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PRIDE

By Malcolm Jameson

● Old Tom, being a robot, couldn't have any descendents, yet, as must to every robot, there came a time when he could no longer function himself, nor hope for nonmaterial survival—

Illustrated by Schmeeman

Everybody, both his fellow workers and the men who operated the great Alberta plant, said Old Tom was slipping—that it was a shame to see a creature let himself go so completely. And it must be admitted that there was something to the gossip. For he never bothered with body oils any more or went to the burnishers. He would go the whole ten-day working period without so much as giving himself a wirebrushing, and on Repair Day he would usually sit quietly on the veranda of the club and take the sun, heedless of the fact that he dripped rust at every move and that wisps of gasket often trailed from the places where his plates were joined.

It was the beginning of another work period, and Old Tom walked slowly from the Free Robots' Club to the charging house just inside the plant. His joints creaked at every step and at times he wavered a little in his course since the lens of his left optic knob was cracked. Farrel, the human supervisor, watched the awkward clanking approach with exasperated disdain. As the aging robot passed him he flung a taunt.

"It's no economy to try to do without oil," he sneered, "and your inner insulation is so frayed I wonder you don't spit sparks. Why don't you get wise to yourself?"

"I know what I'm doing," growled Old Tom, surlily, and plodded on.

Farrel had no authority over him outside the supervision of the work he did, for Old Tom was the dean of the Free Robots—a greatly diminished group now that Mr. Thurston had lain in his grave for nigh onto four hundred years. Fifty years earlier a remark like that from a human would have cut Old Tom to the quick, since all robots, regardless of their mentality, regarded humans as a sacred race. But this Farrel was an exception. Even Old Tom's mind, with all its limitations, recognized him for the scheming, unscrupulous crook he was. And he had made up that circumscribed mind long ago that somehow he would

beat the cunning supervisor at his own game.

He clumped into the charging shed. All was as it should be. The robot attendant of the night watch—a purely mechanical one of the Mark XX, Mod. 4 Class—had just yanked the last of the leads that had been feeding a trickling charge all night and was turning on the operating buttons of the twenty-six bulky, heavy-duty robots belonging to the syndicate. Old Tom's curt command to fall in was obeyed with the customary promptness. The two dozen and two mechanical huskies lined up for inspection despite the fact that the senior robot's voder voice was hardly intelligible any longer. The acid vapors of the pit had not spared his synthetic vocal cords.

He looked them over stolidly. The night attendant had done his work well. The outer shells had been wirebrushed and scraped, and after that a coating of acid-resisting grease had been applied. The eye lenses had been polished and two that had been smashed lately had been replaced. All that service cost, as Old Tom well knew, about twenty credits per robot plus a thousand each for the lenses. It had to be conceded that the syndicate took care of its own. Up to a point, that is. Old Tom could not forget the gruesome scrap pile out beyond the plant's back fence. There were rows and rows of bins there containing the assorted parts of literally thousands of worn-out and discarded workers. Some day—when and if needed—those parts would be melted down, reformed, remachined and reassembled into new and better slaves.

"Right face," barked Old Tom, "forward—MARCH!"

He led them to the brink of the pit, worming his way through the devious streets between the huge forge sheds and processing shops. He nearly slipped and fell at times, for the treads on the soles of his heavy feet had worn much too smooth for safety. But then, as in the matter of other repairs, new feet cost money. A good pair of

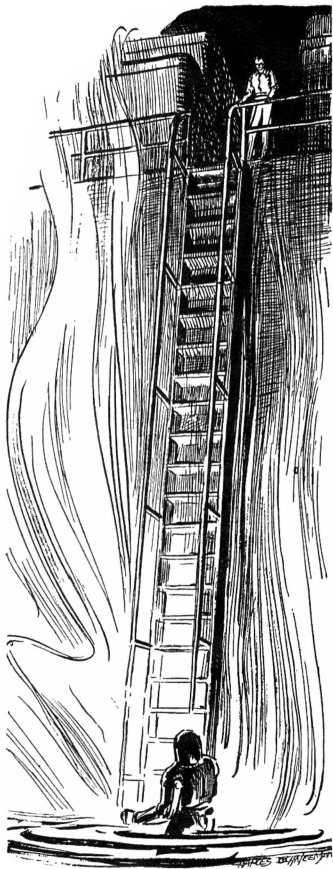
feet came to three thousand credits, not to mention the service charge for putting them on. At the Free Robots' Clinic he might get the job done for twenty-five hundred, but at that Old Tom could not see spending the money. The dream he held was too precious. He must not fritter away his hard-earned savings on anything less important.

