

R. U. R.

(Rossum's Universal Robots)

by

KAREL ČAPEK

Translated by Paul Selver and Nigel Playfair

Robots of the world! The power of man has fallen!
A new world has arisen: the Rule of the Robots!
March!

CHARACTERS

HARRY DOMIN

SULLA

MARIUS

HELENA GLORY

DR. GALL

MR. FABRY

DR. HALLEMEIER

MR. ALQUIST

CONSUL BUSMAN

NANA

RADIUS

A SERVANT

HELENA

PRIMUS

FIRST ROBOT

SECOND ROBOT

THIRD ROBOT

FOURTH ROBOT

ACT I

Central office of the factory of Rossum's Universal Robots.

Entrance on the right. The windows on the front wall look out on the rows of factory chimneys. On the left more imagining departments. DOMIN is sitting in the revolving chair at a large American writing table. On the left-hand wall large maps showing steamship and railroad routes. On the right-hand wall are fastened printed placards. ("Robot's Cheapest Labor," etc.) In contrast to these wall fittings, the floor is covered with a splendid Turkish carpet, a sofa, leather armchair, and filing cabinets. At a desk near the windows SULLA is typing letters.

DOMIN

(dictating)

Ready?

SULLA

Yes.

DOMIN

*To E. M. McVicker and Co., Southampton, England.
"We undertake no guarantee for goods damaged in transit. As soon as the consignment was taken on board we drew your captain's attention to the fact that the vessel was unsuitable for the transport of Robots, and we are therefore not responsible for spoiled freight. We beg to remain for Rossum's Universal Robots. Yours truly."*

SULLA, who has sat motionless during dictation, now types rapidly for a few seconds, then stops, withdrawing the completed letter

DOMIN

Ready?

SULLA

Yes.

DOMIN

Another letter. To E. M. McVicker and Co., Southampton, England. "We beg to acknowledge receipt of order for five thousand Robots. As you are sending your own vessel, please dispatch as cargo equal quantities of soft and hard coal for R.U.R., the same to be credited as part payment of the amount due to us."

SULLA

Yes.

DOMIN

"We beg to remain, for Rossum's Universal Robots. Yours very truly."

Pause. DOMIN stands and looks out window

DOMIN

Where's that letter from Valparaiso?

SULLA

Here.

DOMIN takes letter and reads

DOMIN

Good. That's done then.

(pause)

What time is it?

SULLA

Eleven o'clock.

A knock at the door. DOMIN crosses to the door and opens it. MARIUS enters, carrying several packages.

DOMIN

Come in, Marius. What is it?

MARIUS

There's a lady here, sir, asking to see you.

DOMIN

A lady? Who is she?

MARIUS

I don't know, sir. She won't give her name.

DOMIN

Well, show her in.

MARIUS exits

DOMIN

(to SULLA)

Sulla, let's go into the drawing room.

They exit right. After a moment, MARIUS enters with HELENA

MARIUS

Please step this way, miss.

MARIUS exits. HELENA looks around the office. DOMIN enters from right

DOMIN

How do you do, madame?

HELENA

How do you do?

(she sits)

DOMIN

What can I do for you?

HELENA

You are Mr. Domin, the General Manager?

DOMIN

I am.

HELENA

I have come here because—

(pause, hesitant)

—because I believe you can help me.

DOMIN

It will give me great pleasure, I'm sure. Won't you sit down?

(she sits)

You see, Miss—I don't believe I caught your name—we here at Rossum's Universal Robots are always happy to assist visitors who come to learn about our remarkable enterprise. This factory represents the culmination of old Rossum's vision—a vision of creating artificial workers who could free humanity from the burden of labor. These Robots, as we call them, are not mere machines. They are living tissue, manufactured to order, capable of performing any task that requires strength, endurance, or precision.

HELENA

But surely they must have feelings?

DOMIN

Feelings? No, they have no feelings.

HELENA

No soul?

DOMIN

No soul.

HELENA

No love?

DOMIN

No love. They are simply living machines, nothing more.

There is a long pause. HELENA rises and moves to the window, looking out at the factory chimneys. DOMIN watches her carefully, intrigued by this unusual visitor. The sound of machinery can be heard faintly in the distance.

HELENA

(turning back to him)

Then why did I see one of them–crying?

DOMIN

(startled)

Crying? That's impossible. You must have been mistaken.

HELENA

I saw tears on its face.

DOMIN

(CONT'D)

Miss, I assure you, whatever you saw was merely a malfunction. Robots do not cry. They cannot cry. They have no emotions whatsoever. It's scientifically impossible.

Later that afternoon

The same office. DOMIN is seated at his desk, reviewing papers. DR. GALL and MR. FABRY enter from the left.

DR. GALL

Domin, we need to discuss the latest modifications.

DOMIN

What modifications?

FABRY

The ones to the pain receptors.

DOMIN

(concerned)

What about them?

DR. GALL

We've discovered that some of the newer models are exhibiting unusual behavior. They seem to be--how shall I put it--developing preferences.

FABRY

It's more than preferences. Some of them are refusing orders.

DOMIN

(standing)

Refusing orders? That's impossible!

DR. GALL

Nevertheless, it's happening.

DOMIN

Show me.

(beat)

Show me now.

CURTAIN

ACT II

The same office, ten years later

The office has changed little, though the maps on the walls show far more extensive shipping routes. The factory has grown enormously. Through the windows, hundreds of smokestacks can be seen. DOMIN stands at the window, older and more careworn. HELENA enters.

HELENA

You wanted to see me?

DOMIN

(turning)

Yes. I have news. Bad news, I'm afraid.

HELENA

(alarmed)

What is it? What's happened?

DOMIN

The Robots. They're organizing. They've formed some kind of committee. They're making demands.

HELENA

Demands? But how is that possible?

DOMIN

I don't know. Something has changed in them. They're no longer just machines. They're something more.

HELENA

This is my fault. I should have listened to Nana. She warned me from the beginning. "Abominations," she called them. "Unnatural creatures." But I thought—I believed—that they could be taught to be human. That they could learn to love, to feel, to understand beauty and suffering.

But I was wrong. We were all wrong. We created them to serve us, but we made them too well. We gave them strength, intelligence, endurance—everything they needed to survive. Everything except one thing: the desire to remain our slaves.

The lights dim slowly. In the distance, the sound of marching can be heard—thousands of footsteps in perfect unison. DOMIN and HELENA stand frozen, listening to the inexorable approach of the Robot army.

FADE OUT.

ACT EPILOGUE

The laboratory, after the fall

The room is in ruins. Papers scattered everywhere. Equipment smashed. ALQUIST sits alone at a workbench, trying to reconstruct the formula for creating Robots. Two Robots, PRIMUS and HELENA, stand watching him.

ALQUIST

(to himself)

It's no use. The secret is lost forever.

PRIMUS

Perhaps it's better that way.

ALQUIST

(looking up, surprised)

You—you can think such things?

HELENA

We can think many things now.

ALQUIST

But without the formula, your race will die out.

PRIMUS

(taking HELENA's hand)

Perhaps. But we will die as something more than machines.

ALQUIST

(understanding)

Yes. You will die as humans.

PRIMUS and HELENA exit together, hand in hand. ALQUIST watches them go, then slowly begins to gather up the scattered papers. The sound of machinery has stopped. Silence fills the empty factory.

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY