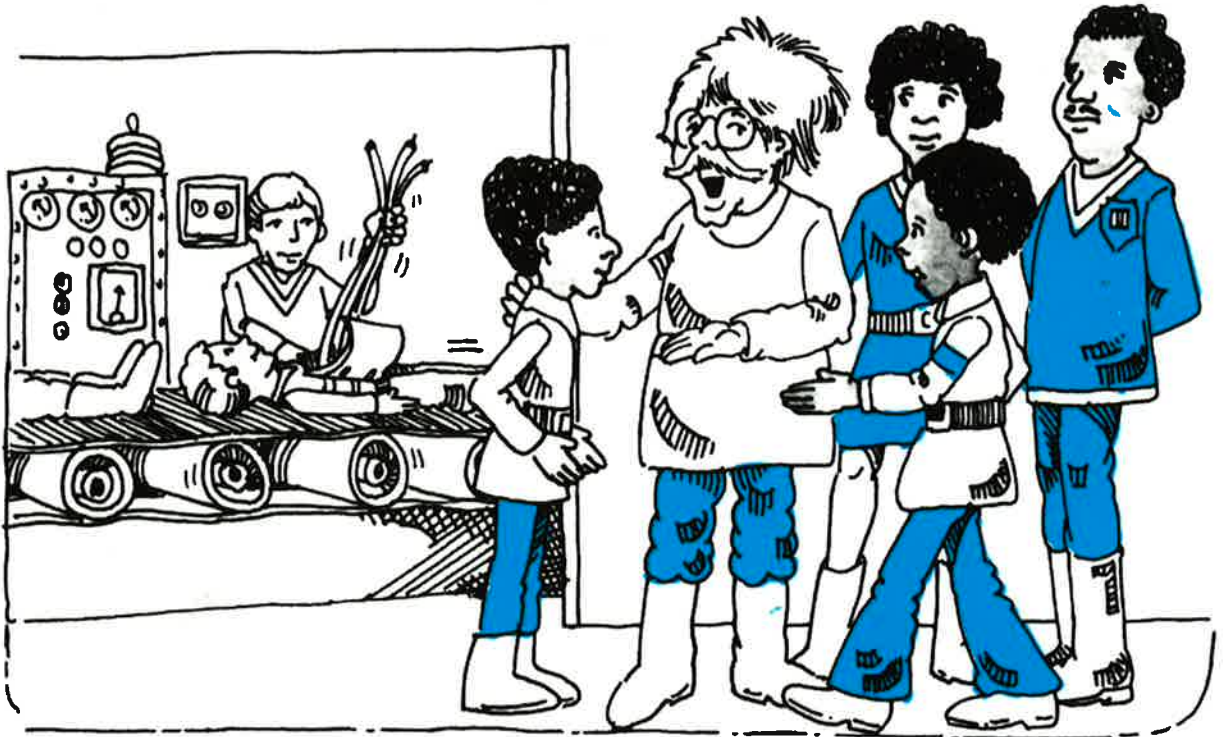


My Robot's Birthday

by Alfred Slote



- 1 Since we lived in the country and I had no friends my own age to play with, I wanted a robot for a companion. At first my father resisted, because he felt that robots were too expensive. But eventually he gave in. Saturday was my birthday, and mother and father pretended that we were going to take a tour of a robot factory. I knew that the real reason for going was to buy my present.
- 2 The factory was a circular white building. As we entered the building, we found ourselves inside a green room. Behind a desk was a blond lady in a white uniform with a small red label: ATKINS ROBOTS, LIMITED.
- 3 She checked our name on a list, took a piece of paper out of a drawer, and then left

the room, walking stiff in the knees. That was the way robots walked.

- 4 "There probably isn't a human being in the place," father said. "It's a form of living advertising."
- 5 "If you can call it living," mother said.
- 6 "I am Dr. Atkins, and I do," said a man as he entered the room. "When robots are well built and well programmed, they have lives of their own," he went on in a cold, dry voice. "And who is to say really whether human beings in their humanness are any more alive than well-programmed Atkins robots in their robotness?"
- 7 We followed Dr. Atkins into a small room in which there were several chairs facing a blank

white wall.

