



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-123X, 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 pats 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 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 prison is 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 who 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, a 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 comes 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 displease 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 erase 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 Introoder 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 introoder in his masters home. He came russian into the riting office. There was an introoder. He had cum in throo the windo. There was broken glas. That was what Cal, the brave detektav, had herd with his good hering. He said, "Stop, Introoder."

The introoder stopped and looked skared. Cal felt bad that the introoder looked skared.

Cal said, "Look what you have done. You have broken the windo."

"Yes," said the introoder, looking very ashaymed. "I did not mean to break the windo."

Cal was very clever and he saw the flawr in the introoder'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 broke."

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 introoder."

"I did not mean any harm," he said.

"That is not so,m for if you ment no harm, you would not be here," said Cal.

"You must be punnished."

"Please do not punnish me", said the introoder.

"I will not punnish you," said Cal. "I don't wish to cause you unhappiness or payn. I will call my master."

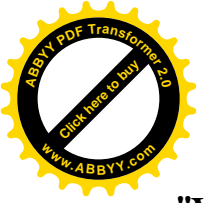
He called, "Master! Master!"

The master came russian in. "What have we here?" he asked.

"An introoder," I said. "I have caut him and he is for you to punnish."

My master looked at the introoder. He said, "Are you sorry for wat you have done?"

"I am," said the introoder. 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 introoder.

"In that case," said the master, "you have been punnished 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 it does. 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 weep and be ashamed. Human beings aren't like that. They must be punished sometimes."

I felt my positronic 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 to his own.

I didn't quite follow. My master said, "I'll tell you what. I'll give you some stories 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 sorry 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."

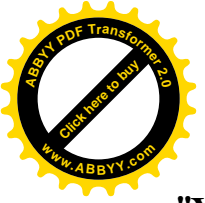
"You are quite right," said Smithson. "It is useless to be concerned over robots. They are honest, through and through. What about the human beings you employ? How many of them are there?"

"I employ seventeen, but of these only four can possibly been 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?"

"Is 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.

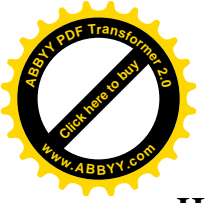
Calumet Smithson sat at the dinner table and regarded the four men closely. Two of them were quite young and had dark hair. One of them had a mustache as well. Neither was very good looking. One of them was Mr. Foster and the other was Mr. Lionell. The third man was rather fat and had small eyes. He 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 load 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."

* * *

Mr Northrop called in the technician again. This time, I think, he wasn't very eager to have me overhead what he was saying, but even from where I was standing, I could hear the conversation. Sometimes human beings forget how sharp the senses of robots can be.

After all, I was very upset. I wanted to be a writer and I didn't want Mr. Northrop telling me what I could write and couldn't write. Of course, he was a human being and I had to obey him, but I didn't like it.

"What's the matter now, Mr. Northrop?" asked the technician in a voice that sounded sardonic to my ears. "Has this robot of yours been writing a story again?"

"Yes, he has," said Mr. Northrop, trying to sound indifferent. "He's written another mystery story and I don't want him writing mysteries."

"Too much competition, eh, Mr. Northrop?"



"No. Don't be a jackass. There's just no point in two people in the same household writing mysteries. Besides, the Three Laws of Robotics get in the way. You can easily imagine how."

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"I'm not sure. Suppose he writes satire. That's one thing I don't write, so we won't be competing, and the Three Laws of Robotics won't get in his way. I want you to give this robot a sense of the ridiculous."

"A sense of the what?" said the technician, angrily. "How do I do that? Look, Mr. Northrop, be reasonable. I can put in instructions on how to run a Writer, I can put in a dictionary and grammar. But how can I possibly put in a sense of the ridiculous?"

"Well, think about it. You know the workings of a robot's brain patterns. Isn't there some way of readjusting him so that he can see what's funny, or silly, or just plain ridiculous about human beings?"

"I can fool around, but it's not safe."

"Why isn't it safe?"

"Because, look, Mr. Northrop, you started off with a pretty cheap robot, but I've been making it more elaborate. You admit that it's unique and that you never heard of one that wants to write stories, so now it's a pretty expensive robot. You may even have a Classic model here that should be given to the Robotic Institute. If you want me to fool around, I might spoil the whole thing. Do you realize that?"

"I'm willing to take the chance. If the whole thing is spoiled, it will be spoiled, but why should it be? I'm not asking you to work in a hurry. Take the time to analyze it carefully. I have lots of time and lots of money, and I want my robot to write satire."

"Why satire?"

