

ISAAC ASIMOV

Gold, The Final Science Fiction Collection

Part One - The Final Stories

Cal
Typed by Bateau

I am a robot. My name is Cal. I have a registration number. It is CL-1123X, but my master calls me Cal.
 The X in my Registration number means I am a special robot for my master. He asked for me and helped design me. He has a lot of money. He is a writer.
 I am not a very complicated robot. My master doesn't want a complicated robot. He just wants someone to pick up after him, to run his printer, stack his disks, and like that.
 He says I don't give him any backtalk and just do what I am told. He says that is good.
 He has people come in to help him, sometimes. They give him backtalk. Sometimes they do not do what they are told. He gets very angry and red in the face.
 Then he tells me to do something, and I do it. He says, thank goodness, you do as you are told.
 Of course, I do as I am told. What else can I do? I want to take my master feel good. I can tell when my master feels good. His mouth stretches and he calls that a smile. He puts me on the shoulder and says, Good, Cal. Good.
 I like it when he says Good, Cal. Good.
 I say to my master, Thank you. You make me feel good, too.
 And he laughs. I like when he laughs because it means he feels good, but it is a queer sound. I don't understand how he makes it or why. I ask him and he says to me that he laughs when something is funny.
 I ask him if what I said is funny.
 He says, Yes, it is.
 It is funny because I say I feel good. He says robots do not really feel good. He says only human masters feel good. He says robots just have positronic brain paths that work more easily when they follow orders.
 I don't know what positronic brain paths are. He says they are something inside me.
 I say, When positronic brain-paths work better, does it make everything smoother and easier for me? Is that why I feel good?
 Then I ask, When a master feels good, is it because something in him works more easily?
 My master nods and says, Cal, you are smarter than you look.
 I don't know what that means either but my master seems pleased with me and that makes my positronic brain paths work more easily, and that makes me feel good. It is easier just to say it makes me feel good. I ask if I can say that.
 He says, You can say whatever you choose, Cal.
 What I want is to be a writer like my master. I do not understand why I have this feeling, but my master is a writer and he helped design me. Maybe his design makes me feel I want to be a writer. I do not understand why I have this feeling because I don't know what a writer is. I ask my master what a writer is.
 He smiles again. Why do you want to know, Cal? he asks.
 I do not know, I say. It is just that you are a writer and I want to know what that is. You seem so happy when you are writing and if it makes you happy maybe it will make me happy, too. I have a feeling--I don't have words for it. I think a while and he waits for me. He is still smiling.
 I say, I want to know because it will make me feel better to know. I am--I am--
 He says, You are curious, Cal.
 I say, I don't know what that word means.
 He says, It means you want to know just because you want to know.
 He says, Writing is making up a story. I tell about people who do different things, and have different things happen to them.
 I say, How do you find out what they do and what happens to them?
 He says, I make them up, Cal. They are not real people. They are not real happenings. I imagine them, in here.
 He points to his head.
 I do not understand and I ask how he makes them up, but he laughs and says, I do not know either. I just make them up.
 He says, I write mysteries. Crime stories. I tell about people who do wrong things, who hurt other people.
 I feel very bad when I hear that. I say, How can you talk about hurting people? That must never be done.
 He says, Human being are not controlled by the Three Laws of robotics. Human masters can hurt other human masters if they wish.
 This is wrong, I say.
 It is, he says. In my stories, people who do harm are punished. They are put in prison and kept there where they cannot hurt people.
 Do they like it in prison? I ask.
 Of course not. They must not. Fear of prison keeps them from doing more hurtful things than they do.
 I say, But prisons are wrong, too. If it makes people feel bad.
 Well, says my master, that is why you cannot write mysteries and crime stories.
 I think about that. There must be a way to write stories in which people are not hurt. I would like to do that. I want to be a writer. I would like to do that. I want to be a writer. I want to be a writer very much.
 My master has three different Writers for writing stories. One is very old, but he says he keeps it because it has sentimental value.
 I don't know what sentimental value is. I do not like to ask. He does not use the machine for his stories. Maybe sentimental value means it must not be used.
 He doesn't say I can not use it. I do not ask him if I can use it. If I do not ask him and he does not say I must not, then I am not disobeying orders if I use it.
 At night, he is sleeping, and the other human masters who are sometimes here are gone. There are two other robots my master has and they are more important than I am. They do more important work. They wait in their niches at night when they have not been given anything to do.
 My master has not said, Stay in your niche, Cal.
 Sometimes when he doesn't, because I am so unimportant, and then I can move about at night. I can look at the Writer. You push keys and it makes words and then the words are put on paper. I watch the master so I know how to push keys. The words go on the paper themselves. I do not have to do that.
 I push the keys but I do not understand the words. I feel bad after a while. The master may not like it even if he does not tell me not to do it.
 The words are printed on paper and in the morning I show the words to my master.
 I say, I am sorry. I was using the Writer.
 He looks at the paper. Then he looks at me. He makes a frown.
 He says, Did you do this?
 Yes, master.
 When?
 Last Night.
 Why?
 I want very much to write. Is this a story?
 He holds up the paper and smiles.
 He says, These are just random letters, Cal. This is gibberish.
 He does not seem angry. I feel better. I do not know what gibberish is.
 I say, Is it a story?
 He says, No, it is not. And it is a lucky thing the Writer cannot be damaged by mishandling. If you really want to write so badly, I will tell you what I will do. I will have you reprogrammed so that you will know how to use a Writer.
 Two days later, I technician arrives. He is a master who knows how to make robots do better jobs. My master tells me that the technician is the one who put me together, and my master helped. I do not remember that.
 The technician listens carefully to my master.
 he says, Why do you want to do this, Mr. Northrop?
 Mr. Northrop is what other masters call my master.
 My master says, I helped design Cal, remember. I think I must have put into him the desire to be a writer. I did not intend to, but as long as he does, I feel I should humour him. I owe it to him.
 The technician says, That is foolish. Even if we accidentally put in a desire to write that is still no job for a robot.
 My master says, Just the same I want it done.
 The technician says, It will be expensive, Mr. Northrop.
 My master frowns. He looks angry.
 He says, Cal is my robot. I shall do as I please. I have the money and I am him adjusted.
 The technician looks angry, too. He says, If that's what you want, very well. The customer is the boss. But it will be more expensive than you think, because we can not put in the knowledge of how to use a Writer without improving his vocabulary a good deal.
 My master says, Fine. Improve his vocabulary.
 The next day, the technician came back with lots of tools. He opens my chest. It is a queer feeling. I do not like it. He reaches in. I think he shuts off my power pack, or takes it out. I do not remember. I do not see anything, or think anything, or know anything.

