

Brillo

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Crazy season for cops is August. In August the riots start. Not just to get the pigs off campus (where they don't even happen to be, because school is out) or to rid the railroad flats of *Rattus norvegicus*, but they start for no reason at all. Some bunch of sweat-stinking kids get a hydrant spouting and it drenches the storefront of a shylock who lives most of his time in Kipps Bay when he's not sticking it to his Spanish Harlem customers, and he comes out of the pawnshop with a Louisville Slugger somebody hocked once, and he takes a swing at a *mestizo* urchin, and the next thing the precinct knows, they've got a three-star riot going on two full city blocks; then they call in the copchoppers from Governor's Island and spray the neighborhood with quiescent, and after a while the beat cops go in with breathers, in threes, and they start pulling in the bash-head cases. Why did it get going? A little water on a store window that hadn't been squeegee'd since 1974? A short temper? Some kid flipping some guy the bird? No.

Crazy season is August.

Housewives take their steam irons to their old men's heads. Basset hound salesmen who trundle display suitcases full of ready-to-wear for eleven months, without squeaking at their bosses, suddenly pull twine knives and carve up taxi drivers. Suicides go out twenty-story windows and off the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge like confetti at an astronaut's parade down Fifth Avenue. Teenaged rat packs steal half a dozen cars and drag-race them three abreast against traffic up White Plains Road till they run them through the show windows of supermarkets. No reason. Just August. Crazy season.

It was August, that special heat of August when the temperature keeps going till it reaches the secret kill-crazy mugginess at which point eyeballs roll up white in florid faces and gravity knives appear as if by magic, it was *that* time of August, when Brillo arrived in the precinct.

Buzzing softly (the sort of sound an electric watch makes), he stood

inert in the center of the precinct station's bullpen, his bright blue-anodized metal a gleaming contrast to the paintless worn floorboards. He stood in the middle of momentary activity, and no one who passed him seemed to be able to pay attention to anything *but* him:

Not the two plainclothes officers duckwalking between them a sixty-two-year-old pervert whose specialty was flashing just before the subway doors closed.

Not the traffic cop being berated by his Sergeant for having allowed his parking ticket receipts to get waterlogged in a plastic bag bombardment initiated by the last few residents of a condemned building.

Not the tac/squad macers reloading their weapons from the supply dispensers.

Not the line of beat cops forming up in ranks for their shift on the street.

Not the Desk Sergeant trying to book three hookers who had been arrested soliciting men queued up in front of NBC for a network game show called "Sell a Sin."

Not the fuzzette using a wrist bringalong on the mugger who had tried to snip a cutpurse on her as she patrolled Riverside Drive.

None of them, even engaged in the hardly ordinary business of sweeping up felons, could avoid staring at him. All eyes kept returning to the robot: a squat cylinder resting on tiny trunnions. Brillo's optical sensors, up in his dome-shaped head, bulged like the eyes of an acromegalic insect. The eyes caught the glint of the overhead neons.

The eyes, particularly, made the crowd in the muster room nervous. The crowd milled and thronged, but did not clear until the Chief of Police spread his hands in a typically Semitic gesture of impatience and yelled, "All right, already, can you clear this room!"

There was suddenly a great deal of unoccupied space.

Chief Santorini turned back to the robot. And to Reardon.

Frank Reardon shifted his weight uneasily from one foot to the other.

He absorbed the Police Chiefs look and tracked it out around the muster room, watching the men who were watching the robot. *His* robot. Not that he owned it any longer... but he still thought of it as his. He understood how Dr. Victor Frankenstein could feel paternal about a congeries of old spare body parts.

He watched them as they sniffed around the robot like bulldogs delighted with the discovery of a new fire hydrant. Even beefy Sgt. Loyo, the Desk Sergeant, up in his perch at the far end of the shabby room, looked clearly suspicious of the robot.

Santorini had brought two uniformed Lieutenants with him. Administrative assistants. Donkey work protocol guardians. By-the-book civil service types, lamps lit against any *ee-vil* encroachment of dat ole debbil machine into the paydirt of human beings' job security. They looked grim.

The FBI man sat impassively on a stout wooden bench that ran the length of the room. He sat under posters for the Police Athletic League, the 4th War Bond Offensive, Driver Training Courses and an advertisement for *The Christian Science Monitor* with a FREE—TAKE ONE pocket attached. He had not said a word since being introduced to Reardon. And Reardon had even forgotten the name. Was that part of the camouflage of FBI agents? He sat there looking steely-eyed and jut-jawed. He looked grim, too.

Only the whiz kid from the Mayor's office was smiling as he stepped once again through the grilled door into the bullpen. He smiled as he walked slowly all around the robot. He smiled as he touched the matte finish of the machine, and he smiled as he made pleasure noises: as if he was inspecting a new car on a showroom floor, on the verge of saying, "I'll take it. What terms can I get?"

He looked out through the wirework of the bullpen at Reardon. "Why do you call it Brillo?"

Reardon hesitated a moment, trying desperately to remember the whiz kid's first name. He was an engineer, not a public relations man. Universal Electronics should have sent Wendell down with Brillo. *He* knew how to talk to these image-happy clowns from City Hall. Knew how to butter and baste them so they put ink to contract. But part of the deal when he'd been forced to sell Reardon Electronics into merger with UE (after the stock

raid and the power grab, which he'd lost) was that he stay on with projects like Brillo. Stay with them all the way to the bottom line.

It was as pleasant as clapping time while your wife made love to another man.

"It's... a nickname. Somebody at UE thought it up. Thought it was funny."

The whiz kid looked blank. "What's funny about Brillo?"

"Metal fuzz," the Police Chief rasped. Light dawned on the whiz kid's face, and he began to chuckle; Reardon nodded, then caught the look of animosity on the Police Chief's face. Reardon looked away quickly from the old man's fiercely seamed features. It was getting more grim, much tenser.

Captain Summit came slowly down the stairs to join them. He was close to Reardon's age, but much grayer. He moved with one hand on the banister, like an old man.

Why do they all look so tired? Reardon wondered. And why do they seem to look wearier, more frightened, every time they look at the robot? Are they afraid it's come around their turn to be replaced? Is that the way I looked when UE forced me out of the company I created?

Summit eyed the robot briefly, then walked over and sat down on the bench several feet apart from the silent FBI man. The whiz kid came out of the bullpen. They all looked at Summit.

"Okay, I've picked a man to work with him... it, I mean." He was looking at Reardon. "Mike Polchik. He's a good cop; young and alert. Good record. Nothing extraordinary, no showboater, just a solid cop. He'll give your machine a fair trial."

"That's fine. Thank you, Captain," Reardon said. "He'll be right down. I pulled him out of the formation. He's getting his gear. He'll be right down."

The whiz kid cleared his throat. Reardon looked at him. *He wasn't tired. But then, he didn't wear a uniform. He wasn't pushed up against what these men found in the streets every day. He lives in Darien,*

probably, Frank Reardon thought, *and buys those suits in quiet little shops where there're never more than three customers at a time.*

"How many of these machines can your company make in a year?" the whiz kid asked.

"It's not my company anymore."

"I mean the company you work for—Universal."

"Inside a year: we can have them coming out at a rate of a hundred a month." Reardon paused. "Maybe more."

The whiz kid grinned. "We could replace every beat patrolman..."

A spark-gap was leaped. The temperature dropped. Reardon saw the uniformed men stiffen. Quickly, he said, "Police robots are intended to *augment* the existing force." Even more firmly he said, "Not replace it. We're trying to *help* the policeman, not get rid of him."

