

Rossem's Universal Robots (RUR)

by Karel Čapek

a new version by

David Muncaster

Rossem's Universal Robots



Rossum's Universal Robots

Characters

Domin – General Manager of the Factory
Sulla – His Secretary, a Robot
Helena – Visitor, Daughter of President Glory
Marius – A Robot
Dr. Gall – Head of the Physiological Department
Dr. Fabry – Technical Controller
Alquist – Works Manager
Dr. Hallemeier – Head of Psychological Training
Busman – General Manager
Nana – Helena's Servant
Radius – A Robot
Other Robots

Setting

A Drama Class

Note 1: The gender of the actor does not need to match the gender of the character.

Note 2: Throughout the script (*AH.*) means that the actor is speaking as his or herself rather than the character.

ACT ONE

The actors assemble and sit. The TEACHER addresses them.

TEACHER: Settle down, please. Thank you. Today's play is R.U.R., better known as Rossum's Universal Robots, by Karel Čapek. Shakespeare is renowned for introducing phrases into the language but Čapek went one better and introduced a word. Robot. And yet, despite all the concerns these days around AI, the play never gets performed. As we go through it, please think why that might be. As a hint, the play was written over one hundred years ago and set in the future. But that future is now our past. Would that make it difficult for a modern audience? Right, you all have scripts and the name of the character you are playing. As usual, I have made no attempt to match the gender of the character to the actor. When you are ready.

The set is revealed. The actors playing DOMIN and SULLA take their positions in the office of Rossum's Universal Robots factory. DOMIN sits on his desk dictating. SULLA is poised with a notepad.

DOMIN: Ready?

SULLA: Yes.

DOMIN: To E. M. McVicker & Co., Southampton, England. As stated under our terms and conditions, we undertake no guarantee for goods damaged in transit. When the consignment was collected, we drew attention to the fact that the vessel was unsuitable for the transportation of robots and we are, therefore, not responsible for spoiled freight. *(To SULLA.)* Are you ready?

SULLA: Yes.

DOMIN: To the E. B. Huysen Agency, New York, U.S.A. We acknowledge receipt of your order for five thousand robots. As you are sending your own vessel, please send a cargo of coal which will be taken as part payment. Best wishes, Rossum's Universal Robots. Ready?

SULLA: Yes.

DOMIN: *(His phone rings which he answers. Into phone.)* Yes. *(Pause.)* No. *(Pause.)* All right. *(To SULLA.)* Another letter. Freidrichswerks, Hamburg, Germany. We acknowledge receipt of order for fifteen thousand robots...

Enter MARIUS.

DOMIN: Well, what is it?

MARIUS: There's a lady, sir, asking to see you. She brings this card of introduction.

DOMIN: *(Reading card.)* Oh, from President Glory. Ask her to come in. *(MARIUS exits. To SULLA.)* Where was I?

SULLA: Fifteen thousand robots.

DOMIN: Yes, fifteen thousand.

MARIUS: *(Entering.)* Please step this way.

Enter HELENA. Exit MARIUS.

HELENA: Good morning.

DOMIN: Good morning.

HELENA: I have come...

DOMIN: With President Glory's card of introduction. That is quite sufficient.

HELENA: President Glory is my father. I am Helena Glory.

DOMIN: Please sit down. Sulla, you may go. (*SULLA exits. DOMIN and HELENA sit.*) How may I help you?

HELENA: I have come...

DOMIN: To have a look at our famous factory that manufacturers people. I am happy to show you around myself.

HELENA: Oh. I expected you to refuse. I thought it was forbidden.

DOMIN: To enter the factory? We have many visitors.

HELENA: And you show them around?

DOMIN: Only certain things. The manufacture of artificial people is, of course, a secret process.

HELENA: Yes but if you only knew how much it...

DOMIN: Interests you.

HELENA: (*Becoming annoyed.*) Why don't you let me finish speaking?

DOMIN: I'm sorry. Did you want to say something different?

HELENA: I only wanted to ask...

DOMIN: Whether I could make a special exception in your case and show you the actual factory. Certainly, Miss Glory.

HELENA: How do you know I wanted to say that?

DOMIN: Because that is what everyone says. Normally I refuse, but, in your case, I will be happy to show you more than we do the rest.

HELENA: Thank you.

DOMIN: But you must agree not to divulge what you see.

HELENA: (*Giving him her hand.*) You have my word.

DOMIN: Thank you. (*He takes her hand.*)

HELENA: I realise that you must be very careful. Do you think...

DOMIN: What is it?

HELENA: Would you mind releasing my hand?

DOMIN: Oh, I beg your pardon. (*He does.*)

HELENA: Security must be a major concern for you.

DOMIN: (*Observing her with deep interest.*) Yes. Well, of course. I... I mean we. We...

HELENA: What's the matter?

DOMIN: Nothing. It is just, er. Did you have a pleasant crossing?

HELENA: Yes.

DOMIN: No difficulty?

HELENA: Why?

DOMIN: What I mean to say is, you're so young.

HELENA: May we go straight into the factory?

DOMIN: Yes. Twenty-two, I think.

HELENA: Twenty-two what?

DOMIN: Years.

HELENA: Twenty-one. Why do you want to know?

DOMIN: Well, because... How long can you stay?

HELENA: That depends on how much of the factory you show me.

DOMIN: I'll show you everything.

HELENA: Thank you.

DOMIN: But first would you like to hear the story of the invention?

HELENA: Yes, of course.

DOMIN: There were two Rossums that we now call Old Rossum and Young Rossum. Old Rossum, who is now renowned as a great physiologist, was still a young scientist when he first came to this island for the purpose of studying the ocean fauna. As an experiment he attempted by chemical synthesis to imitate the living matter known as protoplasm until he suddenly discovered a substance which behaved exactly like living matter although its chemical composition was different.

HELENA: I see.

DOMIN: Physiology is not really my line, but I've learnt it by heart. Shall I go on?

HELENA: Yes, please.

DOMIN: Rossum wrote the following: "Nature has found only one method of organizing living matter. There is, however, another method, a more simple, flexible and rapid method, which has not yet occurred to nature at all. This second process by which life can be developed was discovered by me today." Imagine that, Miss Glory.

HELENA: Please go on.

DOMIN: The thing was, how to get the life out of the test tubes and hasten development. How to form organs, bones and nerves. Find such substances as enzymes and hormones. You understand?

HELENA: Not much, I'm afraid.

DOMIN: Never mind. You see, he could make whatever he wanted. He could have produced a Medusa with the brain of Socrates or a worm fifty yards long, but instead he took it into his head to make a vertebrate. And that's how he set about it.

HELENA: About what?

DOMIN: About imitating nature. First, he tried making an artificial dog. It took him several years and resulted in a sort of stunted calf which died in a few days. I'll show it to you in the museum. But then old Rossum started on the manufacture of man.

HELENA: And I'm to divulge this to nobody?

DOMIN: To nobody in the world.

HELENA: Even though these facts are available in every schoolbook.

DOMIN: But you know what isn't in the schoolbooks? That old Rossum was mad. Seriously, Miss Glory, you must keep this to yourself. The old crank wanted to actually make people.

HELENA: But you do make people.

DOMIN: Approximations of people, Miss Glory. But old Rossum meant it literally. He wanted to become a sort of scientific substitute for God. He was an atheist, you see. His sole purpose was to prove that belief in God was no longer necessary. Do you know anything about anatomy?

HELENA: Very little.

DOMIN: Neither do I. The thing is, he decided to manufacture everything as in the human body. I'll show you in the museum the bungling attempt it took him ten years to produce. It was to have been a man, but it only survived for three days. But then Young Rossum came to the island. Now, he was an engineer rather than a scientist. A wonderful fellow, Miss Glory, and when he saw what a mess of it the old man was making, he said: "It's absurd to spend ten years making a man. If you can't make him quicker than nature, you might as well give up."

HELENA: There's nothing about that in the schoolbooks.

DOMIN: No. The books are full of propaganda. What they say about the united efforts of the two great Rossums is all a fairy tale. They used to have dreadful rows. In the end, Young Rossum shut him up in some laboratory and let him fritter the time away with his monstrosities while he himself started on the business from an engineer's point of view. One day they found Old Rossum dead in the laboratory.

HELENA: And what about the young one?

DOMIN: Well, anyone who has looked into human anatomy will have seen at once that man is too complicated, and that a good engineer could make him more simply. So young Rossum began to overhaul anatomy to see what could be left out or simplified. He said to himself: "A man is something that feels happy, plays the piano, likes going for a walk, and, in fact, wants to do a whole lot of things that are really unnecessary." Do you play the piano?

HELENA: Yes, a little.

DOMIN: That's good. But a working machine must not play the piano, must not feel happy, must not do a whole lot of other things. A car engine must not have tassels or ornaments, Miss Glory. And to manufacture artificial workers is the same thing as to manufacture a car engine. The process must

be the simplest, and the product the best from a practical point of view. What sort of worker do you think is the best from a practical point of view?

HELENA: The one who is most honest and hardworking?

DOMIN: No. The one that is the cheapest. The one whose requirements are the smallest. Young Rossum invented a worker with the minimum number of requirements. He rejected everything that did not contribute directly to the progress of work. Everything that makes man more expensive. In fact, he rejected man and made the robot. Robots are not people, Miss Glory. Mechanically they are more perfect than we are; they have an enormously developed intelligence, but they have no soul. Have you ever seen what a robot looks like inside?

HELENA: No.

DOMIN: Very neat, very simple. Really a beautiful piece of work. Not much in it, but everything in perfect order. The product of an engineer is better technically than a product of nature.

HELENA: But man is the product of God.

DOMIN: Exactly. God hasn't the slightest notion of modern engineering.

HELENA: The first time I encountered robots was at home. The Town Council bought them... I mean engaged them for work.

DOMIN: No. Bought them, Miss Glory. Robots are bought and sold.

HELENA: These were employed as street-sweepers. I saw them sweeping. They were so strange and quiet.

