Feminine Intuition

Isaac Asimov

For the first time in the history of United States Robots and Mechanical Men Corporation, a robot had been destroyed through accident on Earth itself.

No one was to blame. The air vehicle had been demolished in mid-air and an unbelieving investigating committee was wondering whether they really dared announce the evidence that it had been hit by a meteorite. Nothing else could have been fast enough to prevent automatic avoidance; nothing else could have done the damage short of a nuclear blast and that was out of the question.

Tie that in with a report of a flash in the night sky just before the vehicle had exploded—and from Flagstaff Observatory, not from an amateur—and the location of a sizable and distinctly meteoric bit of iron freshly gouged into the ground a mile from the site and what other conclusion could be arrived at?

Still, nothing like that had ever happened before and calculations of the odds against it yielded monstrous figures. Yet even colossal improbabilities can happen sometimes.

At the offices of United States Robots, the hows and whys of it were secondary. The real point was that a robot had been destroyed.

That, in itself, was distressing.

The fact that JN-5 had been a prototype, the first, after four earlier attempts, to have been placed in the field, was even more distressing.

The fact that JN-5 was a radically new type of robot, quite different from anything ever built before, was abysmally distressing.

The fact that JN-5 had apparently accomplished something before its destruction that was incalculably important and that that accomplishment might now be forever gone, placed the distress utterly beyond words.

It seemed scarcely worth mentioning that, along with the robot, the Chief Robopsychologist of United States Robots had also died.

Clinton Madarian had joined the firm ten years before. For five of those years, he had worked uncomplainingly under the grumpy supervision of Susan Calvin.

Madarian’s brilliance was quite obvious and Susan Calvin had quietly promoted him over the heads of older men. She wouldn’t, in any case, have deigned to give her reasons for this to Research Director Peter Bogert, but as it happened, no reasons were needed. Or, rather, they were obvious.

Madarian was utterly the reverse of the renowned Dr. Calvin in several very noticeable ways. He was not quite as overweight as his distinct double chin made him appear to be, but even so he was overpowering in his presence, where Susan had gone nearly unnoticed. Madarian’s massive face, his shock of glistening red-brown hair, his ruddy complexion and booming voice, his loud laugh, and most of all, his irrepressible self-confidence and his eager way of announcing his successes, made everyone else in the room feel there was a shortage of space.

When Susan Calvin finally retired (refusing, in advance, any cooperation with respect to any testimonial dinner that might be planned in her honor, with so firm a manner that no announcement of the retirement was even made to the news services) Madarian took her place.

He had been in his new post exactly one day when he initiated the JN project.

It had meant the largest commitment of funds to one project that United States Robots had ever had to weigh, but that was something which Madarian dismissed with a genial wave of the hand.

“Worth every penny of it, Peter,” he said. “And I expect you to convince the Board of Directors of that.”

“Give me reasons,” said Bogert, wondering if Madarian would. Susan Calvin had never given reasons.

But Madarian said, “Sure,” and settled himself easily into the large armchair in the Director’s office.

Bogert watched the other with something that was almost awe. His own once-black hair was almost white now and within the decade he would follow Susan into retirement. That would mean the end of the original team that had built United States Robots into a globe-girdling firm that was a rival of the national governments in complexity and importance. Somehow neither he nor those who had gone before him ever quite grasped the enormous expansion of the firm.

But this was a new generation. The new men were at ease with the Colossus” They lacked the touch of wonder that would have them tiptoeing in disbelief. So they moved ahead, and that was good.

Madarian said, “I propose to begin the construction of robots without constraint.”

“Without the Three Laws? Surely—”

“No, Peter. Are those the only constraints you can think of? Hell, you contributed to the design of the early positronic brains. Do I have to tell you that, quite aside from the Three Laws, there isn’t a pathway in those brains that isn’t carefully designed and fixed? We have robots planned for specific tasks, implanted with specific abilities.”

“And you propose—”

“That at every level below the Three Laws, the paths be made open-ended. It’s not difficult.”

Bogert said dryly, “It’s not difficult, indeed. Useless things are never difficult. The difficult thing is fixing the paths and making the robot useful.”

“But why is that difficult? Fixing the paths requires a great deal of effort because the Principle of Uncertainty is important in particles the mass of positrons and the uncertainty effect must be minimized. Yet why must it? If we arrange to have the Principle just sufficiently prominent to allow the crossing of paths unpredictably—”

“We have an unpredictable robot.”

“We have a creative robot,” said Madarian, with a trace of impatience. “Peter, if there’s anything a human brain has that a robotic brain has never had, it’s the trace of unpredictability that comes from the effects of uncertainty at the subatomic level. I admit that this effect has never been demonstrated experimentally within the nervous system, but without that the human brain is not superior to the robotic brain in principle.”

“And you think that if you introduce the effect into the robotic brain, the human brain will become not superior to the robotic brain in principle.”

“That, “ said Madarian, “is exactly what I believe.” They went on for a long time after that.