"Oh, hey, sure. Of *course!*" the whiz kid said, glancing around the room. "That's what I meant," he added unnecessarily. Everyone knew what he meant. The silence at the bottom of the Marianas Trench. And in that silence: heavy footsteps, coming down the stairs from the second-floor locker rooms.

He stopped at the foot of the stairs, one shoe tipped up on the final step; he stared at the robot in the bullpen for a long moment. Then the patrolman walked over to Captain Summit, only once more casting a glance into the bullpen. Summit smiled reassuringly at the patrolman and then gestured toward Reardon.

"Mike, this is Mr. Reardon. He designed—the robot. Mr. Reardon, Patrolman Polchik."

Reardon extended his hand and Polchik exerted enough pressure to make him wince.

Polchik was two inches over six feet tall, and weighty. Muscular; thick forearms; the kind found on men who work in foundries. Light, crew-cut hair. Square face, wide open; strong jaw, hard eyes under heavy brow ridges. Even his smile looked hard. He was ready for work, with a .32

Needle Positive tilt-stuck on its velcro fastener at mid-thigh and an armament bandolier slanted across his broad chest. His aura keyed one word: cop.

"The Captain tells me I'm gonna be walkin' with your machine t'night."

Nodding, flexing his fingers, Reardon said, "Yes, that's right. The Captain probably told you, we want to test Brillo under actual foot patrol conditions. That's what he was designed for: foot patrol."

"Been a long time since I done foot patrol," Polchik said: "Work a growler, usually."

"Beg pardon?"

Summit translated. "Growler: prowl car."

"Oh. Oh, I see," Reardon said, trying to be friendly. "It's only for tonight, Mike," the Captain said. "Just a test."

Polchik nodded as though he understood far more than either Reardon or Summit had told him. He did not turn his big body, but his eyes went to the robot. Through the grillework Brillo (with the sort of sound an electric watch makes) buzzed softly, staring at nothing. Polchik looked it up and down, slowly, very carefully. Finally he said, "Looks okay to me."

"Preliminary tests," Reardon said, "everything short of actual field runs... everything's been tested out. You won't have any trouble."

Polchik murmured something. "I beg your pardon?" Frank Reardon said. "On-the-job-training," Polchik repeated. He did not smile. But a sound ran through the rest of the station house crew.

"Well, whenever you're ready, Officer Polchik," the whiz kid said suddenly. Reardon winced. The kid had a storm-window salesman's tone even when he was trying to be disarming.

"Yeah. Right." Polchik moved toward the front door. The robot did not move. Polchik stopped and turned around. Everyone was watching.

"I thought he went on his own, uh, independ'nt?" They were all watching Reardon now. "He's been voice-keyed to me since the plant,"

Reardon said. "To shift command, I'll have to prime him with your voice." He turned to the robot. "Brillo, come here, please."

The word *please*.

The buzzing became more distinct for a moment as the trunnions withdrew inside the metal skin. Then the sound diminished, became barely audible, and the robot stepped forward smoothly. He walked to Reardon and stopped.

"Brillo, this is Officer Mike Polchik. You'll be working with him tonight. He'll be your superior and you'll be under his immediate orders." Reardon waved Polchik over. "Would you say a few words, so he can program your voice-print?"

Polchik looked at Reardon. Then he looked at the robot. Then he looked around the muster room. Desk Sergeant Loyo was grinning. "Whattaya want me to say?"

"Anything."

One of the detectives had come down the stairs. No one had noticed before. Lounging against the railing leading to the squad room upstairs, he giggled. "Tell him some'a your best friends are can openers, Mike."

The whiz kid and the Chief of Police threw him a look. Summit said, "Bratten!" He shut up. After a moment he went back upstairs. Quietly.

"Go ahead. Anything," Reardon urged Polchik.

The patrolman drew a deep breath, took another step forward and said, self-consciously, "Come on, let's go. It's gettin' late."

The soft buzzing (the sort of sound an electric watch makes) came once again from somewhere deep inside the robot. "Yes, sir," he said, in the voice of Frank Reardon, and moved very smoothly, very quickly, toward Polchik. The patrolman stepped back quickly, tried to look casual, turned and started toward the door of the station house once more. The robot followed.

When they had gone, the whiz kid dry washed his hands, smiled at everyone and said, "Now it begins."

Reardon winced again. The Desk Sergeant, Loyo, rattled pencils, tapped them even, dumped them into an empty jelly jar on the blotter desk. Everyone else looked away. The FBI man smiled.

From outside the precinct house the sounds of the city seemed to grow louder in the awkward silence. In all that noise no one even imagined he could hear the sound of the robot.

Polchik was trying the locks on the burglarproof gates of the shops lining Amsterdam between 82nd and 83rd. The robot was following him, doing the same thing. Polchik was getting burned up. He turned up 83rd and entered the alley behind the shops, retracing his steps back toward 82nd. The robot followed him.

Polchik didn't like being followed. It made him feel uneasy. *Damned piece of junk!* he thought. *He rips one of them gates off the hinges, there'll be hell to pay down at the precinct.*

Polchik rattled a gate. He moved on. The robot followed. (*Like a little kid*, Polchik thought.) The robot grabbed the gate and clanged it back and forth. Polchik spun on him. "Listen, dammit, stop makin' all that racket! Y'wanna wake everybody? You know what time it is?"

"1:37 A.M.," the robot replied, in Reardon's voice.

Polchik looked heavenward.

Shaking his head he moved on. The robot stopped. "Officer Polchik." Mike Polchik turned, exasperated. *What now?*

"I detect a short circuit in this alarm system," the robot said. He was standing directly under the Morse-Dictograph Security panel. "If it is not repaired, it will cancel the fail-safe circuits."

"I'll call it in," Polchik said, pulling the pin-mike on its spring-return wire from his callbox. He was about to thumb on the wristband callbox, when the robot extruded an articulated arm from its chest. "I am equipped to repair the unit without assistance," the robot said, and a light-beam began to pulse at the end of the now-goosenecked arm.

"Leave it alone!"

"A simple 155-0 system," the robot said. "Fixed temperature unit with heat detectors, only barely exceeding NFPA standard 74 and NFPA 72-A requirements." The arm snaked up to the panel and followed the break line around the outside.

"Don't screw with it! It'll set it—" The panel accordion-folded back. Polchik's mouth fell open. "Oh my God," he mumbled.

The robot's extruded arm worked inside for a long moment, then withdrew. "It is fully operable now." The panel folded back into place.

Polchik let the pin-mike slip from his fingers and it zzzzz'd back into the wristband. He walked away down the alley, looking haunted.

Down at the corner, the Amsterdam Inn's lights shone weakly, reflecting dully in the street oil slick. Polchik paused at the mouth of the alley and pulled out the pin-mike again. He thumbed the callbox on his wrist, *feeling* the heavy shadow of the robot behind him.

"Polchik," he said into the mike.

"Okay, Mike?" crackled the reply. "How's yer partner doing?"

Glancing over his shoulder, Polchik saw the robot standing impassively, gooseneck arm vanished; ten feet behind him. Respectfully. "Don't call it my partner."

Laughter on the other end of the line. "What's'a' matter, Mike? 'Fraid of him?"

"Ahhh... cut the clownin'. Everything quiet here, Eighty-two and Amsterdam."

"Okay. Oh, hey, Mike, remember... if it starts to rain, get yer partner under an awning before he starts t'rust!"

He was still laughing like a jackass as Polchik let the spring-wire zzzzz back into the callbox.

"Hey, Mike! What you got there?"

Polchik looked toward the corner. It was Rico, the bartender from the Amsterdam Inn.

"It's a robot," Polchik said. He kept his voice very flat. He was in no mood for further ribbing.

