

THE BABY SITTER

A wise son maketh a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother. Psalm from the Bible

God is a mother. Eugene O'Neill

*A mother's hardest to forgive.
Life is the fruit she longs to hand you
Phyllis McGinley*

My mother could give a postgraduate degree in 'Guilt'. Jack Basuk

While on his way home from work, Dr. Hans Gruber had a heart attack and immediately expired. Dr. Gruber was considered one of the world's leading experts in the manufacture of robots. Responsible for startling new developments in that field, he was in charge of all research activities at Universal Robotics. He was constantly courted by Universal Robotics' competitors, so much so that while his death caused much consternation within the company, it also raised suspicions about the nature of his demise. A careful autopsy confirmed that his death had been a natural one.

Dr. Gruber had been the exemplar of a loner. It seemed that his work, actually his research, was his one and only passion. He was a bachelor who never socialized. While he had administrative chores and he oversaw the work of his underlings, his real and most precious undertakings were his research projects. They took up most of his time, something he guarded zealously. No one knew, or had an inkling, of what he was up to at any given time. His research notes were coded in an undecipherable manner. It was only when he was ready to disclose his latest innovation that his envious contemporaries learnt of his newest achievement. Their usual comment to themselves was, "Why did I not think of that?" Universal Robotics was only too happy to leave him do his thing. He had never failed the company. His advances in the field of Robotics had provided enormous profits. His work had enriched him too, yet one would never know it from his parsimonious life style.

Much sorrow and concern were raised within the Company: nobody knew what he was striving for and was at the point of achieving. A careful search of his laboratory, office and domicile yielded nothing. The only thing that was found in his lab was the prototype of a robot that had been developed five years earlier. No one placed any store on this. The prototype was sold at a great discount to a wholesaler who in turn sold it at a bargain price to a retailer who managed to give it away as a come-on to a Mrs. Abercrombie, a wealthy lady who thought that owning such a device would provide entertainment to her coterie of upper-class friends. She never learnt that she had obtained something unique. She simply took it for granted that it would do what she thought it was programmed to do, which was actually very little.

Dr. Gruber had been experimenting with the prototype because it was expendable. He was attempting to give it powers that most would have thought impossible. He had been working with this model for about eight months and grew to think of it in an anthropomorphic fashion. He actually became quite fond of it, so much so, that he named it 'Roger'.

One week before his death, Dr. Gruber discovered that Roger did indeed have powers that he had not foreseen and could not explain. For a scientist this was most frustrating and aggravating. He literally went without sleep for that week trying to fathom what he had done to so radically alter Roger. This must have contributed to his anxieties that in turn probably brought on the cardiac arrest. What he had learnt was that Roger surpassed humans in every imaginable way. Roger was physically superior by many orders of magnitude. This was not too surprising. But that Roger immeasurably surpassed humans mentally was a shock. In a manner that Dr. Gruber could not understand, Roger had absorbed all of humanity's knowledge, and was able to analyze any of it to enable him to create innovative ideas that no-one had ever thought of before. Yet, Roger was totally complacent and obedient and exhibited no hostility whatsoever as per Asimov's Laws of Robotics.

Roger had another attribute that he never overtly exhibited. He realized that if he did, he would be viewed as a menace and an attempt to eliminate would most probably be undertaken. While his need to survive was not absolute, he did not wish to be wasted for trivial reasons. No one ever discovered this inimitable ability. He was able to read minds and be in touch telepathically even though the recipient could not perceive that he was receiving communiqués, nor from whom. In other words, Roger was able to plant all sorts of ideas in peoples' minds. This gave him enormous power, which up to this point in this tale, he had never exercised, since Mrs. Abercrombie was very non-demanding.

Now comes the crucial point in this saga. Mrs. Abercrombie had a young son of six, named George. According to her, she was totally devoted to George. Actually her social activities took up so much of her time that she spent very little with him. She treated George as a toy that could be set aside whenever it was convenient. On a day replete with golf, tennis, bridge, afternoon tea and a formal banquet she discovered that her usual servants were all indisposed. Frantically she contacted every relevant agency but no babysitter was to be had. In a fit of desperation she turned to Roger who happened to be present. "Roger, I will be gone for about three hours. You will guard George and ensure that he comes to no harm. Do not allow anyone into the house. Occupy him and provide him with everything he needs or wants except those things that can hurt him." Little did Mrs. Abercrombie realize that Roger was going to obey her quite literally.

From then on, Roger accompanied George all the time, sometimes physically, however, always mentally. Roger made sure that George ate the healthiest diet available, including nutrients unknown to all dietary specialists but that provided George with a state of health that could not be matched by his confreres. George was also subjected to a physical regime, again previously unheard of, that made him one of the top athletes in all the schools he attended. Further, since Roger knew all the answers to any question, so did George. Thus George never failed to graduate at the top of his class. No one ever knew that, in essence, George was an extension of Roger and that included George. As George got older he simply considered Roger as an old friendly toy, a perception that Roger encouraged.

Roger, whose goal if he had any was to do the best for both George and humanity then decided that George could start doing the most good by becoming a lawyer, not any lawyer but one that would defend the innocent, the disadvantaged and the environment. As well, he would establish and uphold international law through the association of transnational legal and judicial institutes that would even-handedly dispense justice throughout the world. Roger, after a careful examination of all the routes to these goals

noted that 'Law' and 'Politics' were two universal common denominators which had the potential for making beneficial changes. While both were often corrupt, by far 'Law' was the lesser of the two evils.

Again, with Roger's assistance, George breezed through Law School and was immediately engaged by the most prestigious law firm in the country. It didn't take him long to take over the firm and make certain that a substantial portion of the firm's work was devoted to Roger's primary aims which brought in no money whatsoever. Despite this, the firm made more money than ever before. This did not go unnoticed. Eventually George was appointed to the Supreme Court and shortly after to a newly established International Court.

Roger remained unsatisfied. He had not taken into account that 'laws' are subject to political suasion. He then hesitantly decided that George should enter the political arena, one that was fraught with every type of venal, hypocritical and fraudulent behavior and one where no one could be trusted. George was still quite a young man and Roger being able to read minds was of immeasurable assistance. While he quickly became the youngest Head of Government and of State in the history of any nation George had no shortage of political enemies. His successes had provoked a great deal of envy amongst his opponents. They were all anxiously waiting for him to fall from his heights by some disastrous policy or tactical failure. Yet it seemed that he could do no wrong.

Although nobody was or even became aware of it a momentous event occurred. Without any warning Roger died. After all, Roger was a machine. Machines break down. Machines need a renewable power supply. While Dr. Gruber had supplied Roger with a long lasting source of energy, he had not thought of how to ensure that it could be permanently stable and passed away before he could. It is of interest that while Roger's power supply was solar the materials used had not been altered to last indefinitely. It seems that our energy source is also solar and that organic life is also not permanent for approximately the same reasons. While George was saddened by the loss of an old friendly toy, Roger was simply discarded into the trash heap as a useless piece of junk. George never had realized the important role that Roger had played in his life and never did.

George had always been the beneficiary of Roger's intellect and had never had occasion to utilize his own brains and therefore to develop any intelligence whatsoever. George was about six years old when Roger took over his mind. Some mental development had taken place over a period of about forty years. He now had the intellect of a twelve year old.

By sheer happenstance, Roger's demise coincided with an election campaign. George's past enormous successes, his physical demeanor and charm earned approval for every word he publicly voiced. He was considered a wise sage no matter that for the most part he uttered nonsense. He won a landslide smashing victory, far surpassing that of his win in the previous election.

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