The Board of Directors clearly had no intention of being easily convinced.

Scott Robertson, the largest shareholder in the firm, said, “It’s hard enough to manage the robot industry as it is, with public hostility to robots forever on the verge of breaking out into the open. If the public gets the idea that robots will be uncontrolled...Oh, don’t tell me about the Three Laws. The average man won’t believe the Three Laws will protect him if he as much as hears the word ‘uncontrolled.’ “

“Then don’t use it, “ said Madarian. “Call the robot—call it ‘intuitive.’ “

“An intuitive robot, “ someone muttered. “A girl robot?” A smile made its way about the conference table.

Madarian seized on that. “All right. A girl robot. Our robots are sexless, of course, and so will this one be, but we always act as though they’re males. We give them male pet names and call them he and him. Now this one, if we consider the nature of the mathematical structuring of the brain which I have proposed, would fall into the JN-coordinate system. The first robot would be JN-1, and I’ve assumed that it would be called John-10....I’m afraid that is the level of originality of the average roboticist. But why not call it Jane-1, damn it? If the public has to be let in on what we’re doing, we’re constructing a feminine robot with intuition.”

Robertson shook his head, “What difference would that make? What you’re saying is that you plan to remove the last barrier which, in principle, keeps the robotic brain inferior to the human brain. What do you suppose the public reaction will be to that?”

“Do you plan to make that public?” said Madarian. He thought a bit and then said, “Look. One thing the general public believes is that women are not as intelligent as men.”

There was an instant apprehensive look on the face of more than one man at the table and a quick look up and down as though Susan Calvin were still in her accustomed seat.

Madarian said, “If we announce a female robot, it doesn’t matter what she is. The public will automatically assume she is mentally backward. We just publicize the robot as Jane-1 and we don’t have to say another word. We’re safe.”

“Actually,” said Peter Bogert quietly, “there’s more to it than that. Madarian and I have gone over the mathematics carefully and the JN series, whether John or Jane, would be quite safe. They would be less complex and intellectually capable, in an orthodox sense, than many another series we have designed and constructed. There would only be the one added factor of, well, let’s get into the habit of calling it ‘intuition.’ “

“Who knows what it would do?” muttered Robertson.

“Madarian has suggested one thing it can do. As you all know, the Space Jump has been developed in principle. It is possible for men to attain what is, in effect, hyper-speeds beyond that of light and to visit other stellar systems and return in negligible time—weeks at the most.”

Robertson said, “That’s not new to us. It couldn’t have been done without robots.”

“Exactly, and it’s not doing us any good because we can’t use the hyper-speed drive except perhaps once as a demonstration, so that U. S. Robots gets little credit. The Space Jump is risky, it’s fearfully prodigal of energy and therefore it’s enormously expensive. If we were going to use it anyway, it would be nice if we could report the existence of a habitable planet. Call it a psychological need. Spend about twenty billion dollars on a single Space Jump and report nothing but scientific data and the public wants to know why their money was wasted. Report the existence of a habitable planet, and you’re an interstellar Columbus and no one will worry about the money.”

“So?”

“So where are we going to find a habitable planet? Or put it this way—which star within reach of the Space Jump as presently developed, which of the three hundred thousand stars and star systems within three hundred light-years has the best chance of having a habitable planet? We’ve got an enormous quantity of details on every star in our three-hundred-light-year neighborhood and a notion that almost every one has a planetary system. But which has a habitable planet? Which do we visit?...We don’t know.”

One of the directors said, “How would this Jane robot help us?”

Madarian was about to answer that, but he gestured slightly to Bogert and Bogert understood. The Director would carry more weight. Bogert didn’t particularly like the idea; if the JN series proved a fiasco, he was making himself prominent enough in connection with it to insure that the sticky fingers of blame would cling to him. On the other hand, retirement was not all that far off, and if it worked, he would go out in a blaze of glory. Maybe it was only Madarian’s aura of confidence, but Bogert had honestly come to believe it would work.

He said, “It may well be that somewhere in the libraries of data we have on those stars, there are methods for estimating the probabilities of the presence of Earth-type habitable planets. All we need to do is understand the data properly, look at them in the appropriate creative manner, make the correct correlations. We haven’t done it yet. Or if some astronomer has, he hasn’t been smart enough to realize what he has.

“A JN-type robot could make correlations far more rapidly and far more precisely than a man could. In a day, it would make and discard as many correlations as a man could in ten years. Furthermore, it would work in truly random fashion, whereas a man would have a strong bias based on preconception and on what is already believed.”

There was a considerable silence after that Finally Robertson said, “But it’s only a matter of probability, isn’t it? Suppose this robot said, ‘The highest-probability habitable-planet star within so-and-so light-years is Squidgee-17” or whatever, and we go there and find that a probability is only a probability and that there are no habitable planets after all. Where does that leave us?”

