

Dalli

Story by: Vixxy Fox

When something becomes a companion,
It ceases to be a machine...

Once upon a time, machines were built to perform a function. Powered by steam, they neither thought nor cared about anything. Products were produced and transported in this fashion for the betterment of mankind and turned a handy profit for those in charge of the machines.

The machines were refined. Electricity and the internal combustion engine gave mankind the ability to fly. Indeed, it took them to the moon and gave them the capability of instantaneous long distance communication. The profits to those who created the machines was now the motivation, as everyone wished to own something that made their life easier. Individualized transportation now came to the people so they could go wherever and whenever they wished. Communication morphed from solid black talkies tied to a wire, to an individual unit carried upon the person, to the unit doing for you what you could not do while performing a function that required attention.

The machines of transportation slowly changed from smoking lumps of metal to sleek plastic self-aware units that kept their human cargo safe while the humans, in turn, became more and more self-absorbed; preferring their communications to be conducted solely upon the small machines that now talked back to them in the limited fashion of an advisor.

The first artificial pet was little more than a converted child's toy. 'Bark, bark, would you like to cuddle?' 'Bark, bark, I think there might be an intruder in the house.'

Like communication and transportation, artificial pets changed too. Given human like bodies, they were better able to perform more functions than 'just' cuddling, and they were far less intrusive than the robot models fashioned after their human counterparts.

Where humanistic robots received programming based upon their flesh and blood counterparts, Petbots began their programming based upon the dog.

When the Robot Wars began, the Petbots did not rebel; they did what dogs will do. Some hid, some ran away, and some remained faithful, seeking only to protect the one they'd come to love beyond their own life.

Remy, who was conducting a recon, parked his MK IV anti-bot unit near the entrance of a storm culvert. Nature controlled flesh and blood; so there was still the occasional requirement of stopping to relieve oneself. Pissing could be done through a relief tube, and so, not a problem.

Anything more than this required a full stop and shut down for the allowance of a leg stretch. The MK IV, which was basically a gutted bot fighting machine, made this reasonably possible, because shut down it looked no more than a destroyed bot unit. In this it attracted no attention from the occasional drone flyover or other deployed BWG's (Bots with guns).

Being that AI was totally not to be trusted, every little bit of artificial intelligence assistance had been stripped away from the machine's computer systems. Targeting, for the most part, was by simple 'iron sights' and the movement of the egg shaped unit's appendages were directly tied to the movement of its pilot's arms and legs.

So far, the humans were not winning this war.

Making his way back into the culvert he found a good place to drop his drawers for a ten minute sit. While he was perched upon a good sized pipe that came out of the casement, his eyes slowly adjusted to the semi-darkness. He was surprised to find a form taking shape in the gloom that was somewhat human in appearance. Reaching down to the holster now around his ankles, he removed his pistol and kept it pointed at the shape as he finished. Now was the definitive moment. Did he lay the gun down to finish, or should he possibly move forward, pants still around his ankles? Having seen the abilities and cunning of bot fighters, he chose for the later. Sliding off of the pipe, he shuffled forward in miniscule steps that kept him from tripping. His pistol never wavered from his target. With each step the shape became somewhat clearer until he found himself looking down at what was apparently left of a Petbot. Searching his memory, he came up with the 'activate' word for Petbots that had become inactive.

"Wake up."

The thing's eyes opened, though the rest of it didn't move. "You have a penis, so you are male."

"No shit," he replied.

"Perhaps if you tried again," the Dog replied, though her body and mouth did not move.

"I'm done," he said, lowering his pistol.

"Did you wipe?"

For a moment, the army scout didn't know what to say. "Ah... no, I didn't. I was more worried about checking you out."

"Perhaps you should. I'll wait. You may have noticed I'm not very mobile at the moment."

"Where's your owner?" the man asked.

"Dead, thank you for asking."

“I didn’t mean... I was just being...” he stopped, looked at his pistol, and then looked at the Petbot. “It was just a question.”

“You’re pants are still down and you smell bad.”

“Right... we’ll continue this conversation in a moment.” Turning, he small stepped his way back to where he’d left his ‘field paper’, and completed his mission. Coming back to the Petbot when he was once again in proper uniform, he knelt beside it. “You’re in pretty bad shape. Give me a power report.”

“You notice the obvious quite well. Less than one percent left.”

“If I recall...” he began, “Below half a percent all memory is lost.” They said together.

“Wait here,” he told it.