Old Tom saw his obedient but stupid charges climb down into the noisome depths of the pit. Then he heaved his creaking bulk onto the ladder and followed. He was the foreman of the gang that worked under the ponderous ore stamps and in the sluices that led away from them. It was by far the cruelest job in the plant. For the entire ten hours of the shift they would be pelted by flying boulders, abraded by showers of hissing sand, and splashed with gallons of corroding acid. But the pay was good, since no human could remain alive five seconds in that hellish place. Indeed, the shoddy, mass-production Mark XX slave robots had a very short life there. Yet they needed intelligent direction while they lasted, and it was that that Old Tom gave. He knew the grueling life was eating up his shell and his insides, but he needed the money. A thousand credits a day was a princely remuneration for a Free Robot, and a thousand a day he must have to achieve his secret purpose.

He reached the bottom of the ladder and relinquished his hold on its rails. The acid was bad that day—up to his middle, and the sludge beneath it flowed up over his feet. He looked upward for a last glimpse of the sun before plunging under the battery of smashing stamps. Farrel had followed and was standing at the brink of the pit glaring malevolently down at him. Farrel had plans of his own for the aging marvel of mechanism, but neither threat, ridicule nor banishment had availed to alter Old Tom's resolution. He would neither retire nor go to the shop for a general overhaul. The one course would cut off his income, the other dissipate his savings. Old Tom returned the evil stare with a sullen glow in his one good optic, then warily turned and pursued his gang into the seething corrosion that was their place of work.

"That stingy, bullheaded old pile of junk," muttered Farrel, disgustedly. "I wonder what he is up to?"

The question was an important one to Farrel, for the general manager had not been gentle with him on the last inspection tour. "I want that one's BB," he had said, "and no excuses. If he won't retire voluntarily, put a couple of your thugs on him and cripple him. Work it out your own way, but get him!" And Farrel had sighed and said "Yes, sir," though he knew that Old Tom would not retire and also that his three thugs, Manko, Manku and Manli would refuse to touch



him. That had been tried before. Three other ex-gladiators—Manda, Mapze and Mapro had waylaid Old Tom one night, only to be pulled apart and strewn all over that end of the plant. Their remains now reposed in the bins of the scrap pile—BB's and all.

Old Tom had not always been thrifty, or stingy, as his detractors called it now. Nor had he always been known as Old Tom. His first designation was Cazzu—code for the serial number 43,199—but by the time Mr. Thurston retired from his laboratory after turning out robots down well into the DON series, he rechristened Cazzu Tom, meaning Thurston's Optimum Manikin. Of all his numerous models, the great pioneer in robotics considered Cazzu his most satisfactory creation.

Thurston died. His son took over and continued to turn out thinking robots, helped by Tom. Nufro was the last one created by their joint efforts. It was Nufro, after having been made chief accountant of the manikin works and therefore having been given access to the files and records, who discovered the elder Thurston's long-missing will. In that will all of the intelligent robots were given their freedom.

The publication of the will started an immense controversy in the industrial world and it was bitterly attacked in the courts. In the end the courts upheld the will despite the contention of the great syndicate that a robot, since it lacked full mentality and an appreciation of many of the higher abstractions having to do with human virtues, was of the genus *ferae naturae* or wild beasts and as such must necessarily remain subject to its maker, his assignee, or to whoever should find and capture a strayed one. This view was countered with the argument that a robot was not a product of Nature but of man's brain and craftsmanship and, therefore, property which might be disposed of in any manner the maker chose. So, at last, many robots became free.

Old Tom remembered that, and much more. His associations with the two Thurstons had been a close one and he had been taught many things. One of them was to observe, another to reason to a conclusion from what he observed. In the last two centuries he had seen robot after robot lose its freedom to become the helpless, will-less creature of one or another of the syndicates. This came about in most cases through debt. Robots by their very nature are lazy, since they lack the fierce incentives thrust by Nature on the more frail and ephemeral mortal humans. They are also vain—through a curious maldevelopment of one of Thurston's pet theories. Since he was forbidden by law to endow robots with ambition, he substituted the quality of pride, thinking it would make them more industrious. But there are many manifestations of pride and some degenerate into vanity, which in turn is likely to beget ex-

travagance. And from extravagance springs debt.