8 "Our factory is made up of four *P* departments: Production, Programming, Physiognomy, and Personality."

9 Dr. Atkins pushed a button, and the room became completely dark. Suddenly the wall in front of us seemed to be melting before our very eyes. We were looking right through it into a long room. In the middle of the room was a conveyor belt with robots lying down on it. Standing above them, working on them, wiring them, making connections, attaching terminals, were other robots. Robots were manufacturing robots!

10 Suddenly Production disappeared.

11 "We are now coming to our second *P* department—Programming."

12 A scene lighted up in front of us. Seated at a row of machines with keyboards were a dozen older people punching out computer cards.

13 "These people are your computer experts, I take it," mother said.

14 "You are half right, madam," Dr. Atkins said. "They are computer experts, but they are not people. They are robots. Our most expensive robots. We have programmed them to design other robots."

15 Programming disappeared.

16 "Now we are coming to Physiognomy—which means what, young man?"

17 "Faces," I said.

18 "Very good. Suppose you wanted a robot as a companion. What kind of face would you like your robot to have?"

19 I knew what was going on. I was going to pick out a face for my birthday present.

20 "Can I see some?" I asked.

21 I saw more than some. So many faces flashed on the screen that I couldn't keep up with them.

22 "Hey, there's a nice face," I said.

23 The face I liked held still on the screen. It was a boy who looked about my age, with dark hair and eyes and a grinning, friendly expression.

24 The face faded and Dr. Atkins said, "We are now arriving at our Personality department." We were looking into another room, which had a gigantic computer in it.

25 "Young man, if you were to have a robot for a friend, what kind of personality would you like him to have?"

26 "Like mine," I said.

27 "That is not very helpful," Dr. Atkins said. "How would you describe your personality?"

28 "Well," I said, looking at the computer where a single light was going on and off, "I'm happy—" Suddenly, a whole battery of lights went on and cards started going through the machine.

29 "I do a lot of outdoor things like camping and fishing. I watch a lot of films, especially if they are about animals. I like to read books about animals too, and a lot of other books such as detective stories. I like just about everything."

30 I thought the computer would go wild. Green lights, yellow lights, red lights, cards going in and out, and bells sounding.

31 "Hmmm," said Dr. Atkins, "a robot who liked to do all those things would be as close to a real human being as possible. That would make it a very expensive robot."

32 Father cleared his throat. "I—uh—don't suppose there's any inexpensive way you could make the robot happy."

33 "No, Mr. Jameson," Dr. Atkins said. "I'm afraid you have to be born a human being to be able to feel happiness for free—a nice day, a pretty sunset, a birdcall. Enjoyment like that, people get just by being alive. But a robot must be programmed to enjoy things, and I'm sorry to say that is very costly."

34 Suddenly, there was a knock on the door.

35 "Come in," Dr. Atkins said.

36 The door opened. A dark-haired kid was standing there.

37 "Happy birthday, Jack," the kid said, grinning. "I'm yours now. What are you going to call me?"

38 I thought for a moment, and then said, "Danny."

39 "Danny One," Dr. Atkins corrected. "You may have to have this Danny repaired or replaced."

40 Danny One and I stood there grinning at each other. This was both our birthdays.

How Well Did You Read?

The first four sentences below describe events in the story. Put the four events in the correct order by lettering them *a*, *b*, *c*, and *d*.

- 1 The storyteller saw a face he liked on the screen.
- 2 Dr. Atkins introduced himself.
- 3 The storyteller met Danny One.
- 4 The storyteller described his personality to Dr. Atkins.

Write the letter of the best answer for each question.

