

Futures

Sharing economy

A helping hand. By H. E. Roulo

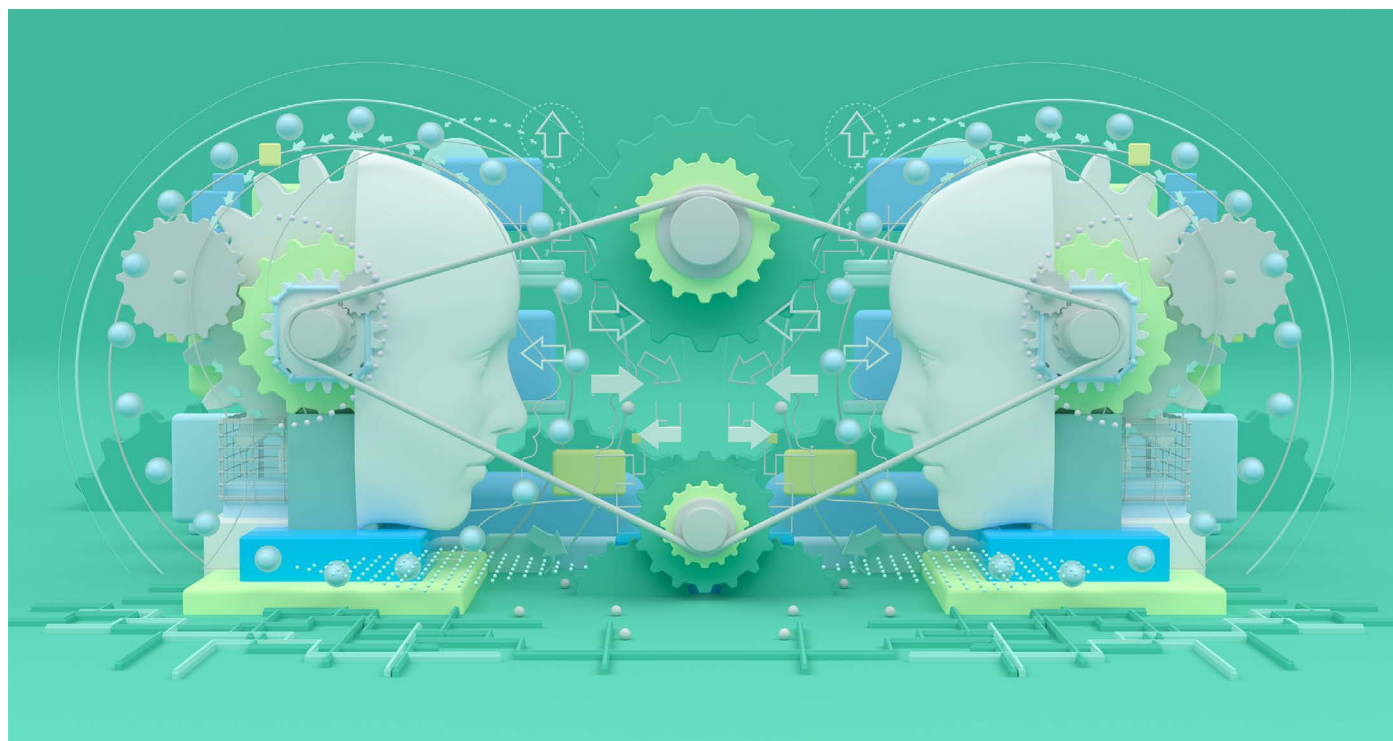


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

The cook turned from the griddle to smile towards my seat at the diner's counter, slightly abashed to see me waiting. His name, Garrett, hovered on the flat-panel television behind him, where it was attached to my order.

Garrett bounced in time to the oldies dub-step, frequently checking the timer for the sizzling ham. Most services were fully automated, but a human cook added atmosphere to the charming diner.

I smiled encouragingly. I'd been here frequently enough to get over the fascination of seeing a person cook. I came back for the human connection.

Squinting, Garrett moved his lips as he read directions on the screen above him. After plating my eggs and drizzling hollandaise sauce over them, he compared them to the picture and set my plate down.