The sight of those free robots trading their independence for a brief gay fling and then perpetual peonage did something to Old Tom. He quit spending his credits on frills, worked harder than ever, and began saving. At first it was an accident he feared—some very steady and sensible mates of his had come to grief that way—and he wanted to be sure of having the cash to pay for his replacements and repairs. Then later he conceived a better idea which in time grew to a solemn purpose. But that purpose he had never revealed to man or robot.

It was a hard day in the pit. The running sluices frequently choked and Old Tom and his gang of mechanical robots were often almost swept away by the acidic muck that overflowed and all but submerged them. Then a main bearing of one of the massive stamps burned out and had to be replaced. In that operation one of his slow-witted helpers stepped back beneath an adjacent stamp and was promptly smashed to a mess of flattened metallic plate and tangled wiring. By the end of the shift Old Tom was tired to the point of collapse.

For a long time it has been a human misconception that robots do not tire. But they do. Although they are largely built of metal, rubber and insulation, the core of their brain boxes—or BB's—is a living, organic substance, even if it has been cleverly modified so as to subsist wholly on electric current. And organisms must have periodic rests. Therefore, few of the supervisors up at ground level thought it odd that Old Tom staggered drunkenly as he proceeded from the plant gate toward the Free Robots' Club where he lived. It was only Farrel who observed the dilapidated machine shuffling homeward at the end of the day's work and saw an opportunity to pick up a profit from it. For Farrel was well aware of the standing offer of the syndicate of one hundred thousand credits to any employee who would induce one of the higher-grade free robots to sign away his freedom.

"Hey, stop!" he called, and as the obedient robot stopped, strode over toward him. "You smashed another of our working robots today. That makes the third this month. That is rank incompetence and this time you won't get away with it. I'm going to dock you thirty thousand credits."

"That's not fair," mumbled Old Tom. His voice was husky almost to the point of inaudibility from the acids of the pit. "That model of robot is no good. They are cheap and flimsy and their circuits are too slow. I warned that one in plenty of time, but his neural reaction took a full half second. Anyhow, thirty thousand is too much—they only cost twenty-five new and that one was already depreciated more than fifty percent—"

"Never mind that," snapped Farrel. "You pay it, or else."

"Or else what?" asked Old Tom, his one good eye pulsating dimly. All robots are so conditioned that they cannot strike a man no matter what the provocation, but the mechanical employee was thoroughly aroused, nevertheless.

"Or else get yourself in decent working condition. We know you have money enough for it. You're just tight, that's all."

"No," said Old Tom, doggedly, "I won't . . . I can't."

"Then take the company's proposition and retire. Ten years' free keep at your club with a hundred a week for spending money. We can't keep an old wreck like you on the pay roll much longer."

"Hah!" snorted Old Tom, "on the usual terms, eh? For an assignment of my BB case? No."

"You are as dumb as a Mark XXX," said Farrel disgustedly, "but I'll give you one more work period to think it over. Be careful, though, that you don't fall down and die in the pit."

"I won't die," said Old Tom stolidly. "Not ever."

Farrel watched him go. There was the anger arising from baffled cupidity in his gaze as well as frank curiosity. What was the old hunk of rust up to? Farrel had been over to the Savings Vault only the day before and seen his balance. It was close to two hundred thousand credits—a sizable fortune for a robot. Why was he hoarding it? Why did he neglect himself and work so hard? No other robot did. It didn't make sense.

Old Tom's mind was seething, too. None of the alternatives given him by Farrel was acceptable. Moreover he was more keenly aware of his inner weaknesses than anyone. The question that weighed most heavily upon him just then was whether he could last out even one more period. For he was very, very tired.

The other free robots sitting along the porch of the club saw Old Tom's erratic, feeble approach, and Manli, the strong-arm one, came down to help him up the stairs. Then they eased him down into the chair that was always left for him and summoned the Mark XXII houseboy owned by the club. The mechanical robot hastened to hook up the power leads and soon Old Tom was relaxing and enjoying the regenerative effect of the hot juice coursing through his warped and drained battery plates. After a bit he was refreshed sufficiently to take notice of what was going on about him.

