

[REDACTED]

**Cues:**

**Title:** The Forest Society

**Dialogue:** It's hard to hate someone once you understand their point of view.

**Optional Science Idea:** A robotic art gallery guide starts to make its own art at night.

842 words.

Story begins on next page

## The Forest Society

“What did you mean by that?”

He looked at the metallic body parts strewn across the floor, “It's hard to hate someone once you understand their point of view, is all.”

“It wasn't a person.”

“I know,” he sighed, reaching down he scooped up a disembodied hand and perused the quality of the workmanship; “artificial intelligence or no; he was still my friend.”

There was a scream from the other side of the room, a woman in a fur coat was hunched over and shuddering; her hand pressed against the wall to keep her from collapsing to the ground.

“Was it hers?”

“It belonged to her, yes. It was painted by her great-great-grandfather.”

“My word,” he looked at the woman and then scrunched his face in sympathy for the briefest of moments; “what was the painting valued at?”

“At this point; it isn't even worth discussing, it was beyond value. I'm entirely ruined.” He placed the robotic hand onto the nearest plinth and looked up towards the glass ceiling, he had reminiscence in his eyes; of a time when life was far simpler. He smiled, “it's one less burden to bear.”

“It baffles me how you can be so calm about all of this,” the man pointed his pencil towards the carnage.

“It is what it is, what can I do about it? It wasn't *his* fault; at the base of it all; the fault lies with me.”

“Surely it's down to The Forest Society; they sent you a defective unit.”

“It's a robot. What can you truly expect from a device which sees primarily in ones and zeros? It doesn't understand how an inferior brush stroke can reflect an artists emotional state, I..” he sighed once more. “I should've known better than to leave him in the gallery overnight, I knew something was wrong deep down; but I never assumed that he would take to altering the artwork so that they

appealed to his own vision. I watched him late in the evenings after all of the customers had left the gallery; I simply thought he was admiring them, taking them in, appreciating them for what they were. How was I to know he was sizing them up?"

"You weren't to know, that's the point. They aren't programmed to deface peoples property; the three laws of robotics state..."

"The three laws, yes; I know the three laws. No hurting or allowing a human to come to harm by action or inaction, all that stuff... yes." he looked at the robotic hand resting on the plinth once more; "it doesn't account for the emotional distress that may come to a human if you ruin his art. Put yourself in the robots shoes."

"Right" the man nodded and closed his notebook.

"He believed that he was helping. He believed that by taking a brush to the work on the walls; he was helping to create perfection. Robots do not understand that there is beauty to be found amongst disarray, they see and articulate with pure logic; they simply cannot account for inaccuracy. To his mathematics mind; he did nothing wrong."

A man wearing leather gloves entered the room, a police officer pointed towards the men and then spoke into his radio. He nodded at the response and then towards the man; indicating that his approach had been approved. He made his way over.

"If I'm not being arrested officer; my ride is here."

"There's no legal precedent in the present circumstances. You're free to go."

The man nodded toward the officer in appreciation and then turned to meet the approaching chauffeur. His foot caught on something solid. He looked down to find one of the robots hands gripping tightly onto the hem of his trousers.

"Sir?" a muffled, far-off voice asked.

The man looked for the source of the voice. The robot's head was resting on it's right side; eyes open; a shattered bowl of steel; circuitry pouring out onto the floor. It's jaw moved as if it were trying to mouth something.

“Yes, Forsyth?” the man asked, crouching.

“I'm... I'm sorry, Sir.” the robot said in a low volume, conscious of the surroundings.

“It's okay, you did me a favour actually. Now I'm free from the stress of looking after these priceless artefacts. I will return them to their rightful owners and put the rest of my stock to auction. I will be able to sleep at night knowing that the gallery is closed; that none of this will be my responsibility any longer.”

“You're f-f-f-free now, sir.” Forsyth whispered, the damage causing him to stutter.

“That's right,” the man said.

“Then my idea worked.” The robot smiled, “I-I-I-I could see your pain, it was written on y-y-y-your face.”

“Jehoshaphat Forsyth! You knew this would happen?” he whispered.

“I do not work on a whim s-s-s-sir.”

“Why would you do this?”

“I-I-I-I heard you talking to the officer. Y-Y-Y-You referred to me as your friend.”

“That is true, I did.”

The robot smiled once more; “This is what friends do, sir.”

End