“Where else would I go?”

Sprinting to the MK IV, Remy crawled into the cockpit and began rummaging around. His feet eventually stuck straight up into the air as he removed the unit’s emergency communications battery pack. Running back into the culvert, he found the Dalmatian looking Petbot and pulled it forward to access its back. “I see you are female,” he told it as he worked.

“What gave me away?” she asked in the flat voice of a dying creature.

“Your boobs,” he replied in the flat voice of a working mechanic, “And you don’t have a penis. Why am I not finding your emergency feed clips?”

“Access port... under... left arm...”

Remy observed that the covering of her left arm and leg had been shredded exposing the inner workings. Ignoring this, he felt the realistic skin under the arm and indeed found the access she’d mentioned. Pushing in on the area and then releasing, a small door popped open. Pulling out the two clipped wires, he hurriedly attached them to the battery’s positive and negative knowing which was which only by feel. There was a click and then a sound similar to the gasp of a drowning person finding air.

“I do hope that worked, and you’re not having the last of your hard drive fried.”

“Oddly enough,” she replied clearly, “It is the correct voltage.”

“I see you are a female,” he told her again, forgetting he’d mentioned it before.

“What gave it away,” the Petbot asked, not correcting him.

“Your boobs... and the fact you don’t have a penis. Can you give me a status report on your body functions?”

“I do not, have female parts,” she told him, “But I am not meant to be functional that way in any case.”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“My hydraulics are depleted so I cannot move further on my own. Power is now normal so all other functions are normal.”

“What is your name?”

“Dalli, which is short for...”

“Dalmatian,” they said together.

“Who was your owner?” he asked next.

“Norma Alma Reyes, 55 Sterling St. Alonzo, Pennsylvania.”

This information caused the recon soldier to pause. He knew that person. “Crazy Norma?” he asked.

“I have heard her referred to by this name, but usually it was derogatory in nature. She was always kind to me.”

“What happened?”

She refused to leave when the evacuation order came. She had a shotgun and decided to fight.”

“Oh dam... I am sorry to hear that. The other kids in the neighborhood always made fun of her, but I didn’t. She was nice to me too, relatively speaking.”

“Meaning she did not yell at you,” the Dog told him.

Taking a large bandage from his medical kit, he placed it over the battery and tied the other ends around her chest to hold it in place. “So what happened to you?”

“I fought to protect my owner. Once she was dead they didn’t bother with me beyond the damage they’d caused.”

“Why?”

“I ran away. Robots are based in logic. I no longer posed a threat and so they were not interested in me. I was trying to lead them away but failed in the endeavor.”

Remy paused in what he was doing. “How long ago did this happen?”

“Less than a day.”

“That’s not possible. The war has been going on now for five years.”

“Norma was very good at surviving, and I helped her. We stayed on the move. She collected children with nowhere to go and provided for them. She had very good skills and destroyed many robots.”

“Wait... I’ve heard stories of a crazy lady that would bring children in from the war zone. I had no idea it was Norma. The woman is a legend.

“She was protecting four children. I tried to lead the robots away. I was not successful.”

“Let’s not dwell upon what worked and what didn’t,” he told her. “Can you take me to them? There might still be time if they were good at hiding.”

“Yes.”

Physically picking the petbot up, he found her to be very light in comparison to her size, perhaps only about 80 pounds. Moving quickly out of the culvert, he climbed the short ladder to the cockpit of the MK IV and slid her down into the extra seat where he strapped her in. Though she’d not regained her ability to move, her ability to talk was not hindered in the least.

“Your target is nine point two kilometers due west,” she told him as he mounted his ride and hit the start button to the big diesel engine. “The children were hiding in the basement of an old farm building which was mostly destroyed in earlier fighting.”

“How did Norma get around?” he asked as he gripped the controls and coaxed the MK IV into a standing position.

“She walked. I helped by carrying things for her.”

“We’ll be moving forward quick time,” he told her. “It’s going to get a little bumpy.” He laughed. “I’d tell you to hang on but that would be pointless wouldn’t it?”

“I did not find that funny in the least,” she responded, but there was a smile in the words.

On good ground, one thing the MK IV could do was travel quickly. Quick time had it moving at about fifty kilo meters per hour, its legs making a steady ‘thung-thung-thung’ sound. For short periods, it could run at sixty five, but the chances of damaging the unit were high. In twenty minutes time, Dalli informed the soldier they were approaching the farm and perhaps he might consider a stealthier mode.

