

Too much tech? by Ruby Marshall

Summary: *A retired couple have opposing views of society's increasing use of robotics. A new robot sparks their conflict but also reveals how biomimicry technology may improve their lives.*

Characters:

MARTHA (f), *Scottish, retired, elderly, married to Martin.*

MARTIN (m), *Scottish, retired, elderly, married to Martha.*

REPORTER (-)

PROFESSOR (f), *late 30s*

Living room in a small Scottish town. MARTHA has just been watching the news and MARTIN is reading a newspaper in the chair next to her. They are both retired and spend much of their time watching the fast changes in the world which they struggle to keep up with.

MARTHA (*almost shouting*): Martin!

MARTIN *rustles his paper as he turns a page.*

MARTIN: Aye.

MARTHA (*anxious, a little more panicky*): Martin!

MARTIN (*Raised voice, slight annoyance but not shouting*): AYE!

MARTHA (*speaking, not shouting*): Have you seen this? The robots are taking over!

MARTIN, *a little exasperated as he folds his paper up.*

MARTIN: Martha, what are you on about no'?

MARTHA *is confused and worried.*

MARTHA: Have you not seen the news? It was just talking about this biomimicry thing. Some sort of robots or something

Through the following, MARTHA getting more worked up as she goes on. MARTIN calm, curiously thinking about the fish then humorous about the fish'n'chips (a bit tongue in cheek), maybe takes a sip of a cup of tea.

MARTIN: Oh aye, that new robotic camera that swims like a fish... looks like one too. We better no' be confusing it with a real one or the chippy will be serving up robot fish'n'chips!

MARTHA: Martin this is not funny!

MARTIN: What's the big deal? It's gonna show us some new species in the next David Attenborough documentary. We love those shows.

MARTHA: Aye, but did you see how real it was? And not just that one! There's that dog robot that can sprint and leap and those mutant looking ones to carry things for the army.

I can see it now. The robots are gonna turn on us humans.

We're not safe anymore.

MARTIN (*gently*): D'you no' think you're exaggerating that just a wee bit?

MARTHA: I don't know Martin, I just don't know. The world has changed so much. We canny even buy a newspaper from a real person anymore! Gotta go to that machine with too many buttons and flashing lights.

MARTIN (*trying to lighten the mood*): Aye, but where would I be without my paper eh?

MARTIN *rustles his paper to add to the joke and MARTHA sighs.*

MARTHA: I'm... just scared. You know I am. Everything has changed so fast. Technology is sprouting up *everywhere* and people are being replaced.

MARTIN: You're talking like people are actually going missing! Look, I know it's too much for us oldies but that doesn't mean it's bad.

MARTHA: Oh, I *do* like those videos, the ones when we call.

MARTIN: Video calling

MARTHA: Aye, those are great, to see everyone.

MARTIN: Well there you go, you do like some technology.

MARTHA: But they're creating technology that moves and acts like living things. Where will it stop? Animals now, next it'll be us! And they'll be too strong for us to fight!

MARTIN: We're no' fighting anything, not in our state anyway. Remember *humans* are still controlling those robots. That lassie, the Professor on the news, she's probably spent ages making that fish to explore the ocean. And did you hear her saying that it could be developed to help people swim if they lost a leg?

MARTHA: Hmm.

MARTIN: You're right, life has gotten a wee bit weird not having to interact with people. Then there's that group, Too Much Tech, trying to ban all technology, wanting to pull us back to the dark ages.

MARTHA: I've got a mind to go join them at a protest. They make some good points! We need to get back to *natural* life with only humans.

MARTIN: Now. Are you hearing what you're saying? You want to join those extremists? You want to reject and reverse/

MARTHA: Better than being replaced! They say they're only trying to look out for humans. We need to take power back from the machines.

MARTIN: And where have you been hearing about them?

MARTHA: Well on my tablet. It pops up on my timeline.

MARTIN: Martha, d'you no' think that group is proving themselves wrong by using 'unnatural' technology to spread their message?

MARTHA: Oh...um...but, how else would they?

MARTIN *sighs angrily and turns his attention to the TV.*

MARTIN: Look, here's that professor back on. Turn the volume up.

The evening news jingle is heard, and we now hear an interview between a news anchor and the creator of the robotic fish (the professor Martin previously mentioned).

REPORTER: Good evening and welcome back to our science and engineering interview series with tonight's topic of biomimicry. Tell us, Professor, how can this technology be developed to benefit society?

PROFESSOR: In this specific case we have learned how to create a highly efficient vehicle to carry a camera for underwater observation by studying and taking inspiration from fish. However, this is just one example of biomimicry. Using the lessons we learn from nature could give us new modes of transport, new medicine and better medical instruments or new assistive aids for all abilities and ages.

REPORTER: It's certainly very intriguing and it seems we should all be looking forward to seeing what's to come! But could there be significant risks or even obstacles for public acceptance?

PROFESSOR: Being unsure of new technology is understandable. It can be a lot to learn and get used to. It's good to remember that we don't live in a disaster movie and that

researchers are working to help society. As we develop the human world, we don't have to become more removed from the natural world; by taking inspiration from it we can become more connected to nature.

MARTHA turns the TV volume down and is still unsure as she continues.

Martha: Oh but she can't have read the most recent announcement about how those robotic lawnmowers in Princes Street Garden have formed a gang!

MARTIN: For goodness sake. That is ridiculous. Don't *you* be ridiculous/

MARTHA: I heard they were even planning an attack on some poor wee dog...

MARTIN: Whit wee dog? This is getting out of hand. You sound like you've been brainwashed!

Did you no' listen to what that professor said? This new technology is being inspired by nature, not taking us out of it!

MARTHA: No, but/

MARTIN: Imagine the great things she said it could do for us – maybe this will lead to something that lets me walk again!

Beat.

MARTHA (*gently*): Martin. They can't/

MARTIN (*just as gently, persuasively*): But maybe they can. Soon, maybe. An assistive exo-suit thingy that could give more strength to my legs? I could make you breakfast again, get my own paper. We could go for walks in the park together.

MARTHA: D'you think that could really happen?

MARTIN: I'm no scientist, but a little hope and positivity rather than listening to that toxic extremist group must be a better way to see the world.

MARTHA (*daydreaming aloud*): We could dance again. Oh, remember when we used to glide across the dancefloor?

MARTIN: Maybe the suit would even have a disco setting, or some tap shoe add-ons. Think of the possibilities!

MARTHA laughing slightly.

MARTHA: At that rate I'll be needing my own exo-suit to keep up with you!

MARTIN: Och, what are ye like?

END

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