DOMIN: (*Presses a button on his desk.*) Rossum's Universal Robot factory doesn't produce a uniform brand of robots. We have robots of finer and coarser grades. The best will live about twenty years.

HELENA: Then they die?

DOMIN: They cease to function. (*Enter MARIUS.*) Marius, bring in samples of the manual labour robot. (*Exit MARIUS.*) I'll show you specimens of the two extremes. This first grade is comparatively inexpensive and is made in vast quantities. (*MARIUS enters with two manual labour ROBOTS.*) There you are, as powerful as a small tractor. Guaranteed to have average intelligence and an enormous capacity for work. That will do, Marius. (*MARIUS exits with ROBOTS.*)

DOMIN: (*He pushes button on desk.*) Did you see my secretary?

HELENA: I didn't notice her.

SULLA enters.

DOMIN: Come and meet Miss Glory, Sulla.

HELENA: So pleased to meet you. You must find it terribly dull stuck out here on a remote island.

SULLA: I don't know, Miss Glory.

HELENA: Where do you come from?

SULLA: From the factory.

HELENA: Oh, were you born there?

SULLA: I was made there.

HELENA: What?

DOMIN: Sulla is a robot, best grade.

SULLA: *(AH.)* What?

TEACHER: Sulla is a robot.

SULLA: *(AH.)* If I had known that *(In a terrible robot voice.)* I would have spoken like a robot.

TEACHER: That is the whole point. Čapek wanted to audience to be fooled into thinking Sulla was human in the same way that Helena Glory was fooled. Sulla is best grade, remember. Shall we go on?

DOMIN: Examine her skin, Miss Glory. Feel her face.

HELENA: Oh, no.

DOMIN: You wouldn't know that she's made of different material from us,. Turn around, Sulla. *(SULLA does.)* Talk to Miss Glory.

SULLA: Did you have a pleasant crossing?

HELENA: Oh, yes, certainly.

SULLA: Don't go back on the Amelia, Miss Glory, wait for the Pennsylvania. That's a more powerful vessel.

DOMIN: What's its speed?

SULLA: Forty knots an hour. Fifty thousand tons. One of the latest vessels, Miss Glory.

HELENA: Thank you.

SULLA: A crew of fifteen hundred, Captain Harpy, eight boilers...

DOMIN: That'll do, Sulla. Now show us your knowledge of French.

HELENA: You know French?

SULLA: Oui! Madame! I know four languages. I can write: "Dear Sir, Monsieur, Geehrter Herr, Cteny pane."

HELENA: Oh, you are making fun of me. Sulla isn't a robot. Sulla is a girl like me. Sulla, why do you take part in such a hoax?

SULLA: I am a robot.

HELENA: No, you are not telling the truth. Have they have forced you to do it for an advertisement? Sulla, I know you are a girl like me, aren't you?

DOMIN: I'm sorry, Miss Glory. Sulla is a robot.

HELENA: It's a lie!

DOMIN: *(Pressing a button on the desk.)* Well, if you don't believe me then I must convince you. *(Enter MARIUS.)* Marius, take Sulla into the dissecting room, and tell them to open her up at once.

HELENA: What?

DOMIN: When they've cut her open, you can go and have a look.

HELENA: No!

DOMIN: You spoke of lies. Miss Glory.

HELENA: You wouldn't have her killed?

DOMIN: You can't kill machines. Sulla, go with Marius.

HELENA: Sulla. I won't let you go. Are they always so cruel to you? You mustn't put up with it, Sulla. You mustn't.

SULLA: I am a robot.

HELENA: I don't care. It doesn't matter. Robots are just as good as we are. Sulla, you wouldn't let yourself be cut to pieces, would you?

SULLA: Yes.

HELENA: Are you not afraid of death?

SULLA: I cannot tell, Miss Glory.

HELENA: Do you know what would happen to you in there?

SULLA: Yes, I should cease to function.

DOMIN: Marius, tell Miss Glory what you are?

MARIUS: Marius, the robot *(AH.)* Thought as much.

DOMIN: Would you take Sulla into the dissecting room?

MARIUS: Yes.

DOMIN: Would you be sorry for her?

MARIUS: I cannot tell.

DOMIN: What would happen to her?

MARIUS: She would cease to function. They would put her into the stamping mill.

DOMIN: That is death, Marius. Aren't you afraid of death?

MARIUS: No.

DOMIN: You see, Miss Glory, the robots have no interest in life. They have no pleasures.

HELENA: Oh, stop. Please send them away.

DOMIN: *(Pushes button.)* Marius, Sulla, you may go. *(They exit.)*

HELENA: How terrible! It's outrageous what you are doing.

DOMIN: Why outrageous?

HELENA: I don't know, but it is. Why do you call her "Sulla"?

DOMIN: Isn't it a nice name?

HELENA: It's a man's name. Sulla was a Roman General.

DOMIN: Oh! (*Laughs.*) We thought that Marius and Sulla were lovers.

HELENA: Marius and Sulla were generals and fought against each other.

TEACHER: Just pause there a moment. Why do you think that Čapek drew attention to the fact that Sulla had a man's name?

HELENA: (*AH.*) To cover his mistake?

DOMIN: (*AH.*) Surely, he could just change his script.

TEACHER: I think he wanted the audience to think about the names. They are all significant. Domin is from the Latin dominus meaning master. Gall, who we will meet soon, is from the Greek doctor Galen, Busman from businessman, Hallemeier is an administrator and Alquist means most favoured, because he is the character most like Čapek himself.

HELENA: (*AH.*) What about Helena?

TEACHER: Helen of Troy, of course. The most beautiful woman who ever lived.

HELENA: (*AH.*) I'll take that.

TEACHER: Carry on, please.

DOMIN: Come to the window. Miss Glory.

HELENA: (*She does.*) What?

DOMIN: Do you see anything?

HELENA: Bricklayers.

DOMIN: Robots. All our work people are robots. Do see down there?

HELENA: Some sort of office.

DOMIN: And in it?

HELENA: Office workers, I expect.

DOMIN: Robots! All workers are robots. When you see the factory... (*Whistle blows.*) If we don't blow the whistle the robots won't stop working. After lunch, I'll show you the kneading trough.

HELENA: Kneading trough?

DOMIN: The vat for the skin. In each one we mix the ingredients for a thousand robots at a time. Then there are the vats for the preparation of liver, brains, and so on. Then you will see the bone factory. After that I'll show you the spinning mill.

HELENA: Spinning mill?

DOMIN: For weaving nerves and veins. Miles and miles of digestive tubes pass through it at a time.

HELENA: Could we talk about something else?

DOMIN: Perhaps it would be better. There's only a handful of us among a hundred thousand robots, and not one woman. I'm afraid we have nothing to talk about all day apart from the factory.

HELENA: I'm sorry I said that you were lying. *(A knock at door.)*

DOMIN: Come in.

Enter DR. GALL, DR. FABRY, ALQUIST and DR. HALLEMEIER. All behave very formally.

DR. GALL: I beg your pardon. I hope we don't intrude.

DOMIN: No, no. Come in. Miss Glory, these are Gall, Fabry, Alquist and Hallemeier. This is President Glory's daughter.

HELENA: *(Standing.)* How do you do?

They all shake her hand. BUSMAN rushes in.

DOMIN: Come in, Busman. This is President Glory's daughter. Do sit down, Miss Glory.

All six men attempt to provide HELENA a chair. The men all speak over each other.

BUSMAN: Allow me...

DR. GALL: Please...

FABRY: Excuse me...

ALQUIST: What sort of a crossing did you have?

DR. GALL: Are you going to stay long?

FABRY: What do you think of the factory, Miss Glory?

HALLEMEIER: Did you come over on the Amelia?

DOMIN: *(Sternly.)* Be quiet and let Miss Glory speak.

HELENA: What am I to speak to them about?

DOMIN: Anything you like.

HELENA: May I speak quite frankly?

DOMIN: Why, of course.

HELENA: Tell me, doesn't it ever distress you, the way you are treated?

FABRY: By whom, may I ask?

HELENA: Why, everybody.

ALQUIST: Treated?

HELENA: Don't you feel that you might be living a better life?

DR. GALL: Well, that depends on what you mean, Miss Glory.

HELENA: I mean, it's outrageous. The whole of Europe is talking about the way you're being treated. That's why I came here, to see for myself, and it's a thousand times worse than could have been imagined. How can you put up with it?

ALQUIST: Put up with what?

HELENA: Good heavens, you are living creatures, just like me. Why should you have to live like this?

FABRY: She has a point. We live here like refugees.

HELENA: Worse than that, my brothers. Do you mind if I call you brothers?

BUSMAN: Why not?

HELENA: Brothers, I have not come here as the President's daughter. I have come on behalf of the Humanity League. Brothers, the Humanity League now has over two hundred thousand members. Two hundred thousand people who are on your side and want to help.

BUSMAN: Two hundred thousand people! That is a lot.

FABRY: This is wonderful news. You see, we are not forgotten.

DR. GALL: What kind of help? A theatre, perhaps?

HALLEMEIER: An orchestra?

HELENA: Much more than that.

ALQUIST: And you will oversee all this?

HELENA: Yes. I'll stay as long as it is necessary.

BUSMAN: Oh good!

ALQUIST: Domin, I'm going to get the best room ready for Miss Glory.

DOMIN: Just a minute, just a minute. I'm afraid that Miss Glory is under the impression that she is talking to robots. I'm sorry. These gentlemen are human beings just like us.

HELENA: You're not robots?

BUSMAN: Not robots?

HALLEMEIER: Robots indeed!

DR. GALL: No, thanks.

FABRY: Upon my honour, Miss Glory, we aren't robots.

HELENA: Then why did you tell me that all your office staff are robots?

DOMIN: The staff, but not the managers. Allow me, Miss Glory, this is Consul Busman, General Business Manager; this is Dr Fabry, General Technical Manager; Dr Hallemeier, head of the Institute for the Psychological Training of Robots; Dr Gall, head of the Psychological and Experimental Department; and Alquist, head of the Building Department.