Madarian struck in this time. “We still win. We know how the robot came to the conclusion because it—she—will tell us. It might well help us gain enormous insight into astronomical detail and make the whole thing worthwhile even if we don’t make the Space Jump at all. Besides, we can then work out the five most probable sites of planets and the probability that one of the five has a habitable planet may then be better than 0.95. It would be almost sure—”

They went on for a long time after that.

The funds granted were quite insufficient, but Madarian counted on the habit of throwing good money after bad. With two hundred million about to be lost irrevocably when another hundred million could save everything, the other hundred million would surely be voted.

Jane-1 was finally built and put on display. Peter Bogert studied it —her—gravely. He said, “Why the narrow waist? Surely that introduces a mechanical weakness?”

Madarian chuckled. “Listen, if we’re going to call her Jane, there’s no point in making her look like Tarzan.”

Bogert shook his head. “Don’t like it. You’ll be bulging her higher up to give the appearance of breasts next, and that’s a rotten idea. If women start getting the notion that robots may look like women, I can tell you exactly the kind of perverse notions they’ll get, and you’ll really have hostility on their part.”

Madarian said, “Maybe you’re right at that. No woman wants to feel replaceable by something with none of her faults. Okay.”

Jane-2 did not have the pinched waist. She was a somber robot which rarely moved and even more rarely spoke.

Madarian had only occasionally come rushing to Bogert with items of news during her construction and that had been a sure sign that things were going poorly. Madarian’s ebullience under success was overpowering. He would not hesitate to invade Bogert’s bedroom at 3 A.M. with a hot-flash item rather than wait for the morning. Bogert was sure of that.

Now Madarian seemed subdued, his usually florid expression nearly pale, his round cheeks somehow pinched. Bogert said, with a feeling of certainty, “She won’t talk.”

“Oh, she talks.” Madarian sat down heavily and chewed at his lower lip. “Sometimes, anyway,” he said.

Bogert rose and circled the robot. “And when she talks, she makes no sense, I suppose. Well, if she doesn’t talk, she’s no female, is she?”

Madarian tried a weak smile for size and abandoned it. He said, “The brain, in isolation, checked out.”

“I know,” said Bogert. “But once that brain was put in charge of the physical apparatus of the robot, it was necessarily modified, of course.”

“Of course,” agreed Bogert unhelpfully. “But unpredictably and frustratingly. The trouble is that when you’re dealing with n-dimensional calculus of uncertainty, things are—”

“Uncertain?” said Bogert. His own reaction was surprising him. The company investment was already most sizable and almost two years had elapsed, yet the results were, to put it politely, disappointing. Still, he found himself jabbing at Madarian and finding himself amused in the process.

Almost furtively, Bogert wondered if it weren’t the absent Susan Calvin he was jabbing at. Madarian was so much more ebullient and effusive than Susan could ever possibly be—when things were going well. He was also far more vulnerably in the dumps when things weren’t going well, and it was precisely under pressure that Susan never cracked. The target that Madarian made could be a neatly punctured bull’s-eye as recompense for the target Susan had never allowed herself to be.

Madarian did not react to Bogert’s last remark any more than Susan Calvin would have done; not out of contempt, which would have been Susan’s reaction, but because he did not hear it

He said argumentatively, “The trouble is the matter of recognition. We have Jane-2 correlating magnificently. She can correlate on any subject, but once she’s done so, she can’t recognize a valuable result from a valueless one. It’s not an easy problem, judging how to program a robot to tell a significant correlation when you don’t know what correlations she will be making.”

“I presume you’ve thought of lowering the potential at the W-21 diode junction and sparking across the—”

“No, no, no, no—” Madarian faded off into a whispering diminuendo. “You can’t just have it spew out everything. We can do that for ourselves. The point is to have it recognize the crucial correlation and draw the conclusion. Once that is done, you see, a Jane robot would snap out an answer by intuition. It would be something we couldn’t get ourselves except by the oddest kind of luck.”

“It seems to me,” said Bogert dryly, “that if you had a robot like that, you would have her do routinely what, among human beings, only the occasional genius is capable of doing.”

Madarian nodded vigorously. “Exactly, Peter. I’d have said so myself if I weren’t afraid of frightening off the execs. Please don’t repeat that in their hearing.”

“Do you really want a robot genius?”

“What are words? I’m trying to get a robot with the capacity to make random correlations at enormous speeds, together with a key-significance high-recognition quotient. And I’m trying to put those words into positronic field equations. I thought I had it, too, but I don’t. Not yet.”

He looked at Jane-2 discontentedly and said, “What’s the best significance you have, Jane?”

Jane-2’s head turned to look at Madarian but she made no sound, and Madarian whispered with resignation, “She’s running that into the correlation banks.”

Jane-2 spoke tonelessly at last. “I’m not sure.” It was the first sound she had made.

Madarian’s eyes rolled upward. “She’s doing the equivalent of setting up equations with indeterminate solutions.”

“I gathered that,” said Bogert. “Listen, Madarian, can you go anywhere at this point, or do we pull out now and cut our losses at half a billion?”

“Oh, I’ll get it, “ muttered Madarian.

