Robots Don't Cry

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They call us graverobbers, but we're not.

What we do is plunder the past and offer it to the present. We hit old worlds, deserted worlds, worlds that nobody wants any longer, and we pick up anything we think we can sell to the vast collectibles market. You want a seven-hundred-year-old timepiece? A thousand-year-old bed? An actual printed book? Just put in your order, and sooner or later we'll fill it.

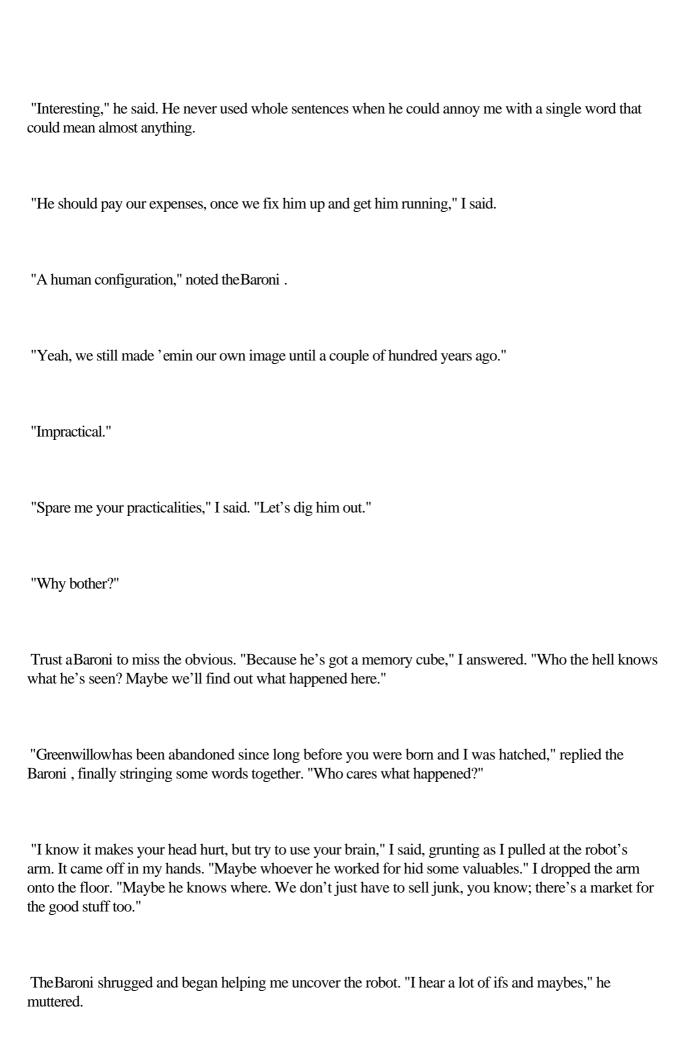
Every now and then we strike it rich. Usually we make a profit. Once in a while we just break even. There's only been one world where we actually lost money; I still remember it—Greenwillow. Except that it wasn't green, and there wasn't a willow on the whole damned planet.

There was a robot, though. We found him, me and the Baroni, in a barn, half-hidden under a pile of ancient computer parts and self-feeders for mutated cattle.

We were picking through the stuff, wondering if there was any market for it, tossing most of it aside, when the sun peeked in through the doorway and glinted off a prismatic eye.

"Hey, take a look at what we've got here," I said. "Give me a hand digging it out."

The junk had been stored a few feet above where he'd been standing and the rack broke, practically burying him. One of his legs was bent at an impossible angle, and his expressionless face was covered with cobwebs. The Baroni lumbered over—when you've got three legs you don't glide gracefully—and studied the robot.