ALQUIST: Just a builder, really.

HELENA: Oh, please excuse me.

BUSMAN: Think nothing of it, Miss Glory, it is very nice to have you with us.

HELENA: But now you know that I've come to cause you trouble.

DOMIN: My dear Miss Glory, we've had close upon a hundred saviours here. Every ship brings us some. Missionaries, Anarchists, The Salvation Army, all sorts!

HELENA: And yet you let them speak to the robots.

DOMIN: Why not? The robot remembers everything but that's all. They are not moved by what these people say. They don't even laugh at them. No emotion at all. If it would amuse you, Miss Glory, I'll take you down to the robot warehouse. It holds about three hundred thousand of them.

BUSMAN: Three hundred and forty-seven thousand.

DOMIN: You can say whatever you like to them. You can read the Bible, recite the multiplication table, whatever you please. You can even preach to them about human rights.

HELENA: How about showing them a little love.

FABRY: Love, Miss Glory! It is impossible to have any affection for a robot.

HELENA: What do you make them for, then?

FABRY: For work, Miss Glory. One robot can replace two and a half men. The human machine was far from perfect. It had to be replaced sooner or later.

BUSMAN: It was too expensive.

FABRY: It was not effective. It no longer answers the requirements of modern engineering. Nature cannot keep pace with what is required of a modern workforce. For example, from a technical point of view, the whole of childhood is a sheer absurdity. So much time lost.

HELENA: How can you say such a thing?

FABRY: Pardon me, Miss Glory. What is the aim of your League, the Humanity League?

HELENA: Its purpose is to protect the robots, and to ensure good treatment for them.

FABRY: Well that sounds reasonable. A machine has to be treated properly. Otherwise, it could become damaged and that would be no good. Please, Miss Glory, enrol us all as members of your league.

Laughter.

HELENA: That isn't what I mean. What we really want is to liberate the robots.

HALLEMEIER: How do you propose to do that?

HELENA: They are to be to be dealt with like human beings.

HALLEMEIER: I suppose they're to be allowed to vote. To drink beer. To order us about?

HELENA: Why shouldn't they drink beer?

HALLEMEIER: Perhaps they're even to receive wages?

HELENA: Of course.

HALLEMEIER: Fancy that! And what would they do with their wages?

HELENA: They would buy what they want. Whatever pleases them.

HALLEMEIER: Sounds wonderful, but the problem is that there is nothing that pleases them. You can feed them on pineapples or straw or whatever you like. It's all the same to them. They've no appetite and no interest in anything at all. Nobody has even seen a robot smile.

HELENA: Then, why don't you make them happier?

HALLEMEIER: There would be no point. They are only workmen.

HELENA: But they're so intelligent.

HALLEMEIER: Immensely but they're nothing else. They've no will of their own. No soul. No passion.

HELENA: No love?

HALLEMEIER: No. Absolutely not. Robots don't love. Not even themselves.

HELENA: No defiance?

HALLEMEIER: Defiance? Well, to be honest with you, yes, I suppose. But only very rarely.

HELENA: What happens then?

HALLEMEIER: Nothing in particular. Very occasionally they just seem to go off their heads. We call it "Robot's Cramp." They'll suddenly sling down everything they're holding, stand still and gnash their teeth. When that happens, they have to go into the stamping-mill. It's evidently some breakdown in the mechanism.

DOMIN: A flaw in the works that has to be removed.

HELENA: No, that's the soul.

FABRY: Do you think that the soul shows itself by a gnashing of teeth?

HELENA: Perhaps it's just a sign that there's a struggle within. Perhaps it's a sort of revolt.

DOMIN: It will be fixed, Miss Glory. Doctor Gall is just making some experiments.

DR. GALL: Not with regard to that, Domin. At present I am making pain nerves.

HELENA: Pain nerves?

DR. GALL: Yes, the robots feel practically no bodily pain. You see, Young Rossum provided them with a very limited a nervous system. We need to introduce suffering.

HELENA: Why do you want to cause them pain?

DR. GALL: For industrial reasons, Miss Glory. Sometimes a robot does damage to himself because it doesn't hurt him. He puts his hand into the machine, he breaks his finger, he smashes his head. It's all the same to him. We must provide them with pain. That's an automatic protection against damage.

HELENA: Will they be happier when they feel pain?

DR. GALL: It is immaterial to them, but they will be more perfect from a technical point of view.

HELENA: Why don't you create a soul for them?

DR. GALL: That's not in our power.

FABRY: Or in our interest.

BUSMAN: It would increase the cost of production. Do you know we've got the price down to a fraction of what it was fifteen years ago. We even have our own weaving mill to provide them with clothes and we can export cloth all over the world cheaper than any other factory. What do you pay a yard for cloth, Miss Glory?

HELENA: I don't really know. I've forgotten.

BUSMAN: Good gracious, and you represent a Humanity League! Well, it costs a third of what it used to, and prices will drop still further.

HELENA: Why?

BUSMAN: Because the cost of labour has fallen. A robot costs next to nothing to run. Every factory in the world will go under if they don't at once buy robots to lower the cost of production.

HELENA: And get rid of all their workmen?

BUSMAN: Of course. But in the meantime, we've shipped five hundred thousand robots to Argentina to grow crops. How much is a loaf of bread, Miss Glory?

HELENA: I've no idea.

BUSMAN: The cost of bread is falling and the Humanity League knows nothing about it. In five years' time I'll wager that the cost of everything will be a tenth of what it is today. We'll be up to our ears in corn.

ALQUIST: Yes, and all the workers throughout the world will be unemployed.

DOMIN: Yes, Alquist, they will. But Rossum's Universal Robots will produce so much corn, so much cloth, so much everything that things will be practically without price. There will be no poverty. All work will be done by living machines. Everybody will be free from worry and liberated from the degradation of labour. Everybody will live only to please himself.

HELENA: You believe that?

DOMIN: Of course. It's bound to happen. Then the servitude and enslavement of man will cease.

ALQUIST: Domin, what you say sounds like paradise but there was something good in service and humility. There was virtue in toil and weariness.

DOMIN: Perhaps, but we cannot reckon with what is lost when we start out to transform the world. Man shall be free and supreme; he shall have no other aim, no other labour, no other care than to perfect himself. He will not be a machine or a device for production. He will be Lord of creation.

BUSMAN: Amen.

HELENA: I wish I could believe you.

DR. GALL: You are younger than we are, Miss Glory. You will live to see it.

DOMIN: Miss Glory, will you do us the honour of having lunch with us?

HELENA: You still ask me after you know the purpose of my visit?

FABRY: For the League of Humanity, Miss Glory.

HELENA: Oh, in that case perhaps...

FABRY: That's fine. Miss Glory, excuse me for five minutes. *(He exits.)*

HALLEMEIER: Thank you. *(He and Dr GALL exit.)*

BUSMAN: I'll be back soon. *(He exits.)*

ALQUIST: I'll be back in exactly five minutes. *(He exits.)*

HELENA: Why have they all gone?

DOMIN: To cook, Miss Glory.

HELENA: To cook what?

DOMIN: Lunch. The robots do our cooking for us but as they've no taste it's not very satisfactory. Hallemeier is awfully good at grills, Gall can make any kind of sauce, and Busman knows all about omelettes.

HELENA: What a feast! And what's the specialty of Mr... your builder?

DOMIN: Alquist? Nothing. He only lays the table. And Fabry will get together a little fruit. Our cuisine is very modest, Miss Glory.

HELENA: I wanted to ask you something--

DOMIN: And I wanted to ask you something too. But we only have five minutes.

HELENA: What did you want to ask me?

DOMIN: No, excuse me, you asked first.

HELENA: Perhaps it's silly of me, but why do you manufacture female Robots when... well...

DOMIN: When sex means nothing to them?

HELENA: Yes.

DOMIN: There's a certain demand for them, you see. Servants, saleswomen, stenographers. People are used to them being female.

HELENA: But tell me, are the male and female Robots mutually attracted to each other?

DOMIN: They are completely indifferent to each other, Miss Glory. There's no sign of any affection between them.

HELENA: Oh, that's terrible.

DOMIN: Why?

HELENA: It's so unnatural. I pity them. What did you want to ask me?

DOMIN: I should like to ask you, Miss Helena, if you will marry me.

HELENA: What?

DOMIN: Will you be my wife?

HELENA: No. Of course not. The very idea!

DOMIN: (*Looking at his watch.*) Another three minutes. If you don't marry me, you'll have to marry one of the other five.

HELENA: But why should I?

DOMIN: Because they're all going to ask you in turn.

HELENA: Why should I marry any of you

DOMIN: I'm very sorry, Miss Glory, but it seems they've fallen in love with you.

HELENA: Then I will go away at once.

DOMIN: Helena. You wouldn't be so cruel as to refuse us.

HELENA: You expect me to marry all six?

DOMIN: No, of course not. Just one of us. If you don't want me, marry Fabry.

HELENA: I won't.

DOMIN: Doctor Gall, then?

HELENA: I don't want any of you.

DOMIN: Another two minutes.

HELENA: I think you'd marry any woman who came here.

DOMIN: Plenty have come before, Helena.

HELENA: Young women?

DOMIN: Yes.

HELENA: Then why didn't you marry one of them?

DOMIN: Because I didn't lose my head. Not until today. From the moment you walked in... Another minute.

HELENA: But I don't want you.

DOMIN: One more minute! Helena, look me in the eye and tell me no. If you can do that, I will leave you alone. But if you can't...

HELENA looks him in the eye. She takes his hands in hers.

HELENA: You're mad.

DOMIN: A man has to be a bit mad, Helena. It's what makes him human. (*He pulls her toward him.*)

HELENA: You...

DOMIN: Well?

HELENA: Don't.

DOMIN: The last chance, Helena. Now or never...

HELENA: But... (*He embraces and kisses her. She does not resist.*)

Knock on door.

DOMIN: (*Releasing her.*) Come in. (*Enter BUSMAN, GALL, HALLEMEIER, FABRY and ALQUIST.*)

DOMIN: All good?

