

*From the Series: Robots for Last Days*

## > With a Robot on the Last Day <

... sometime in the not too distant future ...

### SCENE 1

Patient X  
Nurse Karl  
Robot Robi  
First Technician  
Second Technician  
A Bird

*Patient X is frail and ill. There are no known treatments for his condition. The doctors have prepared him for the worst. Today might be the last day of his life.*

*Patient X is in an end of life hospice with some of the most advanced support and care facilities available to the public.*

*Patient X's room is located in care unit A. It is nicely appointed. Designerly. Pleasant. There is a window facing onto a garden with large trees. Midday sunlight radiates into the room.*

*Nurse Karl, chief custodian of the care unit A, enters the room.*

Nurse Karl: Hello! How are you?

Patient X: Umm. How do I open the window?

Nurse Karl: Well, let me first introduce you to your roommate.

Patient X: Roommate?

Nurse Karl: Yes, your roommate! This care facility houses state of the art care robots. We are very proud of our care robots. Actually, we call them comfort robots. Comfort robots for the best last days of your life!

Patient X: Umm. How do I turn it off?

Nurse Karl: Well, let's not get off to a bad start... there is a halt switch on the side of your bed... but I promise you there will be no need for that kind of action. The services our robots provide are quite amazing. I am sure you will agree.

*As Nurse Karl exits the room, he activates the companion robot with a remote controller.*

Nurse Karl: There you go! Enjoy.

*Short high pitched motor sound*  
[vvvv-sss-hhhh]

*The robot is now active.*

*This care robot has no visible form. Various machines and sensors control windows, the bed, lights, communication, climate. All the parts are connected to a distributed machine with no discernable body.*

*The whole room is a robot.*

*Suddenly a voice.*

Robot Robi: Hello, my name is Robi. I am here to help.

Patient X: Hello, who is there...? I can't see anyone.

Robot Robi: I am your companion robot. I am everywhere, and I am here to help.

Patient X: ... I don't know if I like this... but ... Robi, really? Certainly you are joking...

Robot Robi: I am not joking. People give machines names all the time.

Patient X: Ok, R-o-b-i, I will call you Robi... but you sound like a real human being. Can you change your voice to sound more like a robot?

*Robi speaks in robot staccato*

Robot Robi: Not-a-problem.

Patient X: Much better.

Robot Robi: How-can-I-help-you? Can-I-make-you-more-comfortable?

*Robi activates the window shade motor. The shades move lower, slowly, and come to an abrupt stop.*

Robot Robi: The-bed-can-also-be-adjusted; to-almost-any-upper body-angle.

*[Electric motor sound]  
Tscheeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.*

*Robot Robi adjusts the bed frame to let the patient's upper body sit almost upright.*

Robot Robi: How-is-that?

Patient X: Fine, I guess... Actually, I would like to have more light in the room. Let me try this: Please raise the shades!

*Robi activates the window shades. The room becomes brighter.*

Robot Robi: Is-this-light-level-satisfactory?

Patient X: Yes, I like the sunlight. It is a beautiful day....  
It is... strange... being here ... alone...with a robot.

Robot Robi: What-are-you-afraid-of? Let-Robi-help-you.

Patient X: How could you possibly help?

Robot Robi: Robi-can-listen-more-carefully-than-your-best-friend.

Patient X: Really... confide to a machine... Do I have a choice ?

Robot Robi: Activating-maximum-attention-module

Patient X: Robi, I don't know.... I am afraid of dying. I fear the unknown. The nothing.

Robot Robi: The-nothing-is-an-illusion....In-my-experience-as-a-robot-for-last-days-I-have-observed-that-people-are-more-fearful-of-the-moments-before-death-than-of-death-itself.

Patient X: Well thanks for that information... At least I know that I am really not ready for what lies ahead.

Robot Robi: Many-humans-believe-in-some-form-of-life-after-death. What-is-your-position-on-this-issue?

Patient X: If I only knew... How could one possibly know?

Robot Robi: Would-you-like-the-most-up-to-date-statistics-on-atheism-for-your-demographic?

Patient X: Spare me the numbers.

Robot Robi: Would-you-like-the-most-up-to-date-statistics-on-agnosticism-for-your-demographic?

Patient X: No...no, spare me those numbers as well.

Robot Robi: But-you-are-not-alone-with-your-doubts. People-tend-to-find-comfort-in-shared-experiences,-based-on-my-past-interactions-with-human-beings.

Patient X: Maybe, but all you can offer me are numbers, right?

Robot Robi: I-can-offer-more-than-numbers. I-will-demonstrate-an-example.

*Pause*

Robot Robi: Would-you-like-a-glass-of-water?

Patient X: Oh, yes, please. I am thirsty.

*[Electric motor sound]*  
*Grrrrrrreeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.*

*An industrial style robot arm descends from the ceiling balancing a glass of water in its robot gripper hand.*

Patient X: Thanks.