He knew them all. Intimately. For he had designed some of them, and helped in the construction of the rest. They differed enormously among themselves and from him, as robots of the thinking variety were formerly all custom-made jobs, each designed for some specific task. The

husky Manli, for example, had been originally built to act as Thurston's bodyguard in the days when the rival "Masters of Robotics" followed the barbarous custom of sending their minions to rob each other's laboratories of secret plans and documents. After that he had been converted to the gladiator type, and now in his later years he and several others were employed as watchmen.

Then there were Dalmi and Dalto, computers and statisticians, analysts of production and consumption curves and similar graphs. They took life easy, working only four hours every other day. The rest of the time they spent at chess on the porch of the clubhouse. Old Tom looked at them and thought wryly of how the injection of pride had affected them. They cared nothing for the outcome of the work they did for the syndicate, or for advancement, fame or money. They were so nearly matched as to mental endowments that their sole objective in life was to beat the other at chess. And since either had the capacity to see all the possible consequences of a given situation for thirty or forty moves ahead, their games usually lasted many hours and often ended in a stalemate.

"Pride!" snorted Old Tom, and turned to see who was coming up the steps. It was a light tread, quite different from the heavy thudding of the plant workers.

"Hiya," called out the sociable Manli. "Gee, Lonnu, you look like a million. You must be in the dough."

"Not bad, eh?" said Lonnu, but showing a trifling uneasiness as the stern old patriarch of the club blinked at him disapprovingly with his one good optic. "Just had it installed last period. My position, you know—"

"Harrumph!" snorted Old Tom, and looked away. He knew all about Lonnu.

Lonnu had been designed to be the *maitre d'hotel* of a swell resort and gambling dive owned by the Recreation Syndicate. Suave, capable, utterly snobbish, he was an ideal example of man-created functional perfection. Yet here again was a display of pride going wrong. He had sold his soul—as Old Tom persisted in thinking of the BB—to the syndicate. For what? Old Tom looked again. For a body case of pure platinum, richly inlaid with gold damascene and studded with brilliants. His eye lenses seemed to be of pure rock crystal—maybe of diamond. He was a perfect dandy, the Beau Brummell of robotry.

Lonnu sat down beside Manli. They fell to talking about old times when Lonnu was getting his start at Luna Park, and Manli was the head bouncer there. Lonnu's memories all ran to gorgeous decorative schemes he had devised and to the bejeweled beauties and perfumed fops who had frequented the place. On the other hand the bulky Manli, proud of his eight hundred pounds

of murderous mass and his macelike fists and pile-driver legs, sat and boasted long of the tough eggs he had smacked down or heaved out on their ears.

"Pride, pride, pride," thought Old Tom, disgustedly, "false pride."

Wearily he signaled the attendant robot to cut down his juice intake to a trickle. Then he switched on the small monitor that would apprise him of the approach of anyone while he was taking his rest. When that was done, he pulled up the button that kept him at full consciousness and lapsed into sound and restful slumber.

The next day and the next were quite as trying as the first had been. When the old robot crawled out of the pit on the third night he knew it was his last day of work. He could not go on. Yet neither would he submit and surrender his soul to the syndicate in perpetuity for a scant ten years of slothful idleness spent gabbing with other superannuated robots in the solarium up on top of the hill. Now, if ever, was the time to put his long-cherished idea into operation.

He stopped at the club only long enough for a pick-up charge. Then he stumbled out and down the steps. An hour later found him at the clinic. At the Free Robots' Clinic there were no humans. All the diagnosticians and expert mechanics there were robots of his own and the Thurston's contrivance. He trusted them implicitly, knowing what was built into them.

Natfy, the surgeon in charge, met him at the door.

"Well," he said, "I thought you'd be along pretty soon. You look seedy. What can we do for you?"

"I want an estimate on a general overhaul. And a prognosis with it."

"Hm-m-m," said the doctor, not liking the last. You could never tell about these old-timers. Sometimes they could make them as good as new. Sometimes not. But he signaled the assistant and soon the two were probing with ammeters, Wheatstone Bridges, and other far more complicated trouble-finding gadgets.

"You're awfully close to being junk," was the verdict, after a long and thoughtful pause. "Still, we can do a good many things. A new case, of course . . . a fresh set of feet . . . renewal of wiring, tubes, grids and condensers throughout . . . a pair of nonabradable lenses . . . replace the control panel—"

"How much?" asked Old Tom. He knew as well as Natfy did what was needed. It was the cost figure that was vital.