"Real he is, yeah? No kidding?" Rico's face always looked to Polchik like a brass artichoke, ready to be peeled. But he was friendly enough. And cooperative. It was a funky neighborhood and Polchik had found Rico useful more than once. "What's he supposed to do, eh?"

"He's supposed to be a cop." Glum.

Rico shook his vegetable head. "What they gonna do next? Robots. So what happens t'you, Mike? They make you a detective?"

"Sure. And the week after that they make me Captain."

Rico looked uncertain, didn't know whether he should laugh or sympathize. Finally, he said, "Hey, I got a bottle for ya," feeling it would serve, whatever his reaction should properly have been. "Betcha your wife likes it... from Poland, imported stuff. Got grass or weeds or some kinda stuff in it. S'posed to be really sensational."

For just a second, peripherally seen, Polchik thought the robot had stirred.

"*Escuchar!* I'll get it for you."

He disappeared inside the bar before Polchik could stop him. The robot *did* move. It trembled... ?

Rico came out with a paper bag, its neck twisted closed around what was obviously a bottle of liquor.

"I'll have to pick it up tomorrow," Polchik said. "I don't have the car tonight."

"I'll keep it for you. If I'm on relief when you come by, ask Maldonado."

The robot was definitely humming. Polchik could hear it. (The sort of sound an electric watch makes.) It suddenly moved, closing the distance, ten feet between them, till it passed Polchik, swiveled to face Rico—who stumbled backward halfway to the entrance to the Amsterdam Inn—then swiveled back to face Polchik.

"Visual and audial data indicate a one-to-one extrapolation of same would result in a conclusion that a gratuity has been offered to you, Officer Polchik. Further, logic indicates that you intend to accept said gratuity. Such behavior is a programmed infraction of the law. It is—"

"Shut up!"

Rico stood very close to the door, wide-eyed.

"I'll see you tomorrow night," Polchik said to him.

"Officer Polchik," the robot went on as though there had been no interruption, "it is clear if you intend to accept a gratuity, you will be breaking the law and liable to arrest and prosecution under Law Officer Statutes number—"

"I said shuddup, dammit!" Polchik said, louder. "I don't even know what the hell you're talkin' about, but I said shuddup, and that's an *order*!"

"Yes, sir," the robot replied instantly. "However, my data tapes will record this conversation in its entirety and it will be transcribed into a written report at the conclusion of our patrol."

"What?" Polchik felt gears gnashing inside his head, thought of gears, thought of the robot, rejected gears and thought about Captain Summit. Then he thought about gears again... crushing him.

Rico's voice intruded, sounding scared. "What's he saying? What's that about a report?"

"Now wait a minute, Brillo," Polchik said, walking up to the robot. "Nothin's happened here you can write a report on."

The robot's voice—*Reardon's* voice, Polchik thought irritatedly—was very firm. "Logic indicates a high probability that a gratuity has been accepted in the past, and another will be accepted in the future."

Polchik felt chili peppers in his gut. Hooking his thumbs in his belt—a pose he automatically assumed when he was trying to avert trouble—he deliberately toned down his voice. "Listen, Brillo, you forget the whole thing, you understand. You just *forget* it."

"Am I to understand you desire my tapes to be erased?"

"Yeah, that's right. Erase it."

"Is that an order?"

"It's an order!"

The robot hummed to itself for a heartbeat, then, "Primary programming does not allow erasure of data tapes. Tapes can be erased only post-transcription or by physically removing same from my memory bank."

"Listen—" Rico started, "I don't wan' no trub—"

Polchik impatiently waved him to silence. He didn't need any complications right now. "Listen, Brillo..."

"Yes. I hear it."

Polchik was about to continue speaking. He stopped. *I hear it? This damned thing's gone bananas.* "I didn't say anything yet."

"Oh. I'm sorry, sir. I thought you were referring to the sound of a female human screaming on 84th Street, third-floor front apartment."

Polchik looked everywhichway. "What are you *talkin'* about? You crazy or something?"

"No, sir. I am a model X-44. Though under certain special conditions my circuits can malfunction, conceivably, nothing in my repair programming parameters approximates 'crazy.' "

"Then just shuddup and let's get this thing straightened out. Now, try'n understand this. You're just a robot, see. You don't understand the way real people do things. Like, for instance, when Rico here offers me a bottle of—"

"If you'll pardon me, sir, the female human is now screaming in the 17,000-cycle-per-second range. My tapes are programmed to value-judge such a range as concomitant with fear and possibly extreme pain. I suggest we act at once."

"Hey, Polchik..." Rico began.

"No, shuddup, Rico. Hey, listen, robot, Brillo, whatever: you mean you can *hear* some woman screaming, two blocks away and up three flights? Is the window open?" Then he stopped. "What'm I doin'? Talking to this thing!" He remembered the briefing he'd been given by Captain Summit. "Okay. You say you can hear her... let's find her."

The robot took off at top speed. Back into the alley behind the Amsterdam Inn, across the 82nd-83rd block, across the 83rd-84th block, full-out with no clanking or clattering. Polchik found himself pounding along ten feet behind the robot, then twenty feet, then thirty feet; suddenly he was puffing, his chest heavy, the armament bandolier banging the mace cans and the riot-prod and the bullhorn and the peppergas shpritzers and the extra clips of Needier ammunition against his chest and back.

The robot emerged from the alley, turned a 90° angle with the sharpest cut Polchik had ever seen, and jogged up 84th Street. Brillo was caught for a moment in the glare of a neon streetlamp, then was taking the steps of a crippled old brownstone three at a time.

Troglodytes with punch-presses were berkeleying Polchik's lungs and stomach. His head was a dissenter's punchboard. But he followed. More slowly now; and had trouble negotiating the last flight of stairs to the third floor. As he gained the landing, he was hauling himself hand-over-hand up the banister. *If God'd wanted cops to walk beats he wouldn't'a created the growler!*

The robot, Brillo, X-44, was standing in front of the door marked 3-A. He was quivering like a hound on point. (Buzzing softly with the sort of sound an electric watch makes.) Now Polchik could hear the woman himself, above the roar of blood in his temples.

"Open up in there!" Polchik bellowed. He ripped the .32 Needle Positive off its velcro fastener and banged on the door with the butt. The lanyard was twisted; he untwisted it. "This's the police. I'm demanding entrance to a private domicile under Public Law 22-809, allowing for supersed'nce of the 'home-castle' rule under emergency conditions. I said *open up in there!*"

The screaming went up and plateau'd a few hundred cycles higher, and

Polchik snapped at the robot, "Get outta my way."

Brillo obediently moved back a pace, and in the narrow hallway Polchik braced himself against the wall, locked the exoskeletal rods on his boots, dropped his crash-hat visor, jacked up his leg and delivered a powerful *savate* kick at the door.

It was a pre-SlumClear apartment. The door bowed and dust spurted from the seams, but it held. Despite the rods, Polchik felt a searing pain gash up through his leg. He fell back, hopping about painfully, hearing himself going "oo— oo—oo" and then prepared himself to have to do it again. The robot moved up in front of him, said, "Excuse me, sir," and smoothly cleaved the door down the center with the edge of a metal hand that had somehow suddenly developed a cutting edge. He reached in, grasped both sliced edges of the hardwood, and ripped the door outward in two even halves.

"Oh," Polchik stared open-mouthed for only an instant.

Then they were inside.

The unshaven man with the beer gut protruding from beneath his olive drab skivvy undershirt was slapping the hell out of his wife. He had thick black tufts of hair that bunched like weed corsages in his armpits. She was half-lying over the back of a sofa with the springs showing. Her eyes were swollen and blue-black as dried prunes. One massive bruise was already draining down her cheek into her neck. She was weakly trying to fend off her husband's blows with ineffectual wrist-blocks.

