THE COMPANION SHOP

Written by

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FADE IN:

EXT. CITY - DAY

A pleasant, tree lined neighborhood with upscale boutiques and shops.

A neatly dressed woman, MILDRED, (60’s) walks along the sidewalk. She glances at the COUPON she is holding in her hand.

INSERT COUPON: LONELY OR ALONE? FIND THAT PERFECT SOMEONE AT THE COMPANION SHOP.

EXT. THE COMPANION SHOP - DAY

Mildred stops and looks at a display window containing life-like COMPANIONS. There are males, females, young children and infants. The companions stare ahead blankly.

INT. THE COMPANION SHOP - DAY

Mildred enters the shop. The BELL over the door announces her arrival. A pleasant looking salesperson, ANTHONY, looks up.

ANTHONY

Good afternoon, Madame. May I help you?

Mildred looks around nervously. There are companions of all shapes and sizes displayed on a small showroom floor.

MILDRED

(meekly)
Yes. I’m looking for a companion and I have this coupon for 20% off.

ANTHONY

Why of course, our Summer Clearance Sale...

(small beat)
What did you have in mind?

Mildred looks around as the sales clerk continues.

MILDRED

Perhaps an age appropriate female companion? Someone to talk to, someone to have dinner with or take walks with?

(small beat)
(MORE)
MILDRED (CONT'D)
We have all shapes, sizes, ages and
gender -- infant, children,
teensagers, young adults, middle
aged, elderly...

Mildred sees an elderly male companion in the corner. He is
dressed in baggy pants, a knit sweater and has a small
moustache. She points at him.

MILDRED (CONT'D)
Tell me about that one.

Clerk swings around and rubs his hands together.

ANTHONY
Ah yes, the HENRY model -- very
popular with our more discerning,
mature female clientele -- A
perfect companion.

Mildred approaches the HENRY model. She tugs on the sleeve of
his knit sweater. Anthony stands by her side as she inspects
the HENRY.

ANTHONY (CONT’D)
The clothing, can of course, be
changed to suit your taste...
(small beat)
As well as the tone and pace of his
voice -- The unit is completely
customizable to suit your personal
preferences...

Mildred puts her hand on the HENRY’s face.

MILDRED
He’s cool to the touch.

ANTHONY
He heats up very quickly.

Anthony reaches behind the HENRY and presses an unseen
button. The HENRY stands erect, his arms move slightly as he
balances himself. His eyes open.

Anthony addresses the HENRY.

ANTHONY (CONT’D)
Henry, say hello to this nice lady.

Henry turns to face Mildred.
HENRY
Hello. My name is Henry.
(polite pause)
What is your name?

Mildred is startled and turns away. She then looks back at the HENRY.

MILDRED
My name?

HENRY
Yes, what is your name?

The HENRY has a polite smile on his face and patiently waits for Mildred to answer.

Mildred almost blushes.

MILDRED
My name -- My name is Mildred.

The HENRY extends his hand to Mildred. Mildred timidly takes his hand. They gently shake hands.

MILDRED (CONT’D)
(to Anthony)
His hand is warm...

ANTHONY
Yes, it only takes a few seconds for him to warm up.

HENRY
(to Mildred)
It is a pleasure to meet you, Mildred.
(small beat)
Would you like for me to be your companion?

Mildred looks at Anthony.

MILDRED
Is this his normal behavior?

Anthony smiles.

ANTHONY
Yes, the HENRY is a completely autonomous artificial intelligence -- The best and the very latest. Nothing he says or does is programed.
(MORE)
He responds to situations and people as if he was human.

Mildred puts up the palm of one hand to hide a finger of her other hand pointing in the direction of the HENRY.

MILDRED
(whispers to Anthony)
Should we be talking like this in front of him?

ANTHONY
I can assure you, he in incapable of taking offense -- intended or otherwise. He is a complete gentleman -- Patient, kind and courteous at all times.

MILDRED
(mumbles under her breath)
Not at all like my late husband...

Pause. Mildred is thoughtful, then she presents the twenty percent off coupon.

MILDRED (CONT’D)
And he’s twenty percent OFF during your Summer Clearance Sale?

Anthony nods YES.

MILDRED (CONT’D)
AND there’s a no-questions-asked refund IF I’m not completely satisfied?

Anthony smiles and nods YES again.