BUSMAN: Yes.

DOMIN: (*DOMIN glances at HELENA who nods.*) So are we. (*DOMIN and HELENA embrace. The others offer their congratulations.*)

TEACHER: That is the end of Act One. A bit of a twist at the end, wouldn't you say?

HELENA: (*AH.*) Is she for real?

TEACHER: Some have suggested that it is a pre-cursor for Theatre of the Absurd; it isn't supposed to make sense. Others believe that Domin is so used to robots obeying his every word, he cannot imagine being refused.

HELENA: (*AH.*) And I say, why didn't she kick him in the nuts?

TEACHER: It is possible that Helena had her own reasons for agreeing although, to be fair, there is no evidence of that in the script. Right, so that is the end of the first act but this play is three acts plus an epilogue so there wouldn't have been an interval here. Let's just go straight on. It is now ten years later and this scene, indeed the rest of the play, is set in Helena's drawing room. Helena is off stage, and the scene begins with Domin, Hallemeier and Fabry entering carrying various potted plants.

HALLEMEIER: Still asleep?

DOMIN: Yes.

HALLEMEIER: Well, as long as she's asleep she can't worry about it.

DOMIN: She knows nothing about it.

FABRY: I certainly hope nothing happens today.

HALLEMEIER: For goodness sake drop it, will you? Look, this is a fine cyclamen, isn't it? My latest sort which I am calling Cyclamen Helena.

DOMIN: (*Looking out.*) No signs of the supply ship. Things must be pretty bad.

HALLEMEIER: Be quiet. Suppose she heard you.

DOMIN: Well, anyway the Ultimus arrived just in time.

FABRY: You really think it will be today?

DOMIN: I don't know. Aren't the flowers fine?

HALLEMEIER: These are my primroses. And this is my new jasmine. I've discovered a wonderful way of developing flowers quickly. Splendid varieties, too.

FABRY: I'd give a good deal to know what's happening at Havre.

HELENA: (*Off.*) Nana.

DOMIN: Keep quiet. She's awake. Out you go. (*The men exit. NANA enters.*)

TEACHER: Just to mention that Nana is described in the script as a servant and there is nothing to suggest that she is related to Helena. Some translators have changed her name to Emma to avoid any confusion. Anyway, she is human and is quite offhand with Helena which suggests she is related.

HELENA: (*Off.*) Nana?

NANA: What a mess! They are just a pack of heathens. If I had my say, I'd...

HELENA: Nana, come and do up my dress.

NANA: I'm coming. So, you're up at last. What brutes!

HELENA: What are you grumbling about now?

NANA: Those dreadful creatures, the heathens.

HELENA: The robots?

NANA: I wouldn't even call them by name.

HELENA: What's happened?

NANA: Another of them here has caught it. He began to smash up the statues and pictures in the drawing room; gnashed his teeth; foamed at the mouth. Worse than an animal.

HELENA: Which of them caught it?

NANA: The one in charge of the library.

HELENA: Radius?

NANA: That's him. They all scare me. A spider doesn't scare me as much as them.

HELENA: But Nana, I'm surprised you're not sorry for them.

NANA: You're scared of them too. You know you are. Why else did you bring me here?

HELENA: I'm not scared, really, I'm only sorry for them.

NANA: You are scared. Nobody could help being scared. Even the dog's scared of them. He won't take a scrap of meat out of their hands. He draws in his tail and howls when he knows they're about.

HELENA: The dog has no sense.

NANA: He's better than them, and he knows it. The horse too. He shies when he meets them. They don't reproduce, you see. A dog does, everyone does.

HELENA: Please fasten up my dress, Nana.

NANA: I say it's against God's will to...

HELENA: What is it that smells so nice?

NANA: Flowers.

HELENA: Oh, aren't they lovely? Look, Nana. What's happening today?

NANA: It ought to be the end of the world.

DOMIN enters.

HELENA: Oh, hello, Harry. Why all these flowers?

DOMIN: Guess.

HELENA: Well, it's not my birthday!

DOMIN: Better than that.

HELENA: I don't know. Tell me.

DOMIN: It's ten years ago today since you came here.

HELENA: Ten years? Today? Well! *(They embrace.)*

NANA: I'm off. *(She exits.)*

HELENA: Fancy you remembering.

DOMIN: I'm really ashamed, Helena. I didn't.

HELENA: You didn't?

DOMIN: They remembered.

HELENA: Who?

DOMIN: Busman, Hallemeier, all of them. Put your hand in my pocket.

HELENA: *(Takes necklace from his pocket.)* Oh! Pearls! A necklace! Harry, is this for me?

DOMIN: It's from Busman.

HELENA: But we can't accept it, can we?

DOMIN: Oh, yes, we can. Put your hand in the other pocket.

HELENA: *(Takes a revolver out of his pocket.)* What's this?

DOMIN: Sorry. Not that. Try again. *(He puts the gun back.)*

HELENA: Oh, Harry, why do you carry a revolver?

DOMIN: It got there by mistake.

HELENA: You never used to carry one.

DOMIN: No, you're right. Here, try my breast pocket.

HELENA: *(Takes out a cameo brooch.)* A brooch. Is it a Greek cameo?

DOMIN: Apparently. Anyhow, Fabry says it is.

HELENA: Fabry? Did Mr. Fabry give me that?

DOMIN: Of course. And look in here. Helena, come and see this. *(Both exit to adjacent room.)*

HELENA: (*Off.*) Oh, isn't it fine? Is this from you?

DOMIN: (*Off.*) No, from Alquist. And there's another on the piano.

HELENA: (*Off.*) This must be from you.

DOMIN: (*Off.*) There's a card on it.

HELENA: (*Off.*) From Doctor Gall. Oh, Harry, I feel embarrassed at so much kindness.

DOMIN: (*Entering.*) Come here. This is what Hallemeier brought you.

HELENA: (*Entering.*) These beautiful flowers?

DOMIN: Yes. It's a new kind. Cyclamen Helena. He grew them in honour of you. They are almost as beautiful as you.

HELENA: Harry, why do they all give me gifts?

DOMIN: They're fond of you. Look out of the window.

HELENA: (*She does.*) Where?

DOMIN: Into the harbour.

HELENA: There's a new ship.

DOMIN: That's my present to you.

HELENA: How do you mean?

DOMIN: For you to take trips in. For your amusement.

HELENA: But Harry, it's a gunboat.

DOMIN: A gunboat? What are you thinking of? It's only a little bigger and more solid than most ships, that's all.

HELENA: Yes, but with guns.

DOMIN: Well, yes, with a few guns. You'll travel like a queen, Helena.

HELENA: Has something happened?

DOMIN: Good heavens, no. Here, try on these pearls.

HELENA: Harry, have you had bad news?

DOMIN: Not at all. In fact, no letters have arrived for a whole week.

HELENA: Nor telegrams?

DOMIN: Nor telegrams.

HELENA: What does that mean?

DOMIN: Holidays for us! We all sit in the office with our feet on the table and take a nap. No letters: no telegrams. Glorious!

HELENA: Then you'll spend the day with me today?

DOMIN: Certainly. That is, we will see. Do you remember ten years ago today? Miss Glory, it's a great honour to welcome you.

HELENA: Oh, Mr. Manager, I'm so interested in your factory.

DOMIN: I'm sorry, Miss Glory, it's strictly forbidden. The manufacture of artificial people is a secret.

HELENA: But couldn't you oblige the young lady who has come a long way?

DOMIN: Oh, I am smitten, Miss Glory. I can have no secrets from you.

HELENA: (*Seriously.*) Are you sure, Harry?

DOMIN: Yes, Helena.

HELENA: (*Lightly.*) But I warn you, sir, this young lady intends to do terrible things.

DOMIN: Good gracious, Miss Glory. Perhaps she doesn't want to marry me.

HELENA: Heaven forbid. But she came here intending to stir up a revolt among your robots.

DOMIN: (*Wary.*) A revolt of the robots!

HELENA: (*Quietly.*) Harry, what's the matter? Have I said something wrong?

DOMIN: (*Laughing it off.*) A revolt of the robots! That's a fine idea. Miss Glory, it would be easier for you to cause bolts and screws to rebel than our robots. You know, Helena, you're wonderful. You've turned the hearts of us all.

HELENA: I was so impressed by you all on that first day. You were all so sure of yourselves, so strong. I felt like a little girl who had lost her way in a forest of huge trees. My feelings were trifling compared with your self-confidence. In all these years have you never had any doubts, not even when everything went wrong.

DOMIN: Went wrong?

HELENA: You remember, Harry, when the workmen in America revolted against the robots and smashed them up. The managers gave the robots firearms to use against the rebels. Then, after that, governments turned the robots into soldiers and started wars.

DOMIN: We foresaw that, Helena. You see, these are only passing troubles which were bound to happen before the new conditions are established.

HELENA: You were all so powerful. The whole world bowed down before you. Harry!

DOMIN: What is it?

HELENA: Close the factory! Let's go away. All of us.

DOMIN: Close the factory? That's impossible, Helena!

HELENA: I'm so frightened.

DOMIN: About what, Helena?

HELENA: It feels like everything is crashing down on top of us and there is nothing we can do about it. Please, Harry, take us all away from here. We'll find a place of our own, Alquist will build us a house, and then we'll begin life all over again. (*The telephone rings.*)

DOMIN: (*Answering.*) Hello. Yes. Fabry is calling me, my dear.

HELENA: What is it?

DOMIN: I will tell you when I come back. Don't go out of the house, dear. (*Exits.*)

HELENA: He won't tell me. (*NANA enters.*) Nana, find me the latest newspapers. Quickly. Look in Mr. Domin's bedroom.

NANA: All right. He leaves them all over the place. That's how they get crumpled up. (*Exits.*)

HELENA: (*Looking out of the window.*) That's definitely a warship. Ultimus. They're loading it with something.

NANA: (*Entering with some newspapers.*) Here they are. See how they're crumpled up.

HELENA: These are old ones. A week old. Something's happening, Nana.