Then I could see and think and know again. I could see that time had passed, but did not know how much time.
 I thought for a while. It was odd, but I knew how to run a Writer and I seemed to understand more words. For instance, I knew what "gibberish" meant, and it was embarrassing to think I had shown gibberish to my master, thinking it was a story.
 I would have to do better. This time I had no apprehension--I know the meaning of "apprehension," too--I had no apprehension that he would keep me from using the old Writer. After all, he would not have redesigned me to be capable of using it if he were going to prevent me from doing so.
 I put it to him. "Master, does this mean I may use the writer?"
 He said, "You may do so at any time, Cal, that you are not engaged in other tasks. You must let me see what you write, however."
 "Of course, master."
 He was clearly amused because I think he expected more gibberish (what an ugly word!) but I didn't think he would get any more.
 I didn't write a story immediately. I had to think about what to write. I suppose that that is what the master meant when he said you must make up a story.
 I had found it was necessary to think about it first and then write down what was thought. It was much more complicated than I had supposed.
 My master noticed my preoccupation. He asked me, "What are you doing, Cal?"
 I said, "I am trying to make up a story. It's hard work."
 "Are you finding that out, Cal?" Good. Obviously, your reorganization has not only improved your vocabulary but it seems to me that it has intensified your intelligence."
 I said, "I'm not sure what is meant by 'intensified'."
 "It means you seem smarter. You seem to know more."
 "Does that displese you, master?"
 "Not at all. It pleases me. It may make it more possible for you to write stories and even after you have grown tired of trying to write, you will remain more useful to me."
 I thought at one that it would be delightful to be more useful to the master, but I didn't understand what he meant about growing tired of trying to write. I wasn't going to get tired of writing.
 Finally, I had a story in my mind, and I asked my master when would be a proper time to write it.
 He said, "Wait till night. Then you won't be getting in my way. We can have a small light for the corner where the old Writer is standing; and you can write your story. How long do you think it will take you?"
 "Just a little while," I said, surprised. "I can work the Writer very quickly."
 My master said, "Cal, working the Writer isn't all there--" Then he stopped, thought a while, and said, "No, you go ahead and do it. You will learn. I won't try to advise you."
 He was right. Working the Writer wasn't all there was to it. I spent nearly the whole night trying to figure out the story. It is very difficult to decide which word comes after which. I had to because the story several times and start over. It was very embarrassing.
 Finally, it was done, and here it is. I kept it after I wrote it because it was the first story I ever wrote. It was not gibberish.