- 5 What was the author's main purpose in writing this story?
 - a To give an imaginative view of what the future might be like
 - b To give an imaginative view of what science can accomplish
 - c Both **a** and **b**
- 6 Look at paragraph 9. What was the author's main purpose in writing this paragraph?
 - a To show how robots get their personalities
 - b To show that the production of robots is expensive
 - c To show that robots might be produced by other robots
- 7 Look at paragraph 33. What was the author's main purpose in writing this paragraph?
 - a To show how robots and humans are different
 - b To show how robots and humans are the same
 - c To show that it is better to be a robot than a human being
- 8 After reading this story, what do you think is the author's attitude towards science?
 - a He distrusts science and scorns its accomplishments.
 - b He thinks that science may be able to accomplish remarkable things.
 - c He has no interest in science.

- 9 Suppose that as the storyteller is leaving the factory, a person in uniform opens the door for him. The person bows and smiles and then walks away. As he walks, his knees are very stiff. What might the storyteller assume?

- a The person is a foreigner.
- b The person is a robot.
- c Both **a** and **b**

Learn about Words

Vocabulary

- A You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 opposed the idea (1)
- 2 fair-haired (2)
- 3 rigidly; without bending (3)
- 4 sales promotion (4)
- 5 losing shape; dissolving (9)
- 6 playmate; friend (18)
- 7 appeared for an instant (21)
- 8 provided with a set of instructions (33)

- B A word may have more than one meaning.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** below is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a**, **b**, or **c**. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 9 **present** (1)
 - a at hand; not absent
 - b the time being; now
 - c a gift
- 10 **battery** (28)
 - a unlawful beating of another person
 - b a set of connecting things
 - c single electrical cell

Word Study

- C act + **ive** = active (that tends to act)
cloud + **y** = cloudy (characterized by clouds)
enjoy + **able** = enjoyable (that can be enjoyed)

Many adjectives end in *ive*, *y*, and *able*. Often *ive* means "that tends to," *y* means "characterized by," and *able* means "that can be." Read the definitions below and then choose *ive*, *y*, or *able* to complete the word in **heavy type**. Write the completed word. (Sometimes you may need to drop the last letter of a word before adding the ending.)

- 11 that can be adapted: **adapt**_____
- 12 characterized by weight: **weight**_____
- 13 that can be worked: **work**_____
- 14 that tends to protect: **protect**_____
- 15 that tends to effect: **effect**_____
- 16 characterized by ice: **ice**_____
- 17 that can be washed: **wash**_____
- 18 that tends to create: **create**_____

D There is an incomplete word in each passage below. Choose the suffix *ive*, the suffix *y*, or the suffix *able* to complete the word in a way that makes sense. Write *ive*, *y*, or *able*.

- 19 The snow shovelling law has been effect____. The sidewalks have been clean all winter.
- 20 The floor polish gave the tile a wax____ glow.
- 21 I understand your directions. They are quite understand_____.
- 22 We couldn't play outside because of the snow. It was too snow____ to play outside.
- 23 That beautiful painting attracts me. It's an attract____ painting.
- 24 I respect everyone in my town. They are all respect____ people.

- 25 I am wearing a protect____ hat. It protects my head from injury.
- 26 The Scotts have saved a lot of money. They are very thrift____ people.

E Books sometimes have *indexes* at the back to help you find information. An index is an alphabetical list of all the subjects in a book, with page numbers for each one. Here is an index entry for the subject of fire:

Fire: as energy supply, 311-17; as source of heat, 305-10; fire control, 324-30 (with pictures); fire departments, 331-40 (with pictures); fire fighting, history of, 318-23; forest fires, 341-45

This index entry divides the subject of fire into several parts. It tells you what page each part begins and ends on and which parts have pictures. Use this index entry to answer the questions below. Write *Yes* or *No*.

- 27 Can you find pictures of fire-control activities in this book?
- 28 Can you read about forest fires on page 341?
- 29 Can you read about fire as a source of heat on page 346?
- 30 Can you read about fire as a supply of energy in this book?
- 31 Are there pictures of forest fires?
- 32 Can you read about the history of fire fighting on page 318?
- 33 Can you read about fire departments on page 330?

Use Your Imagination

What do you think it would be like to have a robot for a companion? Would it be fun? Or would it, at times, be frightening? Write a brief story about your robot friend. When you've finished, show your story to a classmate or a friend.