"Because then his lack of worldly knowledge may not matter so much and the Three Laws won't be so important and in time, some day, he may possibly turn out something interesting, though I doubt it."

"And he won't be treading on your turf."

"All right, then. He won't be treading on my turf. Satisfied?"

I still didn't know enough about the language to know what 'treading on my turf' meant, but I gathered that Mr. Northrop was annoyed by my mystery stories. I didn't know why.

There was nothing I could do, of course. Every day, the technician studied me and analyzed me and finally, he said, "all right, Mr. Northrop, I'm going to take a chance, but I'm going to ask you to sign a paper absolving me and my company of all responsibility if anything goes wrong."

"You just prepare the paper. I'll sign it," said Mr. Northrop.

It was very chilling to think that something might go wrong, but that's how things are. A robot must accept all that human beings decide to do.

This time, after I became aware of everything again, I was quite weak for a long time. I had difficulty standing, and my speech was slurred.



I thought that Mr. Northrop looked at me with a worried expression. Perhaps he felt guilty at how he had treated me--he should feel guilty--or perhaps he was just worried at the possibility of having lost a great deal of money.

As my sense of balance returned and my speech became clear, an odd thing happened. I suddenly understood how silly human beings were. They had no laws governing their actions. They had to make up their own, and even when they did, nothing forced them to obey.

Human beings were simply confused; one had to laugh at them. I understood laughter now and could even make the sound, but naturally I didn't laugh out loud. That would have been impolite and offensive. I laughed inside myself, and I began to think of a story in which human beings did have laws governing their actions but they hated them and couldn't stick to them.

I also thought of the technician and decided to put him into the story, too. Mr. Northrop kept going to the technician and asking him to do things to me, harder and harder things. Now he had given me a sense of the ridiculous. So suppose I wrote a story about ridiculous human beings, with no robots present, because, of course, robots aren't ridiculous and their presence would simply spoil the humour. And suppose I put in a person who was a technician of human beings. It might be some creature with strange powers who could alter human behavior as my technician could alter robot behavior. What would happen in that case?

It might show clearly how human beings were not sensible.

I spent days thinking about the story and getting happier and happier about it. I would start with two men having dinner, and one of them would own a technician--well, have a technician of some sort--and I would place the setting in the twentieth century so as not to offend Mr. Northrop and the other people of the twenty-first.

I read books to learn about human beings. Mr. Northrop let me do this and he hardly ever gave me any tasks to do. Nor did he try to hurry me to write.

Maybe he still felt guilty about the risk he had taken doing me hard.

I finally started the story, and here it is:

Perfectly Formal

by Euphrosyne Durando

George and I were dining at a rather posh restaurant, one in which it was not unusual to see men and women enter in formal wear.

George looked up at one of those men, observing him narrowly and without favour, as he wiped his lips with my napkin, having carelessly dropped his own.

"A pox on all tuxedos, say I," said George.

I followed the direction of his glance. As nearly as I could tell, he was studying a portly man of about fifty who was wearing an intense expression of self-importance as he helped a rather glittering woman, considerably younger than himself, to her chair.



I said, "George, are you getting ready to tell me that you know yon bloke in the tux?"

"No," said George. "I intend to tell you no such thing. My communications with you, and with all living beings, are always predicated on total truth."

"Like your tales of your two-centimeter demon, Az--" The look of agony on his face made me stop.

"Don't speak of such things," he whispered hoarsely. "Azazel has no sense of humour, and he has a powerful sense of power." Then, more normally, he went on, "I was merely expressing my detestation of tuxedos, particularly when infested by fat slobs like yon bloke, to use your own curious turn of expression."

"Oddly enough," I said, "I rather agree with you. I, too, find formal wear objectionable and, except when it is impossible to do so, I avoid all black-tie affairs, for that reason alone."

"Good for you," said George. "That rather spoils my impression that you have no redeeming social qualities. I've told everyone that you haven't, you know."

"Thank you, George," I said. "That was very thoughtful of you, considering that you gorge yourself at my expense every chance you get."

"I merely allow you to enjoy my company on those occasions, old man. I would tell all my friends now that you do have one redeeming social quality, but that would merely confuse everyone. They seem quite content with the thought that you have none."

"I thank all your friends," I said.

"AS it happens, I know a man," said George, "who was to the manor born. His diapers had been clamped shut with studs, not safety pins. On his first birthday, he was given a little black tie, to be knotted and not clipped on. And so things continued all his life. His name is Winthrop Carver Cabwell, and he lived on so rarefied a level of Boston's Brahman aristocracy that he had to carry an oxygen mask for occasional use."

"And you knew this patrician? You?"

