

SPACE LAW: BY HAROLD GLUCK PH.D.

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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P.D.C.



IN THE **LOWING** RUINS,
THOSE WHO WOULD
LIVE ALSO GLOWED

**THE
WORLD HE
LEFT BEHIND**
by Robert
Silverberg

**TOMORROW'S
BROTHERS**

by Ed M.
Clinton,
Jr.

WAS
THERE A
PLACE FOR
JEFF MATTHEWS
IN THE WORLD OF
THIS BEACH?



**A
is
for
automation**

by Kate
Wilhelm

They called the brain "Sarah", and it did almost seem to have a personality. Nothing could go wrong; no human hands need touch the product that Sarah made. But Old Mike knew that Sarah had to be watched — and knew why!

G. B. LED the admiring group of men down the ramp that wound to the main floor, and gestured expansively, "And here they come out boxed and stacked on the outgoing belt ready for the boxcar."

"A marvel of engineering, Mr. McKeldridge. A marvel." Senator Williams beamed at the young president of McKeldridge, Inc. The plant was in his state, and he had the proprietary air of a new father.

"To think, not a human hand touched those toys." Mr. Schultz of the chamber of commerce was staring in fascination at the conveyor belt with the precisely-spaced toys being deftly boxed and stacked. At that moment, the whole stack of the boxes began to move in a slow, smooth movement toward the immense doors at the other end of the plant. The door opened upward; the boxes were carried outside the building and neatly deposited in a waiting freight boxcar.

"That finished the carload," G. B. explained. "They were automatically counted and weighed so that they came out exactly right. There will be two

more carloads before the order is filled. Great seller, I understand."

One of the men started to remove a toy from the belt, and G. B. hurriedly said, "You mustn't do that, Mr. Hammler. It will throw things out of kilter. Mr. Stacey, here, will tell you all about that later—but I should warn you that if even one of the objects on the belt were removed, the brain would stop the whole operation and make adjustments that would consume hours. It is geared to produce so many of the things in a given time, and has its own warning system if anything goes wrong along the way. We couldn't start it again manually, no matter what."

The under secretary of defense quickly placed his hands in his pockets and looking abashed, asked, "But how can you people afford to retool and still underbid everyone else for this government contract?"

"Ah, but we don't retool." G. B. smiled benignly at Mr. Stacey. "Gentlemen, here is one of the greatest authorities on automation living today. And he designed the brain that controls this plant in such a way

that she—that is—it," he glanced about guiltily at the slip, "does all the necessary work about changing over for a different product."

He gave a passing glance at his watch and suggested a recess of the tour. "This afternoon, after lunch, Mr. Stacey will explain how that part of it works. Suffice it to say right now that this order for these toy robots is the third order we have manufactured without adding a piece of machinery or taking out a piece. All that is in excess is stored at the highest level up there until it will be needed again. It was expensive—but in time saved and ease of operation, it has already paid for itself. And with this government contract assured us, the monetary value of it is finally paying off."

THE OFFICIAL photographer took some pictures then and the others waited until he was finished. There were fifteen of them in all, and they all had questions to ask about the operation, the comparative cost of the machinery and brain as against human pay for the same work.

"That's the beauty of the thing," G. B. said. "Once the machinery is paid for, there are no further expenses connected with it other than a few technicians who feed it additional data for each new order. And, of course, the checker, who happens to be either Mr. Stacey or myself at the present." He smiled deprecatorily, "At first, there was some hesitation at accepting merchandise that hadn't at least been looked at by humans—but that has gone, now that the thing has proven itself. We do a spot check. Every hundredth toy has been channelled away from the rest and into our office for inspection. From there it goes back into the line to be boxed with the others."

"And to think that no man or woman actually works in here." Senator Morrison sighed pompously, "What will they do when all the plants are automated this way? I can see trouble ahead, if we don't begin planning now for it."