Jane-3 wasn’t it. She was never as much as activated and Madarian was in a rage.

It was human error. His own fault, if one wanted to be entirely accurate. Yet though Madarian was utterly humiliated, others remained quiet. Let he who has never made an error in the fearsomely intricate mathematics of the positronic brain fill out the first memo of correction.

Nearly a year passed before Jane-4 was ready. Madarian was ebullient again. “She does it,” he said. “She’s got a good high-recognition quotient.”

He was confident enough to place her on display before the Board and have her solve problems. Not mathematical problems; any robot could do that; but problems where the terms were deliberately misleading without being actually inaccurate.

Bogert said afterward, “That doesn’t take much, really.”

“Of course not. It’s elementary for Jane-4 but I had to show them something, didn’t I?”

“Do you know how much we’ve spent so far?”

“Come on, Peter, don’t give me that. Do you know how much we’ve got back? These things don’t go on in a vacuum, you know. I’ve had over three years of hell over this, if you want to know, but I’ve worked out new techniques of calculation that will save us a minimum of fifty thousand dollars on every new type of positronic brain we design, from now on in forever. Right?”

“Well—”

“Well me no wells. It’s so. And it’s my personal feeling that n-dimensional calculus of uncertainty can have any number of other applications if we have the ingenuity to find them, and my Jane robots will find them. Once I’ve got exactly what I want, the new JN series will pay for itself inside of five years, even if we triple what we’ve invested so far.”

“What do you mean by ‘exactly what you want’? What’s wrong with Jane-4?”

“Nothing. Or nothing much. She’s on the track, but she can be improved and I intend to do so. I thought I knew where I was going when I designed her. Now I’ve tested her and I know where I’m going. I intend to get there.”

Jane-5 was it. It took Madarian well over a year to produce her and there he had no reservations; he was utterly confident.

Jane-5 was shorter than the average robot, slimmer. Without being a female caricature as Jane-1 had been, she managed to possess an air of femininity about herself despite the absence of a single clearly feminine feature.

“It’s the way she’s standing,” said Bogert. Her arms were held gracefully and somehow the torso managed to give the impression of curving slightly when she turned.

Madarian said, “Listen to her....How do you feel, Jane?”

“In excellent health, thank you,” said Jane-5, and the voice was precisely that of a woman; it was a sweet and almost disturbing contralto.

“Why did you do that, Clinton?” said Peter, startled and beginning to frown.

“Psychologically important,” said Madarian. “I want people to think of her as a woman; to treat her as a woman; to explain.”

“What people?” Madarian put his hands in his pockets and stared thoughtfully at Bogert. “I would like to have arrangements made for Jane and myself to go to flagstaff.”

Bogert couldn’t help but note that Madarian didn’t say Jane-5. He made use of no number this time. She was the Jane. He said doubtfully, “To flagstaff? Why?”

“Because that’s the world center for general planetology, isn’t it? It’s where they’re studying the stars and trying to calculate the probability of habitable planets, isn’t it?”

“I know that, but it’s on Earth.”

“Well, and I surely know that.”

“Robotic movements on Earth are strictly controlled. And there’s no need for it. Bring a library of books on general planetology here and let Jane absorb them.”

“No! Peter, will you get it through your head that Jane isn’t the ordinary logical robot; she’s intuitive.”

“So?”

“So how can we tell what she needs, what she can use, what will set her off? We can use any metal model in the factory to read books; that’s frozen data and out of date besides. Jane must have living information; she must have tones of voice, she must have side issues; she must have total irrelevancies even. How the devil do we know what or when something will go click-click inside her and fall into a pattern? If we knew, we wouldn’t need her at all, would we?”

Bogert began to feel harassed. He said, “Then bring the men here, the general planetologists.”

“Here won’t be any good. They’ll be out of their element. They won’t react naturally. I want Jane to watch them at work; I want her to see their instruments, their offices, their desks, everything about them that she can. I want you to arrange to have her transported to flagstaff. And I’d really like not to discuss it any further.”

For a moment he almost sounded like Susan. Bogert winced, and said, “It’s complicated making such an arrangement. Transporting an experimental robot—”

“Jane isn’t experimental. She’s the fifth of the series.”

“The other four weren’t really working models.”

Madarian lifted his hands in helpless frustration. “Who’s forcing you to tell the government that?”

“I’m not worried about the government. It can be made to understand special cases. It’s public opinion. We’ve come a long way in fifty years and I don’t propose to be set back twenty-five of them by having you lose control of a—”

“I won’t lose control. You’re making foolish remarks. Look! U. S. Robots can afford a private plane. We can land quietly at the nearest commercial airport and be lost in hundreds of similar landings. We can arrange to have a large ground car with an enclosed body meet us and take us to Flagstaff. Jane will be crated and it will be obvious that some piece of thoroughly non-robotic equipment is being transported to the labs. We won’t get a second look from anyone. The men at Flagstaff will be alerted and will be told the exact purpose of the visit. They will have every motive to cooperate and to prevent a leak.”