"Okay! That's it!" Polchik yelled.

The sound of another voice, in the room with them, brought the man and his wife to a halt. He turned his head, his left hand still tangled in her long black hair, and he stared at the two intruders.

He began cursing in Spanish. Then he burst into a guttural combination of English and Spanish, and finally slowed in his own spittle to a ragged English. "... won't let me alone... go out my house... always botherin' won't let me alone... damn..." and he went back to Spanish as he pushed the woman from him and started across the room. The woman tumbled, squealing, out of sight behind the sofa.

The man stumbled crossing the room, and Polchik's needler tracked him. Behind him he heard the robot softly humming, and then it said, "Sir, analysis indicates psychotic glaze over subject's eyes."

The man grabbed a half-filled quart bottle of beer off the television set, smashed it against the leading edge of the TV, giving it a half-twist (which registered instantly in Polchik's mind: this guy knew how to get a ragged edge on the weapon; he was an experienced bar-room brawler) and suddenly lurched toward Polchik with the jagged stump in his hand.

Abruptly, before Polchik could even thumb the needler to stun (it was on dismember), a metal blur passed him, swept into the man, lifted him high in the air with one hand, turned him upside-down so the bottle, small plastic change and an unzipped shoe showered down onto the threadbare rug. Arms and legs fluttered helplessly.

"Aieeee!" the man screamed, his hair hanging down, his face plugged red with blood. "*Madre de dios!*"

"Leave him alone!" It was the wife screaming, charging—if it could be called that, on hands and knees—from behind the sofa. She clambered to her feet and ran at the robot, screeching and cursing, pounding her daywork-reddened fists against his gleaming hide.

"Okay, okay," Polchik said, his voice lower but strong enough to get through to her. Pulling her and her hysteria away from the robot, he ordered, "Brillo, put him down."

"You goddam cops got no right bustin' in here," the man started complaining the moment he was on his feet again. "Goddam cops don't let a man'n his wife alone for nothin' no more. You got a warrant? Huh? You gonna get in trouble, plenty trouble. This my home, cop, 'home is a man's castle,' hah? Right? Right? An' you an' this tin can..." He was waving his arms wildly.

Brillo wheeled a few inches toward the man. The stream of abuse cut off instantly, the man's face went pale, and he threw up his hands to protect himself.

"This man can be arrested for assault and battery, failure to heed a legitimate police order, attempted assault on a police officer with a deadly weapon, and disturbing the peace." Brillo said. His flat, calm voice seemed

to echo off the grimy walls.

"It... it's talkin'! Flavio! *Demonio!*" The wife spiraled toward hysteria again.

"Shall I inform him of his rights under the Public Laws, sir?" Brillo asked Polchik.

"You gon' arrest me? Whu'for?"

"Brillo..." Polchik began.

Brillo started again, "Assault and battery, failure to—"

Polchik looked annoyed. "Shuddup, I wasn't asking you to run it again. Just shuddup."

"I din't do nothin'! You come bust t'rough my door when me an' my wife wass arguin', an' you beat me up. Look'a the bruise on my arm." The arm was slightly inflamed where Brillo had grabbed him.

"Flavio!" the woman whimpered.

"Isabel; *callete la boca!*"

"I live right downstairs," a voice said from behind them. "He's always beating her up, and he drinks all the time and then he pisses out the window!" Polchik spun and a man in Levi's and striped pajama tops was standing in the ruined doorway. "Sometimes it looks like it's raining on half my window. Once I put my hand out to see—"

"Get outta here!" Polchik bellowed, and the man vanished.

"I din't do nothin'!" Flavio said again, semi-surly.

"My data tapes," Brillo replied evenly, "will clearly show your actions."

"Day to tapes? Whass he talkin' 'bout?" Flavio turned to Polchik, an unaccustomed ally against the hulking machine. Polchik felt a sense of camaraderie with the man.

"He's got everything down recorded... like on TV. And sound tapes, too." Polchik looked back at him and recognized something in the dismay

on the man's fleshy face.

Brillo asked again, "Shall I inform him of his rights, sir?"

"Officer, sir, you ain't gonna 'rest him?" the woman half asked, half pleaded, her eyes swollen almost closed, barely open, but tearful.

"He came after me with a bottle," Polchik said. "And he didn't do you much good, neither."

"He wass work op. Iss allright. He's okay now. It wass joss a'argumen'. Nobody got hort."

Brillo's hum got momentarily higher. "Madam, you should inspect your face in my mirror." He hummed and his skin became smoothly reflective, "My sensors detect several contusions and abrasions, particularly..."

"Skip it," Polchik said abruptly. "Come on, Brillo, let's go."

Brillo's metal hide went blank again. "I have not informed the prisoner..."

"No prisoner," Polchik said. "No arrest. Let's go."

"But the data clearly shows..."

"Forget it!" Polchik turned to face the man; he was standing there looking uncertain, rubbing his arm. "And you, strongarm... lemme hear one more peep outta this apartment and you'll be in jail so fast it'll make your head swim... and for a helluva long time, too. If you get there at all. We don't like guys like you. So I'm puttin' the word out on you... I don't like guys comin' at me with bottles."

"Sir... I..."

"Come on!"

The robot followed the cop and the apartment was suddenly silent. Flavio and Isabel looked at each other sheepishly, then he began to cry, went to her and touched her bruises with the gentlest fingers.

They went downstairs, Polchik staring and trying to figure out how it

was such a massive machine could navigate the steps so smoothly. Something was going on at the base of the robot, but Polchik couldn't get a good view of it. Dust puffed out from beneath the machine. And something sparkled.

Once on the sidewalk, Brillo said, "Sir, that man should have been arrested. He was clearly violating several statues."

Polchik made a sour face. "His wife wouldn't of pressed the charge."

"He attacked a police officer with a deadly weapon."

"So that makes him Mad Dog Coll? He's scared shitless, in the future he'll watch it. For a while, at least."

Brillo was hardly satisfied at this noncomputable conclusion. "A police officer's duty is to arrest persons who are suspected of having broken the law. Civil or criminal courts have the legal jurisdiction to decide the suspect's guilt or innocence. Your duty, sir, was to arrest that man."

"Sure, sure. Have it *your* way, half the damn city'll be in jail, and the other half'll be springin' 'em out."

Brillo said nothing, but Polchik thought the robot's humming sounded sullen. He had a strong suspicion the machine wouldn't forget it. Or Rico, either.

And farther up the street, to cinch Polchik's suspicion, the robot once more tried to reinforce his position. "According to the Peace Officer Responsibility Act of 1975, failure of an officer to take into custody person or persons indisputably engaged in acts that contravene..."

"Awright, dammit, knock it off. I tole you why I din't arrest that poor jughead, so stop bustin' my chops with it. You ain't happy, you don't like it, tell my Sergeant!"

Sergeant, hell, Polchik thought. *This stuff goes right to Captain Summit, Santorini and the Commissioner. Probably the Mayor. Maybe the President; who the hell knows?*

Petulantly (it seemed to Polchik), the robot resumed, "Reviewing my tapes, I find the matter of the bottle of liquor offered as a gratuity still

unresolved. If I am to—"

Polchik spun left and kicked with all his might at a garbage can bolted to an iron fence. The lid sprang off and clanged against the fence at the end of its short chain. "I've had it with you... you nonreturnable piece of scrap crap!" He wanted very much to go on, but he didn't know what to say. All he knew for certain was that he'd never had such a crummy night in all his life. It *couldn't* just be this goddammed robot—staring back blankly. It was *everything*. The mortgage payment was due; Benjy had to go in to the orthodontist and where the hell was the money going to come from for *that*; Dorothy had called the precinct just before he'd come down, to tell him the hot water heater had split and drowned the carpets in the kid's bedroom; and to top it all off, he'd been assigned this buzzing pain in the ass and got caught with a little juice passed by that nitwit Rico; he'd had to have this Brillo pain tell him there was a hassle two blocks away; he was sure as God made little green apples going to get a bad report out of this, maybe get set down, maybe get reprimanded, maybe get censured... he didn't know what all.