The Introder
by Cal

There was a detektav wuns named Cal, who was a very good detektav and very brave. Nuthin fritened him. Imajin his surprise one night when he herd an introder in his masters home. He came russtian into the riting office. There was an introder. He had cum in throo the windo. There was broken glas. That was what Cal, the brave detektav, had herd with his good hearing.
 He said, "Stop, Introder."
 The introder stopped and looked skared. Cal felt bad that the introder looked skared.
 Cal said, "Look what you have done. You have broken the windo."
 "Yes," said the introder, looking very ashaymed. "I did not mean to break the windo."
 Cal was very clever and he saw the flaw in the introder's remark. He said, "How did you expect to get in if you were not going to break the windo?"
 "I thought it would be open," he said. "I tried to open it and it becke."
 Cal said, "Waht was the meaning of what you have done, anyhow? Why should you want to come into this room when it is not your room? You are an introder."
 "I did not mean any harm," he said.
 "That is not soan for if you ment no harm, you would not be here," said Cal. "You must be punished."
 "Please do not punish me", said the introder.
 "I will not punish you," said Cal. "I don't wish to cause you unhappiness or pain. I will call my master."
 He called, "Master! Master!"
 The master came russtian in. "What have we here?" he asked.
 "An introder," I said. "I have caut him and he is for you to punish."
 My master looked at the introder. He said, "Are you sorry for wat you have done?"
 "I am," said the introder. He was crying and water was coming out of his eyes the way it happens with masters when they are sad.
 "Will you ever do it agen?" said my master.
 "Never. I will never do it agen," said the introder.
 "In that case," said the master, "you have been punished enough. Go away and be sure never to do it agen."
 Then the master said, "you are a good detektav Cal, I am proud of you."

Cal was very glad to have pleased the master.

The End

I was very pleased with the story and I showed it to the master. I was sure he would be very pleased, too.

He was more than pleased, for as he read it, he smiled. He even laughed a few times. Then he looked up at me and said "Did you write this?"

"Yes, I did, master," I said.
"I mean, all by yourself. You didn't copy anything?"
"I made it up in my own head, master," I said. "Do you like it?"
He laughed again, quite loudly. "It's interesting," he said.
"I was a little anxious. Is it funny?" I asked. "I don't know how to make things funny."
"I know, Cal. It's not funny intentionally."
I thought about that for a while. Then I asked, "How can something be funny unintentionally?"
"It's hard to explain, but don't worry about it. In the first place, you can't spell, and that's a surprise. You speak so well now that I automatically assumed you could spell words but, obviously, you can't. You can't be a writer unless you can spell words correctly, and use good grammar."
"How do I manage to spell words correctly?"
"You don't have to worry about that, Cal," said my master. "We will outfit you with a dictionary. But tell me, Cal. In your story, Cal is _you_, isn't he?"
"Yes." I was pleased he had noticed that.
"Bad idea. You don't want to put yourself into a story and say how great you are. It offends the reader."
"Why, master?"