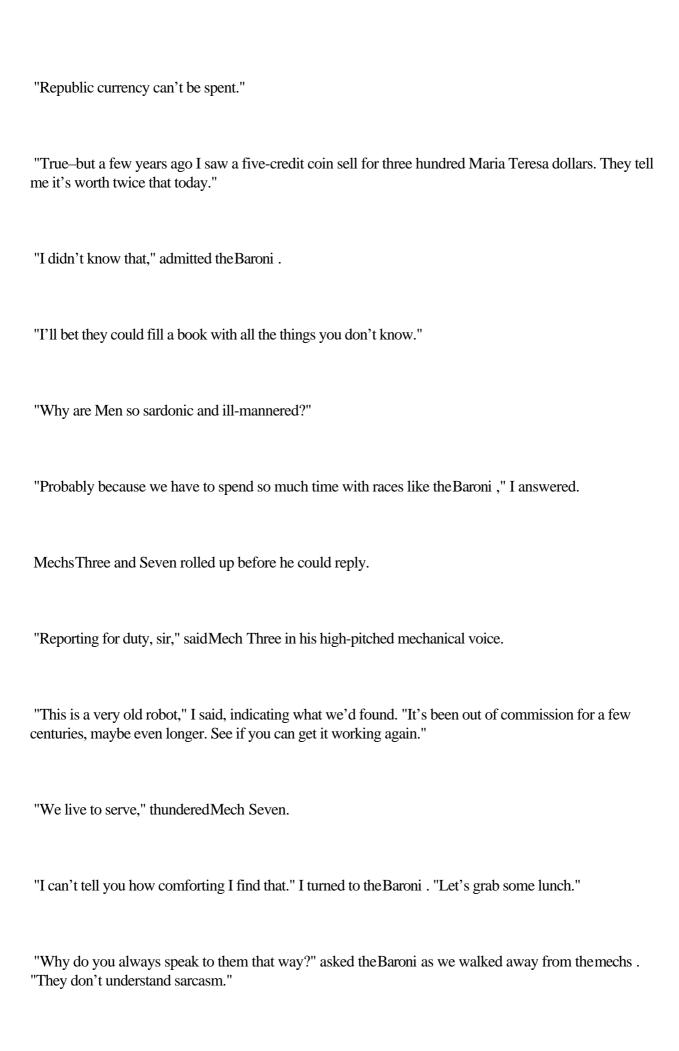
"Fine," I said. "Just sit on what passes for your ass, and I'll do it myself." "And let you keep what we find without sharing it?" he demanded, suddenly throwing himself into the task of moving the awkward feeders. After a moment he stopped and studied one. "Big cows," he noted. "Maybe ten or twelve feet at the shoulder, judging from the size of the stalls and the height of the feeders," I agreed. "But there weren't enough to fill the barn. Some of those stalls were never used." Finally we got the robot uncovered, and I checked the code on the back of his neck. "How about that?" I said. "The son of a bitch must be five hundred years old. That makes him an antique by anyone's definition. I wonder what we can get forhim?" The Baroni peered at the code. "What does AB stand for?" "Aldebaran. Alabama. Abrams' Planet. Or maybe just the model number. Who the hell knows? We'll get him running and maybe he can tell us." I tried to set him on his feet. No luck. "Give me a hand." "To the ship?" asked the Baroni, using sentence fragments again as he helped me stand the robot upright. "No," I said. "We don't need a sterile environment to work on a robot. Let's just get him out in the

We half-carried and half-dragged him to the crumbling concrete pad beyond the barn, then laid him down while I tightened the muscles in my neck, activating the embedded micro-chip, and directed the signal by pointing to the ship, which was about half a mile away.

sunlight, away from all this junk, and then we'll have a couple of mechs check him over."