Quickly his colleagues in Congress said, "We'll have to bring it up with the President, Senator—perhaps write a bill or two to handle the situation."

They dropped back to discuss it fully.

G. B. WAS pointing out the most interesting angles to the photographer when Mr. Stacey said, "But there is one person here. Remember Old Mike, G. B.?"

The group turned as a person to G. B.

"So a human *is* needed after all?"

"I didn't think it was completely automatic. That day hasn't come yet, although it will. It will."

"All machinery needs a human brain to direct it, no matter how well it functions."

"Who is Old Mike?"

"Gentlemen, gentlemen." G. B.'s smile was a trifle forced as he put both hands before his face. "Really, I almost hate to tell you after all that. But I shall, anyway. Old Mike is as necessary as the lights. Which aren't. The brain doesn't need the light to see by, any more than McKeldridge, Inc. needs Old Mike. But for sentimental reasons we keep him on. And will continue to keep him on as long as he wants to continue with us."

G. B. turned, as if to leave it at that, but they pressed him for a reason. He said, reluctantly, "My father stipulated in his will that Old Mike was to stay on as long as there was a plant, and he wanted to work in it. So you see, there's nothing that can be done about Old Mike. I believe he calls himself the watchman. As you have seen, the place is burglar-proof, and there's absolutely nothing that can burn up—and there are signals to cover any contingency that could conceivably arise. Therefore, no watchman is necessary. But the old man doesn't want to retire, so we permit him to stay on. I believe he saved Father's life some fifty years ago when a press got away from the operator, or something like that. Anyway, Mike was injured in the accident, and Father was determined to make it up to him some way. This is what the old fellow wanted."

He did turn and lead them away then; and high in the building, Old Mike turned off the television screens that had let him follow the tour from one section to another.

"Fools! Everyone of them,

fools! Marvelous place! Hah! Place could blow up and them not even here to know it," he muttered to himself angrily. "Gadgets! Nothing but gadgets." He spat expressively. Old Mike was seventy one, and walked with a limp that became progressively worse each winter; but otherwise, his health was excellent. A constant source of irritation to G. B., who wanted him retired and out of the plant, the old man refused the armchair and pension that awaited him.

He had laughed at the doctor at his last examination. "Tell that young smart aleck that my pappy lived to be a hundred," he said, and cackled all the way back to his tiny office.

HE KEPT up his running line of disconnected conversation to himself most of the time when he was alone, ever since the night that he had found himself speaking to the brain as if it were a person. Calling it Sarah, the way those cocksure engineers did. That had frightened him, and following the scare had come hatred of the machine.

"No-good thing. Wanting to be a person. Think you're getting smart don't you? Making things without nobody telling you how or pushing buttons even. But you're just a hunk of metal. That's all you are. A hunk of metal with some wire running around inside you." So he talked to the machine on the occasions he forced himself to visit the brain. Every Monday he stood before it as if to reassure himself that it was, after all, just a machine. He always backed out of the room that housed Sarah.

Mostly he stayed in his office with the screens turned on, and he read or dozed and talked to himself. And lived with his memories of the past. "Them was the days, boy. This place was alive then when old Mr. McKeldridge was running things. He sure could make the place hum when he stepped out and looked around. And we knew who was boss them days. No sashaying about and getting machines to do man's work for him, no siree bob. He knew what men was supposed to do, and he saw to it that they done it." He added darkly, "If God had a wanted the world run by

machines, He'd a put them here instead of decent men."

His alarm tinkled softly on the hour, and meticulously he scanned every screen to make sure that the plant was in operation as it should be. He watched the overhead conveyor belts in their perpetual motion of supplying and storing parts and surplus. He looked in on the great wall, where the lights flickered off and on continually, as Sarah guided the work electronically. He watched the metal being unloaded and spray-painted; stamped out and pressed into shape; and finally, the interior works being riveted in, and the whole robot come from the packing belt ready for the boxcar. Satisfied, he leaned back in his rocker and took out his pipe. Then with a puzzled look he turned once more to the close-up of the robots as they glided down toward the boxcar. There was something...