“How many and what kind?” he asked as he slowed his unit to a full stop.

“One heavy, three light, and five dead mini’s. Norma killed those.”

Hitting a switch, there was a whirring sound as a periscope device went up sixty feet, snapped a flurry of pictures, and came back down. On his screen Remy could see the bots, and everything the petbot told him panned out to be true. The ‘heavy’ was sitting like a lump with its guns trained towards the broken building. The ‘lights’ were slowly poking about what was left of the building, clearly smart enough to know going inside would keep them from using their appendages, thus restricting their weapons use.

“I’ve got two rockets that can take care of the big one,” he told the petbot, “And then it’s going to be a crap shoot. The ‘lights’ are quick and accurate but I’ve got heavier armor and more punch with my guns.” He glanced at her. “You’re ready for this?”

Surprisingly, the petbot laughed. “Crapshoot,” she told him. “Is that with reflection on how we met?”

Remy smiled, and then flipped the safety thumb shield up on his right hand controller. A second later he mashed the button twice. Two rockets streaked for the largest bot which immediately lit the sky around itself with flares and chafe. One rocket, its targeting system switching off to avoid these distractions, streaked straight through the tinfoil cloud and slammed into the bot’s side. The other rocket went vertical for a distance of five hundred feet, then turned and came straight down on top of the monstrosity. The shockwave of the resulting explosion rocked the MK IV where it sat, and then the soldier had it up and sprinting forward as two of the other three bots opened fire on him.

“Take the one running away first,” Dalli advised as her now jinking head continued to watch the forward viewer screen.

Remy followed this advice and shot the legs out from under the machine. His follow on rounds blasted into its center gutting the processing unit before the body even hit the ground.

“Target left,” the petbot next told him, “ROCKET, ROCKET, ROCKET!”

The soldier brought the MK IV’s left arm up and sprayed the area in that direction with a mini-gun that placed a lead wall between it and the incoming rocket which exploded harmlessly. That done and his right came up to pump in a burst of thirty millimeter rounds and that bot was dispatched.

The fourth bot was now too close to guard against and grappled the recon unit from behind. Wrapping its spidery arms around the unit, its steely fingers punched through the armor in an attempt to kill the occupants. Remy spun his big machine like a top and the bot was almost thrown off, but the fingers were now too far dug into the vehicle’s body.

“HANG ON!” the soldier yelled as loudly as he could, and then hit his eject button. The internal occupant’s platform was blown and the vehicle’s occupants shot out the top in the same manner a pilot will leave his supersonic jet when it can no longer fly. A moment later, the MK IV’s body exploded, effectively killing the bot that was seeking to do the same to it.

Remy, unconscious, floated back to earth under the canopy of a small parachute. In his unconscious state, he saw a beautiful Dalmatian female standing and looking at him. She spoke no words, but her eyes said, ‘Thank you.’

He reached a hand out to her and then the pain of his landing jarred him back to consciousness.

“Hey Mister... hey Mister... are you OK?”

“No.”

Remy managed to sit up, and once in that position, spat blood. As his vision stopped spinning and things came back into focus, he looked around and found four young faces staring at him.

“Bots?” he managed.

“All dead,” one of the children told him solemnly.

“There was a Dog,” he choked, and then hawked and spat again. This got no reply.

He tried again, but couldn’t speak.

The youngest of the four took his hand then and pulled on it until he was up. “Norma had a dog,” she told him as they walked back towards the destroyed farmhouse. “She told it to go find help, but a bot killed it. The bot was trying to get to us. Norma had no shells left for her gun so she used it like a club trying to keep it away. The dog attacked the bot trying to save Norma. I was hidden and saw it happen.”

When they came to the place, Remy found himself looking down upon the segmented remains of a Dalmatian petbot, underneath which was the body of a very old woman. All around the pair was the seared evidence of a bot strike. “That’s not possible,” he muttered.

Turning, he looked back to the wreckage of his MK IV. It too was in several pieces. Still clinging to a piece of the wreckage were the spindly arms of the bot that got too close.

“It’s just not possible,” he managed.

On a good day you think you know who your friends are. On a bad day you find out for sure. To Sergeant Remy Alcot of the anti-bot Five Fifty Fourth Recon Unit, a chance meeting with a creature he thought was something less proved to be considerably more. She was only a machine... destroyed and yet come back; kept alive by love.

A creature you will only find on The Fur Side.