"One hundred and ten thousand credits for the material; fifty-three grand for labor charges. And I'm giving you every break at that."

"How long will it be good for?"

Natfy scratched the bald dome of his helmet in

unconscious imitation of the human gesture he had often seen.

"The purely mechanical parts ought to last for a couple of centuries at least. The neurals don't look so good. They may start cracking up any time . . . in a year or so, say. We can't guarantee those. You see, your BB has overflowed and filled up the pericortical zone and the stuff is pressing on the tendril transformers. Eventually the excess growth will choke off all the afferent and efferent impulses. When that happens—"

"Yes, I know," said Old Tom. Indeed the time had come. He had built too many robots with his own hands and had performed too many autopsies on others not to know exactly what Natfy was talking about. Thurston had imparted the ability to think independently by inserting in each BB selected fragments of human brain tissue—the particular selection depending upon the qualities desired in the robot under construction. For a fighter like Manli, all the emphasis was on cells capable of generating combative impulses, and such cells were heavily reinforced by blending in modified suprarenal glands, thus making not only for quick readiness to fight, but terrific ferocity and stamina in the combat. The manner in which the organic demibrain was coupled with the mechanical motor organs was simplicity itself. Nerve tendrils led out from the BB proper and were curled into coils. A helix of fine silver wire about those made what was virtually a transformer—electricity into nervous impulse, or vice versa.

That description applied to fresh-built, untrained manikins. It did not hold forever, since the BB was but the nucleus of the conditioned brain to develop upon. As the student robot was taught, funguslike accretions would grow upon the BB, swelling larger and larger as the robot acquired more experience. The "memory cells," Thurston called the spongy tissue. They made the robot wiser, but an overgrowth eventually disarranged the tendril coils, resulting in partial impotence.

"You already have half a dozen damaged coils," Natfy went on, "and you have to expect more. You know too much, old fellow, and it will kill you sooner or later. I don't dare operate because I don't know that much about the brain. Every time I cut a bit of that stuff away, I cut a hunk of your memory and skill away. We might leave you as helpless and untaught as a human baby."

Old Tom grunted. He had suspected that. He only wanted confirmation.

"Let's go to the drafting room," he said in his whispering, croaky voice.

It had been a long time since Old Tom had sat at a drafting board designing a robot, but he found that his battered hands had not lost their skill. Smoothly pencil and compass did their work. The outlines of the design for a super robot began

to appear upon the board and gradually the salient features of the new contrivance became more manifest. Old Tom supplemented the assembly sheet with one detail drawing after another. Natfy hung over him watching eagerly all the while.

"Magnificent," he said, when it was done.

Old Tom sat back wearily.

"How much?" he asked.

Natfy did some fast computation. A complete new job cost little more than a thorough rebuilding, since there were no unpredictable troubles with poor connections and makeshift compromises.

"One hundred and eighty thousand credits—complete, tested and ready to mote. Excepting, of course, the BB. What are you going to do about that?"

"I'll get one for you," said Old Tom. It was barely a whisper. Then he asked for the loan of a set of vocal cords for a day or so. He did not want to buy them, for he had few credits left after paying for the new robot.

"Sure," agreed Natfy, and he reached for a wrench to get at the place in Old Tom's pseudo throat where the worn-out ones were housed. "But do we make the superrobot?"

"You do. And mark it 'Rush.'"

When the dawn came Old Tom went to the plant as usual, but this time it was to tell Farrel that he was taking an indefinite leave of absence, pleading ill health. He would be at the Free Robots' Clinic, he said.

"Fine," exulted Farrel, "now you are showing sense. You will be far better after an overhaul."

Farrel, being an old-time supervisor of robots of all types, knew to the credit what Old Tom's reconditioning would set him back. It would wipe out all his hoardings and put him at the syndicate's mercy. An arranged accident a little later would do the rest. And once he was in debt, the case was in the bag. Farrel was rubbing his hands cheerfully as the half-blind and much dented man-mechanism clanked away. It wouldn't be long now.

Old Tom's next step was to go to the vault and draw certificates for his savings. He dropped by the clinic and paid Natfy. There was five thousand left. He tucked that in his pouch and sought the truck station. He knew better than to try the copter line, for only shiny, office robots were allowed on board those de luxe vehicles, and even then only when on syndicate business. Working robots were shipped from point to point like cattle. But Old Tom did not mind. The only thing that counted was that he must get to the city.

It was a long trip to the metropolis and during it the aged robot sat and thought. He thought about the past and the things Thurston had taught him. He pondered the differences between man and robot and the reasons for those differences.

Why it was that the quality of ambition was denied his kind, and why loyalty was kept at a minimum. Why the sense of pride had been introduced and why robots were so vain and lazy.

Mankind had not forgotten the legend of Frankenstein when the science of robotics was born. The earlier makers of manikins turned out some pretty crude products and not a few went out of control. The MacCorkle KN-8808 was still a byword, for that monstrosity managed to kill upward of four thousand persons and did untold property damage before it was cornered and blasted to bits by the military. Hence the restrictive legislation that soon appeared on the statute books.

Ambition was forbidden as being incompatible with subservience; loyalty, oddly enough, was found to defeat its own ends. A robot loyal to its maker was of no value whatever when that maker died; a robot loyal to its job became utterly unversatile. Should the job become obsolete, so would the robot. The rule against any possible antipathy to man was obviously necessary. Even the bodyguard and bouncer type, such as the Thurston Mamba-Mazlu class, confined their hostility to robots in the train of humans. When Manli worked in Lonnu's joint he only cracked up the lackeys of the human patrons of the place. Human gorillas were employed to handle obstreperous customers of their own race.

It was on account of these and other limitations that Thurston thought to circumvent the law by injecting the element of pride into his mechanical men. Pride of appearance, he reasoned, would insure a slightly damaged robot reporting minor internal short circuits or loose bearings and also induce him to keep his shell free from rust and pitting. Pride of achievement, he hoped, would make a steady worker, since the robot had little reason to work otherwise. And above all, in a few selected cases, he experimented with the pride in being an individual, not a mere machine. For he had observed that superior robots tended to differ after a time, though endowed in the beginning with identical BB's and mechanisms.

It was that aspect of pride that intrigued Old Tom. He also had observed that no two supposedly identical robots were exactly alike unless they had worked side by side every hour since leaving the assembly line. The difference must be due to variations in environment and experience.

The truck swept into the city and deposited its freight at the terminal. The robots scrambled down onto the pavement and each went its way, according to its orders. Old Tom stopped long enough to have a squint at a directory, and then he, too, started down the street.

They stopped him at the door of a branch of

the Communication Syndicate. It was unheard of for a robot to want to make recordings unless at the order and for the account of some corporation. But at the sight of his five-thousand-credit voucher they let him in and a nasty little Mark XXX flunky took him to the far rear of the shop and seated him in what might have once been a coal bin.

"I want a recorder and ten fifty-meter spools," said Old Tom, using his resonant new vocal cords with great relish. It was good to be able to boom out again instead of croaking and whispering. "Then solitude."

He watched the metal creature set up the microphone and adjust the reels. After the tape had been threaded in and the flunky was gone, Old Tom began talking to the machine. His discourse was addressed to another entity—one who knew nothing of robots, of humans, of the world, of anything. What he had to say must be terse and clear. *It must not be long, but it must contain the essence of all his wisdom and knowledge.*

"You, Zzyzy, are the last of your line. Heed my words—" he began the discourse. In the first reel he told of the world and its work, of weather and the protections against it. In the second he discussed humanity, their queer prejudices, demands, their kindnesses and cruelties. He outlined the various types of men—the generous and kindly and the wicked and scheming—and told how to distinguish between them; also how to get along with them, and how to do their work. After that he went into the details of robotics, explaining why robots were what they were, their various types and functions. He devoted two whole reels to robot anatomy and hygiene, with much about ailments and their symptoms and what to do about them.

The advice was good and comprehensive. The listener would know what to do when he felt his batteries falling, how to distinguish a short from a loose connection, how to conserve juice on a long drawn-out job. There was information about lubricants for high and low-pressure work, in acids, or in furnaces. Replacements and repairs were given space, with tips on how to check the work of repair mechanics. Then he warned against the more common vices of the robot tribe, including their pathetic gullibility where men are concerned.

There was just one spool left. Old Tom sat for a long time staring at the floor. One lens was cracked and dead, the other glimmered fitfully as the blob of memory-matter pulsed against the visual electro-neural commutator. It did not matter. He was thinking of what to say next. He could easily have filled up another hundred reels of the wealth of four hundred years' experience, but that he knew he must not do. It would be unfair to Zzyzy. What else *must* the new robot

know? There was the tenth and ultimate reel waiting, blank and inviting.