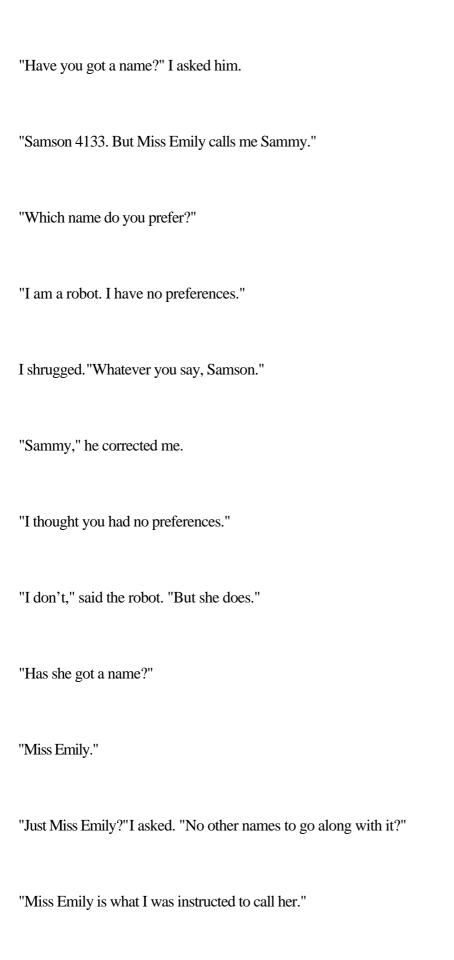
"This is me," I said as the chip carried my voice back to the ship's computer. "Wake up Mechs Three















