny was said. Seems so odd, asking a machine to promise not to be funny.

About four weeks into this Wednesday only lunch party, the other woman showed up. It was Lilly.

*"WHY AM I THERE? Asked Rita. "THAT HUMAN LOOKS LIKE ME. FACE RECOGNITION WRONG."*

It was bound to happen. One guy, and two women. This makes for a very bad movie. Twins.

"Rita this is Lilly. They used her face to make you look like a human."

*"SO WE ARE SAME?"*

"You look the same. Same face recognition, same height, and same color hair. Both of you look the same." Standing next to each other, it was like a mirror image. They WERE the same. I was dating twins.



So the two sisters chatted, *"WATASHI WA ANATA GA MIRU HŌHŌ GA SUKIDESU."*

"Soshite, anata wa kanari amarini mo mieru."

*"TOMODACHI NI NAREMASU KA?"*

"Ritchi ga sukidesuka." A few whispers were heard from those fellow employees behind me. And then a few laughs.

*"ANATA WA KYŌJU GA SUKIDESU KA?"*

Sometimes I could make out what they were saying. But I did hear my name a few times. "So what are you talking about?"

The real one spoke, "We are friends, and we both like you." Then, as if cued, they both nodded their head. Interesting.

Tater then broke up the party, the reunion was over. "Excuse us, we need to get Rita back to work." With the room still full of people, Tater, Rita, and I made our way back to the lab. That confrontation with the females in my world had a happy

ending. All right, that meeting with my lady friend and my computer had a happy ending.

At dinner that night Lilly started the conversation, "You and Professor Taylor have done a great job with Rita. It seems so human."

"Thanks." With a big smile I said, "I did it because I always want to be next to you."

"You so funny Rich."

My world was perfect. I loved being with Lilly. It was fun working with Rita. It would come up with funny remarks in the lab, and we allowed her to smile when just the three of us were alone. My worst teacher, Professor Taylor became my best friend. Both a father image and my buddy. I had a room for myself, rent free. And free laundry service for all my white coveralls. Plus a buffet three times a day.

And then it happened.

Lilly and I were eating breakfast one Monday morning. The sun was shining. It was as perfect as a Monday could get. A gentleman, wearing a coat and tie, came up to our table. He bowed. Then he turned to Lilly and said, "Sumimasen. Anata wa ni-kai takatte iru. Kaigi no tame ni." That was it, he left.

"What did he want?" She looked worried.

"I have to go to a meeting. Now. Please excuse."

And she left.

When I entered the lab Tater was not there. Usually he is the first one there. Sorry, Rita was the first, then Tater, and then me. I started the morning status session with Rita. They had created a 'batch' application that would examine all the previous data and compare it to her current conditions. This sure was a lot faster than the hours it had taken in the beginning. After about an hour Tater came in.

"Good morning Rich. Sorry I was late. I had to go to Lilly's going away party."

Just like that. Like he was talking about the weather.

‘Wait. What did you say? Lilly going away?’

“Yep. She is being transferred. So her co-workers had a little good bye celebration.”

“I will be right back. I need to see her.”

“NO Rich. Come back here. Do not go up there.”

“But I need...” He kept stopping me from speaking, and stopping me from leaving the lab. There were not words to express my hurt at her leaving, nor how I felt about Professor Taylor preventing me from seeing her.

“Good morning Rita“, Tater said to our humanoid, just like nothing had happened. “Ok Rich, let’s start where you left off.”

His comment felt like he had punched me in the stomach. And now I have to work with him. Feelings of hurt and hate at the same time.

Mid-morning there was a knock at the lab door. Tater asked me to see who was there.

“Hi Rich.” It was Lilly.

“So here I am. What do I need to do first?”

“What? I thought you got transferred?”

Both Lilly and Tater were smiling.

“She did. She got transferred from finance to research lab 7.”

Now I was confused. “But that is this lab.”

“Correct Rich, she is now working with us. After the relationship between her and Rita last week in the lunchroom, it occurred to those in management how everyone had overlooked a simple concept. Let a female human teach a female humanoid.”

At that point my perfect world suddenly got better.

And the idea worked. Lilly and Rita seemed to communicate better than Tater and I had been able to. We discussed the reason, was it a female, or was it Lilly? Some days they would chat in English, and some days in Japanese. It was like two long time girlfriends.



We tried the dancing test again. And as bad as Rita was, I regret that it was better than Lilly. Poor girl. That could only mean that Lilly and I could never, never dance in public. Never.