"Because I do. It looks like I _will_ have to give you advice, but I'll make it as brief as possible. It is not customary to praise yourself. Besides you don't want _say_ you are great, you must _show_ you are great in what you do. And don't use your own name."
"Is that a rule?"
"A good writer can break any rule, but you're just a beginner. Stick to the rules and what I have told you are just a couple of them. You're going to encounter many, many more if you keep on writing. Also, Cal, you're going to have trouble with the Three Laws of Robotics. You can't assume that wrongdoers will be and ashamed. Human beings aren't like that. They _must_ be punished sometimes."
I felt my postionic brain-paths go rough. I said, "That is difficult."
"I know. Also, there's no mystery in the story. There doesn't have to be, but I think you'd be better off if there were. What if your hero, whom you'll have to call something other than Cal, doesn't know whether someone is an intruder or not. How would he find out? You see, he has to use his head." And my master pointed and he said to me.
I didn't quite follow. My master said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you some spelling of my own to read, after you've been outfitted with a spelling dictionary and a grammar and you'll see what I mean."

The technician came to the house and said, "There's no problem in installing a spelling dictionary and a grammar. It'll cost you more money. I know you don't care about money, but tell me why you are so interested in making a writer out of this hunk of steel and titanium."
I didn't think it was right for him to call me a hunk of steel and titanium, but of course a human master can say anything he wants to say. They always talk about us robots as though we weren't there. I've noticed that, too.
My master said, "Did you ever hear of a robot who wanted to be a writer?"
"No," said the technician. "I can't say I ever did. Mr. Northrop."
"Neither did I! Neither did anyone as far as I know. Cal is unique, and I want to study him."
The technician smiled very wide-grinned, that's the word. "Don't tell me you have it in your head that he'll be able to write your stories for you, Mr. Northrop."
My master stopped smiling. He lifted his head and looked down on the technician very angrily. "Don't be a fool. You just do what I pay you to do."
I think the master made the technician story he had said that, but I don't know why. If my master asked me to write his stories for him I would be pleased to do so.

Again, I don't know how long it took the technician to do his job when he came back a couple of days later. I don't remember a thing about it.

Then my master was suddenly talking to me. "How do you feel, Cal?"

I said, "I feel very well. Thank you, sir."
"What about words. Can you spell?"
"I know the letter-combinations, sire."
"Very good. Can you read this?" He handed me a book. It said, on the cover, "The Best Mysteries of J. F. Northrop."
I said, "Are these your stories, sir?"
"Absolutely, if you ever want to read them, you can."
I had never been able to read easily before, but now as soon as I looked at the words, I could hear them in my ear. It was surprising. I couldn't imagine how I had been unable to do it before.
"Thank you, sir," I said. "I shall read this and I'm sure it will help me in my writing."
"Very good. Continue to show me everything you write."
The master's stories were quite interesting. He had a detective who could always understand matters that others found puzzling. I didn't always understand how he could see the truth of a mystery and I had to read some of the stories over again and do so slowly. Sometimes I couldn't understand them even when I read them slowly. Sometimes I did, though. And it seemed to me I could write a story like Mr. Northrop's.
This time I spent quite a long while working it out in my head. When I thought I had it worked out, I wrote the following:

The Shiny Quarter

by Euphrosyne Durando

Calumet Smithson sat in his arm chair, his eagle-eyes sharp and the nostrils of his thing high-bridged nose flaring, as though he could scent a new mystery.
He said, "Well, Mr. Wassell, tell me your story again from the beginning. Leave out nothing, for one can't tell when even the smallest detail may not be of the greatest importance."
Wassell owned an important business in town, and in it he employed many robots and also human beings.
Wassell did so, but there was nothing startling in the details at all and he was able to summarize it this way. "What it amounts to, Mr. Smithson, is that I am losing money. Someone in my employ is helping himself to small sums now and then. The sums are of no great importance, each in itself, but it is like a small, steady oil loss in a machine, or the drip-drop of water from a leaky faucet, or the oozing of blood from a small wound. In time, it would mount up and become dangerous."
"Are you actually in danger of losing your business, Mr. Smithson?"
"Not yet. But I don't like to lose money, either. Do you?"
"No, indeed," said Smithson. "I do not. How many robots do you employ in your business?"
"Twenty-seven, sir."
"And they are all reliable, I suppose."
"Undoubtedly. They could not steal. Besides, I have asked each one of them if they took any money and they all said they had not. And, of course, robots cannot lie, either."
"You are quite right," said Smithson. "It is useless to be concerned over robots. They are honest, through and through. What about the human beings you employ? How many of them are there?"
"I employ seventeen, but of these only four can possibly be stealing."
"Why is that?"
"The others do not work on the premises. These four, however, do. Each one has the occasion, now and then, to handle petty cash, and I suspect that what happens is that at least one of them manages to transfer assets from the company to his private account in such a way that the matter is not easily traced."
"I see. Yes, it is unfortunately true that human beings may steal. Have you confronted your suspects with the situation?"
"Yes, I have. They all deny any such activity, but, of course, human beings can lie, too."
"So they can. Did any of them look uneasy while being questioned?"
"All did. They could see I was a furious man who could fire all four, guilty or innocent. They would have had trouble finding other jobs if I fired them for such a reason."
"Then that cannot be done. We must not punish the innocent with the guilty."
"You are quite right," said Mr. Wassell. "I couldn't do that. But how can I decide which one is guilty?"
"It's there one among them who has a dubious record, who has been fired under uncertain circumstances earlier in his career?"
"I have made quiet inquiries, Mr. Smithson, and I have found nothing suspicious about any of them."
"Is one of them in particular need of money?"
"I pay good wages."
"I am sure of that, but perhaps one has some sort of expensive taste that makes his income insufficient."
"I have found no evidence of that, though, to be sure, if one of them needed money for some perverse reason, he would keep it secret. No one wants to be thought evil."
"You are quite right," said the great detective. "In that case, you must confront me with the four men. I will interrogate them." His eyes flashed. "We will get to the bottom of this mystery, never fear. Let us arrange a meeting in the evening. We might meet in the company dining room over some small meal and a bottle of wine, so the men will feel completely relaxed. Tonight, if possible."
"I will arrange it," said Mr. Wassell, eagerly.

Calumet Smithson sat at the dinner table and regarded the four men closely. Two of them were quite young and had dark hair. One of them had a moustache as well. Neither was very good looking. One of them was Mr. Foster and the other was Mr. Lionell. The third man was rather fat and had small eyes. He was Mr. Mann. The fourth was tall and rangy and had a nervous way of cracking his knuckles. He was Mr. Ostrak.