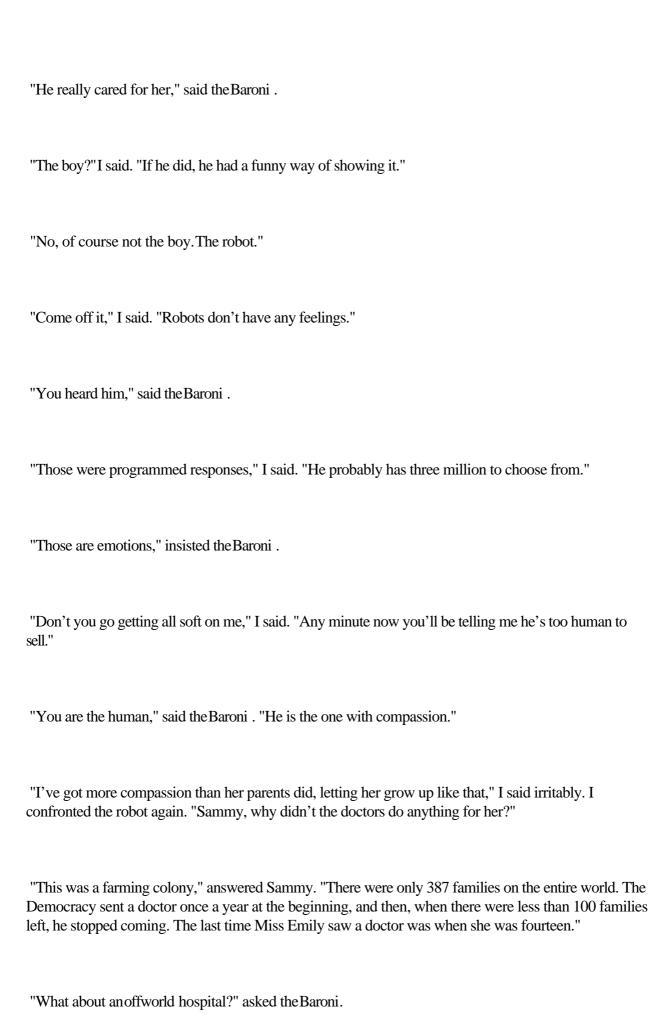






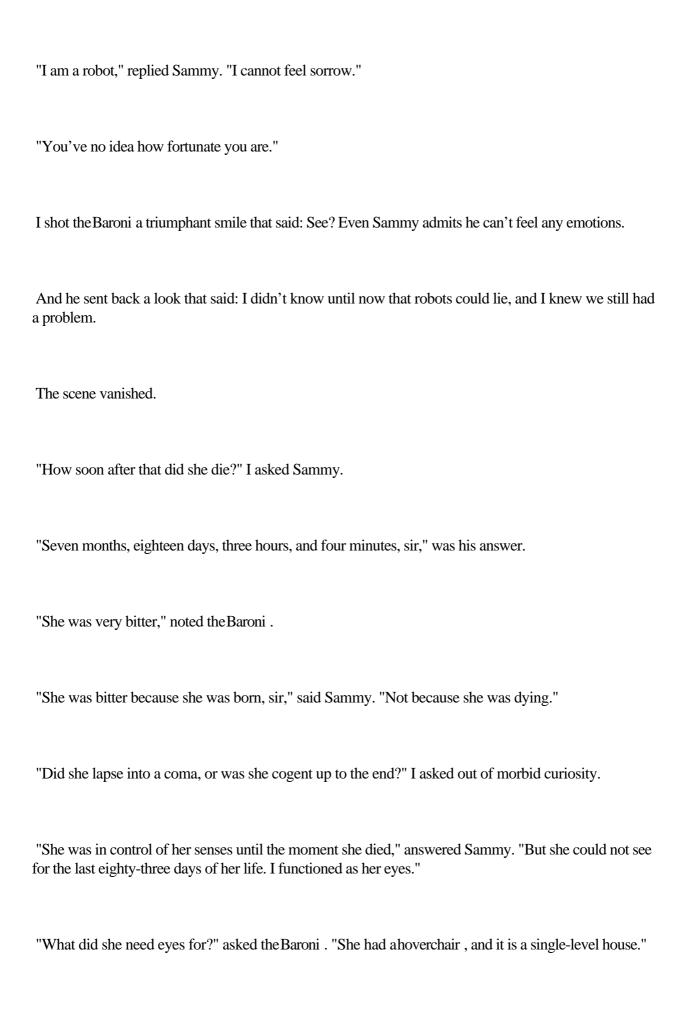


"What do they know?" replied Sammy.
And instantly he projected another scene. Now the girl was fully grown, probably about twenty. She kept most of her skin covered, but we could see the ravaging effect her various diseases had had upon her hands and face.
Tears were running down from these beautiful blue eyes over bony, parchment-like cheeks. Her emaciated body was wracked by sobs.
A holograph of a robot's hand popped into existence, and touched her gently on the shoulder.
"Oh, Sammy!" she cried. "I really thought he liked me! He was always so nice to me." She paused for breath as the tears continued unabated. "But I saw his face when I reached out to take his hand, and I felt him shudder when I touched it. All he really felt for me was pity. That's all any of them ever feel!"
"What do they know?" said Sammy's voice, the same words and the same inflections he had just used a moment ago.
"It's not just him," she said. "Even the farm animals run away when I approach them. I don't know how anyone can stand being in the same room with me." She stared at where the robot was standing. "You're all I've got, Sammy. You're my only friend in the whole world. Please don't ever leave me."
"I will never leave you, Miss Emily," said Sammy's voice.
"Promise me."
"I promise," said Sammy.
And then the holograph vanished and Sammy stood mute and motionless again.