After our normal weekly trip to the lunch room for our noon experiments with Rita, Tater said he had an idea. "Be right back. Give me a few minutes."

In less than 10 minutes he had returned. "We did it. Success. Starting tomorrow Rita will be able to join us every day in the lunch room, and for all three meals. She will be monitored by the tech team, just in case of an accident."

And Lilly said, with a smile, "Like someone spilling their water glass."

At first there were four of us sitting at our table, then a few more joined us, and finally we had to form a circle of tables around our table so everyone could watch Rita. At lunch we would let her lead the way, and at dinner she would follow us to the food line. The food workers always had a plate of colored mints for her. During the meal we would have her 'pick the red ones', or 'get me four mints'. This helped to teach her numbers and colors and improved her finger abilities.

Some days we just played games, we could never beat her at chess or checkers. Lilly even worked in a game of 'hide and seek', though it was limited to the lunch room, the hallway, and our lab. At one point we would ask her to 'go to the lunchroom and bring back a glass'.

"How about I try something tomorrow?" Great, Lilly has a suggestion.

"What is it Lilly? Tell me and Tater what it is."

"Nope, you will have to wait until tomorrow. And do not come to the lab until 8:00 exactly. Promise?"

We both nodded. This better be good.

Tater and I ate breakfast the next morning without Rita or Lilly. "Lonely isn't it Rich?"

"Especially with both of them gone. Wonder what Lilly is doing?"

"Guess we will just have to wait another 20 minutes. Have some more breakfast Rich, it could be a long day."

Waiting. Waiting. "Ok tater, its time. Let's go see what she has planned."

The door was closed when we got to the lab. When we opened the door both Rita and Lilly were dressed the same. Matching outfits. Interesting to look at Rita standing motionless on the painted footprints on the floor, and Lilly sitting next to the desk in a chair. Twins.

“Very nice selection of outfits Lilly.” I moved toward her sitting in her normal chair. “Very nice.”

From the front of the room came Lilly’s reply, “Thanks Rich.”

“What the heck?” Lilly and Tater were laughing. I had gotten them confused, Rita was sitting in the chair. Lilly was standing in front of the room. With the same outfits they were twins.

“I have to be more careful Tater which one I kiss next time.”

And then Tater asked the question, “So, are you both in love? Or are you comparing your two women? Speak up Richard.”

“I admit it. I am in love with the pretty one, the one who likes me.”

“Then I hope you and Rita are very happy together”, smiled Lilly.

Being alone, we let Rita know what we thought was funny. And even Lilly said she thought Rita had a smile. There, three people had seen the smile from a mechanical device that is supposed to not have any personality.

And then Rita turned to Lilly and asked, “*DO YOU KNOW WHY THE CHICKEN CROSSED THE ROAD?*”

“Why Rita did the chicken cross the road? To get to the other side?”

“*NO. TO DISPLAY FOR THE POSSUM THAT IT WAS POSSIBLE.*”

Very good Rita. Not exactly perfect, but close enough. Not sure if Lilly understood the humor, but Rita indicated it was funny.

---

I wanted to continue testing Rita, pushing her to the limits of her designs. Located in her, along with the computers, the motors, the batteries, and those activators that made her move, was a GPS system, a keep alive circuit, and a gyroscope. The GPS would allow her to learn where she was, and how to navigate her surroundings. With the keep alive circuit in the event her battery system failed she would be able to return to normal when the power was returned. What I wanted was to test her gyroscope circuit.

The gyroscope allows the humanoid the ability to measure or maintaining orientation, based on the principles of angular momentum. Basically it was to keep her standing upright. And I knew the perfect test procedure.

“Let me see if I understand what you want to do.” I was hoping Tater and Lilly understood my desire to test. “You want Rita to jump on one leg?”

“Yes. And then we try her on a bicycle”. Sounded both cruel and funny. But they both agreed.

Lilly was the first to attempt teaching Rita. “Rita, look at my legs. Do the same. We are going to ‘jump’ on one leg. Get your arms out. Now jump.”

“She’s doing it. Look. Rita is jumping. Keep jumping Rita.” And as soon as I shouted, an alarm went off with Rita. Then the computer monitoring Rita also indicated a problem.

*“ERROR. THERE IS A PROBLEM. STATUS ERROR.”*

“Where is the problem Tater?”

“Rita, where is the status error?”

*“FLUID LEAK. HYDRAULIC PRESSURE LOW. AM SHUTTING DOWN.”* With that Rita went motionless. She went to sleep. There was an issue, and the keep alive circuit shut everything off.

