



A Boy's Best Friend

This is a passage from *I, Robot* (1950), a collection of short stories by Isaac Asimov. The title of this story is *A Boy's Best Friend*. It is about a young boy who has become fond of a robot dog in preference to the real dog that his father wants to give him.



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Mr Anderson said, “Where’s Jimmy, dear?”
 “Out on the crater,” said Mrs Anderson. “He’ll be all right, Robutt is with him. Did he arrive?”
 “Yes. He’s at the rocket station, going through the tests. Actually, I can hardly wait to see him myself. I haven’t really seen one since I left Earth 15 years ago. You can’t count films.”
 “Jimmy has never seen one,” said Mrs Anderson. “Because he’s Moonborn and can’t visit Earth. That’s why I’m bringing one here. I think it’s the first one ever on the Moon.”
 “It cost enough,” said Mrs Anderson, with a small sigh.
 “Maintaining Robutt isn’t cheap, either,” said Mr Anderson.
 Jimmy was out on the crater, as his mother had said. By Earth standards, he was **spindly**¹, but rather tall for a 10-year-old. His arms and legs were long and agile. He looked thicker and **stubbier**² with his spacesuit on, but he could handle the lunar gravity as no Earth-born human being could. [...] “Come on, Robutt,” he shouted.
 Robutt, who could hear him by radio, **squeaked**³ and **bounded after**⁴.
 Jimmy, expert though he was, couldn’t **outrace**⁵ Robutt, who didn’t need a spacesuit, and had four legs and tendons of steel. Robutt sailed over Jimmy’s head, **somersaulting**⁶ and landing almost under his feet.
 “Don’t show off, Robutt,” said Jimmy, “and stay in sight.”

Robutt squeaked again, the special squeak that meant “Yes.”
 “I don’t trust you, you faker,” shouted Jimmy, and up he went in one last bound that carried him over the curved **upper edge**⁷ of the crater wall and down onto the inner slope.
 The Earth sank below the top of the crater wall and at once it was **pitch-dark**⁸ around him. A warm, friendly darkness that **wiped out**⁹ the difference between ground and sky except for the **glitter**¹⁰ of stars.
 Actually, Jimmy wasn’t supposed to exercise along the dark side of the crater wall. The **grown ups**¹¹ said it was dangerous, but that was because they were never there. The ground was **smooth and crunchy**¹² and Jimmy knew the exact location of every one of the few rocks. Besides, how could it be dangerous racing through the dark when Robutt was right there with him, bouncing around and squeaking and **glowing**¹³? Even without the glow, Robutt could tell where he was, and where Jimmy was, by radar. [...]

Jimmy’s father calls him and he goes back “inside” where he lives.

Jimmy was out of his spacesuit now and washed up. You always had to wash up after coming in from outside. Even Robutt had to be **sprayed**¹⁴, but he loved it. He stood there on all fours, his little foot-long body **quivering**¹⁵

and glowing just a tiny bit, and his small head, with no mouth, with two large glassed-in eyes, and with a **bump**¹⁶ where the brain was. He squeaked until Mr Anderson said, “Quiet, Robutt.”

Mr Anderson was smiling. “We have something for you, Jimmy. It’s at the rocket station now, but we’ll have it tomorrow after all the tests are over. I thought I’d tell you now.”

“From Earth, Dad?” “A dog from Earth, son. A real dog. A Scotch terrier puppy. The first dog on the Moon. You won’t need Robutt any more. We can’t keep them both, you know, and some other boy or girl will have Robutt.” He seemed to be waiting for Jimmy to say something, then he said, “You know what a dog is, Jimmy. It’s the real thing. Robutt’s only a mechanical imitation, a **robot-mutt**¹⁷. That’s how he got his name.”

Jimmy **frowned**¹⁸. “Robutt isn’t an imitation, Dad. He’s my dog.” “Not a real one, Jimmy. Robutt’s just steel and wiring and a simple positronic brain. It’s not alive.”

“He does everything I want him to do, Dad. He understands me. Sure, he’s alive.”

“No, son. Robutt is just a machine. It’s just programmed to act the way it does. A dog is alive. You won’t want Robutt after you have the dog.”

“The dog will need a spacesuit, won’t he?”

“Yes, of course. But it will **be worth**¹⁹ the money and he’ll get used to it. And he won’t need one in the City. You’ll see the difference once he gets here.”

Jimmy looked at Robutt, who was squeaking again, a very low, slow squeak, that seemed frightened. Jimmy held out his arms and Robutt was in them in one bound. Jimmy said, “What will the difference be between Robutt and the dog?”

“It’s hard to explain,” said Mr Anderson, “but it

will be easy to see. The dog will really love you. Robutt is just adjusted to act as though it loves you.”

“But, Dad, we don’t know what’s inside the dog, or what his feelings are. Maybe it’s just acting, too.”

Mr Anderson frowned. “Jimmy, you’ll know the difference when you experience the love of a living thing.”

Jimmy held Robutt **tightly**²⁰. He was frowning, too, and the desperate look on his face meant that he wouldn’t change his mind. He said, “But what’s the difference

how they act? How about how I feel?

I love Robutt and that’s what counts.”

And the little robot-mutt, which had never been held so tightly in all its existence, squeaked high and rapid squeaks-happy squeaks.



Glossary

1 spindly: esile

2 stubby: tarchiato

3 to squeak: guaire

4 to bound after:
rincorrere

5 to outrace: superare

6 to somersault: fare
una capriola

7 upper edge: bordo
superiore

8 pitch-dark: buio pesto

9 to wipe out: cancellare

10 glitter: brillio

11 grown up: adulto

12 smooth and crunchy:
liscio e friabile

13 to glow: fare luce

14 sprayed: lavato

15 quivering: tremante

16 bump: bernoccolo

17 robot-mutt: cagnolino
robot

18 to frown: aggrottare
la fronte

19 to be worth: valere
la pena

20 tightly: forte

COMPREHENSION

1 Answer the following questions.

- 1 In the first part of the passage Jimmy’s parents are speaking. What are they speaking about?
- 2 How long have they been on the planet?
- 3 The boy is on the dark side of the crater wall. What is it like? Why don’t the boy’s parents want him to play there?
- 4 The boy is with Robutt. Who is Robutt? What does he look like?
- 5 Robutt is not only a friend for the boy. What else is he?
- 6 In the second part of the passage the boy’s father tells him that he will receive a new dog, a real dog. What is the boy’s reaction? Is he happy about it? Why?

SPEAKING

2 Discuss in the class. What do you think? Should the child have the “real dog” that his parents want to give him or should he keep the robot dog? Which do you think is better and why?