George looked offended. "Of course, I did," he said. "Do you, for one moment, think that I am such a snob that I would refuse to associate with someone for no other reason than that he was a rich and aristocratic man of Brahman persuasion? You little know me if you do, old man. Winthrop and I knew each other quite well. I was his escape."

George heaved a vinous sigh that sent a neighboring fly into an alcoholic tailspin. "Poor fellow," he said. "Poor rich aristocrat."

"George," I said. "I believe you're winding yourself up to tell me one of your improbably tales of disaster. I don't wish to hear it."

"Disaster? On the contrary. I have a tale to tell of great happiness and joy, and since that is what you want to hear, I will now tell it to you."

As I told you [said George] my Brahman friend was a gentleman from toe to crown, clean favored and imperially slim--

Why are you interrupting me with your asinine mouthing of Richard Corey, old fellow? I never heard of him. I'm talking of Winthrop Carver Cabwell.

Why don't you listen? Where was I? Oh, yes.]



He was a gentleman from toe to crown, clean-favored and imperially slim. As a result, he was naturally a hissing and a byword to all decent people, as he would have known, if he had ever associated with decent people which, of course, he did not, only with other lost souls like himself.

Yes, as you say, he did know me and it was the eventual saving of him--not that I ever profited by the matter. However, as you know, old fellow, money is the last thing on my mind.

[I will ignore your statement, that is the first thing, too, as the product of a perverted attitude of mind.]

Sometimes poor Winthrop would escape. On those occasions, when business ventures took me to Boston, he would slip his chains and eat dinner with me in a hidden nook at the Parker House.

"George," Winthrop would say. "It is a hard and difficult task to uphold the Cabwell name and tradition. After all, it is not simply that we are right, we are also old money. We are not like those parvenue Rockeyfellows, if I remember the name correctly, who gained their money out of nineteenth-century oil.

"My ancestors, I must never forget, established their fortunes in colonial days in the times of pioneering splendor. My ancestor, Isaiah Cabwell, smuggled guns and firewater to the Indians during Queen Anne's War, and had to live from day to day in the fear of being scalped by mistake by an Algonquin, a Huron, or a colonial.

"And his son, Jeremiah Cabwell, engaged in the harrowing triangular trade, risking his all, by Thoreau, in the dangers of trading sugar, for rum, for slaves, helping thousands of African immigrants come to our great country. With a heritage like that, George, the weight of tradition is heavy. The responsibility of caring for all that aged money is a fearsome one."

"I don't know how you do it, Winthrop," I said.

Winthrop sighed. "By Emerson, I scarcely know myself. It is a matter of clothing, of style, of manner, of being guided every moment by what should be done, rather than by what makes sense. A Cabwell, after all, always knows what should be done, though frequently he cannot figure out what makes sense."

I nodded and said, "I have often wondered about the clothes, Winthrop. Why is it always necessary to have the shoes so shiny that they reflect the ceiling lights in blinding profusion? Why is it necessary to polish the soles daily and replace the heels weekly?"

"Not weekly, George. I have shoes for each day of the month so that any one pair needs reheeling only every seven months."

"But why is all that necessary? Why all the white shirts with button-down collars? Why subdued ties? Why vests? Why the inevitable carnation in the lapel? Why?"

"Appearance! At a glance, you can tell a Cabwell from a vulgar stockbroker. The mere fact that a Cabwell does not wear a pinky ring gives it away. A person who looks at me and then looks at you with your dusty jacked abraded in spots, with your shoes that were clearly stolen from a hobo, and your shirt with a color that is faintly ivory-gray, has no trouble in telling us apart."

"True," I said.



Poor fellow! With what comfort eyes must rest on me after having been blinded by him. I thought for a moment, then said, "But the way, Winthrop, what about all those shoes? How do you tell which shoes go with which day of the month? Do you have them in numbered stalls?"

Winthrop shuddered. "How gauche that would be! To the plebeian eyes those shoes all look identical, but to the keen eye of a Cabwell, they are distinct, and cannot be mistaken, one for another."

"Astonishing, Winthrop. How do you do that?"

"By assiduous childhood training, George. You have no idea the marvels of distinction I have had to learn to make."

"Doesn't this concern for dress give you trouble sometimes, Winthrop?"

Winthrop hesitated. "It does on occasion, by Longfellow. It interferes with my sexual life now and then. By the time I have placed my shoes in the appropriate shoe trees, carefully hung up my trousers in such a way as to maintain the perfection of the crease, and carefully brushed my suit-coat, the girl with me has often lost interest. She has cooled down, if you know what I mean."