Bogert pondered. “The risky part will be the plane and the ground car. If anything happens to the crate—”

“Nothing will.”

“We might get away with it if Jane is deactivated during transport. Then even if someone finds out she’s inside—”

“No, Peter. That can’t be done. Uh-uh. Not Jane-5. Look, she’s been free-associating since she was activated. The information she possesses can be put into freeze during deactivation but the free associations never. No, sir, she can’t ever be deactivated.”

“But, then, if somehow it is discovered that we are transporting an activated robot—”

“It won’t be found out.” Madarian remained firm and the plane eventually took off. It was a late-model automatic Computo-jet, but it carried a human pilot—one of U. S. Robots’ own employees—as backup. The crate containing Jane arrived at the airport safely, was transferred to the ground car, and reached the Research Laboratories at Flagstaff without incident.

Peter Bogert received his first call from Madarian not more than an hour after the latter’s arrival at Flagstaff. Madarian was ecstatic and, characteristically, could not wait to report.

The message arrived by tubed laser beam, shielded, scrambled, and ordinarily impenetrable, but Bogert felt exasperated. He knew it could be penetrated if someone with enough technological ability—the government, for example—was determined to do so. The only real safety lay in the fact that the government had no reason to try. At least Bogert hoped so.

He said, “For God’s sake, do you have to call?”

Madarian ignored him entirely. He burbled, “It was an inspiration. Sheer genius, I tell you.”

For a while, Bogert stared at the receiver. Then he shouted incredulously, “You mean you’ve got the answer? Already?”

“No, no! Give us time, damn it. I mean the matter of her voice was an inspiration. Listen, after we were chauffeured from the airport to the main administration building at Flagstaff, we uncrated Jane and she stepped out of the box. When that happened, every man in the place stepped back. Scared! Nitwits! If even scientists can’t understand the significance of the Laws of Robotics, what can we expect of the average untrained individual? For a minute there I thought: This will all be useless. They won’t talk. They’ll be keying themselves for a quick break in case she goes berserk and they’ll be able to think of nothing else.”

“Well, then, what are you getting at?”

“So then she greeted them routinely. She said, ‘Good afternoon, gentlemen. I am so glad to meet you.’ And it came out in this beautiful contralto....That was it. One man straightened his tie, and another ran his fingers through his hair. What really got me was that the oldest guy in the place actually checked his fly to make sure it was zipped. They’re all crazy about her now. All they needed was the voice. She isn’t a robot any more; she’s a girl.”

“You mean they’re talking to her?”

“Are they talking to her! I should say so. I should have programmed her for sexy intonations. They’d be asking her for dates right now if I had. Talk about conditioned reflex. Listen, men respond to voices. At the most intimate moments, are they looking? It’s the voice in your ear—”

“Yes, Clinton, I seem to remember. Where’s Jane now?”

“With them. They won’t let go of her.”

“Damn! Get in there with her. Don’t let her out of your sight, man.”

Madarian’s calls thereafter, during his ten-day stay at Flagstaff, were not very frequent and became progressively less exalted.

Jane was listening carefully, he reported, and occasionally she responded. She remained popular. She was given entry everywhere. But there were no results.

Bogert said, “Nothing at all?”

Madarian was at once defensive. “You can’t say nothing at all. It’s impossible to say nothing at all with an intuitive robot. You don’t know what might not be going on inside her. This morning she asked Jensen what he had for breakfast.”

“Rossiter Jensen the astrophysicist?”

“Yes, of course. As it turned out, he didn’t have breakfast that morning. Well, a cup of coffee.”

“So Jane’s learning to make small talk. That scarcely makes up for the expense.”

“Oh, don’t be a jackass. It wasn’t small talk. Nothing is small talk for Jane. She asked because it had something to do with some sort of cross-correlation she was building in her mind.”

“What can it possibly—”

“How do I know? If I knew, I’d be a Jane myself and you wouldn’t need her. But it has to mean something. She’s programmed for high motivation to obtain an answer to the question of a planet with optimum habitability/distance and—”

“Then let me know when she’s done that and not before. It’s not really necessary for me to get a blow-by-blow description of possible correlations.”

He didn’t really expect to get notification of success. With each day, Bogert grew less sanguine, so that when the notification finally came, he wasn’t ready. And it came at the very end.

That last time, when Madarian’s climactic message came, it came in what was almost a whisper. Exaltation had come complete circle and Madarian was awed into quiet.

“She did it,” he said. “She did it. After I all but gave up, too. After she had received everything in the place and most of it twice and three times over and never said a word that sounded like anything....I’m on the plane now, returning. We’ve just taken off.”

Bogert managed to get his breath. “Don’t play games, man. You have the answer? Say so, if you have. Say it plainly.”