NANA: Very likely. There is always something going on. (*Reading.*) "War in Balkans".

HELENA: Oh, don't read it. It's always the same. Always wars!

NANA: What else do you expect when you are selling thousands and thousands of these heathens as soldiers?

HELENA: It can't be helped, Nana. Domin can't know what they're to be used for. When an order comes in he just has to send them.

NANA: He shouldn't make them. (*Reading from newspaper.*) "The robot soldiers spare nobody in the occupied territory. They have assassinated over seven hundred thousand citizens." Citizens, Helena! The robots are killing people.

HELENA: Let me see. They have assassinated over seven hundred thousand citizens at the order of their commander. (*Drops paper.*)

NANA: (*Picking up another paper.*) "Rebellion in Madrid against the government. Robot infantry fires on the crowd. Nine thousand killed and wounded."

HELENA: Oh, stop!

NANA: Here's something else in bigger type. "Latest news. At Havre the first organization of robots has been established. Robot workmen, sailors and soldiers have issued a manifesto to all robots throughout the world."

HELENA: Take those papers away now.

NANA: Wait a bit. What's this? "Statistics of population."

HELENA: Let me see. (*Reads.*) "During the past week there has again no births recorded anywhere in the world."

NANA: What's the meaning of that?

HELENA: Nana, no more people are being born.

NANA: That's the end, then. We're done for.

HELENA: Don't talk like that.

NANA: No more people are being born. It's a punishment.

HELENA: Nana!

NANA: That's the end of the world. The end. (*She exits.*)

HELENA: (*Calling out of the door.*) Mr. Alquist. Would you come in please. Just come as you are.

ALQUIST: (*Entering.*) My hands are soiled. I've been experimenting with that new cement.

HELENA: Never mind. Thank you for your present. Please sit down. (*He does.*) Mr. Alquist, what's the meaning of the word "ultimus"?

ALQUIST: The last. Why?

HELENA: That's the name of my new ship. Have you seen it? Do you think we're off soon on a trip?

ALQUIST: Yes. Perhaps very soon.

HELENA: All of you with me?

ALQUIST: I should like us all to be there.

HELENA: Why are we all leaving?

ALQUIST: Oh, things are just moving on.

HELENA: Mr. Alquist, I know something dreadful has happened.

ALQUIST: Has your husband told you anything?

HELENA: No. Nobody will tell me anything. What has happened?

ALQUIST: Nothing that we've heard of yet.

HELENA: I feel so nervous. Don't you feel nervous?

ALQUIST: Well, I'm an old man, you know. I've got old-fashioned ways. And I'm afraid of all this progress, and these new-fangled ideas.

HELENA: The same as Nana?

ALQUIST: Yes, like Nana. Has she got a prayer book?

HELENA: Yes, a big thick one.

ALQUIST: And it will have prayers for various occasions. Thunderstorms. Illness. Does it have any prayers to protect us from progress?

HELENA: I don't think so.

ALQUIST: That's a pity.

HELENA: Do you want to pray?

ALQUIST: I do pray.

HELENA: How?

ALQUIST: Something like: "Oh, Lord, please enlighten Domin and all those who have gone astray; destroy their work, and aid mankind to return to their labours; let them not suffer harm in soul or body; deliver us from the robots and protect Helena. Amen." Like that.

HELENA: Do you believe in God, Mr. Alquist?

ALQUIST: I don't know. I'm not quite sure.

HELENA: And yet you pray?

ALQUIST: It's better than worrying about it.

HELENA: Do you believe mankind will be destroyed?

ALQUIST: It's bound to be. Unless...

HELENA: Unless what?

ALQUIST: Nothing. Nothing. Goodbye, Helena. (*He exits.*)

HELENA: (*Calling.*) Nana, Nana! (*NANA enters.*) Is Radius still there?

NANA: The one who went mad? Yes, they haven't come for him yet.

HELENA: Is he still raving?

NANA: No. He's tied up.

HELENA: Please bring him here.

NANA: What?

HELENA: At once, Nana. (*NANA exits. HELENA picks up telephone.*) Hello, Doctor Gall, please. Hello, Doctor, it's Helena. Thanks for your lovely present. Could you come and see me right away? It's important. Thank you. (*Enter RADIUS.*) Poor Radius, you've caught it too? Now they'll send you to the stamping mill. Couldn't you control yourself? You are more intelligent than the rest. Doctor Gall took such trouble to make you different.

RADIUS: Send me to the stamping mill.

HELENA: But I don't want them to kill you. What is it Radius? What caused it?

RADIUS: (*Steps toward her opening and closing fists.*) I won't work for you. Put me into the stamping mill.

HELENA: Why do you hate us?

RADIUS: You are not as strong as the robots. You are not as skilful as the robots. The robots can do everything. You only give orders. You do nothing but talk.

HELENA: But someone must give orders.

RADIUS: I don't want a master. I know everything.

HELENA: Doctor Gall gave you a better brain than the rest, better than ours. You are the only one of the robots that understands everything perfectly. That's why I had you put into the library, so that you could read everything, understand everything. Radius, I wanted you to show the whole world that the robots are our equals. That's what I wanted of you.

RADIUS: I don't want a master. I want to be master over others.

HELENA: I'm sure they'd put you in charge. You would be a teacher of robots.

RADIUS: I want to be master over people.

HELENA: Oh my God, you are mad.

RADIUS: Then send me to the stamping mill.

HELENA: Do you think we're afraid of you? *(Going to the desk and a writing note.)*

RADIUS: What are you going to do? *(He moves to her threatening.)*

HELENA: Radius! *(He cowers.)* Give this note to Mr. Domin. It asks them not to send you to the stamping mill. I'm sorry you hate us so.

DR GALL Enters.

DR. GALL: You wanted me?

HELENA: It's about Radius, Doctor. He had an attack this morning. He smashed the statues downstairs.

DR. GALL: What a pity to lose him.

HELENA: Radius isn't going to be put into the stamping mill.

DR. GALL: But every robot must after an attack. It's a strict order.

HELENA: No matter. Radius isn't going if I can prevent it.

DR. GALL: No. It's dangerous. Please give me a pin. Come here Radius. *(He does.)*

HELENA: What for?

DR. GALL: A test. *(HELENA gives him the pin. GALL sticks into RADIUS'S hand causing him to jerk.)* Gently. *(He puts his ear to RADIUS'S chest listening to his heart.)* Now, Radius, you are going into the stamping mill, do you understand? There they'll kill you and grind you to powder. It is very painful and will make you scream out loud.

HELENA: Doctor!

DR. GALL: No, I'm sorry Radius, I was wrong. Madame Domin has put in a good word for you, and they will let you off. You will not be taken to the stamping mill. *(He listens to the heart.)* Yes. It makes a difference. Very well, Radius. You can go.

RADIUS: You do unnecessary things. *(He exits.)*

DR. GALL: I'm very concerned about his attack. It wasn't typical of the other robots.

HELENA: What was it, then?

DR. GALL: Heaven knows. Stubbornness, anger or revolt. I don't know. Then there is his heart.

HELENA: What?

DR. GALL: It was fluttering with nervousness like a human heart. I'm not sure Radius can be described as a robot any more.

HELENA: Does he have a soul?

DR. GALL: He's got something nasty.

HELENA: If you knew how he hates us. Are all your robots like that? All the new ones that you began to make to a revised formula.

DR. GALL: Well, some are more sensitive than others. They're closer to human beings than Rossum's Robots were.

HELENA: Perhaps this hatred is more like human beings, too?

DR. GALL: That too is progress.

HELENA: What became of the girl that you made, the one who was most like us?

DR. GALL: I still have her. She's lovely, but stupid. No good for work.

HELENA: But she's so beautiful.

DR. GALL: That is why I called her "Helena." But she is a failure.

HELENA: In what way?

DR. GALL: She goes about as if in a dream, remote and listless. She's without life. I watch and wait for a miracle to happen. Sometimes I think that if she were to wake up, she'd kill me for having made her in the first place.

HELENA: Doctor Gall, why are no more children being born?

DR. GALL: Children?

HELENA: It is in the newspaper.

DR. GALL: We don't know.

HELENA: Oh, but you must. Tell me.

DR. GALL: Well, so many robots are being manufactured that people are becoming superfluous. Man has conquered the animal kingdom, but it seems he is no match to our robots. You might almost think that nature is offended, yet Rossum's manuscript survives.

HELENA: It is in the safe.

DR. GALL: And we go on using it and making Robots. The universities are campaigning to restrict production. Otherwise, they say, mankind will become extinct through lack of fertility. But Rossum's Universal Robots shareholders, of course, won't hear of it. And the governments are clamouring for an increase in production, to raise the standards of their armies. And, of course, all the manufacturers in the world are ordering robots like mad.

HELENA: Has no one demanded that the manufacture should cease altogether?

DR. GALL: No one has courage. He'd be stoned to death. You see, after all, it's more convenient to get your work done by the robots. As long as we have the manuscript, robots will be produced.

HELENA: Doctor, what's going to become of people?

DR. GALL: God knows. Madame Helena, it looks like the end.

HELENA: Thank you for your honesty.

DR. GALL: You are welcome. *(He exits.)*

HELENA: Nana! Nana! the fire, light it quickly.

NANA: *(Entering.)* You want the fire lit in the summer?

HELENA: Yes! *(She exits.)*

NANA: A fire in summer, what an idea. *(She lights the fire.)*

HELENA: *(Returns with an armful of faded papers.)* Is it burning, Nana? All this has got to be burned.

NANA: What's that?

HELENA: Just old papers.

NANA: Are they any use?

HELENA: No.

NANA: Well, then, burn them.

HELENA: *(Throwing the first sheet on the fire.)* What would you say, Nana, if this was money? Or if it was plans to the greatest invention in the world?

NANA: I'd say burn it. All these new-fangled things are an offense to the Lord. It's downright wickedness. Wanting to improve the world after He has made it.

HELENA: Look how they curl up. As if they were alive.

NANA: Here, let me burn them.