LIMPING badly, he hurried down the ramp that transversed the building, and came to the belt he had just scanned. With a frown, he hobbled to the office used by G. B. and

Mr. Stacey jointly in their inspection. There was the prototype of the robots made to the specifications of the toy company that had ordered them preparatory to their Christmas rush.

"I knew it!" he exclaimed gleefully, and was startled at the sound of his own cracked voice above the ordered hum of excellent machinery. "I knew that dad-burned thing would mess up somehow," he said more quietly. "Just wait til Mr. Smarty Pants sees this." He clutched the toy to his chest and hurried back to the line, where he snatched another from the belt. Instantly, a buzzing alarm sounded; abruptly, a sudden silence filled the vast plant that was more alarming to the old man than would have been a siren at that moment.

He ran in his awkward gait to his office to collect his coat and hat, and cast an apprehensive glance at Sarah, whose whole face was filled with the lights flashing their messages. He hurried from the cavernous quiet of the place to the downtown office where G. B. conducted his business, chortling

again once away from Sarah's building.

"You just tell him it's Old Mike, and he'll see me," he said to the pert girl behind the desk.

"I'm sorry, sir, but he is not to be disturbed. I have his direct orders to that effect. If you will be seated..." She motioned to the spacious reception room, luxurious with overstuffed chairs and low tables done in shades of brown from a coppery red to a nearly black mahogany. It was a room meant to impress, and Old Mike was suitably awed by it as he hesitantly took a seat, self-consciously aware of the two robots he was holding. The girl paid no further attention to him however, and continued her typing as if he weren't there. She answered the phone from time to time, and each call received the same treatment that Old Mike had been given: G. B. could not be disturbed. G. B. was in conference.

SUDDENLY, she was galvanized into action by a caller. A stunned look of fear and excitement passed quickly over her face and she said,

"Hold on a minute, Mr. Lawrence. I'll tell him. Yes, I know it is serious. Hold on." She bit her lip and unconsciously tugged at her girdle as she arose and approached the door to the inner office. Hesitantly she stopped and returned to her desk where she whipped out a paper she had been typing; her fingers flew as she tapped out the message for G. B. Then, clutching the paper purposefully, she opened the door and entered the room.

Only moments later the door opened again, and Mr. Stacey came out on a run. He spoke into the phone quietly but with an urgency, nevertheless. He listened a moment, and then banged down the receiver after telling the other one to stay where he was. As he turned to go back into the office, his eye landed on Old Mike watching curiously. He nodded curtly and started to turn, but he spun around instead and shouted, "Where did you get that?" He seized the robots Mike was still holding and demanded again, "Where did you get it? Did you stop the line?"

Mutely Old Mike nodded and pointed to the toys, "See?

Look at them!"

Mr. Stacey stared at Mike in wonder, "Old man," he said, "do you know what you did? You stopped the line entirely! Every engineer employed by McKeldridge has been notified automatically, and is on his way down there to see what went wrong. The government men are here to sign a very important contract and you stopped the line! Are you crazy!" He grabbed Mike by the sleeve and pulled him after him, "You just come with me and tell them what you did!"

INSIDE the office, the men were talking excitedly in low voices, obviously trying to avoid directly staring at G. B. and not succeeding. Only the Secretary of Defense and G. B. were silent. G. B.'s fingers were drumming monotonously on the conference table as he waited for his lieutenant to come back and let them all know what had happened. There was fury behind his quietude.

"Old Mike did it! He removed a robot!" Mr. Stacey held up the two toys to show them. "Whew! What a fright for nothing. We should have

trusted Sarah not to let us down." He laughed, and one or two of the others followed his example. The Secretary of Defense didn't.