ANTHONY
That is our policy. If you’re not completely satisfied, you may return the unit within 90 days for a complete, no-questions-asked refund.

(small beat)
There will be a small re-stocking fee and if there is any damage to the unit, you will be held responsible for that...

Mildred takes one step backwards.

MILDRED
Damage to the unit?
ANTHONY
Yes, in the unlikely event the unit is accidentally damaged, there will be charges to refurbish it.
(quickly adds)
Of course the unit is almost indestructible, so this is very rare and almost impossible to do.

Anthony slaps the HENRY on the back.

ANTHONY (CONT’D)
I only wish I was built this well.

MILDRED
How much is he?

Anthony tilts his head to one side and looks at Mildred with sad eyes.

ANTHONY
Madame, can we really put a price on companionship?

MILDRED
It would be difficult, but TRY...

Anthony leans over, cups one hand over his mouth and whispers something into Mildred’s ear.

Mildred recoils in horror.

MILDRED (CONT’D)
WOW -- That’s a LOT of money.

Mildred simmers for a moment then shows Anthony the Summer Clearance Sale discount coupon once again.

MILDRED (CONT’D)
But if I did buy him, I’d still get the 20% discount off of that figure, right?

ANTHONY
YES, you certainly would madame.

Mildred raises one hand into the air and points a finger skyward.

MILDRED
Then, I’ll take him.

Anthony smiles and motions for Mildred to follow him.
ANTHONY
This way please. We just need to sign some papers...

EXT. THE COMPANION SHOP - DAY

Mildred and HENRY leave the shop together. As they walk side by side, Mildred takes HENRY’s hand.

INT. THE COMPANION SHOP - DAY

INSERT ON SCREEN: THREE WEEKS LATER

Mildred and HENRY enter the shop. The BELL on the door announces their arrival. Sales person looks up and greets them.

ANTHONY
And how are we doing today?

Mildred turns to HENRY.

MILDRED
Wait here, I won’t be a moment.

HENRY
As you wish, my dear.

HENRY patiently waits as Mildred leaves and walks towards Anthony.

ANTHONY
(softly)
Is there a problem?

Mildred looks back to confirm HENRY is out of earshot.

MILDRED
No. Nothing is WRONG -- It’s just that I’ve met someone else -- A real man. I think this other man really likes me, but he feels threatened by HENRY.

(small beat)
He’s actually -- Jealous of HENRY.

ANTHONY
I see...

Mildred looks over her shoulder in HENRY’s direction.
MILDRED
I’m afraid I MUST return HENRY.

ANTHONY
I see...
(small beat)
Let’s just check the terms of your sales contract...

Anthony taps a few keys on a desk top computer.

ANTHONY (CONT’D)
This is not at all unusual. It happens ALL the time. An attractive woman like yourself buys a unit, then suddenly she becomes even more attractive to every eligible REAL man within a tri-state area.
(small beat)
Common as pig tracks.

Mildred looks mildly offended.

MILDRED
Common as what?

Anthony smiles and taps more keys on his computer without looking up.

ANTHONY
In affairs of the heart, sometimes the best terms are the more earthy ones...
(small beat)
Don’t you agree?

Anthony does not notice Mildred’s displeasure. He is looking at his computer screen.

ANTHONY (CONT’D)
Here we go...

ANTHONY (CONT’D)
There will be a 75% re-stocking fee to complete your no-questions-asked refund -- The return of your HENRY.

Mildred tries not to raise her voice, but is visibly upset.

MILDRED
A 75% re-stocking FEE?
(small beat)
There’s no physical damage.
Anthony gives Mildred an insincere smile.

ANTHONY
No. This HENRY appears to be in pristine condition.

MILDRED
SO WHY THE OUTRAGEOUSLY HIGH RE-STOCKING FEE?

Anthony looks past Mildred and towards HENRY who is patiently waiting for Mildred to return to him.

ANTHONY
This HENRY is obviously emotionally attached to YOU. He will need therapy, counseling and complete re-programming before he can be re-sold...

MILDRED
WHAT?

ANTHONY
We see it from time to time. This is a clear case of an emotionally attached unit.
(small beat)
He will require extensive emotional rehabilitation.

MILDRED
WHAT?

Anthony looks directly at Mildred and smiles.

ANTHONY
Let’s face it -- We all have our cross to bear AND you, Mildred, are a real heart breaker.

FADE OUT.