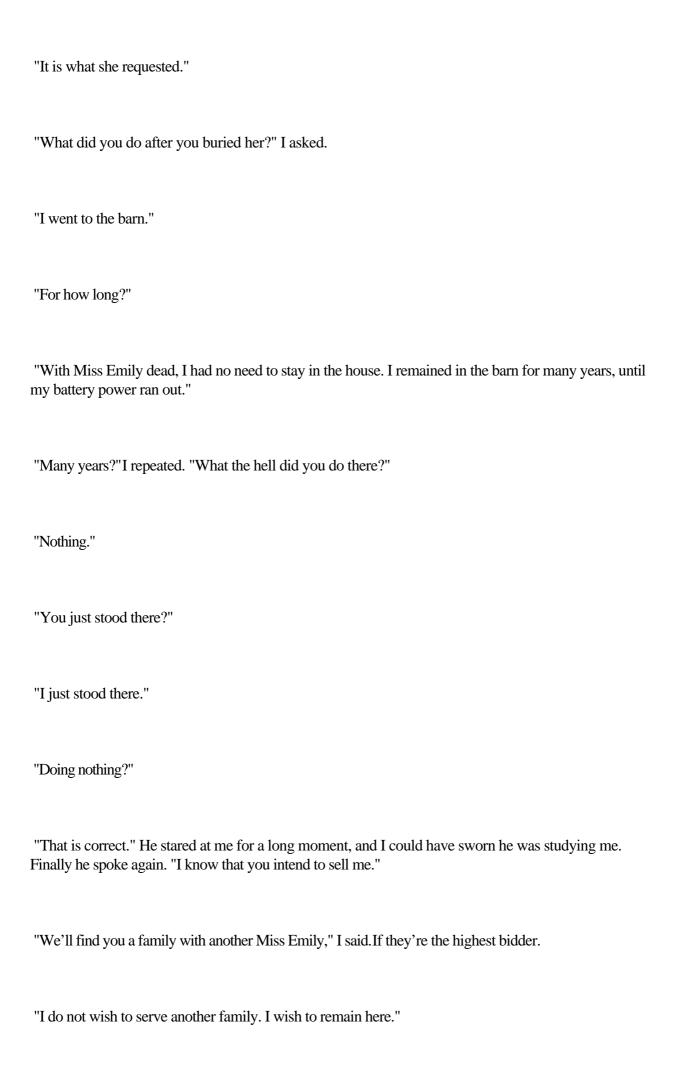








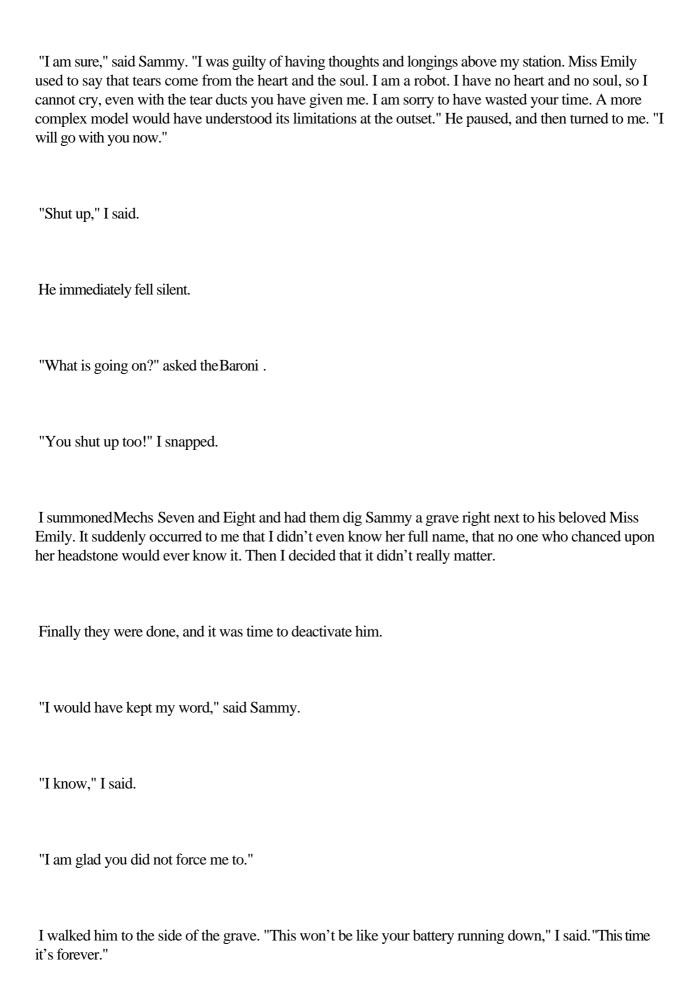
Still will be heard from whitesyringas "
Suddenly the robot's voice fell silent. For a moment I thought there was a flaw in the projection. Then I saw that Miss Emily had died.
He stared at her for a long minute, which means that we did too, and then the scene evaporated.
"I buried her beneath herfavorite tree," said Sammy. "But it is no longer there."
"Nothing lasts forever, even trees," said the Baroni . "And it's been five hundred years."
"It does not matter. I know where she is."
He walked us over to a barren spot about thirty yards from the ruin of a farmhouse. On the ground was a stone, and neatly carved into it was the following:
Miss Emily
2298-2331 G.E.
There will be rose
andrhododendron
"That's lovely, Sammy," said the Baroni.





