

# AMAZING

STORIES

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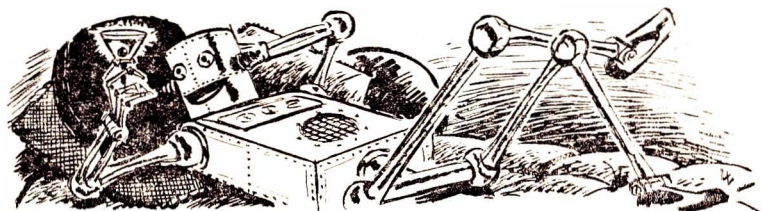
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# The Idiot

By PAUL V. DALLAS

AN AMAZING FEATURETTE



THE picture-taking was over now, and the questioning began. "Professor," one of the reporters asked, "is it true that this machine will be the greatest friend man ever had?"

"Exactly," answered the scientist, coughing modestly.

"How does it work?" asked another one. "What will it do?" asked one from up front.

"It would be easier to tell you what it won't do," Professor Wilson answered, smiling at his quick wit. "It is a Friend. Just that. Science has given the world many things, but ten thousand years of continuous science have culminated in this highly complicated mechanism. The first Machine Friend."

"Can you give us details?"

"Well, it is fully adjustable so that it can be made to look

just as you would want your best friend to look. It can be pre-set to do anything you want it to and not do anything you don't want it to do. It is built on the liking principle, so that it will like you regardless of your faults, and yet have none of its own. It can make coffee, lend money. And it drives its own car. That's it in a nutshell."

"It sure sounds like a real friend," said one of the younger reporters, "but what about the contest? Why was it cancelled?"

"The contest was cancelled," said the scientist sternly, "because nobody who wrote in was able to convince me in twenty-five words or less that he or she was able to appreciate a real Friend. I am therefore going to pick a name out of the phone book

—at random—and present the Machine Friend to him or her. I trust you will all be at the presentation.”

A quick search of the office revealed a phone book under the desk. This was held behind the scientist's back. He inserted a short finger into it. The book was opened. The finger rested on the name James Haeffledonger. . . .

The appropriate ceremonies were held and the presentation made, even though it turned out that James Haeffledonger's phone had been disconnected for nonpayment. James lived alone. He was poor. He needed a friend, so everyone was pleased.

The trouble occurred a week later, when a large pile of radio tubes and wire were found in Haeffledonger's garbage can. Investigations were made and it was discovered that this debris had once been the innards of the Machine Friend.

The Presentation Committee reconvened and called, en masse, at the shabby home of James Haeffledonger. They forced their way in and found the eviscerated machine

perched on the sofa with a cup of coffee in front of it. James sat across the way, sipping his own coffee.

“It's impossible!” shouted Professor Wilson, pushing his way to the front of the crowd. “The machine could not have made coffee without its radio tubes and wires and uranium!”

“It didn't make the coffee,” Haeffledonger said shyly, “I did.”

“You addle-brained imbecile!” screamed the scientist. “You dolt! You loafer! I shall prefer charges! How can you expect the Machine Friend to do anything for you when you have removed its works?” The little man actually jumped up and down in his rage.

Haeffledonger looked bewildered in his stupid way. “But I didn't want it to *do* anything. I want to do things for *it*. I don't ask anything of it.”

“The man's a complete idiot!” Professor Wilson shouted.

So they took the machine away from James Haeffledonger and gave it to someone else—someone who knew how to use a friend intelligently.

THE END