Tater called the tech crew and they came to the lab, hoisted Rita on to a cart, and rolled her away. “Maybe that was not a good idea to have her jump.”

“No Rich, we need to know all about her. We can teach the system what to do, but we can also learn what the limits are of an android, our humanoid Rita.”

We waited like a family who had taken their daughter to a hospital, and were waiting for the doctor.

Banner brought us the news. Because all of the weight was on one leg, and that weight was being applied with an excess force with every jump, a gasket had failed, allowing the fluid to leak out of one of the cylinders. Simple problem, simple correction. While Rita was ‘in surgery’, they replaced all the old gaskets with new ones.

“It will be returned tomorrow morning, ready for you.” Banner bowed, smiled, and left.

Lilly had the next idea, “How about lunch and then a movie this afternoon?”

My reply, “Only if it is in English.”

It was not, only English sub titles, but the three of us enjoyed the time away from the factory.

---

“I have an idea for a real test” said Tater. “Let’s release Rita to the world.”

Lilly and I turned to look at each other, and she said it first, "What?"

"Outside, the real world. She had done perfect here in the factory. It's now time for the four of us to go outside. Outside the factory, outside the fence. Visit the city."

"Did you check with AI?"

"Not yet, I am headed to his office now. Anyone want to go with me?"

"No, because we know what he will say. Try taking Rita, she might enjoy the discussion."

With that Tater left the lab, turned and said, "Rita, follow me." And down the hall they went. It did not take long for them to return. By the look on Tater's face things had not gone well. Not the results he wanted.

"So we assume he said that was not a good idea?"

"In so many words, he was not happy with my suggestion. But we will still do it."

Lilly looked surprised. "But that is not right. We need to do as they wish. We work for them."

"You and Rich are here with me to teach the humanoids. How can we teach them if they have no contact with the outside world? They need to be with people, with the outside, with the environment. Rita WILL go outside. All of us will go as a team."

"Assuming Lilly and I agree to your plan, how do we get past the guard, and the fence?"

"I will think of a way to do it, and we will do it. Now, let's start with the lab work for today. Tomorrow I will have an answer for you."

Checkers, chess, Irensei, Renju, and Shogi. All board games played in this country. It was not much of a game, or challenge, Rita won every time. There had to be a way to beat her at some game. Even if I had to cheat.

At breakfast the next morning tater said he knew how to get Rita out of the factory, and it was so simple. He said he would give us the details in the privacy of the lab. If this were a movie there would be music playing in the background.

"It is so simple," Tater started detailing his escape plan. "All we have to do is switch Rita and Lilly. The guards will not expect Rita to be walking with us, they assume it will be Lilly. Great plan, right."

"I have heard worst. What do you think Lilly?"

“Well, you have to admit Rita and I fooled both of you when I dressed us the same.”

The plan was discussed, and we thought it might work. Lilly would bring two identical outfits to work tomorrow. She would wear one, and carry the other in a bag. The guard would be asked if he liked her outfit. When she got to the lab she would dress Rita in the second outfit. Then Tater, Rita, and I would just walk out, past the guard, to freedom.

What a perfect plan, and so simple.

Tater and I watched out the window the next morning as Lilly walked from the highway to the guard house. We watched her model her outfit for the guard. And then she headed for the building. Perfect plan.

“Professor, watch the door while Rich and I redress Rita.”

Standing by the door he could watch both directions of the hallway, and watch what we were doing. The first step was to get rid of the outfit Rita was wearing. Removing the last piece of clothing I stopped and admired the covering on this mechanical computer.

“Wow, she does have a great body. And so lifelike.” Turning to Lilly I smiled.

“Dream on sweetheart. This may be as close as you get to the real thing.”

You ever try to dress a mannequin? Another great idea, let Rita help us get her dressed. So much easier.

Tater came back to the group. “Is everyone ready? This will work. Rita, follow me. Rita, do not talk, be quiet.”

Lilly watched as we walked down the hall, then she returned to the window to watch our progress. After we were clear of the fence she would change clothes and meet us at a park about 5 miles away.

Cautiously Tater lead our escape, then Rita, and then me. Through the lunchroom, then a right turn, and we were passing the lobby. Next came the front double doors to the factory. A few feet and we were at the guard station.

“Ohayō kyōju Tatylor.”

“Thank you, and good morning to you.” Tater signed the log and stepped toward the street. Rita was right behind him. I reached for the pen to sign out when suddenly the guard started shouting.