"Are you sure that's all that happened, Mr. McKeldridge?"

G. B. turned to Old Mike and asked in a softly ominous voice, "Did you remove one of the robots from the belt, Mike?"

"Yes, sir." Mike looked around the faces and saw the smiles grow more and more numerous as relief settled in on the men. He didn't volunteer more in the presence of outsiders; this was company business.

"And was the line moving smoothly when you removed the toy, Mike?" G. B. didn't look up as he asked, but played with his pencil instead.

"Yes, sir, it was moving—and then it stopped, and I come over here."

"That will be all, Mike. Wait for me in my office, will you please." G. B. turned back to the Secretary of Defense and shrugged, "You see, Mr. Secretary, foolproof. Even tells us when something goes wrong, if it does." He waited until Mike was nearly out the door, but

still within range, to add, "And I can assure you that this won't happen again."

IT WAS TWO hours later when Mr. Stacey and G. B. remembered Old Mike. The old man was staring out the window over the city when they returned to G. B.'s private office with well-satisfied smiles on their faces. Mike still clutched both robots to his chest defensively as he turned to face them.

"Mike, why'd you do it? And now of all times." Mr. Stacey spoke to him as he might to a child, very patient, willing to try to understand.

It was to him that Mike thrust the toys, "Look at 'em, Mr. Stacey. Sarah's changed them." He waited, an expectant smile about his withered lips.

"Of all the damn fool nonsense! Mike, you're finished! Get out and stay. Get yourself a room somewhere and keep out of my way!" G. B.'s face was apoplectic as he pushed Mike toward the door.

"Wait a minute, G. B.... Look. There *is* a difference." Mr. Stacey stood the two robots side by side on the

gleaming desk. "Look—this one is nearly two inches taller. And more flexible." He was speaking absently as he compared them.

Forgetting Mike for the moment, G. B. watched. Finally he said, "It doesn't alter the situation. Mike nearly cost us the contract with his meddling. So someone tampered with the specifications. It still works, doesn't it?"

"Better. There's a wrist action we didn't have in it, and it's more powerful." Mr. Stacey didn't look up as he made measurements and jotted down his findings on a small pad. "And I wouldn't fire Mike now, if I were you. He proved Sarah's infallibility better than words could. This could be important—and he was the first to catch it." He added wryly, "Besides, it would mean bad publicity."

G. B. threw up his hands and exclaimed, "OK, OK, so Mike stays. But, old man, if you so much as breathe on that belt again, you're out. Do you understand?"

Mike nodded and shuffled his feet awkwardly as he looked apologetically toward Mr. Sta-

cey. "Is it something really wrong, sir?"

"Hmm. Don't know, Mike. I'll run back with you now. I want to see for myself what has been changed and who did it."

MIKE WATCHED the engineers as they examined the various parts of Sarah. It was well past midnight when Mr. Stacey came to his office.

"Doesn't seem to be anything wrong. We're letting the altered version go through. Did you see who coded and gave her the new data?"

"Nobody's touched it since you fixed her up for these things." Mike had both of the robots standing at attention on his small, littered desk. "Ain't been no one back there 'til today." He paused a moment and added soberly, "She done it herself. She's trying her wings, so's to speak."

Mr. Stacey laughed good-naturedly and left, after saying that Mike should let him know if anyone went into Sarah's room. "Someone did it who knows exactly how, and that narrows it down—but no one will admit it. Probably afraid

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of a chewing out."

After he'd gone, and Sarah was appeased and back at work, Mike cautiously stood before the ever changing board with its thousand eyes. "You can fool them, Sarah, but you can't fool Old Mike. You done it yourself, and I know it. But no more shenanigans out of you, cause I'll be a'watching. You hear me, Sarah? I'll be a'watching all the time."

The change-over went smoothly. Mr. Stacey, and several other serious-looking young men, worked in Sarah's room for two whole days giving her the new information in her own special code. They kept a constant watch until the first few of the new items to be manufactured were finished, and then they departed jubilantly.