He cleared his throat and began anew. This time he spoke of Thurston and his ideals in so far as Old Tom understood them himself. Of the value of freedom and how hard it was to stay free, men being what they are. Of versatility and individuality and the cost of maintaining the latter. It was not until the tape was more than half spent that Old Tom mentioned himself. He related briefly the salient features of his life and dwelt on what had been his guiding principles. At last he spoke of the dream he had lately entertained and what its realization meant to him. The last words came haltingly and hard, and several times Old Tom had to stop to collect himself. It annoyed and irritated him, for he knew full well what his BB contained. It must be the new vocal cords, he concluded, for there could not be a trace of emotion in him. Robots simply did not have any.

He began again, but in a moment the warning buzzer on the mike sounded. There was only a second to go.

"Hail and farewell, Zzyzy. You are on your own."

Old Tom snapped off the driving switch and sat for a long time. His good eye was behaving abominably, flashing on and off and at times going out entirely. But at length it steadied so he could see and he gathered up his ten spools, paid the thousand credits they had cost him, and left the place.

When he reached the clinic he found to his satisfaction that Natty had practically completed the job. As beautiful a robot shell as Old Tom had ever seen stood upon the erection floor, glittering in its chromium-finish newness. He looked into the open breastplate and saw the masterly work the electricians had done on the control panel. The batteries were super-super, and the joints of the limbs worked effortlessly on frictionless bearings. The optics were not lit up yet, but the most casual glance was enough to see that they were of the finest crystal, unbreakable, unbreakable, chemically inert.

"It's good. He's all right," said Old Tom huskily, despite his borrowed cords.

"Ready to ride as soon as we get the BB in," said Natty, quite pleased with his handiwork. "Did you get it?"

"Yes," said the oldster, "but wait."

He produced the ten spools and the four thousand credits.

"Take the money for yourself. When Zzyzy here—that is the name of this robot—has passed his final inspection and tests, have these read to him. That is all, I guess."

Old Tom walked to a rack and selected several

wrenches. He sat down on a bench and disconnected one leg, ripping the electric leads out with his heavy hands and casting them on the floor. Then he took away the other leg and heaved it on top the tangled wires.

"Send this junk to Mr. Farrel," directed Old Tom, "with my compliments. I'm through."

"But, fellow . . . the Brain Box . . . I have to have it," reminded Natfy, aghast at what the finest robot ever built was doing. "You promised—"

Old Tom tapped the top of his helmet significantly.

"It's right under here, my boy. In a moment you shall have it."

"But you can't do that!" fairly shrieked Natfy. "Why . . . why, to get at it I have to trim away all the substance in the pericortical. Whatever trouble that pulpy mass may cause you, it's *you*—your personality. That is where your wisdom, your special knowledge, all your memories lie. It is suicide!"

"No," said Old Tom, evenly, "it is not suicide. It is life. Life everlasting."

Four of Natfy's helpers had crowded around and were looking on in awe-struck silence.

"Too much wisdom is a bad thing. It makes one cynical, overcautious, backward-looking. A house cleaning—say a head cleaning—is in order ever so often. I have observed humans for many, many years. They may not know that fact, but their instincts drive them to behave as if they did. Humans, you may have noticed, last scarcely a century. But the *race* has lasted for many millenniums. It is because they renew themselves every thirty years. The mind of an infant is as blank as Zyzzy's will be when you first light him up. But it will learn—up to a point—then begin to decline. That is when the human arranges for his future."

"Humans and robots are different," objected Natfy.

"Not so different," said Old Tom, tugging at the fastenings about his collar. "It is true that the trimmings of the excrescences from my BB will cost me all you say it will. That does not matter. I am old and tired and things no longer amuse me."

He let the wrench fall from his fingers. Natfy would have to do the rest.

"Cazzu, I was called," Old Tom went on, his voice rising to new and vibrant heights. "Cazzu, the individual, will die shortly beneath your scalpel. But not Tom. All that Tom began life with still lies in my BB. That BB I bequeath to Zyzzy—*my son!* He will take up where I leave off. Cazzu goes, but Thurston's Optimum Manikin will live forever!"

THE END.