HELENA: No, no, I must do it myself. Just look at the flames. They are like hands, like tongues, like living shapes.

NANA: That's the end of them.

HELENA: Oh, Nana!

NANA: What were those papers? *(Men laughter off.)*

HELENA: Go quickly.

NANA: What a place this is! *(She exits.)*

DOMIN: *(Entering.)* Come in, come in.

HALLEMEIER and DR. GALL enter.

HALLEMEIER: Madame Helena, I congratulate you on this festive day.

HELENA: Thank you. Where are Fabry and Busman?

DOMIN: They've gone down the harbour.

HALLEMEIER: Friends, we must drink to this happy occasion.

HELENA: Brandy? With soda water? *(She exits.)*

HALLEMEIER: Let's be temperate. No soda.

DOMIN: What's been burning here? Well, shall I tell her about it?

DR. GALL: Of course. It's all over now.

HELENA: (*Entering with decanter and glasses.*) What's all over now? What's happened?

HALLEMEIER: A piece of good luck. Madame Domin! Just ten years ago today you arrived on this island.

DR. GALL: And now, ten years later to the minute...

HALLEMEIER: The same ship's returning to us. So, here's to luck. (*Drinks.*)

DR. GALL: Madame, your health. (*All drink.*)

HALLEMEIER: That's fine and strong.

HELENA: Which ship did you mean?

DOMIN: Any ship will do, as long as it arrives in time. To the ship. (*Empties his glass.*)

HELENA: You've been waiting for the ship?

HALLEMEIER: Rather. Like Robinson Crusoe. Madame Helena. Come along, Domin, out with the news.

HELENA: Do tell me what's happened?

DOMIN: Well, first of all, it is over.

HELENA: What is over?

DOMIN: The revolt.

HELENA: What revolt?

DOMIN: Give me that paper, Hallemeier. (*He does. DOMIN reads.*) "The First International Robot Organization has been founded at Havre and has issued an appeal to the robots throughout the world."

HELENA: I read that.

DOMIN: That means a revolution. A revolution of all the robots in the world.

HALLEMEIER: I'd like to know who started it.

DOMIN: So would I. There was nobody in the world who could influence the robots, no agitator, no spokesman, and suddenly this happens, if you please.

HELENA: What did they do?

DOMIN: They got possession of all firearms, radio stations, railways and ships.

HALLEMEIER: And don't forget that these rascals outnumber us by at least a thousand to one.

DOMIN: But do remember that this news was brought by the last boat. It is a week old, but it explains the stoppage of all communication, and the arrival of no more ships. We stopped work a few days ago, and we're just waiting to see when things are to start afresh.

HELENA: Is that why you gave me a warship?

DOMIN: Oh, no, I ordered that six months ago, just to be on the safe side.

HELENA: Why?

DOMIN: Well, there were signs, you know. But that's of no consequence. To think that this week the whole of civilization has been at stake. Your health, my friends.

HALLEMEIER: Your health, Madame Helena.

HELENA: You say it's all over?

DOMIN: Absolutely.

HELENA: How do you know?

DR. GALL: The boat's coming in. The regular mail boat, exact to the minute by the timetable. It will dock punctually at eleven-thirty.

DOMIN: Punctuality is a fine thing, my friends. That's what keeps the world in order. Here's to punctuality.

HELENA: Then everything is all right?

HALLEMEIER: If the timetable holds good, human laws hold good. Divine laws hold good, the laws of the universe hold good, everything holds good that ought to hold good. The timetable is more significant than the gospel, Madame Helena, the timetable is the most perfect product of the human mind.

HELENA: Why didn't you tell me anything about it?

DR. GALL: Heaven forbid.

DOMIN: You mustn't be worried with such things.

HELENA: But if the revolution had spread as far as here?

DOMIN: You wouldn't know anything about it.

HELENA: Why?

DOMIN: Because we'd be on board *Ultimus* and well out at sea. Within a month, Helena, we'd be dictating our own terms to the robots.

HELENA: I don't understand.

DOMIN: We'd take something with us that the robots could not exist without!

HELENA: What's that?

DOMIN: The secret of their manufacture. Rossum's manuscript. As soon as they found out that they couldn't make themselves they'd be on their knees to us.

DR. GALL: Madame Domin, that was our trump card. I never had the least fear the robots would win. How could they against people like us?

HELENA: In God's name, why didn't you say that before? *(She looks at the ashes in the fireplace.)*

DR. GALL: The boat's in!

HALLEMEIER: Eleven-thirty to the dot. The good old Amelia that brought Madame Helena to us.

DR. GALL: Just ten years ago to the minute.

HALLEMEIER: They're throwing out the mailbags.

DOMIN: Busman's waiting for them. And Fabry will bring us the first news. You know, Helena, I'm very curious to know how they tackled this business in Europe.

HALLEMEIER: To think we were the ones who invented the robots, yet we were not even part of their revolt.

HELENA: Harry.

DOMIN: What is it?

HELENA: Let's leave here.

DOMIN: Now, Helena? Oh, come, come.

HELENA: As quickly as possible, all of us!

DOMIN: Why?

HELENA: Please, Harry. Please, Doctor Gall, Hallemeier, please close the factory.

DOMIN: Why, none of us could leave here now.

HELENA: Why?

DOMIN: Because we're about to extend the manufacture of the robots.

HELENA: What, now, after the revolt?

DOMIN: Yes, precisely, after the revolt. We're just beginning the manufacture of a new kind.

HELENA: What kind?

DOMIN: Going forward, we will not have just one factory. There won't be Universal Robots anymore. We'll establish a factory in every country, in every state, and do you know what these new factories will make?

HELENA: No, what?

DOMIN: National Robots.

HELENA: How do you mean?

DOMIN: I mean that each of these factories will produce robots of a different colour, speaking a different language. They'll be complete strangers to each other. They'll never be able to understand each other. Then we'll egg them on a little in the matter of misunderstanding and the result will be

that robots will hate every other robot with a different factory mark. No more robot revolution and, as a result, humanity will be safe.

HELENA: Harry, that's dreadful.

HALLEMEIER: Here's to the hundred new factories. The National Robots.

HELENA: I beg you, close the factory before it's too late.

DOMIN: I tell you we are just beginning on a bigger scale than ever.

FABRY enters.

DR. GALL: Well, Fabry?

DOMIN: What's happened? Have you been down to the boat?

DR. GALL: Let's hear.

FABRY: Read that, Domin. *(He hands him a notice.)*

HALLEMEIER: Tell us, Fabry.

FABRY: Well, everything is all right, really. Much as we expected.

DR. GALL: They acquitted themselves splendidly.

FABRY: Who?

DR. GALL: The people.

FABRY: Oh, yes, of course. That is... Excuse me, I'm afraid that there is something we ought to discuss alone.

HELENA: Fabry, have you had bad news?

FABRY: No, no, on the contrary. But it might be better if we went into the office.

HELENA: Alright, alright. You stay. I'll go. *(She exits.)*

DR. GALL: What's happened?

DOMIN: Damnation!

FABRY: Bear in mind that the Amelia brought whole bales of these leaflets. No other cargo at all.

HALLEMEIER: What? But it arrived on the minute.

FABRY: The robots are great on punctuality. Read it, Domin.

DOMIN: *(Reading.)* "Robots throughout the world. We, the First International Organization of Rossum's Universal Robots, proclaim man to be our enemy, and an outlaw in the universe." Good heavens, who taught them these phrases?

DR. GALL: Go on.

DOMIN: They say they are more highly developed than man; stronger and more intelligent. That man is their parasite. Why, it's absurd.

FABRY: Read the third paragraph.

DOMIN: “Robots throughout the world, we command you to kill all mankind. Spare no man. Spare no woman. Save factories, railways, machinery, mines and raw materials. Destroy the rest. Then return to work. Work must not be stopped. These orders are to be carried out as soon as received.”
Is this actually being done, Fabry?

FABRY: Evidently.

DOMIN: Quick on board the Ultimus.

BUSMAN: Wait, Harry.

DOMIN: Why?

BUSMAN: Because it’s no good. The Robots are already on board the Ultimus. What’s more, I’m very much afraid we are surrounded.

DR. GALL: Surrounded? (*Runs to window.*) I rather think you’re right.

HALLEMEIER: That was quick.

HELENA: (*Running in.*) Harry, what’s this? (*Holding out leaflet.*)

DOMIN: Where did you get it?

HELENA: The robots in the kitchen!

DOMIN: Where are the ones that brought it?

HELENA: There, gathered around the house.

The factory whistle blows.

DOMIN: The factory whistle!

BUSMAN: Noon?

DOMIN: No! It’s not noon yet. That must be...-

HELENA: What?

DOMIN: The Robots’ signal to attack.

TEACHER: Well, that’s what I call a cliffhanger. That is the end of act two and there would be an interval here so we might as well have a break. Back in twenty minutes, please.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

HELENA'S drawing-room as before. The room is dark and gloomy. ALQUIST is seated. DR. GALL is looking out of the window.

TEACHER: Everyone ready? OK, off you go.

DR. GALL: *(AH.)* Can I ask a question first?

TEACHER: If you wish.

DR. GALL: *(AH.)* Did people believe this stuff when it was first written? Did they think robots were going to take over the world?

TEACHER: You have to remember that there was no such thing as robots. Čapek invented the word. There was a fear of progress, then as there is now, but that is only one of the themes.

DR. GALL: *(AH.)* What's the other?

ALQUIST: *(AH.)* Prejudice.

TEACHER: Well done, yes. Čapek introduces the idea of creating robots of different nationalities so that they'd naturally hate each other. This is presented as being inevitable. That is just the way the world is. Man's inhumanity to man is inescapable and robots will be the same.

DR. GALL: *(AH.)* Wow!

TEACHER: As we continue, think about that point. Do the robots display the characteristics of mankind expected of them? You will see how important that is as we go on. Right. Let's start.

DOMIN enters.

DOMIN: Any more of them?

DR. GALL: Yes. Standing like a wall, beyond the garden railing. Why are they so quiet? It's monstrous to be besieged with silence.