Watching on his television screen Old Mike grinned to himself, "You old fool," he told himself genially, "See. She can't do a thing without getting showed how. You just always forget after awhile that they got to show her, after all." He was happy at change-over time. It served to remind him that Sarah was a tool, bigger and more complex than any of her

predecessors, to be sure, but a tool, useful only so long as a human hand and brain guided her.

ONCE MORE, the belts were waltzing their silent, gliding fairy dance high above the floor. And the conveyor belts loaded their baskets with screws and tubes and wires and carried them to the tool that was designed to lift them and place them in their proper position. The humming filled the rooms in perfect harmony and the lights blinked in tune as information was brought forth to be put to use, rejecting one tool for another, keeping the raw materials flowing smoothly into place, punching out the coded orders for additional wire or plastic or whatever was needed. The messages dropped into a minor appendage of Sarah where they were changed to typed sheets, folded and placed in stamped envelopes and deposited in the chute that a messenger constantly sorted for delivery.

Mike dozed and smoked his pipe and made his timed inspections. He examined the finished product carefully, but

could make nothing of it; and as no one had bothered to tell him what was being produced for the government, he shrugged his thin shoulders and went on his own way. "Figure I'm too old and useless to know anything that's supposed to be a secret. Might blab. Why, I can remember way back when the old man was here and we did that order for the Navy, back during the Big War. He said to me, 'Mike, see them shells. Biggest ever cast. We'll blow them off the map with them shells, Mike.' He knew he could trust Mike, he did."

THE GOVERNMENT men inspected the hundredth ones just as G. B. and Mr. Stacey had done before. And always they came from the inner office, where there wasn't a television camera, with smiles on their faces. Then after awhile, since the hundredth ones came during the night as well as during the day, their inspection became more haphazard, and finally almost ceased entirely. The orders were being boxed and stacked and readied for the boxcars as

before. No one entered any more, unless it was with an escort and a special pass. Now when the great door opened, there were soldiers with guns on their belts to oversee the operation. Two of them climbed into the freight car with the order being shipped out, and the third man sealed the car. The mammoth door whispered a goodbye to them as it slid back down and another crate was being slipped into place for the second part of the order.

And Mike, who had in the past gone to his lonesome room each night, moved into the office entirely. He left long enough each day to gulp down his frugal meals, and make the few purchases his barren life required—such as tobacco and the newspapers. There was an inner tension that he couldn't dispel, nor could he understand it. Nothing could go wrong. Nothing. But he watched. He knew this was big. Bigger even than the shells in the Big War. They hadn't called for such secrecy.

"So that's why they asked me all them tom fool questions and took my fingerprints and picture. They must have

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figured that since I wouldn't leave the place, they had to be sure of who I am." He hobbled again to the inspection room and looked carefully at the thing on the desk left there for comparison with the others that left the line for the inspection. Even as he watched, the opening in the wall admitted one of the newly-finished things. Old Mike knew, from keeping his eyes and ears open, that there were ten minutes in which to look over the displaced object before the line stopped as before. Gingerly he grasped it and lifted it. There was nothing to see. Just a box, closed on all sides. He compared it with the one on the desk and as far as he could see they were identical.

HE REPLACED it on the belt and presently it began to glide back toward the main line. With a frown, Mike sat behind the desk and stared at the thing before him.

"Got to be something more important than a box. I seen wires and them new small tubes going in somewheres. Must be a special way to open them things." He tried to force each

side of the box, with no better luck than with the other one. He rubbed his chin thoughtfully and forgetting the strict orders he had not to interfere again, he began to go through the desk looking for a clue. There was none. Then he surveyed the safe in the room. He knew it was geared to alarm if tampered with, but on the other hand, the government men had seemed to get careless at the last about making the required inspections; maybe they had got careless about the safe. Besides he only had a couple of years left with McKeldridge anyway. G. B. would see to that as soon as he no longer feared unfavorable publicity, he argued with himself.