“She has the answer. She’s given me the answer. She’s given me the names of three stars within eighty light-years which, she says, have a sixty to ninety percent chance of possessing one habitable planet each. The probability that at least one has is 0.972. It’s almost certain. And that’s just the least of it. Once we get back, she can give us the exact line of reasoning that led her to the conclusion and I predict that the whole science of astrophysics and cosmology will—”

“Are you sure—”

“You think I’m having hallucinations? I even have a witness. Poor guy jumped two feet when Jane suddenly began to reel out the answer in her gorgeous voice”

And that was when the meteorite struck and in the thorough destruction of the plane that followed, Madarian and the pilot were reduced to gobbets of bloody flesh and no usable remnant of Jane was recovered.

The gloom at U. S. Robots had never been deeper. Robertson attempted to find consolation in the fact that the very completeness of the destruction had utterly hidden the illegalities of which the firm had been guilty.

Peter shook his head and mourned. “We’ve lost the best chance U. S. Robots ever had of gaining an unbeatable public image; of overcoming the damned Frankenstein complex. What it would have meant for robots to have one of them work out the solution to the habitable-planet problem, after other robots had helped work out the Space Jump. Robots would have opened the galaxy to us. And if at the same time we could have driven scientific knowledge forward in a dozen different directions as we surely would have...Oh, God, there’s no way of calculating the benefits to the human race, and to us of course.”

Robertson said, “We could build other Janes, couldn’t we? Even without Madarian?”

“Sure we could. But can we depend on the proper correlation again? Who knows how low—probability that final result was? What if Madarian had had a fantastic piece of beginner’s luck? And then to have an even more fantastic piece of bad luck? A meteorite zeroing in...It’s simply unbelievable—”

Robertson said in a hesitating whisper, “It couldn’t have been meant. I mean, if we weren’t meant to know and if the meteorite was a judgment—from—”

He faded off under Bogert’s withering glare. Bogert said, “It’s not a dead loss, I suppose. Other Janes are bound to help us in some ways. And we can give other robots feminine voices, if that will help encourage public acceptance—though I wonder what the women would say. If we only knew what Jane-5 had said!”

“In that last call, Madarian said there was a witness.” Bogert said, “I know; I’ve been thinking about that. Don’t you suppose I’ve been in touch with flagstaff? Nobody in the entire place heard Jane say anything that was out of the ordinary, anything that sounded like an answer to the habitable-planet problem, and certainly anyone there should have recognized the answer if it came —or at least recognized it as a possible answer.”

“Could Madarian have been lying? Or crazy? Could he have been trying to protect himself—”

“You mean he may have been trying to save his reputation by pretending he had the answer and then gimmick Jane so she couldn’t talk and say, ‘Oh, sorry, something happened accidentally. Oh, darn!’ I won’t accept that for a minute. You might as well suppose he had arranged the meteorite.”

“Then what do we do?” Bogert said heavily, “Turn back to flagstaff. The answer must be there. I’ve got to dig deeper, that’s all. I’m going there and I’m taking a couple of the men in Madarian’s department. We’ve got to go through that place top to bottom and end to end.”

“But, you know, even if there were a witness and he had heard, what good would it do, now that we don’t have Jane to explain the process?”

“Every little something is useful. Jane gave the names of the stars; the catalogue numbers probably—none of the named stars has a chance. If someone can remember her saying that and actually remember the catalogue number, or have heard it clearly enough to allow it to be recovered by Psycho-probe if he lacked the conscious memory—then we’ll have something. Given the results at the end, and the data fed Jane at the beginning, we might be able to reconstruct the line of reasoning; we might recover the intuition. If that is done, we’ve saved the game—”

Bogert was back after three days, silent and thoroughly depressed. When Robertson inquired anxiously as to results, he shook his head. “Nothing!”

“Nothing?”

“Absolutely nothing. I spoke with every man in flagstaff—every scientist, every technician, every student—that had had anything to do with Jane; everyone that had as much as seen her. The number wasn’t great; I’ll give Madarian credit for that much discretion. He only allowed those to see her who might conceivably have had planetological knowledge to feed her. There were twenty-three men altogether who had seen Jane and of those only twelve had spoken to her more than casually.

“I went over and over all that Jane had said. They remembered everything quite well. They’re keen men engaged in a crucial experiment involving their specialty, so they had every motivation to remember. And they were dealing with a talking robot, something that was startling enough, and one that talked like a TV actress. They couldn’t forget.”

Robertson said, “Maybe a Psycho-probe—”

“If one of them had the vaguest thought that something had happened, I would screw out his consent to Probing. But there’s nothing to leave room for an excuse, and to Probe two dozen men who make their living from their brains can’t be done. Honestly, it wouldn’t help. If Jane had mentioned three stars and said they had habitable planets, it would have been like setting up sky rockets in their brains. How could anyone of them forget?”

“Then maybe one of them is lying,” said Robertson grimly. “He wants the information for his own use; to get the credit himself later.”

“What good would that do him?” said Bogert. “The whole establishment knows exactly why Madarian and Jane were there in the first place. They know why I came there in the second. If at any time in the future any man now at Flagstaff suddenly comes up with a habitable-planet theory that is startlingly new and different, yet valid, every other man at Flagstaff and every man at U. S. Robots will know at once that he had stolen it. He’d never get away with it.”

