



Walko

Rob & Jonny

Rob Bunks Off! · Vol. 1

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English-language translation © Ruth Martin

One night, Robot Rob 1 opened a window very quietly. He climbed out and dangled from the window ledge for a little while. Then his arms grew longer and longer, and he slowly lowered himself down to the street. When he was on solid ground, he gave a contented whistle. Then he took to his heels and ran. He knew he was going to be sold soon, to slave away day and night for other people. After all, that was why his inventor had given him all his knowledge and skills. But Rob was no fool. He had some very different plans...

He didn't want to be a servant; he wanted to have a nice life of his own! He wanted to see all the great places there were in the world. And experience all the wonderful things that life had to offer.

By the time the people in the factory noticed that Number 1 was missing, he was long gone.

To be precise, at that point Rob was on a jumbo jet, on his way to London, the capital of the UK.

London was a place he had always wanted to visit. Rob liked refined British manners, the British sense of humour, and above all, British pop music. It was so exciting to fly, to see the world from up above, and feel free as a bird!

Once they had landed, some people on the tube into the city stared at him. Quite a few laughed and shook their heads. What crazy outfits young people wear these days, just to stand out from the crowd! No one could ever have imagined that this wasn't a boy in fancy dress, but a genuine robot! [...]

A lot of people got off at a stop called Covent Garden. Rob marched after them, since that seemed like an interesting place to be.

"Woooooiii!" went the robot; he hadn't been wrong about that. There were beautiful market halls here, colourful stalls, traders, artists and singers. And so many cheerful people looking at it all! Rob couldn't get enough of the jolly hustle and bustle all around him. [...]

A scruffy-looking dog caught his attention. He was just trying to snaffle some leftovers from a table. But a grumpy waiter stopped him.

"Get lost, you cheeky so-and-so!" he scolded him. "We're not a dog restaurant here, you know!"

The dog trotted off, sulkily. Suddenly, he leapt in the air in fright, and looked like he wanted to get away as fast as he could. But it was too late: he already had a dog warden's catching loop around his neck.

"Gotcha!" laughed the man with the catching pole, and dragged the dog roughly off to his van.

He was just about to load the poor thing into the back when he heard a voice behind him cry out:

“Oooh thank you, Mister! You’re a real angel!!!”

The dog catcher turned around in surprise. “Do you mean me.... sir?” he asked.

“Yes, of course! I’m soooo grateful to you for finding my Woofy!” Rob called out in one of his slightly funny voices. “I’m afraid he does run away sometimes. The silly boy.”

“Uh-huh... And why isn’t your silly Woofy wearing a dog tag?” the dog warden growled.

What on earth is a dog tag? thought Rob.

Quick as a flash, his computer brain found a picture of one and sent it to his built-in 3D printer.

“Ah yes, the dog tag,” he replied. “I’ve got it here somewhere! Now where did I put it...” He kept looking around until the tag fell out of the printer slot in his back.

“Ah, here it is!” Rob cried, picking the gleaming thing up off the floor.

The dog warden looked very disappointed, but then he loosened the catching loop and let the dog go.

“Well, in that case... But your Woofy has to wear that tag round his neck!” he growled, before getting into his van and driving off.

“I am not a silly boy,” the dog said to Rob. “And my name is Jonny, not Woofy! Who are you, anyway? I’ve never seen anyone like you before!”

Rob didn’t understand a word of Jonny’s woofing. But his clever brain only took two minutes to learn the dog language.

“I’m Robot Rob. Pleased to meet you!” he answered in Doggish.

“Robot Rob, uh-huh. That sounds very nice,” said Jonny.

“Thank you!” said Rob. “But why have you suddenly started rumbling like that?”

“That’s just my tummy. It rumbles when I’m hungry,” Jonny explained. And he also explained that here in London, you had to pay money for food.

“Don’t you have any money?” Rob asked.

“No. To get money, you have to work. Like those people,” he said, pointing to two street performers. One of them was making a great racket with his electric guitar. And the other was standing stock still, pretending to be an Egyptian mummy.

“Ah ... so that’s how you work!” cried Rob. He pressed a few of his buttons, and suddenly, loud metallic music started to blare out of him. He began to dance to it.

The street performers and the people who had been watching them came over at once. In no time at all, everyone was crowding around Rob, throwing money into the empty tin can that Jonny held out to them.

[...]

Working is really good fun.

He sent up his mini drone camera and took a few photos to remember it by. And when the tin was full, he stopped dancing.

“Thank you very much and bye-bye!” he called out, and Jonny gave a friendly bark.

After a roar of applause, they went to the nearest food stall and bought a large Pizza Margherita for Jonny. Rob threw the rest of the coins into his globetrotter rucksack.

“Mmmm, that was delicious!” sighed Jonny, and burped contentedly. “It’s like we’re in heaven! But aren’t you hungry?” he asked, as Rob packed the leftovers away.

“Robots of my generation feed off sunlight, knowledge and experiences,” said Rob.

“I see,” said Jonny, though that didn’t seem very logical to him. Then, to his surprise, Rob marched over to a stall and bought them a large strawberry ice-cream.

“Aha, so you do like ice-cream!” Jonny cried in delight.

“I believe it’s nice and cool,” said Rob, holding the ice-cream to his head, where it began to sizzle. Jonny wanted to try it, too – and it really was wonderfully refreshing!

“If it’s not too far for you, I’ll show you where I live,” Jonny suggested.

Rob agreed. He wanted to see some of the city, in any case. They walked through St James’s Park and fed the squirrels.