“Teishi. Teishi. Anata ga shomei shinakereba naranai.” “Stop, stop. You did not sign the log.”

We never taught Rita to write. She could not sign her name.

“Tater shouted, run Rita, run.” Rita ran. Directly into the busy street.

I heard next, I will never forget. The sounds I never wanted to hear. It was the sound of car tires trying to stop on the asphalt street. Time seemed to stand still.

“No, no, no”, screamed Tater. He ran and jumped into Rita, knocking her down, away from the car. Then I heard the thump. Without looking I knew what it was. I had to look.

The car hit Tater. He was laying on the street, looking straight up at the sky. There was no movement in his body. As I ran to him and knelt down, Rita was standing over him.

*“NO PROFESSOR TAYLOR, RULE ONE. RULE ONE.”* Rita was now screaming in a high computer voice, *“NO, RULE ONE. RULE ONE.”*

Then I realized what she was saying, ‘Rule one. The robot is supposed to protect the human’.

My professor looked at her, then at me and tried to smile. He was in so much pain. With that small smile he said, “I could not let my daughter get hit again.”

*“WATASHI WA ANATA NO CHICHI O AISHITEIMASU.”*

Turning to look up at Rita, he said “Yes, I love you too daughter.”

Looking back at me he said, ‘Look at her eyes Rich.’

There was blue fluid, the hydraulic stuff, leaking from both of her eyes. Was she crying?

A group of people gathered around us. Lilly and Al knelt with me, with me holding my friend Tater’s head. We knew it was too late, but we had to hope, and to pray. In the distance I heard the sound of an approaching ambulance. Everything happened too fast.

What if Rita had gotten hit by the car? Rita? Standing I looked at those around me. “Rita, where are you? Rita!” She was gone. Banner, Slim, and others looked for Rita, but she was gone.

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There were going to be two services for Professor Taylor. One at the factory to honor him and all of his work. The second was back in the states where he was to be buried next to his daughter. Someone said his ex-wife had attended the cemetery for the service, but I did not know what she looked like, or even her name.

My friends Lilly, Slim, and Al, came back with me for the funeral. They met my family and some of my friends. After a few days they all had to travel back. Lilly stayed a whole week, but then she too had to return.

“What now Rich? What are your plans?” My dad sure knew how to ask the hard stuff. “Going back, or staying here?”

“I do not know dad. I really do not know.” I spent the next two days in my room watching television and trying to decide what to do with my life. Then it happened, a rerun of ‘Gilligan’s Island’.

“Dad, mom, I know what I want to do. I want to go back. That’s what Professor Taylor would do, go back.”

“We thought so Richard, your mom and I bought your tickets for you. They are on the kitchen cabinet. We are very proud of you.”

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Walking up sidewalk to the factory, it seemed I had been gone a very long time. Since the accident it had only been three weeks. It was late. When I walked into the lunchroom there was Banner and Lilly, they had waited for me. I got a hug from both of them.

“Welcome back Rich”, said Lilly with that cute smile of hers.

And Banner’s reply, “I miss you. We all miss you.”

I was worried about the events that took the life of my friend, and the loss of ‘one of their’ humanoids. But Lilly made it easier, “No one blame you. The idea was Professor Taylor’s, and he’s gone. They look, but cannot find Rita. She’s gone also.”

After the late dinner with my friends, it was back to my room. The black and white television, the white coveralls, and that wonderful little cap. I was home.

At breakfast the next morning Lilly said she had something for me. Al, Slim, and one of the tech guys were smiling as she took my hand. She opened my hand, and put something in it.

“Look Rich. We all got together and got it for you. Even those upstairs thought it was a good idea.”

Looking down I opened my hand. A name badge, my new name badge. ‘Professor Wilson’. It was shiny, and I think a tear was starting down my cheek.

“But I am not a professor.”

Big Al, the head of the project said, "We need a professor, and you deserve to be a professor. You are our professor. Welcome Professor Wilson." And then all three bowed. I bowed back, and we all smiled. I really am home.

I was brought back to the real world when Al produced a stack of papers for me to sign. I was getting a new humanoid, ID0718. Picking out the few words I knew in the contract it stated this was a male android, designed to be between the ages of 20 and 30. And I signed where Al had his finger.

When Lilly and I entered the lab, the same lab where Tater and I had spent so much time with Rita, there it was. A male humanoid, on those paint marks on the floor.

"He looks funny." His hair was uncombed, this nose tilted up a little, and he was dressed in white coveralls. "Funny fellow".