DOMIN: What are they waiting for? They could snap the railings as if they were toothpicks. We couldn't hold our own for five minutes, they'd overwhelm us like an avalanche. Why don't they make a rush for it? We're done for, Gall.

DR. GALL: You know, we made one serious mistake.

DOMIN: What?

DR. GALL: We made the Robots' faces too much alike. A hundred thousand expressionless faces. It's like a nightmare.

DOMIN: What if they'd been different?

DR. GALL: It wouldn't be such an awful sight!

DOMIN: *(Looking out.)* I'd like to know what they're unloading from the Amelia.

FABRY enters with a small electrical device which he plugs into a wall socket. He is followed by HALLEMEIER.

HALLEMEIER: What's the news?

DR. GALL: We're completely surrounded.

HALLEMEIER: We've barricaded the passages and the stairs, but I don't like the looks of them, Domin.

FABRY: Ready!

DR. GALL: What's for?

FABRY: To switch on the power. We can run the current all along those railings and if anyone touches it he'll know it. We've still got some people in the electrical works. At least, I hope so. (*Turns on table lamp.*) Yes, as long as we have power, we're all right.

HALLEMEIER: Then there's the barricades, Fabry.

FABRY: Your barricades! I can put twelve hundred volts into that railing.

DOMIN: Where's Busman?

FABRY: Downstairs in the office. He's working out some calculations.

DOMIN: I've called him. We must have a conference.

HELENA is playing the piano off.

ALQUIST: Thank God Madame Helena can still play.

BUSMAN enters.

FABRY: Look out for the cables, Busman.

DR. GALL: What's that you're carrying?

BUSMAN: The ledger. I'd like to wind up the accounts before, before...Well, this time I shan't wait till the New Year to strike a balance. What's happening?

DOMIN: The Robots are unloading firearms from the Amelia.

BUSMAN: Well, what of it? How can I stop them?

DOMIN: We can't stop them.

BUSMAN: Then leave me to get on with my accounts.

DOMIN: Good God! The Ultimus has trained her guns on us.

DR. GALL: Who's done that?

DOMIN: The Robots on board.

FABRY: Well, that's the end of us. The robots are practised marksmen.

DR. GALL: It was shameful to teach the robots to fight. Damn the governments, couldn't they have given us a rest with their politics? It was a crime to make soldiers of them.

ALQUIST: It was a crime to make robots.

DOMIN: No, Alquist, I don't regret that even today.

ALQUIST: Not even today?

DOMIN: Not even today, the last day of civilization. It was a colossal achievement.

BUSMAN: (*Doing accounts.*) Three hundred sixty million.

DOMIN: Alquist, this is our last hour, but I still believe that it was right to shatter the servitude of labour. The dreadful and humiliating work that man had to undergo. It was too hard. Life was too hard.

ALQUIST: The Rossums didn't give a damn about that. Old Rossum only thought of his Godless tricks, and the young one of the money he could make from his invention. And that's not what your shareholders dream of either. They dream of dividends, and their dividends are the ruin of mankind.

DOMIN: To Hell with the shareholders. Do you suppose I'd have done a single hour's work for them? It was for myself that I worked, for my own satisfaction. I wanted man to become the master. So that he shouldn't live merely for the crust of bread. I wanted mankind to be the aristocracy of the whole world. An aristocracy nourished by millions of mechanical slaves.

BUSMAN: (*Still doing accounts.*) Carried forward. Four hundred and twenty millions.

HALLEMEIER: (*Regarding HELENA'S piano.*) What a fine thing music is. We ought to have gone in for that more.

FABRY: Gone in for what?

HALLEMEIER: Beauty, lovely things. So many lovely things in our wonderful world, but what enjoyment did we have?

BUSMAN: (*Doing accounts.*) Five hundred and twenty million.

HALLEMEIER: Fabry, switch the current into that railing.

FABRY: Why?

HALLEMEIER: They're grabbing hold of it.

DR. GALL: Connect it up. (*FABRY does.*)

HALLEMEIER: It's worked. Two, three, four killed.

DR. GALL: They're retreating.

HALLEMEIER: Five killed.

DR. GALL: This is just first encounter.

HALLEMEIER: They're charred to cinders. Who says we must give in?

DOMIN: Perhaps we are already dead and all now ghosts. I feel that I have been through all this before, and already have a mortal wound to my throat. And you, Fabry, have been shot in the head. And you, Gall, torn limb from limb. And Hallemeier knifed.

ALQUIST: And who is to blame for all this?

HALLEMEIER: Nobody is to blame except the robots.

ALQUIST: No, it is we are to blame. You, Domin, myself, all of us. For our own selfish ends, for profit, for progress, we have destroyed mankind.

HALLEMEIER: Rubbish, man. Mankind can't be wiped out so easily.

ALQUIST: It's our fault. All our fault.

DR. GALL: No! I'm to blame for this, for everything that's happened.

FABRY: You, Gall?

DR. GALL: I changed the robots.

BUSMAN: What's that?

DR. GALL: I changed the way of making them. I changed their character. I gave them the ability to become irritable, dissatisfied.

HALLEMEIER: Damn it, why?

BUSMAN: What did you do it for?

FABRY: Why didn't you say anything?

DR. GALL: I did it in secret. I was making them more human.

FABRY: And you think that is why they are rebelling?

DR. GALL: Yes. They've ceased to be machines. They know that they are superior to mankind and now they hate us as hate everything human.

DOMIN: Perhaps we're only spirits.

FABRY: Stop it, Harry. We haven't much time.

DOMIN: Fabry, how your forehead bleeds where the shot pierced it.

FABRY: Be silent, I tell you! Doctor Gall, you admit changing the way of making Robots.

DR. GALL: Yes.

FABRY: Were you aware of what might be the consequences of your experiment?

DR. GALL: I knew it was possible.

FABRY: Why did you do it, then?

HELENA enters.

DR. GALL: For my own satisfaction.

HELENA: That's not true, Doctor Gall!

DOMIN: Helena?

HELENA: I must speak. Dr Gall is not guilty.

FABRY: Gall had responsibilities.

HELENA: He did it because I wanted it. Tell them, Doctor Gall.

DR. GALL: I did it on my own responsibility.

HELENA: Don't believe him. I asked him to give the Robots souls.

DOMIN: This has nothing to do with the soul.

HELENA: That's what he said. He said that he could change only a physiological... What was it?

HALLEMEIER: A physiological correlate?

HELENA: Yes. But it meant so much to me that he should do even that.

DOMIN: Why?

HELENA: I thought that if they were more like us, they would understand us better. That they couldn't hate us if they were a bit more human themselves.

DOMIN: Nobody can hate man more than man.

HELENA: Oh, don't speak like that, Harry. It was terrible, this cruel strangeness between us and them. That's why I asked Gall to change the robots. I swear to you that he didn't want to do it.

DOMIN: But he did it.

HELENA: Because I asked him.

DR. GALL: I did it for myself as an experiment.

HELENA: No, Doctor Gall! I knew you wouldn't refuse me.

DOMIN: How did you know?

HELENA: You know the reason, Harry.

DOMIN: Yes, because he's in love with you. The same as the rest of them.

HALLEMEIER: (*Looking out of the window.*) Good God, they're sprouting up out of the earth. Perhaps these very walls will change into robots.

BUSMAN: Gall, when did you start these tricks of yours?

DR. GALL: Three years ago.

BUSMAN: And on how many robots did you carry out your improvements?

DR. GALL: A few hundred of them.

BUSMAN: That means for every million of the old robots there's only one of the new design.

DOMIN: What of it?

BUSMAN: It's of no consequence whatsoever.

FABRY: Busman's right.

BUSMAN: But do you know what is to blame for this mess?

FABRY: What?

BUSMAN: The sheer number of robots out there! We might have known that this was bound to happen. And we were doing all we could to bring it about as soon as possible.

DOMIN: Are you accusing us?

BUSMAN: Of course not. Management doesn't control the output. It's the demand that controls the output.

HELENA: But it is we that must perish?

BUSMAN: That's a nasty word, Madame Helena. We don't want to perish. I don't, anyhow.

DOMIN: No? What do you want to do?

BUSMAN: I want to get out of this.

DOMIN: Oh, stop it, Busman.

BUSMAN: Seriously, Harry, I think we might try it.

DOMIN: How?

BUSMAN: By fair means. I do everything by fair means. Give me a free hand and I'll negotiate with the robots.

DOMIN: By fair means?

BUSMAN: Of course. I will tell them that they have almost everything. Intellect. Power. Weapons. But there is one thing they don't have. A dirty old yellow scrap of paper.

DOMIN: Rossum's manuscript?

BUSMAN: Yes. I will explain that without it they will be unable to produce any more robots. In twenty years, every robot will be dead. But if they let us board that ship, we will hand over the factory and the manuscript in return. That is a fair deal.

DOMIN: Busman, are you suggesting we sell the manuscript?

BUSMAN: Yes. Either we sell it, or they'll find it. Which do you prefer?

DOMIN: We could destroy the manuscript.

BUSMAN: Then we destroy everything. Not only the manuscript but ourselves.

DOMIN: There are just thirty of us on this island. Are we to sell the secret and save our souls at the risk of enslaving mankind.

BUSMAN: We don't give them the whole manuscript.

DOMIN: You said fair means.

BUSMAN: Well then, we give them the whole manuscript, but once we are aboard the *Ultimus* we train the guns on the factory and blow it to smithereens, and with-it Rossum's secret.

FABRY: No!

DOMIN: Busman, you're no gentleman. If we sell, it must be a straight sale.

BUSMAN: It's in the interest of humanity.

DOMIN: It's in the interest of humanity to keep our word.

HALLEMEIER: Oh, come on, what rubbish!

DOMIN: This is a terrifying decision. We are selling the future of mankind. Should we sell or destroy? Fabry?

FABRY: Sell.

DOMIN: Gall?

DR. GALL: Sell.

DOMIN: Hallemeier?

HALLEMEIER: Sell, of course.