Outside the diner's windows, the sky glowed orange with the rays of fading sunset. I was the last customer.

I took my first bite. Warm eggs, ham and English muffin melded together on my tongue.

I nodded approval.

Garrett released an audible sigh of relief. "About done for the day?" I asked.

Garrett leaned his hip against the counter and waved away my sympathy. "I'm not in any hurry."

"No?" I asked so he'd talk, and I wouldn't have to with my mouth full. Eggs Benedict was an indulgence.

"I rented my house out for the next few days. Sharing the roof over my head with some lucky vacationer."

I nodded. Common enough complaint. "Do you rent it out often?"

"What else? It's pretty great. Sharing just about pays for the rent." Garrett checked his screen above the griddle and saw he wasn't needed. He pulled his apron off.

"These are pretty good. Have you cooked here before?"

"Never *cooked* before!" Garrett patted his pockets like he was searching for something. "But I like to help."

"Well, you followed the instructions well."

"I help whenever I can. If I'm nearby, I can

get stuff off high shelves or sing someone a song. You'd be surprised what people want. This almost feels like an old-school job, you know? Show up, put in the time, and ... I dunno, come back again? At least, what I imagine they were like."

I was older than this kid. I stopped eating. "What do you think of it?"

"Not sure. I was driving by when the diner needed an employee and wages surged. I got lucky. I parked quick and beat someone else to the door. I heard some folks routinely cruise the shops around rush time, but I can't imagine that." Garrett picked his coat off the hook and patted the pockets. He pulled out his phone, probably to see whether his pay cheque had arrived.

His phone flickered and died.

"Phone's out of charge?" I asked, resisting the urge to check my own.

"I loaned the processing out for ... coin mining? Science research? I forget. I should have set it to stop sharing when the battery got low."

"You can charge wireless from the diner."

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Garrett slipped his phone back into his pocket. “Nah, I don’t want to watch the ads it would take to get on the shop’s net.”

I wiped my mouth. “When you haven’t got anything left to sell, you sell time. But no one’s got time for that.”

Garrett laughed. “Totally.”

Lights were dimming, in the polite but insistent way automated diners had of shutting down. Was it really that late?

I stretched, preparing to go. Garrett pulled his jacket over his narrow shoulders. The logo for a nearby rock-climbing gym was embroidered on the back.

“You like that place?” I asked, just to keep the conversation going a few minutes longer.

“It keeps me fit. Wear the logo, get free climbing time, so I go pretty often. Sometimes I give instruction if someone needs help.”

“That’s good,” I said. I had a few hobbies like that.

“I have an affiliate code if you want to try it out.”

I noted his code on my phone.

Garrett yawned.

“Been here long?” I asked.

“Two whole hours, all of it paid,” Garrett replied. He peered into the parking lot. A frown replaced his smile.

“What’s wrong?”

Garrett sighed, his irrepressible energy flagging. “My car’s gone. I musta had it set to

loan out when I wasn’t using it, and my phone’s dead, so I can’t see when it will be back.”

“I can give you a ride,” I offered hopefully, eyebrows raised.

Reluctantly, he shook my hand, sealing the deal.

Nice. Giving him a ride would just about cover the cost of the eggs I’d eaten.

It felt good to share.

H. E. Roulo is a Seattle-based author whose stories have appeared in dozens of publications, including *Fantasy’s* special *Women Destroy Fantasy* issue and twice in *Nature*. For more information, visit heatherroulo.com or on Twitter at [@hroulo](https://twitter.com/hroulo).

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

H. E. Roulo reveals the inspiration behind *Sharing economy*.

Non-traditional ways to supplement income are on the rise. Sometimes that means side-gigs, such as putting your hobby on Etsy or driving for Uber. Sometimes it means turning a home into an Airbnb. And more and more, it’s being an influencer. When I read an online post advising someone to nanny rich children so they’d get taken on their vacations, I had to write *Sharing economy*. Perhaps everything we do, have and are can be monetized, but I’ll never doubt the value of conversation and a good eggs Benedict.

