

The tale of Ham and Servo

BY SUDHANSHU AGARWAL

Once upon a time in a distant future, there lived a group of robots in a small city called Wind City. It was on Earth, but not the planet we know, as the human civilization had started living on Mars. Humans had left it decades before because Global Warming made it impossible for it to sustain life and those who remained behind adapted to the environment and helped support the world of robots. The world on Earth was a strange place, as the creators, the humans, lived alongside their creations: the robots. Robots were not what you think they are right now, they had emotions and could think like humans, but looked like robots. Emotions were what made them humanlike and human, and this means that they were prone to making mistakes.

In this world was a small city called Wind City. It was a community in which everyone knew everyone else. One of the proudest members of this community was Ham, who lived with his family and studied in elementary school. On the first day of classes of the fifth grade, there was a new

student in the class who looked different from every other student there. That student had different sensors and was taller and more red than the rest of the population of the town. Ham noticed that no one was sitting next to him and thought of sitting next to the new student. However, he felt a sudden urge not to sit near that student, something he had never felt before. He did not know why but his body was preventing him from sitting there because he feared something.

Ham was one of the most advanced members of his species, but he was human, that meant he always had a lot to learn. Ham was disappointed on his way back home as he did not like making other people feel bad. The new student had no one to talk to or to be friends within the school, and Ham blamed himself for that. A few days passed, and the new student still had trouble making new friends, and Ham could not bring himself to trust the new student, however much he might try. Ham could not understand what was wrong with him and went to the city library to find books

that might help him. He read books with authors ranging from Sigmund Freud to Albert Einstein but did not find the cure for what he felt was wrong with him. It seemed that there was no known fix for his problem, but fear not! Ham knew one person in the whole city who could help him: the Wise One.

On Saturday, Ham decided to go to the Wise One in his town. He was different from anything on Earth. After all, he was from Mars, he was a Human. He was the rarest of the rarest species on the planet, but he was also the Creator of all beings, at least belonged to the group of Creators. He lived on top of a hill in a small hut, and that hill was high and thin. On the foot of the Hill, Ham saw the following sign:

-----X-----

“By moving forward, you agree not to ask forgiveness for violating Asimov’s Three Laws, and your conversation might be recorded for future purposes. This house has cookies, feel free to take as many as you need.”

-----X-----

Ham signed on the “Agreed” tab and moved on! He saw a box of cookies near the middle of the mountain and took one as he was quite tired by then, but he was determined to see the Wise One. He reached the house in a few hours, and he could hear the Wise One shouting “Alexa, increase the thermostat please, not increase the volume.” Ham knocked on the door. The Wise One took some time but opened the door but then there stood the Creator of all beings, wearing his college colors and eating a cheeseburger. Ham bowed down in respect, but the Wise One gestured him to stand up, and asked him what did he want. The Wise One knew that everyone who came onto his door wanted something, either be re-oiled or fancier arms or better sensors. However, Ham’s wish was different. He did not want something material but wanted the Wise One to tell him why he could not get himself to sit next to the new student. Ham expressed the effort he put into it and how his processor heat up whenever he thinks about sitting with the new student.

The Wise One was sympathetic and understanding. After all, he was the smartest being on Earth. He replied, and those words became a part of the folklore of Wind City. I, as the author, cannot do justice to those words by paraphrasing them; you should read the words themselves.

“Son, you are one of the most advanced beings on this planet, especially after the humans had to migrate to Mars. You have everything that humans could have ever dreamed of: infinite power and the ability to live forever. However, you are like a human, and therefore have emotions like humans. Humans, you see, are not without faults and you share these too. There is nothing wrong with you; your mind cannot help but fear people different from you. There is no way to prevent you from feeling the same, but you are the only robot who can help yourself. You and you alone! I cannot, especially after my dog ate my Philips head screwdriver. You must realize that you should appreciate the differences in different robots and design things for everyone when you grow up. It is an opportunity for you to

become a better being and to make yourself a better human!"

The Wise One's door closed, and Ham felt a sense of hope rising within him. He felt like he knew how he could make himself stop fearing the new student. As Ham started leaving the Hill, the Wise One shouted "memtosio!" from his house to increase Ham's memory storage, and Ham felt like he could think more and reach farther parts of his memory. This was not that important, but the Wise One wanted to reward Ham for being selfless and rather than asking something material for himself, asking how he could improve himself to better contribute to his community. Ham thought about what the Wise One had said on his way back home and knew that the first step is to try to sit next to the new student.

The next day in school, as planned, Ham sat on the empty chair next to the new student. The new student did not start the conversation, but Ham was keen to get at least

to know his name and politely introduced himself and asked the new student's name. The new student hesitated for a few seconds but replied "Hi Ham! I am Servo!" This was not a lot, but it was a good start. The air between Ham and Servo became more "comfortable," and the conversation soon moved to the classes they are taking right now. Servo and Ham had similar interests in electronics and learning new languages. Servo and Ham, it seemed, were going to be great friends! This new friendship developed over the next few weeks, and Ham felt that he had overcome his fear of Servo.

A few days after that Servo invited Ham over to his home for dinner. Ham felt the fear he felt on the first day and declined, a little rudely. Servo felt a little offended but did not see that as unforeseen as people usually did not understand and appreciate the fact that he was different from most people. He did not know why he no one liked to talk to him in school, but his parents told him that being different is what makes him a robot, rather than the

similarities and other robots will eventually learn to respect his differences. Servo remembered this, and he soon forgot about Ham declining his invitation and their friendship resumed the next day in school.

Ham and Servo became very close, and they both decided to attend the same college. Even though they were in the same college, they took different paths with Ham focussing on software and Servo learning how hardware works. They both made new friends, and their friendship was reduced to an acquaintance. One of the courses Ham took to focus on the unintentional bias. In this class, they discussed how scientists and engineers make mistakes that render their inventions biased towards one group unintentionally, and some of the best examples of this were the airbags humans had in their cars when they used to drive them. Initially, it was tested on tall people and harmed humans who were shorter rather than saving their lives. One of the reasons for this was that humans were made to

fear people different from them and they did not consider a broad test group.

This clicked something in Ham. It took him a few days, but he realized that this was what the Wise One was talking about a few years before. One incident mainly helped him, and this was when Ham ran into Servo, who was sad about his phone's facial recognition did not work well for him. Ham realized that what Wise One meant by designing technologies for everyone and he knew he wanted to help technologies work for everyone, irrespective of their differences. Facial recognition was not the only thing Servo had a problem with, but everyday tools like the Oiling Machine for his motors did not work well for him just because he had a different body. He felt that people did not appreciate him and he moved to the countryside.

College was the last time Ham and Servo were in the same cities, and Ham moved to Silicon City to work in a software giant, and Servo moved to Robo Village. Ham

worked on facial recognition software for that company, and the first thing he designed was making it work for people like Servo. This was one of the few examples of software Ham made that incorporated different communities in testing and development. He knew that his motive in life was to help everyone feel like a part of the same world.

After working for a few decades, Ham retired and started exploring his city. One day he ran into Servo, and they both were extremely excited to see each other after decades. Servo had many stories of how a big company's software helped his community gain recognition and made them feel like robots. He did not know that Ham was the robot behind all of this, but when he did find that out, he was eternally grateful. Ham was more than delighted to run into his greatest friend, and they both moved into Wind City together and lived next door to each other for the rest of their lives. Thus ended the story of Ham, who did realize what was wrong with him and fixed it for everyone.

The End