But one thing was certain: this metal bird-dog, this stuffed-shirt barracks lawyer with the trailalong of a ten-year-old kid behind his big brother, this nuisance in metal underwear, this... this... *thing* was of no damned earthly use to a working cop pulling a foot beat!

On the other hand, a voice that spoke with the voice of Mike Polchik said, *he did keep that jughead from using a broken bottle on you.*

"Shuddup!" Polchik said.

"I beg your pardon?" answered the robot.

Ingrate! said the inner voice.

It was verging on that chalky hour before dawn, when the light filtering out of the sky had a leprous, sickly look. Mike Polchik was a much older man.

Brillo had interfered in the apprehension of Milky Kyser, a well-known car thief. Mike had spotted him walking slowly and contemplatively along a line of parked cars on Columbus Avenue, carrying a tightly rolled copy of the current issue of *Life* magazine.

When he had collared Milky, the robot had buzzed up to them and politely inquired precisely what in the carborundum Polchik thought he was doing. Polchik had responded with what was becoming an hysterical reaction-formation to *anything* the metal cop said. "Shuddup!"

Brillo had persisted, saying he was programmed to protect the civil rights of the members of the community, and as far as he could tell, having "scanned all data relevant to the situation at hand," the gentleman now dangling from Polchik's grip was spotlessly blameless of even the remotest scintilla of wrongdoing. Polchik had held Milky with one hand and with the other gesticulated wildly as he explained, "Look, dimdumb, this is Milky Kyser, AKA Irwin Kayser, AKA Clarence Irwin, AKA Jack Milk, AKA God Knows Who All. He is a well-known dip and car thief, and he will use that rolled-up copy of the magazine to jack-and-snap the door handle of the proper model car, any number of which is currently parked, you will note, along this street... unless I arrest him! Now will you kindly get the hell outta my hair and *back off!*"

But it was no use. By the time Brillo had patiently repeated the civil rights story, reiterated pertinent sections of the Peace Officer Responsibility Act of 1975 and topped it off with a *precis* of the Miranda-Escobedo-Baum Supreme Court decisions so adroit and simplified even a confirmed tautologist would have applauded, Milky himself—eyes glittering and a sneer that was hardly a smile on his ferret face—was echoing it, word for word.

The robot had given Milky a thorough course in legal cop-outs, before Polchik's dazed eyes.

"Besides," Milky told Polchik, with as much dignity as he could muster, hanging as he was from the cop's meaty fist, "I ain't done nuthin', and just because I been busted once or twice..."

"*Once or twice!?*" Polchik yanked the rolled-up magazine out of Milky's hand and raised it to clobber him. Milky pulled in his head like a turtle, wincing.

But in that fraction of a second, Polchik suddenly saw a picture flashed on the wall of his mind. A picture of Desk Sergeant Loyo and Captain Summit and Chief Santorini and the Mayor's toady and that silent FBI man, all watching a TV screen. And on the screen, there was the pride of the Force, Officer Mike Polchik, beaming Milky Kyser with a semi-lethal

copy of *Life* magazine.

Polchik held the magazine poised, trembling with the arrested movement. Milky, head now barely visible from between his shoulders, peeped up from behind his upraised hands. He looked like a mole.

"Beat it," Polchik growled. "Get the hell out of this precinct, Milky. If you're spotted around here again, you're gonna get busted. And don't stop to buy no magazines."

He let Milky loose.

The mole metamorphosed into a ferret once more. And straightening himself, he said, "An' don't call me 'Milky' any more. My given name is Irwin."

"You got three seconds t'vanish from my sight!"

Milky *ne* Irwin hustled off down the street. At the corner he stopped and turned around. He cupped his hands and yelled back, "Hey, robot... thanks!"

Brillo was about to reply, when Polchik bellowed, "Will you *please!*" The robot turned and said, very softly in Reardon's voice, "You are still holding Mr. Kyser's magazine."

Polchik was weary. Infinitely weary. "You hear him askin' for it?" He walked away from the robot and, as he passed a sidewalk dispenser, stepped on the dispodpedal, and flipped the magazine into the receptacle.

"I saved a piece of cherry pie for you, Mike," the waitress said. Polchik looked up from his uneaten hot (now cold) roast beef sandwich and French fries. He shook his head.

"Thanks anyway. Just another cuppa coffee."

The waitress had lost her way somewhere beyond twenty-seven. She was a nice person. She went home to her husband every morning. She didn't fool around. Extra mates under the new lottery were not her interest; she just didn't fool around. But she liked Mike Polchik. He, like her, was a very nice person.

"What's the matter, Mike?"

Polchik looked out the window of the diner. Brillo was standing directly under a neon streetlamp. He couldn't hear it from here, but he was sure the thing was buzzing softly to itself (with the sort of sound an electric watch makes).

"Him."

"That?" The waitress looked past him.

"Uh-uh. *Him.*"

"What is it?"

"My shadow."

"Mike, you okay? Try the pie, huh? Maybe a scoop of nice vanilla ice cream on top."

"Onita, please. Just a cuppa coffee, I'm fine. I got problems." He stared down at his plate again.

She looked at him for a moment longer, worried, then turned and returned the pie on its plate to the empty space behind the smudged glass of the display case. "You want fresh?" she asked.

When he didn't answer, she shrugged and came back, using the coffee siphon on the portable cart to refill his cup.

She lounged behind the counter, watching her friend, Mike Polchik, as he slowly drank his coffee; and every few minutes he'd look out at that metal thing on the corner under the streetlamp. She was a nice person.

When he rose from the booth and came to the counter, she thought he was going to apologize, or speak to her, or something, but all he said was, "You got my check?"

"What check?"

"Come on."

"Oh, Mike, for Christ's sake, what's wrong with you?"

"I want to pay the check, you mind?"

"Mike, almost—what—five years you been eating here, you ever been asked to pay a check?"

Polchik looked very tired. "Tonight I pay the check. Come on... I gotta get back on the street. He's waiting."

There was a strange look in his eyes and she didn't want to ask which "he" Polchik meant. She was afraid he meant the metal thing out there. Onita, a very nice person, didn't like strange, new things that waited under neon streetlamps. She hastily wrote out a check and slid it across the plasteel to him. He pulled change from a pocket, paid her, turned, seemed to remember something, turned back, added a tip, then swiftly left the diner.

She watched through the glass as he went up to the metal thing. Then the two of them walked away, Mike leading, the thing following.

Onita made fresh. It was a good thing she had done it so many times she could do it by reflex, without thinking. Hot coffee scalds are very painful.

At the corner, Polchik saw a car weaving toward the intersection. A Ford Electric; convertible, four years old. Still looked flashy. Top down. He could see a bunch of long-haired kids inside. He couldn't tell the girls from the boys. It bothered him.

Polchik stopped. They weren't going fast, but the car was definitely weaving as it approached the intersection. *The warrior-lizard*, he thought. It was almost an unconscious directive. He'd been a cop long enough to react to the little hints, the flutters, the inclinations. The hunches.

Polchik stepped out from the curb; unshipped his gumball from the bandolier and flashed the red light at the driver. The car slowed even more; now it was crawling.