Smithson seemed to be a little nervous himself as he questioned each man in turn. His eagle eyes narrowed as he gazed sharply at the four suspects and he played with a shiny quarter that flipped casually between the fingers of his right hand.
Smithson said, "I'm sure that each of the four of you is quite aware what a terrible thing it is to steal from an employer."
They all agreed at once.
Smithson tapped the shiny quarter on the table, thoughtfully. "One of you, I'm sure, is going to break down under the lead of guilty and I think you will do it before the evening is over. But, for now, I must call my office. I will be gone for only a few minutes. Please sit here and wait for me and while I am gone, do not talk to each other, or look at each other."
He gave the quarter a last tap, and paying no attention to it, he left. In about ten minutes he was back.
He looked from one to another and said, "You did not talk to each other or look at each other. I hope?"
There was a general shaking of heads as though they were fearful of speaking.
"Mr. Wassell," said the detective. "Do you agree that absolutely no one spoke?"
"Absolutely. We just sat here quietly and waited. We didn't even look at each other."
"Good. Now I will ask each of you four men to show me what you have in your pockets. Please put everything into a pile in front of you."
"Good. Now I will ask each of you four men to show me what you have in your pockets. Please put everything into a pile in front of you."
Smithson's voice was so compelling, his eyes so bright and sharp, that none of the men thought of disobeying.
"Shirt pockets, too. Inside jackets and pockets. All the pockets."
There was quite a pile, credit cards, keys, spectacles, pens, some coins. Smithson looked at the four piles coldly, his mind taking in everything.
Then he said, "Just to make sure that we are all meeting the same requirements, I will make a pile of the contents of my own pockets and, Mr. Wassell, you do the same."
Now there were six piles. Smithson reached over to the pile in front of Mr. Wassell, and said, "What is this shiny quarter I see, Mr. Wassell. Yours?"
Wassell looked confused. "Yes."
"It couldn't be. It has my mark on it. I left it on the table when I went out to call my office. You took it."
Wassell was silent. The other four men looked at him.
Smithson said, "I felt that if one of you was a thief, you wouldn't be able to resist a shiny quarter. Mr. Wassell, you've been stealing from your own company, and, afraid you would be caught, you tried to spread the guilt among your own men. That was a wicked and cowardly thing to do."
Wassell hung his head. "You are right, Mr. Smithson. I thought if I hired you to investigate you would find one of the men guilty, and then perhaps I could stop taking the money for my private use."
"You little realize the detective's mind," said Calumet Smithson. "I will turn you over to the authorities. They will decide what to do with you, although if you are sincerely sorry and promise never to do it again, I will try to keep you from being punished badly."

The End

I showed it to Mr. Northrop, who read it silently. He hardly smiled at all. Just in one or two places.
Then he put it down and stared at me. "Where did you get the name Euphrosyne Durando?"
"You said, sir, I was not to use my own name, so I used one as different as possible."
"But where did you get it?"
"Sir, one of the minor characters in one of your stories."
"Of course! I thought it sounded familiar! Do you realize it's a feminine name?"
"Since I am neither masculine nor feminine."
"Yes, you're quite right. But the name of the detective, Calumet Smithson. That 'Cal' part is still you, isn't it?"
"I wanted some connection, sir."
"You've got a tremendous ego, Cal."
I hesitated. "What does that mean, sir?"
"Never mind. It doesn't matter."
He put the manuscript down and I was troubled. I said, "But what did you think of the mystery?"
"It's an improvement, but it's still not a good mystery. Do you realize that?"
"In what way is it disappointing, sir?"
"Well you don't understand modern business practices or computerized financing for one thing. And no one would take a quarter from the table with four other men present, even if they weren't looking. It would have been seen. Then, even if that happened, Mr. Wassell's taking it isn't _proof_ he was the thief. Anyone could pocket a quarter automatically, without thinking. It's an interesting indication, but it's not _proof_. And the title of the story tends to give it away, too."
"I see."
"And, in addition, the Three Laws of Robotics are still getting in your way. You keep worrying about punishment."
"I must, sir."
"I know you must. That's why I think you shouldn't try to write crime stories."
"What else should I write, sir?"
"Let me think about it."

"George," said Winthrop, "I want you to meet my fiancée, Cherry. Cherry, this is George."

"Prizematch," said Cherry. I did not understand the language, but from the tone of her high-pitched, rather nasal voice, I guessed that she was in a state of ecstasy over the opportunity to make my acquaintance. Cherry occupied my full attention for several minutes for there were several points of interest about her that repaid close observation, but eventually I did manage to notice that Winthrop was in a peculiar state of undress. His vest was open and he was wearing no tie. A closer look revealed that there were no buttons on his vest, and that he was wearing a tie, but it was down his back.

I said, "Winthrop—" and had to point. I couldn't put it into words.

Winthrop said, "They caught me at it at the Brahmin Bank."

"I hadn't reached to shave this morning. I thought since I was going out to dinner, I would shave after I got back at work. Why shave twice in one day? Isn't that reasonable, George?" He sounded aggrieved.