“Then Madarian himself was somehow mistaken.”

“I don’t see how I can believe that either. Madarian had an irritating personality—all robopsychologists have irritating personalities, I think, which must be why they work with robots rather than with men—but he was no dummy. He couldn’t be wrong in something like this.”

“Then—” But Robertson had run out of possibilities. They had reached a blank wall and for some minutes each stared at it disconsolately.

Finally Robertson stirred. “Peter—”

“Well?”

“Let’s ask Susan.”

Bogert stiffened. “What!”

“Let’s ask Susan. Let’s call her and ask her to come in.”

“Why? What can she possibly do?”

“I don’t know. But she’s a robopsychologist, too, and she might understand Madarian better than we do. Besides, she—Oh, hell, she always had more brains than any of us.”

“She’s nearly eighty.”

“And you’re seventy. What about it?”

Bogert sighed. Had her abrasive tongue lost any of its rasp in the years of her retirement? He said, “Well, I’ll ask her.”

Susan Calvin entered Bogert’s office with a slow look around before her eyes fixed themselves on the Research Director. She had aged a great deal since her retirement. Her hair was a fine white and her face seemed to have crumpled. She had grown so frail as to be almost transparent and only her eyes, piercing and uncompromising, seemed to remain of all that had been.

Bogert strode forward heartily, holding out his hand. “Susan!”

Susan Calvin took it, and said, “You’re looking reasonably well, Peter, for an old man. If I were you, I wouldn’t wait till next year. Retire now and let the young men get to it....And Madarian is dead. Are you calling me in to take over my old job? Are you determined to keep the ancients till a year past actual physical death?”

“No, no, Susan. I’ve called you in—” He stopped. He did not, after all, have the faintest idea of how to start.

But Susan read his mind now as easily as she always had. She seated herself with the caution born of stiffened joints and said, “Peter, you’ve called me in because you’re in bad trouble. Otherwise you’d sooner see me dead than within a mile of you.”

“Come, Susan—”

“Don’t waste time on pretty talk. I never had time to waste when I was forty and certainly not now. Madarian’s death and your call to me are both unusual, so there must be a connection. Two unusual events without a connection is too low-probability to worry about. Begin at the beginning and don’t worry about revealing yourself to be a fool. That was revealed to me long ago.”

Bogert cleared his throat miserably and began. She listened carefully, her withered hand lifting once in a while to stop him so that she might ask a question.

She snorted at one point. “Feminine intuition? Is that what you wanted the robot for? You men. Faced with a woman reaching a correct conclusion and unable to accept the fact that she is your equal or superior in intelligence, you invent something called feminine intuition.”

“Oh, yes, Susan, but let me continue—”

He did. When she was told of Jane’s contralto voice, she said, “It is a difficult choice sometimes whether to feel revolted at the male sex or merely to dismiss them as contemptible.”

Bogert said, “Well, let me go on—”

When he was quite done, Susan said, “May I have the private use of this office for an hour or two?”

“Yes, but—”

She said, “I want to go over the various records—Jane’s programming, Madarian’s calls, your interviews at flagstaff. I presume I can use that beautiful new shielded laser-phone and your computer outlet if I wish.”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well, then, get out of here, Peter.”

It was not quite forty-five minutes when she hobbled to the door, opened it, and called for Bogert.

When Bogert came, Robertson was with him. Both entered and Susan greeted the latter with an unenthusiastic “Hello, Scott.”

Bogert tried desperately to gauge the results from Susan’s face, but it was only the face of a grim old lady who had no intention of making anything easy for him.

He said cautiously, “Do you think there’s anything you can do, Susan?”

“Beyond what I have already done? No! There’s nothing more.” Bogert’s lips set in chagrin, but Robertson said, “What have you already done, Susan?”

Susan said, “I’ve thought a little; something I can’t seem to persuade anyone else to do. For one thing, I’ve thought about Madarian. I knew him, you know. He had brains but he was a very irritating extrovert. I thought you would like him after me, Peter.”

“It was a change,” Bogert couldn’t resist saying.

“And he was always running to you with results the very minute he had them, wasn’t he?”

“Yes, he was.”

“And yet,” said Susan, “his last message, the one in which he said Jane had given him the answer, was sent from the plane. Why did he wait so long? Why didn’t he call you while he was still at flagstaff, immediately after Jane had said whatever it was she said?”

“I suppose,” said Peter, “that for once he wanted to check it thoroughly and—well, I don’t know. It was the most important thing that had ever happened to him; he might for once have wanted to wait and be sure of himself.”

“On the contrary; the more important it was, the less he would wait, surely. And if he could manage to wait, why not do it properly and wait till he was back at U. S. Robots so that he could check the results with all the computing equipment this firm could make available to him? In short, he waited too long from one point of view and not long enough from another.”