"Pull it over, kid!" he shouted.

For a moment he thought they were ignoring him, that the driver might not have heard him, that they'd try and make a break for it... that

they'd speed up and sideswipe him. But the driver eased the car to the curb and stopped.

Then he slid sidewise, pulled up his legs and crossed them neatly at the ankles. On the top of the dashboard.

Polchik walked around to the driver's side. "Turn it off. Everybody out."

There were six of them. None of them moved. The driver closed his eyes slowly, then tipped his Irkutsk fur hat over his eyes till it rested on the bridge of his nose. Polchik reached into the car and turned it off. He pulled the keys.

"Hey! Whuzzis allabout?" one of the kids in the back seat—a boy with terminal acne—complained. His voice began and ended on a whine. Polchik re-stuck the gumball.

The driver looked up from under the fur. "Wasn't breaking any laws." He said each word very slowly, very distinctly, as though each one was on a printout.

And Polchik knew he'd been right. They were on the lizard.

He opened the door, free hand hanging at the needier. "Out. All of you, out."

Then he sensed Brillo lurking behind him, in the middle of the street. Good. *Hope a damned garbage truck hits him.*

He was getting mad. That wasn't smart. Carefully, he said, "Don't make me say it again. Move it!"

He lined them up on the sidewalk beside the car, in plain sight. Three girls, three guys. Two of the guys with long, stringy hair and the third with a scalplock. The three girls wearing tammy cuts. All six sullen-faced, drawn, dark smudges under the eyes. The lizard. But good clothes, fairly new. Money. He couldn't just hustle them, he had to be careful.

"Okay, one at a time, empty your pockets and pouches onto the hood of the car."

"Hey, we don't haveta do that just because..."

"Do it!"

"Don't argue with the pig," one of the girl said, lizard-spacing her words carefully. "He's probably trigger happy."

Brillo rolled up to Polchik. "It is necessary to have a probable cause clearance from the precinct in order to search, sir."

"Not on a stop'n'frisk," Polchik snapped, not taking his eyes off them. He had no time for nonsense with the can of cogs. He kept his eyes on the growing collection of chits, change, code-keys, combs, nail files, toke pipes and miscellanea being dumped on the Ford's hood.

"There must be grounds for suspicion even in a spot search action, sir," Brillo said.

"There's grounds. Narcotics."

"Nar... you must be outtayer mind," said the one boy who slurred his words. He was working something other than the lizard.

"That's a pig for you," said the girl who had made the trigger-happy remark.

"Look," Polchik said, "you snots aren't from around here. Odds are good if I run b&b tests on you, we'll find you're under the influence of the lizard."

"Heyyyy!" the driver said. "The *what!*"

"Warrior-lizard," Polchik said.

"Oh, ain't he the jive thug," the smartmouth girl said. "He's a word user. I'll bet he knows *all* the current rage phrases. A philologist. I'll bet he knows *all* the solecisms and colloquialisms, catch phrases, catachreses, nicknames and vulgarisms. The 'warrior-lizard,' indeed."

Damned college kids, Polchik fumed inwardly. *They always try to make you feel stupid; I coulda gone to college—if I didn't have to work. Money, they probably always had money. The little bitch.*

The driver giggled. "Are you trying to tell me, Mella, my dear, that this Peace Officer is accusing us of being under the influence of the illegal

Bolivian drug commonly called Guerrera-Tuera?" He said it with pinpointed scorn, pronouncing the Spanish broadly: gwuh-rare-uh too-err-uh.

Brillo said, "Reviewing my semantic tapes, sir, I find no analogs for 'Guerrera-Tuera' as 'warrior-lizard.' True, *guerrero* in Spanish means *warrior*, but the closest spelling I find is the feminine noun *guerra*, which translates as *war*. Neither *guerrera* nor *tuera* appear in the Spanish language. If *tuera* is a species of lizard, I don't seem to find it—"

Polchik had listened dumbly. The weight on his shoulders was monstrous. All of them were on him. The kids, that lousy stinking robot—they were making fun, such fun, such *damned* fun of him! "Keep digging," he directed them. He was surprised to hear his words emerge as a series of croaks.

"And blood and breath tests must be administered, sir—"

"Stay the hell outta this!"

"We're on our way home from a party," said the boy with the scalplock, who had been silent till then. "We took a shortcut and got lost."

"Sure," Polchik said. "In the middle of Manhattan, you got lost." He saw a small green bottle dumped out of the last girl's pouch. She was trying to push it under other items. "What's that?"

"Medicine," she said. Quickly. Very quickly. Everyone tensed.

"Let me see it." His voice was even. He put out his hand for the bottle, but all six watched his other hand, hanging beside the needier. Hesitantly, the girl picked the bottle out of the mass of goods on the car's hood, and handed him the plastic container.

Brillo said, "I am equipped with chemical sensors and reference tapes in my memory bank enumerating common narcotics. I can analyze the suspected medicine."

The six stared wordlessly at the robot. They seemed almost afraid to acknowledge its presence. Polchik handed the plastic bottle to the robot. Brillo depressed a color-coded key on a bank set flush into his left forearm, and a panel that hadn't seemed to be there a moment before slid down in

the robot's chest. He dropped the plastic bottle into the opening and the panel slid up. He stood and buzzed.

"You don't have to open the bottle?" Polchik asked. "No, sir."

"Oh."

The robot continued buzzing. Polchik felt stupid, just standing and watching. After a few moments the kids began to smirk, then to grin, then to chuckle openly, whispering among themselves. The smartmouthed girl giggled viciously. Polchik felt fifteen years old again; awkward, pimply, the butt of secret jokes among the long-legged high school girls in their miniskirts who had been so terrifyingly aloof he had never even considered asking them out. He realized with some shame that he despised these kids with their money, their cars, their flashy clothes, their dope. And most of all, their assurance. *He*, Mike Polchik, had been working hauling sides of beef from the delivery trucks to his old man's butcher shop while others were tooling around in their Electrics. He forced the memories from his mind and took out his anger and frustration on the metal idiot still buzzing beside him. "Okay, okay, how long does it take you?"

"Tsk tsk," said the driver, and went cross-eyed. Polchik ignored him. But not very well. "I am a mobile unit, sir. Experimental model 44. My parent mechanism—the Master Unit AA—at Universal Electronics laboratories is equipped to perform this function in under one minute."

"Well, hurry it up. I wanna run these hairies in."

"Gwuh-*rare*-uh too-*err*-uh," the scalplock said in a nasty undertone.

There was a soft musical tone from inside the chest compartment, the plate slid down again, and the robot withdrew the plastic bottle. He handed it to the girl. "*Now* whaddaya think you're doing?"

"Analysis confirms what the young lady attested, sir. This is a commonly prescribed nose drop for nasal congestion and certain primary allergies." Polchik was speechless.

"You are free to go," the robot said. "With our apologies. We are merely doing our jobs. Thank you."

Polchik started to protest—he *knew* he was right—but the kids were

already gathering up their belongings. He hadn't even ripped the car, which was probably where they had it locked away. But he knew it was useless. *He* was the guinea pig in this experiment, not the robot. It was all painfully clear. He knew if he interfered, if he overrode the robot's decision, it would only add to the cloud under which the robot had put him; short temper, taking a gift from a neighborhood merchant, letting the robot outmaneuver him in the apartment, false stop on Kyser... and now this. Suddenly, all Mike Polchik wanted was to go back, get out of harness, sign out, and go home to bed. Wet carpets and all. Just to bed.

Because if these metal things were what was coming, he was simply too tired to buck it.