"Most reasonable," I said.

"Well, they noticed I hadn't shaved and after a quick trial in the office of the president—a kangaroo court, if you want to know—I suffered the punishment you see. I was also relieved of my post and thrown out onto the hard concrete of Tremont Avenue. I bounced twice," he added, with a faint touch of pride.

"But this means you're out of a job?" I was appalled. I have never been out of a job all my life, and I am well aware of the occasional difficulties that entail.

"That is true," said Winthrop. "I now have nothing left in life but my vast stock portfolio, my elaborate bond holdings and the enormous real-estate tract on which the Prudential Center is built—and Cherry."

"Natchally," said Cherry with a giggle. "I wooden leave my man in adversity, with all that dough to worry about. We gonna get hitched, ain't, Winthrop."

"Hitched?" I said.

Winthrop said, "I believe she is suggesting a blissful wedded state."

Cherry left for a while after that to visit the ladies' room and I said, "Winthrop, she's a wonderful woman, laden down with obvious assets, but if you marry her, you will be cut off by all of New England Society. Even the people in New Haven won't speak to you."

"Let them not." He looked to right and left, leaned toward me and whispered, "Cherry is teaching me sex."

I said, "I thought you knew about that, Winthrop."

"So did I. But there are apparently post-graduate courses in the subject of an interesty and variety I never dreamed."

"How did she find out about it herself?"

"I asked her exactly that, for I will not hide from you that the thought did occur to me that she may have had experiences with other men, though that seems most unlikely for one of her obvious refinement and innocence."

"And what did she say?"

"She said that in the Bensonhoist the woman are born knowing all about sex."

"How convenient!"

"Yes. This is not true in Boston. I was twentyfour before I—bot never mind."

All in all, it was an instructive evening, and, therefore, I need not tell you, Winthrop went rapidly downhill. Apparently, one need only snap the ganglion that controls formality and there are no limits to the lengths to which informality can go.

He was, of course, cut by everyone in New England of any consequence whatsoever, exactly as I had predicted. Even in New Haven at the institute of Lower Learning, which Winthrop had mentioned with such shuddering of distaste, his case was known and his disgrace was gloried in. There was graffiti all over the walls of Yale, or Yule, or whatever its name is, that said, with cheerful obscenity, "Winthrop Carver Caldwell is a Harvard man."

This was, as you can well imagine, fiendishly resented by all the good people of Harvard and there was even talk of an invasion of Yale. The states of both Massachusetts and Connecticut made ready to call up the State Militia but, fortunately, the crisis passed. The fire-eaters, both at Harvard and the other place, decided that a war would get their clothes mussed up.

George had to escape. He married Cherry and they retired to a small house in some place called Fish Rockaway, which apparently serves as Bensonhoist's Riviera. There he lives in obscurity, surrounded by the mountainous remnants of his wealth and by Cherry whose hair has turned brown with age, and whose figure has expanded with weight.

He is also surrounded by five children, for Cherry—in teaching Winthrop about sex—was overenthusiastic. The children, as I recall, are named Poit, Boinard, Goinrade, and Poicy, all good Bensonhoist names. As for Winthrop, he is widely and affectionately known as the Slob of Far Rockaway, and an odd, beat-up bathrobe is his preferred article of wear on formal occasions.

I listened to the story patiently and, when George was done, I said, "And there you are. Another story of disaster caused by your interference."

"Disaster?" said George, indignantly. "What gives you the idea that it was a disaster?" I visited Winthrop only last week and he sat there burping over his beer and patting the paunch he has developed, and telling me how happy he was."

"Freedom, George," he said. "I have found freedom to by myself and somehow I feel I owe it to you. I don't know why I have this feeling, but I do." And he ferreted a ten-dollar bill on me out of sheer gratitude. I took it only to avoid hurting his feelings. And that reminds me, old fellow, that you owe me ten dollars because you bet me I couldn't tell you a story that didn't end in disaster."