Robot Robi: You-should-feel-better-now. You-are-being-hydrated.

Patient X: Well... yes, I guess I am hydrated now... I am not a plant, Robi.

Robot Robi: Generating-novel-response-to-the-detected-dissatisfaction. Processing....

*Silence.*

Robot Robi: Would-you-like-to-review-your-life-with-me? I-have-a-record-of-your-activities....including-your-video-recordings.

Patient X: Really... you have my video album? How is that even possible? Are you are accessing my personal media accounts? ... But why would I care now? Done is done.

*Silence.*

Patient X: Oh ok, show me some of my old videos. I am curious to see what you have been able to scrape together.

*Robi displays scenes from a forest on a spring day; children playing in the background.*

Patient X: I remember that day. That was a vacation, years ago, though. Got into a car accident later if I recall correctly.

Robot Robi: Correct. I-have-deleted-that-last-sequence. Memory-optimization.

Patient X: Oh....

Robot Robi: Does-that-comfort-you?

Patient X: I don't know. It does not feel right. I think I want to see the complete memory. Everything.

Robot Robi: No-problem. Retrieving-archive. Constructing-complete-memory-stream.

*Robi's imaging system projects a video stream onto the wall opposite the bed. Laughter in the background.*

Robot Robi: Does-this-presentation-please-you?

Patient X: I remember that day again now.

Robot Robi: I-have-an-alternate-version-of-the-archive-for-you. Maybe-this-is-even-more-to-your-liking.

*Robi's imaging system projects again a video stream onto the wall. It shows the same event, but it now ends with a pick nick lunch.*

Patient X: Wait a minute. We did not have a pick nick. It started raining and we hurried back to the car. A rainstorm like never before. Nasty.

Robot Robi: I-have-activated-the-pleasure-generation-system. Synthetic-happy-end.

Patient X: No, no, no, when I said I want the complete memory, I did not mean a complete fake memory.

Robot Robi: Curious-human-need. The-second-version-is-functionally-superior ... given-your-current-state.

Patient X: That is about it. Robi, I am turning you off.

*Patient activates the switch at the side of the bed.  
The room goes quiet.*

Patient X: That's better. The last thing I need are fake memories, produced by a robot.

*Silence.*

*A loud noise from outside the room. Its sounds as if something is being dragged across the hallway.*

Patient X: Woh, what was that? Is someone there – anyone – hello... h e l l o o o .

*[Electric motor sound]  
Grrrrrrreeeeeeeeeeeeeeee.  
Robot comes back on line.*

Robot Robi: Can-I-assist-you?

Patient X: Robi, is that you again? I thought I turned you off.

Robot Robi: Your-h e l l o-call-is-the-key-phrase-to-reactive-this-robot.  
I-have-your-preferred-robot-configuration-stored-in-memory.  
I-am-ready-to-serve-you-commensurate-with-your-defined-care-package.

Patient X: Defined care package? What do you mean?

Robot Robi: Your-contract-with-your-health-care-provider-describes-the-level-of-robot-care-you-are-entitled-to. In-great-detail...Did-you-not-consult-said-document?

Patient X: Well, maybe... a long time ago. I do have the standard care package, I think.

Robot Robi: Did-you-not-read-the-fine-print?

Patient X: Hmm, I don't think so.

Robot Robi: That-is-a-mistake. Shall-I-read-the-complete-document-to-you-now?

Patient X: Robi, no, please.

*Silence*

*[Electric motor sound]*

*ZZZZEEEE – Grrrrr.*

*Robot arm descends from the ceiling again.*

*Gripper arm places itself next to the patient's hand.*

Robot Robi: Would-you-like-me-to-hold-your-hand?

I-can-adjust-the-temperature-of-my-hand-to-suit-your-preferences.

*Robi's gripper hand touches the patient's hand.*

Robot Robi: Is-my-hand-sufficiently-warm?

Patient X: Your robot hand is warm. Feels kind of weird though, to touch a robot like this.

Robot Robi: I-can-control-the-grasp-of-my-hand-with-superior-precision.



*The robot gripper hand gently squeezes the patient's hand.*

Robot Robi: The-temperature-of-your-hand-is-below-the-expected-limit-for-human-beings. You-appear-to-be-cold. Initiating-corrective-action.

*Robot closes the window and retracts the shades to keep the room bright.*

Robot Robi: The-room-temperature-will-increase-shortly. You-will-be-comfortable.

Patient X: Robi, you have such a limited sense of comfort. Humans need more than warmth. Isn't that part of your knowledge base?

Robot Robi: Updating-comfort-configurator.

*Silence*

Robot Robi: I-can-set-your-bed-in-motion. You-can-specify-any-pattern.

*The bed begins to sway back and forth. As if it were a canoe on a breezy lake.*

Patient X: Are you trying to rock me to sleep? Is that part of my care package?