He watched as the kids—hooting and ridiculing his impotency—piled back in the car, the girls showing their legs as they clambered over the side. The driver burned polyglas speeding up Amsterdam Avenue. In a moment they were gone.

"You see, Officer Polchik," Brillo said, "false arrest would make us both liable for serious—" But Polchik was already walking away, his shoulders slumped, the weight of his bandolier and five years on the Force too much for him.

The robot (making the sort of sound an electric watch makes) hummed after him, keeping stern vigil on the darkened neighborhood in the encroaching dawn. He could not compute despair. But he had been built to serve. He was programmed to protect, and he did it, all the way back to the precinct house.

Polchik was sitting at a scarred desk in the squad room, laboriously typing out his report on a weary IBM Selectric afflicted with *grand mal*. Across the room Reardon poked at the now-inert metal bulk of Brillo, using some sort of power tool with a teardrop-shaped lamp on top of it. The Mayor's whiz kid definitely looked sandbagged. *We don't go without sleep very often*, Polchik thought with grim satisfaction.

The door to Captain Summit's office opened, and the Captain, looking oceanic and faraway, waved him in.

"Here it comes," Polchik whispered to himself.

Summit let Polchik pass him in the doorway. He closed the door and indicated the worn plastic chair in front of the desk. Polchik sat down. "I'm not done typin' the beat report yet, Capt'n."

Summit ignored the comment. He moved over to the desk, picked up a yellow printout flimsy, and stood silent for a moment in front of Polchik, considering it.

"Accident report out of the 86th precinct uptown. Six kids in a Ford Electric convertible went out of control, smashed down a pedestrian and totaled against the bridge abutment. Three dead, three critical—not expected to live. Fifteen minutes after you let them go."

Dust.

Dried out.

Ashes.

Gray. Final.

Polchik couldn't think. Tired. Confused. Sick. Six kids.

Now they were kids, just kids, nothing else made out of old bad memories.

"One of the girls went through the windshield. D.O.A. Driver got the steering column punched out through his back. Another girl with a snapped neck. Another girl—"

He couldn't hear him. He was somewhere else, far away. Kids. Laughing, smartmouth kids having a good time. Benjy would be that age some day. The carpets were all wet.

"Mike!"

He didn't hear.

"Mike! Polchik!"

He looked up. There was a stranger standing in front of him holding a yellow flimsy.

"Well, don't just sit there, Polchik. You *had* them! Why'd you let them go?"

"The... lizard..."

"That's right, that's what five of them were using. Three beakers of it in the car. And a dead cat on the floor and all the makings wrapped in foam-bead bags. You'd have had to be blind to miss it all!"

"The robot..."

Summit turned away with disgust, slamming the report onto the desk top. He thumbed the call-button. When Desk Sergeant Loyo came in, he said, "Take him upstairs and give him a breather of straightener, let him lie down for half an hour, then bring him back to me."

Loyo got Polchik under the arms and took him out.

Then the Captain turned off the office lights and sat silently in his desk chair, watching the night die just beyond the filthy windows.

"Feel better?"

"Yeah; thank you, Capt'n. I'm fine."

"You're back with me all the way? You understand what I'm saying?"

"Yeah, sure, I'm just *fine*, sir. It was just... those kids..."

"So why'd you let them go? I've got no time to baby you, Polchik. You're five years a cop and I've got all the brass in town outside that door waiting. So get right."

"I'm right, Capt'n. I let them go because the robot took the stuff the girl was carrying, and he dumped it in his thing there, and tol me it was nosedrops."

"Not good enough, Mike."

"What can I say besides that?"

"Well, dammit, *Officer* Polchik, you damned well better say *something*

besides that. *You* know they run that stuff right into the skull, you've been a cop long enough to see it, to hear it the way they talk! Why'd you let them custer you?"

"What was I going to run them in for? Carrying nosedrops? With that motherin' robot reciting civil rights chapter-an'-verse at me every step of the way? Okay, so I tell the robot to go screw off, and I bust 'em and bring 'em in. In an hour they're out again and I've got a false arrest lug dropped on me. Even if it *ain't* nosedrops. And they can use the robot's goddam tapes to hang me up by the thumbs!"

Summit dropped back into his chair, sack weight. His face was a burned-out building. "So we've got three, maybe six kids dead. Jesus. Jesus. Jesus." He shook his head.

Polchik wanted to make him feel better. But how did you do that? "Listen, Capt'n, you know I would of had those kids in here so fast it'd of made their heads swim... if I'd've been on my own. That damned robot... well, it just didn't work out. Capt'n, listen, I'm not trying to alibi, it was godawful out there, but you were a beat cop... *you* know a cop ain't a set of rules and a pile of wires. Guys like me just can't work with things like that Brillo. It won't work, Cap'n. A guy's gotta be free to use his judgment, to feel like he's worth somethin', not just a piece of sh—"

Summit's head came up sharply. "Judgment?!" He looked as though he wanted to vomit. "What kind of judgment are you showing with that Rico over at the Amsterdam Inn? And all of it on the tapes, sound, pictures, everything?!"

"Oh. That."

"Yes, that. You're damned lucky I insisted those tapes get held strictly private, for the use of the Force only. I had to invoke privileged data. Do you have any *idea* how many strings that puts on me, on this office now, with the Chief, with the Commissioner, with the goddam Mayor? Do you have any *idea*, Polchik?"

"No, sir. I'm sorry." Chagrin.

"Sorry doesn't buy it, goddammit! I don't want you taking any juice from anywhere. No bottles, no gifts, no *nothing*, not from anybody. Have you got that?"

"Yessir."

Wearily, Summit persisted. "It's tough enough to do a job here without having special graft investigations and the D. A.'s squad sniffing all over the precinct. Jesus, Polchik, do you have any *idea* ... !" He stopped, looked levelly at the patrolman and said, "One more time and you're out on your ass. Not set down, not reprimanded, not docked—*out*. All the way out. *Kapish?*"

Polchik nodded; his back was broken.

"I've got to set it right."

"What, sir?"

"You, that's what."

Polchik waited. A pendulum was swinging. "I'll have to think about it. But if it hadn't been for the five good years you've given me here, Polchik... well, you'll be getting punishment, but I don't know just what yet."

"Uh, what's gonna happen with the robot?"

Summit got to his feet slowly; mooring a dirigible. "Come on outside and you'll see."

Polchik followed him to the door, where the Captain paused. He looked closely into Polchik's face and said, "Tonight has been an education, Mike." There was no answer to that one.

They went into the front desk room. Reardon still had his head stuck into Brillo's open torso cavity, and the whiz kid was standing tiptoed behind him, peering over the engineer's shoulder. As they entered the ready room, Reardon straightened and clicked off the lamp on the power tool. He watched Summit and Polchik as they walked over to Chief Santorini. Summit murmured to the Chief for a moment, then Santorini nodded and said, "We'll talk tomorrow, then."

He started toward the front door, stopped and said, "Good night, gentlemen. It's been a long night. I'll be in touch with your offices tomorrow." He didn't wait for acknowledgment; he simply went.

Reardon turned around to face Summit. He was waiting for words. Even the whiz kid was starting to come alive again. The silent FBI man rose from the bench (as far as Polchik could tell, he hadn't changed position all the time they'd been gone on patrol) and walked toward the group.

Reardon said, "Well..." His voice trailed off.

The pendulum was swinging.

"Gentlemen," said the Captain, "I've advised Chief Santorini I'll be writing out a full report to be sent downtown. My recommendations will more than likely decide whether or not these robots will be added to our Force."

"Grass roots level opinion, very good, Captain, very good," said the whiz kid. Summit ignored him.