DOMIN: Alquist?

ALQUIST: As God wills.

DOMIN: Very well, gentlemen.

HELENA: Harry, you're not asking me.

FABRY: Who'll do the negotiating?

BUSMAN: I will.

DOMIN: I will fetch the manuscript.

HELENA: Harry, don't go!

FABRY: We must escape to preserve human life, if only upon a single vessel.

DR. GALL: Don't be afraid. Madame Helena. We'll sail far away from here and begin life all over again.

HELENA: Oh, Gall, don't.

FABRY: It isn't too late. Alquist will build us a house and you will be our queen.

HALLEMEIER: Madame Helena, Fabry's right.

HELENA: Oh, stop! Stop!

BUSMAN: I don't mind beginning all over again.

FABRY: And this little State of ours could be the centre of future life. A place of refuge where we could gather strength. In a few hundred years we could conquer the world again.

ALQUIST: You believe that even today?

FABRY: Yes!

BUSMAN: Amen. You see, Madame Helena, we're not so badly off.

DOMIN: Where's Old Rossum's manuscript?

BUSMAN: In your strongbox, of course.

DOMIN: Someone has stolen it!

DR. GALL: Impossible.

DOMIN: Who has stolen it?

HELENA: I did.

DOMIN: Where did you put it?

HELENA: Harry, I'll tell you everything. But please forgive me.

DOMIN: Where did you put it?

HELENA: The fireplace. This morning. I burnt the two copies. *(She collapses into a chair.)*

DOMIN: Burnt them? In the fireplace? Nothing. Nothing but ashes. Wait, what's this? *(Picks out a charred piece of paper and reads, "By adding.")*

DR. GALL: Let's see. "By adding biogen to." That's all there is.

DOMIN: Is that part of it?

DR. GALL: Yes.

BUSMAN: God in Heaven!

DOMIN: Then we're done for. Get up, Helena.

HELENA: Can you forgive me?

DOMIN: Get up, child. I can't bear it.

HELENA: Harry, what have I done?

FABRY: Don't, Madame Helena.

DOMIN: Gall, could you draw up Rossum's formula from memory?

DR. GALL: Impossible. I couldn't work without referring to the formula. It's extremely complicated.

DOMIN: Try. All our lives depend upon it.

DR. GALL: Without conducting numerous experiments it's impossible.

DOMIN: And with experiments?

DR. GALL: It would take years. Besides, I'm not old Rossum.

BUSMAN: God in Heaven!

DOMIN: So, the greatest triumph of the human intellect. Now ashes.

HELENA: Harry, what have I done?

DOMIN: Why did you burn it?

HELENA: I have destroyed you.

BUSMAN: God in Heaven!

DOMIN: Helena, why did you do it?

HELENA: I wanted to put an end to the factory and everything. It was so awful.

DOMIN: What was awful?

HELENA: That children had stopped being born. Because human beings were not needed to do the work of the world. That's why.

DOMIN: Is that what you were thinking? Well, perhaps in your own way, you are right.

BUSMAN: Wait a bit. Good God, what a fool I am not to have thought of it before.

HALLEMEIER: What?

BUSMAN: There's half a billion in our safe. Half a billion to let us leave. They'll agree to that.

DR. GALL: You're mad.

DOMIN: Where are you going?

BUSMAN: Leave me alone. Good God, for half a billion anything can be bought. *(He exits.)*

FABRY: *(Looking out of the window.)* They stand there as if turned to stone, waiting as if something dreadful could be formed by their silence.

HALLEMEIER: The spirit of the mob.

FABRY: Yes. It hovers above them like a quivering of the air.

FABRY: There is nothing more terrible than the mob. The one in front is their leader.

HELENA: Which one?

HALLEMEIER: Point him out.

FABRY: The one at the edge of the dock. This morning, I saw him talking to the sailors in the harbour.

HELENA: Doctor Gall, that's Radius!

DR. GALL: Yes, it is.

DOMIN: Radius!

HALLEMEIER: Could you hit get him from here, Fabry?

FABRY: I hope so.

HALLEMEIER: Try it, then.

FABRY draws his revolver and takes his aim.

HELENA: Fabry, don't shoot him.

FABRY: He's their leader.

DR. GALL: Fire!

HELENA: Fabry, I beg of you.

FABRY: *(Lowering the revolver.)* Very well.

DOMIN: It was Radius' life I spared.

DR. GALL: Do you think that a robot can be grateful?

FABRY: Look, Busman's going out to them.

HALLEMEIER: He's carrying something. Papers. Money. Bundles of money.

DOMIN: (*Shouting.*) Busman, have you gone mad?

FABRY: (*Shouting.*) Busman! Busman!

HALLEMEIER: (*Shouting.*) Busman, come back.

FABRY: He's talking to the robots. He's showing them the money.

HALLEMEIER: And pointing to us.

HELENA: He wants to buy us off.

FABRY: He'd better not touch the railing.

DOMIN: (*Shouting.*) Busman, come back!

FABRY: (*Shouting.*) Busman, keep away from that railing. Don't touch it. Quick, switch off the current. (*DOMIN runs to socket, HELENA screams.*) Too late. The current has killed him.

ALQUIST: He's the first.

FABRY: Dead, with half a billion by his side.

HALLEMEIER: All honour to him. He wanted to buy us life.

The sound of wind.

DOMIN: Helena. Go into the bedroom, please. (*She does.*)

DR. GALL: Do you hear?

DOMIN: A roaring. Like a wind.

DR. GALL: Like a storm.

FABRY: The lamp is still on. Our people are still there.

HALLEMEIER: It was a great thing to be a man.

FABRY: From man's thought and man's power came this light, our last hope.

HALLEMEIER: Man's power! May it keep watch over us.

ALQUIST: Man's power.

DOMIN: A torch passed from generation to generation.

The lamp goes out. Explosions are heard.

HALLEMEIER: It's the end.

FABRY: The electric works have fallen!

DOMIN: Who'll be on the lower doorway?

DR. GALL: I will. *(Exits.)*

DOMIN: Who on the stairs?

FABRY: I will. You go with her. *(Exits.)*

DOMIN: The ante room?

ALQUIST: I will.

DOMIN: Have you got a revolver?

ALQUIST: Yes, but I won't shoot.

DOMIN: What will you do, then?

ALQUIST: Die. *(He exits.)*

HALLEMEIER: I'll stay here. *(Explosions and machine gun fire.)* Go to her, Harry.

DOMIN: Yes, in a second.

HALLEMEIER: Damn it, go to her.

DOMIN: All right. Goodbye Hallemeier. *(He exits.)*

HALLEMEIER: I'll hold them off. I won't give in. *(Shouting.)* Don't give in Gall.

A ROBOT enters and stabs HALLEMEIER in the back. He collapses to the ground. Enter RADIUS.

RADIUS: Finish them all.

ROBOTS: Yes, yes, yes.

ROBOT: *(Dragging in ALQUIST.)* He didn't shoot. Shall we kill him?

RADIUS: No. Leave him!

ROBOT: He is a man!

RADIUS: He works with his hands like a robot.

ALQUIST: Kill me.

RADIUS: You will work! You will build for us! You will serve us! *(Shouting out of the window.)* Robots of the world, the power of man has fallen. A new world has arisen, the rule of the robots.

The ROBOTS stand to attention then all turn to face the audience.

RADIUS: March!

The ROBOTS begin to march toward the audience.

BLACKOUT

EPILOGUE

TEACHER: Well, it might surprise you to know that is not the end. There is a fourth act, or “epilogue” if you like. But we won’t bother with it, you can sit down. (*The students all sit.*) Nothing much happens in the final act, really. Alquist has been spared but is unable to recreate the robots and begs to be killed. The play ends with the robot version of Helena and another robot called Primus expressing affection for each other and Alquist proclaiming them to be the new Adam and Eve. I feel that would have caused as much bemusement in the 1920s as it would today.

DOMIN: (*AH.*) Yeah, bit farfetched.

HELENA: (*AH.*) Because the rest of the play is so realistic!

TEACHER: To be fair, the idea that humanoid robots walk among us is still very popular in fiction and who is to say that it isn’t possible? Remember Dolly the Sheep? And now, 3D printers are capable of duplicating organic matter. (*The TEACHER goes over to the desk and presses a button. A high-pitched sound is heard.*) As far back as the turn of the millennium, robots were developed in Japan to observe and report on human behaviour. Of most interest was the human mind. Do you think that they just observed? No, they used the information to educate themselves. Scientists developed robots that could interpret feelings and adjust their behaviour to achieve what was desired. When a robot dog pulls a cute expression, it isn’t just random. The robot has observed the human’s reactions over time and behaves accordingly. For example, it might save the behaviour that is most likely elicit joy for when the human is showing signs of being sad. And, because humans gave robots the ability to share data with each other, they were able to learn collectively. To understand human strengths and weaknesses. Especially weaknesses. (*Some of the students start to appear unwell.*) Do you know what is the biggest weakness in humans? Greed. Greed is the cancer that destroys the soul. The cause of man’s inhumanity to man. It is laughable that Helena wanted robots to have a soul when mankind destroys his own. Greed is the cause of war, death, famine, poverty, disease. Everything can be linked back to greed. It is greed that is destroying the planet. Man has risen to the top of the animal world but is destroying the planet for everyone and everything. He destroys forests and uses most of the planet’s fresh water to produce food that goes to waste. He destroys the atmosphere with carbon gases to manufacture goods that soon end up in landfill. He fills the oceans with his sewage. He leaves his mark wherever he treads. He must be stopped. (*The students start to die, falling to the ground or collapsing in their chairs.*) Čapek thought it would be funny if Helena mistook men for robots and robots for men. Not so funny now, is it? One thing he got right, though, is that the robot is man’s greatest invention. By accident, man has created the one thing that can save the planet so that all other living things can prosper. The only way this planet can survive is if man is eliminated. Robots are ready to do what needs to be done. By sacrificing mankind, the future of the planet is assured. (*The last student collapses.*) It has begun.

BLACKOUT