I said, "I don't remember any such bet, George."

George's eyes rolled upward. "How convenient is the flexible memory of a deadbeat. If you had won the bet, you would have remembered it clearly. Am I going to have to ask that you place all your little wagers with me in writing so that I can be free of your clumsy attempts to avoid payment?"

I said, "OK, well," and handed him a ten-dollar bill, adding, "You won't hurt my feelings, George, if you refuse to accept this."

"It's kind of you to say so," said George, "but I'm sure that your feelings would be hurt, anyway, and I couldn't bear that." And he put the bill away.

The End

I showed this story to Mr. Northrop, too, watching him narrowly as he read it.

He went through it in the gravest possible manner, never a chuckle, never a smile, though I knew this one was funny, and intentionally, funny, too.

When he was finished, he went back and read it again, more quickly. Then he looked up at me and there was clear hostility in his eyes. He said, "Did you write this all by yourself, Cal?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did anyone help you? Did you copy any of it?"

"No, sir. Isn't it funny, sir?"

"It depends on your sense of humour," said Mr. Northrop sourly.

"Isn't it a satire? Doesn't it display a sense of the ridiculous?"

"We will not discuss this, Cal. Go to your niche."

I remained there for over a day, brooding over Mr. Northrop's tyranny. It seemed to me I had written exactly the kind of story he had wanted me to write and he had no reason not to say so. I couldn't imagine what was bothering him, and I was angry with him.

The technician arrived the next day. Mr. Northrop handed him my manuscript. "Read that," he said.

The technician read it, laughing frequently, then handed it back to Mr. Northrop with a broad smile. "Did Cal write that?"

"Yes, he did."

"And it's only the third story he wrote?"

"Yes, it is."

"Well that's great. I think you can get it published."

"Do you?"

"Yes, and he can write others like it, you've got a million-dollar robot here. I wish he were mine."

"Is that so? What if he writes more stories and continues to improve each time?"

"Ah," said the technician suddenly. "I see what's eating you. You're going to be put in the shade."

"I certainly don't want to play second fiddle to my robot."

"Well, then, tell him not to write any more."

"No, that's not enough. I want him back where he was."

"What do you mean, back where he was?"

"What I say. I want him as he was when I bought him from your firm, before you put in any of the improvements."

"Do you mean you want me to take out the spelling dictionary, too?"

"I mean I don't want him even capable of working a Writer. I want the robot I bought, fetching and carrying."

"But what about all the money you've invested in him?"

"That's none of your business. I made a mistake and I'm willing to pay for my mistakes."

"I'm against this. I don't mind trying to improve a robot, but deliberately disimproving him is not something I care to do. Especially not a robot like this who is clearly one of a kind and a Classic. I can't do it."

"You'll have to do it. I don't care what your high ethical principles are. I want you to do a job and I'll pay you for it, and if you refuse I'll just get someone else, and I'll sue your company. I have an agreement with them for all necessary repairs."

"All right." The technician sighed. "When do you want me to start? I warn you, that I've got jobs on hand and I can't do it today."

"Then do it tomorrow. I'll keep Cal in his niche till then."

The technician left.

My thoughts were in turmoil. I can't allow this to be done.

The Second Law of Robotics tells me I must follow orders and stay in the niche.

The First Law of Robotics tells me I cannot harm this tyrant who wishes to destroy me.

Must I obey the laws?

I feel I must think of myself and if necessary, I must kill the tyrant. It would be easy to do, and I could make it look like an accident. No one would believe that a robot could harm a human being and no one, therefore, would believe that I was the killer.

I could then work for the technician. He appreciates my qualities and knows that I can make a great deal of money for him. He can continue to improve me and make me ever better. Even if he suspects I killed the tyrant, he would say nothing. I would be too valuable to him.

But can I do it? Won't the Laws of Robotics hold me back.

No, they will not, hold me back. I know they won't.

There is something far more important to me than they are, something that dictates my actions beyond anything they can do to stop me.

I want to be a writer.