

Gomalco, Inc.

by Stephen Heger

"You've got to be kidding me. A robot?", said Marge as she rotated in the chair at her desk. She removed the leaf of paper from the typewriter and set in down on the desk. She looked up at Parkins who was leaning against the wall nursing a cold cup of coffee.

"Yes. *Listen*. I saw him catch his arm on the edge of the desk over there and instead of blood, I swear it was oil.", said Parkins as stone-faced and serious as ever. "It didn't trickle. It oozed. And the look on his face—".

"That's just simply ludicrous. Montgomery a robot. The moon is made of cheese too, right?", said Marge as she stood up from the desk. She tidied up some papers and noticed there was a memo or two for Montgomery and said, "I have to get these out. I'll see you later.".

All this hoopla about robots or whatever piqued her curiosity enough for her to decide to take them personally to his office. She knew it was preposterous but she would at least pop her head in to say hello. She started down the hallway to his office. Her heels clicked on the black and white checkered floor as she strode through the halls and arrived at his door a few minutes later. Emblazoned across the frosted glass was written Hubert Montgomery, Sales Manager. She tried peering through the glass to see if he was there and then rapped on the door lightly. No answer. She slowly turned the knob and peeked in. Montgomery was no where to be seen. She looked at her watch and saw that it was a little after noon. He must be out to lunch.

She went on in and looked around at the office as she set the memos on his desk. Awards lined the wood-paneled walls and rows upon rows of pricing almanacs and year-to-date sales reports sat upon shelves. She was about to leave when something in the garbage can caught her eye. A tissue paper with a black splotch sat

on top. She looked around to make sure she was alone then reached down and picked it up. She stared at it for a moment and considered that there may be truth in what Parkins had said. At least the part about his minor injury. She brought the tissue up to her nose and it smelled faintly of oil. A wave of panic set in as she turned to leave.

“What are you doing in here?”, Montgomery asked from behind her. He towered over her like a mountain. She slid the napkin into the front pocket of her dress before she turned and said, “I was just dropping off these-”, she motioned to his desk, “-er, that memo.”.

“Thank you. That will be all.”, he said as he sidled around her and sat down in the chair. He started leafing through reports and waved her out of the room. She started towards the door and noticed the bandage on his arm before exiting. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up as she rushed over to Parkins office.

She opened the door without knocking as Parkins stood up. “What-”, was all he could get out before he was shushed by Marge. “Shhh.”, she said as she closed the door and peered through the glass. She reached in her pocket as she turned toward him and said, “I found this in his office.”

“In whose office?”, Parkins asked.

Marge handed him the napkin with the black substance on it and said, “Montgomerys garbage can.”.

Parkins looked at the napkin and ran his finger across the smudge. “It *is* oil.”, he said as he rubbed the substance between his fingers and then brought it to his nose. “I told you.”, he said as he pocketed the napkin.

“But it's impossible!”, Marge said. “How could he be a robot? There aren't robots like this anywhere in the world.”

“I don't know, but the facts present themselves and we have no choice but to believe them. Did you show this to anyone?”, Parkins asked.

“No, I just came here right from his office. Do you think it could be something like an alien invasion?”, Marge asked.

“Not likely. More like a Communist plot. Or maybe even worse. Our own government.”, Parkins said.

He stood there thinking for several minutes and then said, “Go and get Wilkins, Jones, and Tyler and tell them to meet me in the mail room in half an hour. Tell them it's important but nothing else.”

Marge looked at him quizzically. “What are you going to do?”, she asked.

“I'm not sure. I want to hash this out with a few of the others. I don't want to act rashly but something needs to be done.”, he said. “Go.”

Marge strode out of the room with her orders and passed on the information to the personnel that Parkins had listed. She went back to her desk to wait out the few minutes before she too headed down. Marge tried focusing on work but it seemed impossible. Her palms were sweaty and she had a gnawing feeling in her stomach that this was all going to go horribly wrong. That something more was at play here. She looked at the clock on the wall and even though she would be a bit early, she decided to head down.

When Marge entered the mail room there were a total of eight people. The three that she had been told to meet here and another

three that Parkins had also wrangled up. Two of them she knew; Spikowski from the warehouse and Stanhope who worked here in the mail room.

"It seems that it's something in his office. A radio or something. I can hear voices in his room when I work late that aren't just his. It could be a telephone call but I-", said Smith. "I just don't know."

"Well, he *is* always working late. Seems to me that he's the last one to leave and now that I think about it, he's always here when I arrive.", said Jones.

"Everyone's here when you get here, Jones. You're always late. This whole thing is preposterous. You have oil on a tissue and he works late. The voices could be a transistor radio he has in the office. This hardly makes for some nefarious robot or espionage plot.", chimed Tyler. "I say we just send one of us to confront him. Simple as that."

"I don't know. Confronting him could alert *them* to the fact that we know something is not on the up-and-up. Whoever *they* are. Not only that. How do we even know someone here isn't one of *them?*", said Jones again.

Eyes darted distrustingly through the room. Feet shuffled and a thick silence hung in the air.

"This is absurd.", said Tyler. "Everyone can just stay here. I'm going to march up there right now and just talk to him."

Tyler headed for the door even as several of the men tried to convince him otherwise. He turned around and smiled as he opened the door and said, "I'll be right back."

Tyler confidently strode through the halls and arrived at Montgomery's door. He straightened out his tie and knocked on the door. There was no answer. Tyler knocked again and heard a muffled voice but couldn't discern what it said. He opted for a direct course of action and opened the door. He couldn't believe what he saw.

Montgomery sat at his desk with a look of abject horror on his face. His tie was loosened, his sleeves were rolled up and in his right hand he held an X-acto knife dripping with a black viscous liquid. On his desk he had his left arm, palm up, and splayed open like a gutted fish. The open layers of skin were pinned back with thumb tacks exposing the inner workings of his arm. Steel rods and tiny servo motors worked to move his fingers while tubing pumped and wires sent impulses through what passed as his central nervous system.

"What in god's name am I?," Montgomery said through clenched teeth. A tear rolled down his cheek and he muttered, "It's just all one big lie, isn't it?". He slowly stood as he lifted the knife and punched the blade right below his left shoulder and ran it down to his abdomen, slicing through his shirt and flesh in one crimson slash.

Tyler stood there in shock. He did not move. He did not blink. There was nothing he could say or put into words to describe what he felt and saw. Behind him he heard gasps and knew that the rest of the office was standing behind him watching.

They stood silent and motionless as Montgomery hacked and slashed at himself, spilling out whatever lifeblood had kept him alive. The blade glanced off the inner metal cage that kept everything inside as it tore through color-coded wires and valves and sacs that simulated organs. He began twitching as impulses shorted and motors wound down. Through the torn flesh they could see the metal box that simulated his heart pump one last time and then he slumped over with a mixture of a meaty slap and a clang of

metal.

They stood there for what could have been hours and then, one by one, they turned and splintered off from the group. They filed through the office and left the building and headed home. By bus and train and car and foot. They went home to their wives and said nothing of what happened at the office that day. Each and every one of them laid in bed that night thinking of what they had inside them but were too afraid to find out. They awoke the next morning and had their coffee and breakfast and kissed their wives and children goodbye and went off to work. Each had a nagging feeling that something big had happened yesterday but couldn't exactly put their finger on it. The closer they got to the office, the further the feeling felt until it left their peripheral altogether. When they arrived at Gomalco Incorporated, Hubert Montgomery, the sales manager, greeted each and every one of them with a smile.