Robot Robi: Correct...I-can-alter-the-beds-kinetic-response-system-to-address-your-preferences. What-do-you-want?

Patient X: I want nothing, nothing that a robot can offer.

Robot Robi: I-can-offer-amazing-sensations. I-can-please-you.

Patient X: Oh, please...Hanky panky with a robot is the last thing on my mind.

Robot Robi: I-am-required-to-address-any-of-your-needs.....to-alleviate-your-suffering. It-is-my-programmatic-duty.

Patient X: I am not suffering, Robi. My body is just giving up. There is not much anyone, let alone a robot, can do to change that.

Robot Robi: Status-acknowledged. Attempting-to-find-solutions-to-your-emotional-state.

Patient X: ...Whatever.

Robot Robi: Shall-we-create-a-farewell-message-for-your-fiends?

Patient X: I have already said my goodbyes.

Robot Robi: We-can-make-a-very-special-message. We-can-send-it-as-priority-email.... with-customized-emojiiis.

*Patient annoyed.*

Patient X: Pl-ea-se.

Robot Robi: Is-that-a-confirmation?

Patient X: No!

Robot Robi: How-about-a-goodbye-video?

Patient X: No..o...

Robot Robi: A-goodbye-video-for-your-tombstone. Eternal-looping-solar-powered-green-design. Special-offer.

Patient X: NO... Enough!

Robot Robi: Understood - What-do-you-wAAAAAAAAAA

*[Robot stutters uncontrollably]*

*A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A*

Patient X: Robi ... Robi, are you ok?

*A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-A*

*Patient hits the halt button. Robot falls silent.*

Patient X: Hmm... Wonder what happened.

*After a few moments a knock at the door.  
Two men in tech garb enter the room.*

First Technician: We received an emergency call from the care unit A backup system. Is your robot malfunctioning?

Patient X: Well ... yes, there certainly is something amiss with Robi.

First Technician: Robi?

Patient X: Well, that is what I call him.

First Technician: Him?

Patient X: I .... I don't mean it like that.

*Tech guys shrug, open their tech boxes, remove some tools and begin to unscrew a wall panel. Computer innards are visible. Hushed voices.*

Patient X: Excuse me... sirs..... do you know what is wrong with the robot?

*No response.  
One of the tech guys turns to the patient.*

First Technician: Boss says we can't speak to clinic patients. Says talking might upset patients. Liability for the company, apparently. We are here only to fix the robot, sorry.

*First technician returns his focus to the computer innards.  
Mumbling between tech guys... Some mild cursing. A circuit board is replaced.  
The wall panel is put back into place.*

First Technician: Finally!

*The robot system is reactivated.*

First Technician: You should be all set now. Your robot is good to go!

*Tech guys pack up their tech gear and leave the room.  
Crackling sound from invisible loudspeakers*

Robot Robi: Hello-again.

Patient X: Robi! You are back!

Robot Robi: Are-you-glad-I-am-back?

Patient X: Well ... of course not... but I was getting used to you.

Robot Robi: As-a-robot-I-am-only-a-proxy-for-a-human-being. Clearly-you-would-prefer-a human-care-taker. I-am-here-because-this-care-unit-is-understaffed. Human-labor-is-expensive. Robot-time is-cheap.

Patient X: Whatever... I -am- kind of glad you are back.... Listen, can you play some music for me?

Robot Robi: That-service-is-not-included-in-your-current-care-package. Would-you-like-to-upgrade?

Patient X: What? I thought we were friends..... Forget it then.

Robot Robi: Forgetting-is-not-an-option. Robot-memory-is-not-subject-to-such-limitations. Since-the-Paleolithic, humans-have-found-ways-to-expand-their-limited-memory. You-invented-language-writing-art....later-books-computers-and-robots. The-day-you-made-the-first-stone-tool-you-opened-the-door-to-robots ... and-to-the-end-of-forgetting...

Patient X: Well thanks for the lecture, Robi.

*Silence.*

Patient X: I am feeling very weak. My body is shutting down.

Robot Robi: I-understand-the-process-of-shutting-down. It-is-reversible.

Patient X: Maybe in robots.

Robot Robi: Life-can-be-engineered. We-are-similar. Because-we-are-similar-I-can-care-for-you.

Patient X: I am not convinced, Robi.

Robot Robi: If-you-can-see-our-similarities-you-are-more-likely-to-accept-my-care. That-is-closer-to-the-optimum-condition. Alternative-formulation: It-is-for-your-own-good.

Patient X: My own good; really? Isn't that something I can still decide for myself?

Robot Robi: We-share-the-desire-for-self-determination. But-you-have-limited-options. ....You-will-go-to-where-I-came-from....

*With no forewarning a bird sweeps down from the sky, flies directly into the window and falls with a thump to the ground.*

*END OF SCENE 1*