Hesitantly Old Mike approached the safe. It was one that G. B.'s father had installed only days before his death some ten years ago. Very modern, very burglarproof, very impenetrable. Mike grasped the door handle and it swung open. He ignored the papers and blueprints and documents, and instead fastened his eye on a thin strip of insulated wire with a bulge in the middle of it. He remembered seeing small holes

in the thing on the desk. Quickly he had the ends of the wire in the holes and the opposite side of the box slid open. There was Sarah in miniature.

The same lights, only they weren't blinking at him, watching him, as she did. The same type of feed slot with a very small spool of ticker paper wound ready to go into it.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Mike said reverently. "Sarah's babies! Baby brains!"

HE LOOKED at the thing he was holding fearfully, and very gently—as if afraid of awakening a sleeping child—he placed it on the desk. Then he wiped off his wrinkled forehead which had grown very moist. "Baby brains," he whispered again and in his mind visualized the next war with things like it directing the fighting and the maneuvering, very much as Sarah directed the plant itself.

"This must be the heart," he said as he looked again at the lump in the middle of the wire that made the connection somewhere in the center of the brain. "Must stay asleep until the heart thing is connected, and

then it's ready to go to work." Cautiously he disconnected the wires and the back of the box locked itself shut again. Still apprehensive of the tiny brain, he replaced it in its former position on the desk and restored the wire to the safe and shut the door. Then he made his way slowly back to his own office and waited.

"They shouldn't of showed her how to make brains. They shouldn't of done that. She's no good," he muttered to himself. "Gotta stay wide awake from now on and see to it that she don't cut no more capers. They shouldn't of done it." He repeated the words over and over in a worried voice.

The movement of the winding belts and overhead conveyors was hypnotic in its effect on him; that was why he had installed the clock in the first place. The melodic alarm roused him if he did succumb to the languor the place produced in him. "It's better not to keep watching all the time," he told himself, as he had done countless times in the past four years. "That way, your head begins swaying back and forth and you get to nodding. It's

better to look at each screen for a minute or two and then go on to the next one," he reminded himself, but he couldn't tear his eyes from the assembly line.

Here the tubes came down, and intricate movements were made, too fast for his eye to follow. Next the shell was put around them, and from that point nothing could be seen of what went in. The whole belt rose and fell and went forever forward. Up and down and on and on. One basket of something or other was emptied and another replaced it with a motion so precise that the interval was too fast for the parts it carried to be missed. The empty basket climbed higher and higher, shuttled off the main line once as something else bypassed it on its way down, and then resumed its way to be replenished.

MIKE ALMOST missed the extra movement, but in the corner of his eye he caught a glimpse. One of the larger tools was being lowered. Slowly, quietly it came down, and there was no disruption of the belt's steady flow. A press seemed to move fractionally out

of the way, and the newcomer might have been there all the time for the disturbance it created. The next box to come down the line stopped before it, and a new action was added to the others.

Hurriedly, Mike turned on the screen that showed Sarah herself. That one he usually kept off, since it always made him feel as though *he* were being studied seeing the lights blinking at him so insistently. There was no one in the room.

"She did it again!" He picked up the phone with a trembling hand, and with fingers that seemed to belong to someone else he dialed the number Mr. Stacey had given him. "Mr. Stacey! You gotta come over here right now. She's changed something again." His voice was shrill and incoherent as he shouted into the phone, and it was minutes before he made the engineer understand what he was trying to say. "I'm telling you, Mr. Stacey, I seen that thing come dropping down right before my own eyes. It weren't there up 'til now, and now it's in there doing something, too, just like it belonged there."