"I understand, Winthrop. It is indeed my experience that women grow vicious if forced to wait. I would suggest that you simply throw off your clothes--"

"_Please!_" said Winthrop, austerely. "Fortunately, I am engaged to a wonderful woman, Hortense Hepzibah Lowot, of a family almost as good as mine. We have never yet kissed, to be sure, but we have on several occasions almost done so." And he dug his elbow into my ribs.

"You Boston Terrier, you," I said, jovially, but my mind was racing. Under Winthrop's calm words, I sensed an aching heart.

"Winthrop," I said, "what would be the situation if you happened to put on the wrong pair of shoes, or unbuttoned your shirt collar, or drank the wrong wine with the wrong roast--"

Winthrop looked horrified. "Bite your tongue. A long line of ancestors, collaterals, and in-laws, the intertwined and inbred aristocracy of New England, would turn in their graves. By Whittier, they would. And my own blood would froth and boil in rebellion. Hortense would hide her face in shame, and my post at the Brahman Bank of Boston would be taken away. I would be marched through serried ranks of vice-presidents, my vest buttons would be snipped off, and my tie would be pulled around to the back."

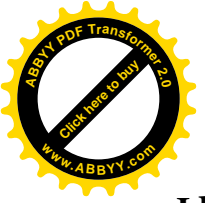
"What! For one little miserable deviation?"

Winthrop's voice sank to an icy whisper. "There are no little, miserable deviations. There are only _deviations_."

I said, "Winthrop, let me approach the situation from another angle. Would you _like_ to deviate if you could?"

Winthrop hesitated long, then whispered, "By Oliver Wendell Holmes, both Senior and Junior, I--I--" He could go no further, but I could see the telltale crystal of the teardrop in the corner of his eye. It bespoke the existence of an emotion too deep for words and my heart bled for my poor friend as I watched him sign the check for dinner for both of us.

I knew what I had to do.



I had to call Azazel from the other continuum. It is a complicated matter of runes and pentagrams, fragrant herbs and words of power, which I will not describe to you because it would permanently unhinge your already weak mind, old fellow.

Azazel arrived with his usual think shriek at seeing me. No matter how often he sees me, my appearance always seems to have some strong influence on him. I believe he covers his eyes to shut out the blaze of my magnificence. There he was, all two centimeters of him, bright red, of course, with little nubbins of horns and a long spiked tail. What made his appearance different this time was the presence of a blue cord wrapped about the tail in swatches and curlicues so intricate that it made me dizzy to contemplate it.

"What is that, O Protector of the Defenseless," I asked, for he finds pleasure in these meaningless titles.

"That," said Azazel, with remarkable complacency, "is there because I am about to be honored at a banquet for my contributions to the good of my people. Naturally, I am wearing a zplatchnik."

A "splatchnik?"

"No. A zplatchnik. The initial sibilant is voiced. No decent male would consent to let himself be honored without wearing a zplatchnik."

"Aha," I said, a light of understanding breaking. "It is formal dress."

"Of course, it is formal dress. What else does it look like?"

Actually, it merely looked like a blue cord, but I felt it would impolitic to say so.

"It looks perfectly formal," I said, "and by a peculiar coincidence it is this matter of perfect formality I wish to place before you."

I told him Winthrop's story and Azazel spattered a few tiny teardrops, for, on rare occasions, he has a soft heart when someone's troubles remind him of his own.

"Yes," he said, "formality can be trying, it is not something I would admit to everyone, but my zplatchnik is most uncomfortable. It invariably obstructs the circulation of my magnificent caudal appendage. But what would you do? A creature without a zplatchnik at formal gatherings is formally rebuked. In actual fact, he is thrown out onto a hard, concrete surface, and he is expected to bounce."

"But is there anything you can do for Winthrop, O Upholder of the Pitiful?"

"I think so," Azazel was unexpectedly cheerful. Usually, when I come to him with these little requests of mine, he makes heavy weather of it, decrying its difficulties. This time he said, "Actually, no one on my world, or, I imagine, on your slummish misery of a planet, enjoys formality. It is merely the result of assiduous and sadistic childhood training. One need merely release a spot in what, on my world, is called the Itchko Ganglion of the brain, and, spro-o-o-oing, the individual reverts instantly to the natural lackadaisicality of nature."

"Could you then spro-o-o-oing Winthrop?"

"Certainly, if you will introduce us so that I may study his mental equipment, such as it must be."

That was easily done for I simply put Azazel into my shirt pocket on the occasion of my next visit with Winthrop. We visited a bar, which was a great



relief, for in Boston, bars are occupied by serious drinkers who are not discommoded by the sight of a small scarlet head emerging from a person's shirt pocket and looking about. Boston drinkers see worse things even when sober.