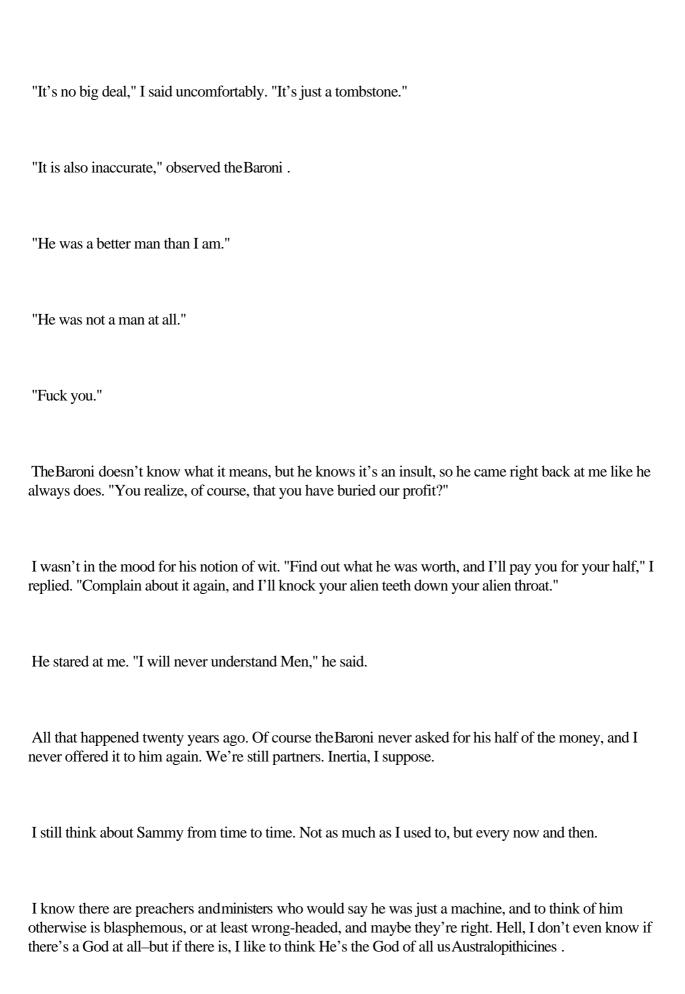


"He loved her."
I didn't even argue this time. I was wondering which was worse, spending thirty years trying to be a normal human being and failing, or spending thirty years trying to cry and failing. None of the other stuff had gotten to me; Sammy was just doing what robots do. It was the thought of his trying so hard to do what robots couldn't do that suddenly made me feel sorry for him. That in turn made me very irritable; ordinarily I don't even feel sorry for Men, let alone machines.
And what he wanted was such a simple thing compared to the grandiose ambitions of my own race. Once Men had wanted to cross the ocean; we crossed it. We'd wanted to fly; we flew. We wanted to reach the stars; we reached them. All Sammy wanted to do was cry over the loss of his Miss Emily. He'd waited half a millennium and had agreed to sell himself into bondage again, just for a few tears.
It was a lousy trade.
I reached out and activated him.
"Is it done?" asked Sammy.
"Right," I said. "Go ahead and cry your eyes out."
Sammy stared straight ahead. "I can't," he said at last.
"Think of Miss Emily," I suggested. "Think of how much you miss her."
"I feel pain," said Sammy. "But I cannot cry."
"You're sure?"



"She was not afraid to die," said Sammy. "Why should I be?"
I pulled the plug and hadMechs Seven andEight lower him into the ground. They started filling in the dirt while I went back to the ship to do one last thing. When they were finished I hadMech Seven carry my handiwork back to Sammy's grave.
"A tombstone for a robot?" asked the Baroni.
"Why not?" I replied. "There are worse traits than honesty and loyalty." I should know: I've stockpiled enough of them.
"He truly moved you."
Seeing the man you could have been will do that to you, even if he's all metal and silicone and prismatic eyes.
"What does it say?" asked the Baroni as we finished planting the tombstone.
I stood aside so he could read it:
"Sammy"
AustralopithicusRobotus

"That is very moving."



Including Sammy.