"But I suppose I ought to tell you right now my recommendations will be negative. As far as I'm concerned, Mr. Reardon, you still have a long way to go with your machine."

"But, I thought—"

"It did very well," Summit said, "don't get me wrong. But I think it's going to need a lot more flexibility and more knowledge of the police officer's duties before it can be of any real aid in our work."

Reardon was angry, but trying to control it. "I programmed the entire patrolman's manual, and all the City codes, and the Supreme Court—"

Summit stopped him with a raised hand. "Mr. Reardon, that's the least of a police officer's knowledge. *Anybody* can read a rule book. But *how to use those rules*, how to make those rules work in the street, that takes more than programming. It takes, well, it takes training. And experience. It doesn't come easily. A cop isn't a set of rules and a pile of wires."

Polchik was startled to hear his words. He knew it would be okay. Not as good as before, but at least okay.

Reardon was furious now. And he refused to be convinced. Or perhaps he refused to allow the Mayor's whiz kid and the FBI man to be so easily

convinced. He had worked too long and at too much personal cost to his career to let it go that easily. He hung onto it. "But merely training shouldn't put you off the X-44 *completely!*"

The Captain's face tensed around the mouth. "Look, Mr. Reardon, I'm not very good at being politic—which is why I'm still a Captain, I suppose." The whiz kid gave him a careful look, but the Captain went on. "But it isn't merely training. This officer is a good one. He's bright, he's on his toes, he maybe isn't Sherlock Holmes but he knows the feel of a neighborhood, the smell of it, the heat level. He knows every August we're going to get the leapers and the riots and some woman's head cut off and dumped in a mailbox mailed C.O.D. to Columbus, Ohio. He knows when there's racial tension in our streets. He knows when those poor slob in the tenements have just *had it*. He knows when some new kind of vice has moved in. But he made more mistakes out there tonight than a rookie. Five years walking and riding that beat, he's *never* fumbled the way he did tonight. Why? I've got to ask *why?* The only thing different was that machine of yours. Why? *Why* did Mike Polchik foulball so bad? *He* knew those kids in that car should have been run in for b&b or naline tests. So why, Mr. Reardon... *why?*"

Polchik felt lousy. The Captain was more worked up than he'd ever seen him. But Polchik stood silently, listening; standing beside the silent, listening FBI man.

Brillo merely stood silently. Turned off.

Then why did he still hear that robot buzzing?

"It isn't rules and regs, Mr. Reardon." The Captain seemed to have a lot more to come. "A moron can learn those. But how do you evaluate the look on a man's face that tells you he needs a fix? How do you gauge the cultural change in words like 'custer' or 'grass' or 'high' or 'pig'? How do you know when *not* to bust a bunch of kids who've popped a hydrant so they can cool off? How do you program all of *that* into a robot... and know that it's going to change from hour to hour?"

"We can do it! It'll take time, but we can do it."

The Captain nodded slowly. "Maybe you can."

"I know we can."

"Okay, I'll even go for that. Let's say you can. Let's say you can get a robot that'll act like a human being and still be a robot... because that's what we're talking about here. There's still something else."

"Which is?"

"People, Mr. Reardon. People like Polchik here. I asked you *why* Polchik foulballed, why he made such a bum patrol tonight that I'm going to have to take disciplinary action against him *for the first time in five years...* so I'll *tell* you why, Mr. Reardon, about people like Polchik here. They're still afraid of machines, you know. We've pushed them and shoved them and lumbered them with machines till they're afraid the next clanking item down the pike is going to put them on the bread line. So they don't *want* to cooperate. They don't do it on purpose. They may not even *know* they're doing it, hell, I don't think Polchik knew what was happening, why he was falling over his feet tonight. You can get a robot to act like a human being, Mr. Reardon. Maybe you're right and you *can* do it, just like you said. But how the hell are you going to get humans to act like robots and not be afraid of machines?"

Reardon looked as whipped as Polchik felt.

"May I leave Brillo here till morning? I'll have a crew come over from the labs and pick him up."

"Sure," the Captain said, "he'll be fine right there against the wall. The Desk Sergeant'll keep an eye on him." To Loyo he said, "Sergeant, instruct your relief."

Loyo smiled and said, "Yessir."

Summit looked back at Reardon and said, "I'm sorry."

Reardon smiled wanly, and walked out. The whiz kid wanted to say something, but too much had already been said, and the Captain looked through him. "I'm pretty tired, Mr. Kenzie. How about we discuss it tomorrow after I've seen the Chief?"

The whiz kid scowled, turned and stalked out.

The Captain sighed heavily. "Mike, go get signed out and go home. Come see me tomorrow. Late." He nodded to the FBI man, who still had

not spoken, then he went away.

The robot stood where Reardon had left him. Silent.

Polchik went upstairs to the locker room to change.

Something was bothering him. But he couldn't nail it down.

When he came back down into the muster room, the FBI man was just racking the receiver on the desk blotter phone. "Leaving?" he asked. It was the first thing Polchik had heard him say. It was a warm brown voice.

"Yeah. Gotta go home. I'm whacked out."

"Can't say I blame you. I'm a little tired myself. Need a lift?"

"No, thanks," Polchik said. "I take the subway. Two blocks from the house." They walked out together. Poichik thought about wet carpets waiting. They stood on the front steps for a minute, breathing in the chill morning air, and Polchik said, "I feel kinda sorry for that chunk of scrap now. He did a pretty good job."

"But not good enough," the FBI man added.

Polchik felt suddenly very protective about the inert form against the wall in the precinct house. "Oh, I dunno. He saved me from getting clobbered, you wanna know the truth. Tell me... you think they'll ever build a robot that'll cut it?"

The FBI man lit a cigarette, blew smoke in a thin stream, and nodded. "Yeah. Probably. But it'll have to be a lot more sophisticated than old Brillo in there."

Polchik looked back through the doorway. The robot stood alone, looking somehow helpless. Waiting for rust. Polchik thought of kids, all kinds of kids, and when he was a kid. *It must be hell, he thought, being a robot. Getting turned off when they don't need you no more.*

Then he realized he could *still* hear that faint electrical buzzing. The kind a watch makes. He cast a quick glance at the FBI man but, trailing cigarette smoke, he was already moving toward his car, parked directly in front of the precinct house. Polchik couldn't tell if he was wearing a watch

or not.

He followed the government man.

"The trouble with Brillo," the FBI man said, "is that Reardon's facilities were too limited. But I'm sure there are other agencies working on it. They'll lick it one day." He snapped the cigarette into the gutter.

"Yeah, sure," Polchik said. The FBI man unlocked the car door and pulled it. It didn't open.

"Damn it!" he said. "Government pool issue. Damned door always sticks." Bunching his muscles, he suddenly wrenched at it with enough force to pop it open. Polchik stared. Metal had ripped.

"You take care of yourself now, y'hear?" the FBI man said, getting into the car. He flipped up the visor with its OFFICIAL GOVERNMENT BUSINESS card tacked to it, and slid behind the steering wheel.

The car settled heavily on its springs, as though a ton of load had just been dumped on the front seat. He slammed the door. It was badly sprung.

"Too bad we couldn't use him," the FBI man said, staring out of the car at Brillo, illuminated through the precinct house doorway. "But... too crude."

"Yeah, sure, I'll take care of myself," Polchik replied, one exchange too late. He felt his mouth hanging open.

The FBI man grinned, started the car, and pulled away.

Polchik stood in the street, for a while.

Sometimes he stared down the early-morning street in the direction the FBI man had taken.

Sometimes he stared down the early morning street in the muster room.

And even as the sounds of the city's new day rose around him, he was not at all certain he did not still hear the sound of an electric watch. Getting louder.