Robertson interrupted. “Then you think he was up to some trickery—”

Susan looked revolted. “Scott, don’t try to compete with Peter in making inane remarks. Let me continue....A second point concerns the witness. According to the records of that last call, Madarian said, ‘Poor guy jumped two feet when Jane suddenly began to reel out the answer in her gorgeous voice.’ In fact, it was the last thing he said. And the question is, then, why should the witness have jumped? Madarian had explained that all the men were crazy about that voice, and they had had ten days with the robot—with Jane. Why should the mere act of her speaking have startled them?”

Bogert said, “I assumed it was astonishment at hearing Jane give an answer to a problem that has occupied the minds of planetologists for nearly a century.”

“But they were waiting for her to give that answer. That was why she was there. Besides, consider the way the sentence is worded. Madarian’s statement makes it seem the witness was startled, not astonished, if you see the difference. What’s more, that reaction came ‘when Jane suddenly began’—in other words, at the very start of the statement. To be astonished at the content of what Jane said would have required the witness to have listened awhile so that he might absorb it. Madarian would have said he had jumped two feet after he had heard Jane say thus-and-so. It would be ‘after’ not ‘when’ and the word ‘suddenly’ would not be included.”

Bogert said uneasily, “I don’t think you can refine matters down to the use or non-use of a word.”

“I can,” said Susan frostily, “because I am a robopsychologist. And I can expect Madarian to do so, too, because he was a robopsychologist. We have to explain those two anomalies, then. The queer delay before Madarian’s call and the queer reaction of the witness.”

“Can you explain them?” Asked Robertson. “Of course,” said Susan, “since I use a little simple logic. Madarian called with the news without delay, as he always did, or with as little delay as he could manage. If Jane had solved the problem at Flagstaff, he would certainly have called from Flagstaff. Since he called from the plane, she must clearly have solved the problem after he had left Flagstaff.”

“But then—”

“Let me finish. Let me finish. Was Madarian not taken from the airport to Flagstaff in a heavy, enclosed ground car? And Jane, in her crate, with him?”

“Yes.”

“And presumably, Madarian and the crated Jane returned from Flagstaff to the airport in the same heavy, enclosed ground car. Am I right?”

“Yes, of course!”

“And they were not alone in the ground car, either. In one of his calls, Madarian said, ‘We were chauffeured from the airport to the main administration building,’ and I suppose I am right in concluding that if he was chauffeured, then that was because there was a chauffeur, a human driver, in the car.”

“Good God!”

“The trouble with you, Peter, is that when you think of a witness to a planetological statement, you think of planetologists. You divide up human beings into categories, and despise and dismiss most. A robot cannot do that. The First Law says, ‘A robot may not injure a human being or, through inaction, allow a human being to come to harm.’ Any human being. That is the essence of the robotic view of life. A robot makes no distinction. To a robot, all men are truly equal, and to a robopsychologist who must perforce deal with men at the robotic level, all men are truly equal, too.

“It would not occur to Madarian to say a truck driver had heard the statement. To you a truck driver is not a scientist but is a mere animate adjunct of a truck, but to Madarian he was a man and a witness. Nothing more. Nothing less.”

Bogert shook his head in disbelief. “But you are sure?”

“Of course I’m sure. How else can you explain the other point; Madarian’s remark about the startling of the witness? Jane was crated, wasn’t she? But she was not deactivated. According to the records, Madarian was always adamant against ever deactivating an intuitive robot. Moreover, Jane-5, like any of the Janes, was extremely non-talkative. Probably it never occurred to Madarian to order her to remain quiet within the crate; and it was within the crate that the pattern finally fell into place. Naturally she began to talk. A beautiful contralto voice suddenly sounded from inside the crate. If you were the truck driver, what would you do at that point? Surely you’d be startled. It’s a wonder he didn’t crash.”

“But if the truck driver was the witness, why didn’t he come forward—”

“Why? Can he possibly know that anything crucial had happened, that what he heard was important? Besides, don’t you suppose Madarian tipped him well and asked him not to say anything? Would you want the news to spread that an activated robot was being transported illegally over the Earth’s surface.”

“Well, will he remember what was said?”

“Why not? It might seem to you, Peter, that a truck driver, one step above an ape in your view, can’t remember. But truck drivers can have brains, too. The statements were most remarkable and the driver may well have remembered some. Even if he gets some of the letters and numbers wrong, we’re dealing with a finite set, you know, the fifty-five hundred stars or star systems within eighty light-years or so—I haven’t looked up the exact number. You can make the correct choices. And if needed, you will have every excuse to use the Psycho-probe—”

The two men stared at her. Finally Bogert, afraid to believe, whispered, “But how can you be sure?”

For a moment, Susan was on the point of saying: Because I’ve called Flagstaff, you fool, and because I spoke to the truck driver, and because he told me what he had heard, and because I’ve checked with the computer at Flagstaff and got the only three stars that fit the information, and because I have those names in my pocket.

But she didn’t. Let him go through it all himself. Carefully, she rose to her feet, and said sardonically, “How can I be sure?...Call it feminine intuition.”