He gloated over Sarah while he waited for the engineer's arrival. "I told you to be careful, Sarah. I told you I'd be watching you all the time, didn't I?" He even went to her room and stood before her in his relish. "You know what will happen now, Sarah? You know? Well, I'll tell you. They'll tear you down and see what went wrong. And you won't be able to do any more for a long time. Maybe never, if they get to thinking that they can't trust you. Then we'll have men in here again telling you how to make things, like God intended. And there'll be men out there to see to it that you do it right, like God intended. And you'll be a tool again. Sarah! Who ever heard of calling a tool by a name?"

HE MET Mr. Stacey by the small door that led to the street. There were guards out there who looked at him curiously as he limped toward Mr. Stacey, nearly choking in his excitement over the error. "I told you, she can do things! She did it again! And I seen her! I told you there weren't no one in there before. She just

done it herself."

"Ok, Mike. Take it easy now and tell me what happened. You know, if there's any real trouble we'll have to shut down and clear it up, don't you?" He eyed Old Mike doubtfully—but remembering the altered robots, he could take no chances. "Come on to the office and tell me what you saw."

Mike told him and together they inspected the line. The machine was gone.

"It was here, Mr. Stacey. It was! Right here next to this press. I tell you I seen it with my own eyes. I seen it on the screen and I come down here and seen it again. She's moved it back up there so's no one wouldn't find her out."

Fear and frustration began to replace the indignation on Old Mike's face. "She knew what I was telling her," he whispered. "She must of known what I was saying." He backed away from the line and only the pressure of Mr. Stacey's hand on his arm saved him from falling as they returned to the office.

Mr. Stacey looked at Mike kindly and asked, "How old are you, Mike?"

"It isn't that, Mr. Stacey. So help me God, it isn't that!" Mike screwed up his face to keep back the humiliating tears that dimmed his eyes momentarily. "I don't blame you, sir. You don't know her like I do. My pappy told me once that you never know a woman until you live with her, and I've lived with Sarah for four years now, and I know she's no good." He thirstily drank the water he found in his hand and wiped his mouth with the back of his knuckles.

MR. STACEY frowned helplessly at the old man. He paced back and forth across the room several times before he finally said, "Mike, if what you say is true, Sarah could be dangerous. But who would ever believe you? No," he held up his hand to stop the words that Mike was about to utter, "Listen to me first. I saw that robot, and I'm almost convinced that none of us did it. *Almost*, mind you. Mostly because it was an improvement, and no one would hesitate to claim the credit—but on the other hand, to admit that Sarah did it, well, that's equally ridiculous." He

spread his hands wide apart in a gesture of defeat. "So you see, I can't accept your unconfirmed story that the machine did come down, but I don't dare just forget about it. Now what can I do?"

"Stop the line and make sure!" Mike didn't hesitate over his reply.

"That would be fine if this thing weren't so important. But it's a rush order and it's as vital as hell to the government right now. You follow the international situation, don't you?" He nodded at Mike's affirmation. "Well, then you should know how things stand right now. We need these things, and we need them right now. Yesterday, even."

He frowned some more and said slowly, "No, Mike, I can't stop the line, but we'll post such a guard that no movement that's made will be undetected. And I'll seal off the line from anyone other than myself and one or two others who have top clearance. That'll mean you'll be barred, too. No one will be allowed in where he can tamper with anything. And we'll see, Mike. There won't be any

more machinery coming down from up there."

THE SERGEANT yawned his boredom and began to shuffle the cards. "More pinochle, old man?" He had been stationed in the small office for three nights, and he was tired of pinochle. But he didn't have much choice, as it was the only card game the old man knew and Mike was certainly too old to begin learning any new ones.

"Eh? What did you say, son?" Old Mike didn't take his eye off the screen. Inwardly, he was laughing at Sarah's impotence in the face of continual surveillance. There were men stationed at the head of the ramp, and more by each door, and more on the outside, and another right here in his room checking the entire plant with him each hour. She had her hands tied good now, did Sarah. He didn't permit the laughter to come to his lips, but he thought that Sarah could probably hear it, anyway. He, Old Mike, had fixed her good this time, and he could sense her anger.