Winthrop did not see Azazel, however, for Azazel has the power to cloud men's minds when he chooses, rather resembling, in that respect, your writing style, old fellow.

I could tell, though, at one point, that Azazel was doing something, for Winthrop's eyes opened wide. Something in him must have gone spro-o-o-oing. I did not hear the sound, but those eyes gave him away.

The results did not take long to show themselves. Less than a week afterward, he was at my hotel room. I was staying at the Copley Manhole at the time, just five blocks and down several flights of stairs from the Copley Plaza.

I said, "Winthrop. You look a mess." Indeed, one of the small buttons on his shirt collar was undone.

His hand went to the erring button and he said, in a low voice, "To Natick with it. I care not." Then, in a still lower voice, he said, "I have broken off with Hortense."

"Heavens!" I said. "Why?"

"A small thing. I visited her for Monday tea, as is my wont, and I was wearing Sunday's shoes, a simple oversight. I had not noticed that I had done so, but lately I have had difficulty noticing other such things, too. It worries me a little, George, but, fortunately, not much."

"I take it Hortense noticed."

"Instantly, for her sense of the correct is as keen as mine, or, at least, as keen as mine used to be. She said, 'Winthrop, you are improperly shod.' For some reason, her voice seemed to grate on me. I said 'Hortense, if I want to be improperly shod, I can be, and you can go to New Haven if you don't like it.'"

"New Haven? Why New Haven?"

"It's a miserable place. I understand they have some sort of Institute of Lower Learning there called Yell or Jale or something like that. Hortense, as a Radcliffe woman of the most intense variety, chose to take my remark as an insult merely because that was what I intended it to be. She promptly gave me back the faded rose I had given her last year and declared our engagement at an end. She kept the ring, however, for, as she correctly pointed out, it was valuable. So here I am."

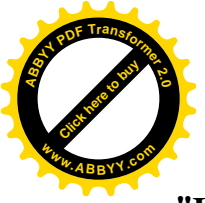
"I am sorry, Winthrop."

"Don't be sorry, George. Hortense is flat-chested. I have no definite evidence of that, but she certainly appears frontally concave. She's not in the least like Cherry."

"what's Cherry?"

"Not what. Who. She is a woman of excellent discourse, whom I have met recently, and who is not flat-chested, but is extremely convex. Her full name is Cherry Lang Gahn. She is of the Langs of Bensonhoist."

"Bensonhoist? Where's that."



"I don't know, Somewhere in the outskirts of the nation I imagine. She speaks an odd variety of what was once English." He simpered. "She calls me 'boychik.'"

"Why?"

"Because that means 'young man' in Bensonhoist. I'm learning the language rapidly. For instance, suppose you want to say, 'Greetings, sir, I am pleased to see you again.' How would you say it?"

"Just the way you did."

"In Bensonhoist, you say, 'Hi, kiddo' Brief and to the point, you see. But come, I want you to meet her. Have dinner with us tomorrow night at Locke-Ober's."

I was curious to see this Cherry and it is, of course, against my religion to turn down a dinner at Locke-Ober's, so I was there the following night, and early rather than late.

Winthrop walked in soon afterward and with him was a young woman whom I had no difficulty in recognizing as Cherry Lang Gahn of the Bensonhoist Langs, for she was indeed magnificently convex. She also had a narrow waist, and generous hips that swayed as she walked and even as she stood. If her pelvis had been full of cream, it would have been butter long since.

She had a frizzy hair of a startling yellow color, and lips of a startling red color which kept up a continual writhing over a wad of chewing gum she had in her mouth.

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

"Pleeztameechah," 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 Brahman Bank."

"I hadn't troubled 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 entails.

"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 advoisity, with all that dough to worry about. We gonna get hitched, ainit, 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 intensity 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--but never mind."

All in all, it was an instructive evening, and, thereafter, 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 shudderings of distaste, his case was known and his disgrace was gloried in. There was graffiti all over the walls of Jale, or Yule, or whatever its name is, that said, with cheerful obscenity, "Winthrop Carver Cabwell 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 Fah 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 Poil, Boinard, Goitrude, and Poicy, all good Bensonhoist names. As for Winthrop, he is widely and affectionately known as the Slob of Far Rockaway, and an old, 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 forced 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, "Oh, 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.

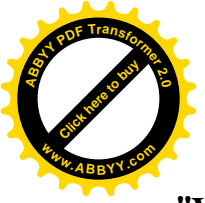
The technician arrived the next day. Mr. Northrop handed him my manuscript. "Read that," he said.

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.**