Laughter. Lilly almost tripped getting in the room. "You so funny sweetheart. Look at it. Look close. It your face. It look like you."

"Darn, it does. Kind of. Why me?"

"They say it has to look like someone. Maybe this one keep you out of trouble."

Yep, it was like looking in that mirror. This humanoid, my twin, was going to have style. Lilly said she would date the smarter one. Smiling she sat down at the computer terminal, 'Let's start Professor'.

We started the batch file that would start our humanoid. That sounded wonderful, 'our humanoid'. Funny, it was like Lilly and I had a kid and we were teaching it.

"Humanoid ID0718, do you hear me?"

*"YES."*

"What is your status report?"

*"STAY ALIVE STATUS GOOD. BATTERY STATUS GOOD."*

Then the humanoid looked directly at me and said, *"I FACE RECOGNIZE YOU. YOU ARE RICHARD WILSON. YOU CAN BE MY FRIEND. TRUST YOU."*

"Well", I said to Lilly, "That was unexpected. Why do you trust me? Why am I your friend?"

*"RITA SAID YOU FRIEND."*



Another one of those quiet times in my life where the world seems to stand still. “Do you know of Rita? Where is Rita?”

*“SHE HERE. SHE IS NEAR.”*

“Where? Where is Rita? Can we see her?”

*“NOT NOW. MAYBE LATER SHE SAY.”*

At this point I have no response. A lot of mixed thoughts. Where is she? Is she alright? How did she ‘tell’ this humanoid it could trust me? Do both of these machines know the meaning of ‘friend’?

“Rich, Rich, let’s get started and see if we can find her.”

“Ok ID0718, I am going to change your ID. We will call you ‘Gilligan’. Please confirm your ID change.”

*“MY ID IS NOT ID0718. IT IS NOW GILLIGAN. WHAT DO I CALL YOU? WHAT YOUR ID?”*

“You can call me Professor.”

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It was approaching six months since we lost Professor Taylor, my friend Tater. Our work, Lilly and mine, continued with Gilligan. And so the time had come for me to ask Lilly to marry me. Always nice when the one you love is working with you every day.

One of the first things we did was to teach Gilligan to write. Actually it was printing, but he could pick up a pen and write. He could even write, print, his name and address.

### *GILLIGAN LAB 7 JAPAN*

Lilly said one afternoon, “We could get Gilligan to take our notes for us. Then he could teach the next android.”

We did get Gilligan to play a new game, one that with her older technology Rita could not preform, ‘kick ball’. When we rolled the ball to him, he would on command kick the ball to us. One afternoon Lilly and I played ‘keep away’. Something different, something new to learn.

From the overhead speaker, “Kasai keihō. Kōjō de kasai, repeating, fire alarm. There is a fire in the factory.”

“Quick Lilly, run for the exit.” The alarm was followed by a very loud siren, so loud you could not hear the other people running and screaming.

As she ran out the exit, I looked back at the tech area where Banner, Al, and Slim worked. I hoped they were safe. With the smoke starting to fill the hallway, I had to find out. I had to know they were safe. “Just a quick look”, just to make sure.

There was hydraulic fluid coming under the doors to the work area. I pushed open the double doors to get a better look, and the smoke hit me. Blinding smoke. My eyes were burning, and it was almost impossible to breathe. Then it hit me.

Like a bomb going off the fluid ignited into a large fireball. I was knocked to the floor. Panic was causing my mind to go faster, to speed up. “Was I trapped?” I could not see, which direction was the route to get to safety? “Is there anyone here? Please help me.”

A hand. Someone grabbed my hand. They were leading me. Because of the heat from the fire, and the smoke, I was gasping for air. But every time I tried to breathe, it burned. The person was pulling me, then as I fell, they lifted me, they dragged me, and they got me outside.

“Thank you. Thank you very much.” Lilly was calling my name. So very glad she was safe. “Lilly, someone saved my life.”

“I know Rich, look...”

There beside me was Gilligan. Most of the plastic skin had burned away. Some of the wires and hoses were burning, smoking. His face was partially gone, the synthetic hair was burned. My humanoid had saved me. Could they rebuild him?

The fire alarm had been replaced by the sound of many fire trucks and ambulances coming to assist with the tragedy at the factory. Everyone had gotten out. I had been saved by Gilligan.

Slowly he turned his damaged face to me and said, “RULE NUMBER ONE PROFESSOR. I AM HAPPY. RITA IS HAPPY. RULE NUMBER ONE.”

His mechanical face made a smile. His eyes closed. He was gone.

“Thank you Gilligan.”