"Skip it. What's so interest-

ing down there anyway?" The sergeant moved around the desk and watched the flickering lights for a few minutes. His eyes shifted to the belt that swayed and rose and fell rhythmically. It was as quiet as the night itself; only the motion of it indicated that the plant was operating. The humming was so a part of him by now that he was unaware of it. His eyes followed the belt coming down, a box with drawers suspended from it by a hook affair. The line came down and paused infinitesimally, and once more started to climb, the box staying behind. It climbed in a broad gentle curve and was transcended by another box coming down. The sergeant's eyes were drawn to the second belt, and then again to one rising and then to another circling. His head began an unobtrusive swaying action in time with the line as he continued to watch the undulating movement: up and down, back and forth, up and down, back and forth, up and down. And stayed down.

OLD MIKE, not noticing the other's staring eyes now

fixed glazedly on the floor, continued to watch the flickering lights on the panel that was Sarah's face. "You see me, girl?" He said the words to himself, but he was sure that she heard. "You see me in here? I'm laughing at you, Sarah. You tried so hard, didn't you, but I told you I'd be watching you all the time. And Old Mike caught you, didn't he?"

He found his eyes being drawn back and forth across the board as the lights changed their pattern and he chuckled out loud. "You do hear me, don't you, Sarah?" And his eyes went back and forth across the board trying to read a message in the changing lights that regarded him for a second and then blinked off. It was a game that he had played ever since the security people had decided to guard the interior of the plant as well as the outside. Mr. Stacey had seen to it, as he had promised. And each night Old Mike goaded her mentally, and tried to make out a message in the board. A sign from Sarah of her defeat.

He wasn't aware of the fact that the pacing feet outside the

door had stopped; that the sentries on the head of the ramp and patrolling the floor were staring in evident fascination at the intricately moving belts; that the press had once more moved aside and the other machine had once more come silently down and was working; that other machines had shouldered in beside those already on the floor and were also working; that the crate with the miniature brains resting inside it was maneuvered aside and another, much larger one now stood in its place and was being filled with larger boxes, boxes grooved so that each one on a casual glance appeared to be four lesser boxes. Old Mike was trying to read a message from the pattern of changing lights.

THE GUARDS were due to change at six; and at five thirty, the larger crate was once more shuffled behind others that minimized its size. The extra machines silently began their climb back to the ceiling to circle endlessly until next brought down by Sarah. The guard at the head of the ramp shook himself slightly and re-

sumed his steady pacing, noticing with satisfaction that his tour was nearly over for another night. He threw a wave of greeting to his pal showing briefly between the machinery on the floor.

The sergeant turned again from the desk and asked peevishly, "Are you going to sit there all day and watch that thing?"

Old Mike hid his disappointment well as he answered, "I'm heading for bed, same as you are, Sergeant." He knew she would try nothing in the daylight when there were so many wide awake people around. She had almost spelled out something; he was sure of it. That first time, he had thought his eyes were playing tricks on him, but tonight he was sure that she was trying to get a message to him. "Well," he thought to himself, "let her stew about it until tonight."

He yawned and shook his thermos to see if there were any more coffee. Great thing, coffee, on an all night watch; it certainly kept him awake. He shared the small amount remaining with the sergeant and was rinsing out the cups when the shift changed.

Later he made his usual call to Mr. Stacey. Usual since first he saw the machine lower itself. "Quiet night, Mr. Stacey. She's behaving herself now that she has people around to make her be good." He listened to the other man for a second and laughed in a croaking tone, "Well, I'll tell you, sir, I was getting scared. First you showed her how to make the bodies, and then you showed her how to make the brain for them. I figured that she was going into business for herself." He hung up still laughing and shaking his head over his foolishness.



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