Rob took a liking to the little rodents at once. And it wasn’t long before the robot could communicate with them perfectly. Rob told them such funny stories that the squirrels fell about laughing.

Outside Buckingham Palace, some guards were standing stiffly to attention with unmoving faces.

“I think they’re robots, too,” Rob whispered.

“No, no. But something similar,” Jonny whispered back.

Rob pinched one of the guards until he twitched.

“You’re right, dog,” he whispered.

“I know, robot,” said Jonny.

Outside a very posh shop called Harrods, Rob remembered something. And so they went in and found a nice necklace to hang Jonny’s brand new dog tag on.

They had someone show them all the necklaces, and they tried them all on. Most of them looked far too blingy, and so in the end they bought the cheapest one. Jonny was overjoyed.

The sales assistant was less overjoyed when Rob shook a mountain of coins out of his rucksack.

The man rolled his eyes and said in a very refined tone: “Sir, may I remind you that this is the finest shop in London?!”

At that, Rob took a photo of him and said: “You have a very funny face, Mr Harrods! You could work as a street performer with that face, and earn a whole mountain of 50-pence pieces.”

After that, they marched into the famous Hyde Park – where they saw a little cat who was just escaping up a tree from a fat, snuffling dog. The cat was safe up there. But now it was staring down with a very worried look on its face – the dog was still sitting under the tree.

Rob went over to it and touched the dog lightly with his fingers. There was a crackling sound and a few sparks flew... and the dog quickly ran off, yelping! Rob stretched his arms out very loooong, gently picked the cat up off the branch, and set it back down on the ground. They walked a little way with it, just to be on the safe side.

“Thank you, gentlemen!” the little cat said as they parted ways.

“Our pleasure!” said Rob and Jonny

Jonny was still gobsmacked at how Rob had scared off the big dog. And now he was even more amazed: this boy with his superpowers was smelling the flowers! And he even knew all their names, as well as the names of the trees and all the other plants that grew here!

“The plants make oxygen that people, animals and they themselves need,” said Rob. “You wouldn’t exist without oxygen. And nor would I!”

“Wooooow, you know so many things!” Jonny cried.

[...]

When they came to the Serpentine and Rob saw the rowing boats, he exclaimed: “I want to do that, too!”

Jonny was all for it, but he’d never rowed a boat before. So Rob had to take charge. The boat was quite wobbly, though, and to his surprise, he fell into the water with a splash.

Jonny couldn’t believe that someone with all Rob’s skills didn’t know how to swim. Dogs could do it without even having to learn!

Jonny thought Rob was just joking around. So he let him shout and thrash around for a while. But when he realised the situation was serious, he jumped into the water at once and bravely saved his life.

Luckily, Rob was completely waterproof to a depth of five metres. So all his components were still working. Even so, he'd had enough of rowing for one day.

"When it comes to exercise, you shouldn't overdo it," he said.

They lay down in a field of brightly-coloured flowers to dry off.

"Ahh, that scent," sighed Rob. "And the warm sun! What luck that the earth goes round it at just the right distance away."

Jonny wondered about this, but he didn't ask any questions.

Then they watched the clouds drifting across the sky.

"That one there looks like a train!" Rob cried.

"Yes! And that one's like a big bone!" cried Jonny.

"And that one next to it is a dinosaur, right?" asked Rob.

"I think so," Jonny replied. "For a robot, you've got a very good imagination."

"Imagination makes life more beautiful," said Rob with a yawn.

"Are you tired?" Jonny asked him.

"Yes, my battery is nearly empty, but the sun will charge it up," Rob murmured, yawning again. Soon, he began to snore softly, and then Jonny sank into dreamland as well.

When they woke up, Jonny said: "Right: now I'll show you where I live!"

It didn't take them long to get to Camden Town. It was especially busy there. The whole area was so colourful and lively. Rob loved it at once. And when he saw all the houseboats on the canal, he cried out: "Oh, ships! But why are they all standing still?"

"Because people live on these boats. They're like houses," Jonny explained. "That's why they're called houseboats."

"Woooooiiiiii!" cried Rob. "That must be marvellous!"

"Would you like that, then?" asked Jonny.

"Yes, of course!" cried Rob.

"But why?" asked Jonny.

"Because on a ship, you're completely free," said Rob.

When they reached the famous Camden Market, Rob was over the moon. There were so many things you could buy there! He was particularly taken with a pair of sporty blue trousers.

"They'll suit you perfectly, sir!" said the young saleswoman.

Rob tried on the trousers – and she was right. They did look very cool! And they were cheap. Rob bought them, along with a hat for Jonny.

And because he had money left over, he even offered to pay double the price.

"You're a real gentleman, sir!" the lady exclaimed.

Rob raised Jonny's hat to her and said: "And in these trousers, I look like one, now."

To celebrate, they went and got another ice-cream. Both Jonny and the children nearby thought it was great, the way the ice-cream made Rob's feet smoke and sizzle.

"Wooiwooiiwoooooiiii!", went Rob, when they finally reached Jonny's home.

"I wanted to surprise you!" the dog laughed – and he had certainly done that.

Jonny's home was nothing other than an honest-to-goodness houseboat on the canal. It was a bit dilapidated: there wasn't a single board or plank that was still straight, and the paint was peeling everywhere. But it was still beautiful!

Vines and ivy were growing all over it, and the lovely deck was like a brightly coloured flower garden. There were two comfy deckchairs to lounge in as well. And right behind the boat, next to the canal, was the start of a patch of wild heathland – a glorious paradise in the middle of the city!