

**Ligonier Valley Writers
First Prize 2025**

**RoboHub H2
By Chris Cottom**

Good morning, you're through to RoboHub Technical Support. You're speaking to Anil today. Can I start by taking the serial number?

It'll be a nineteen-digit number on your husband's left buttock.

No problem. What's your zip code?

Thank you. And the first line of your address?

Wow! You've got an early H2. An industry gamechanger: faded Levi 501s as standard, Carlos Santana moustache option, full set of Woody Allen one-liners. An absolute classic!

No, Mrs Hoskins. An H2 doesn't go missing.

I see ... Don't worry. Even on full charge, he's got a limited range.

Sorry, I meant limited geographic range.

Your H2 went next door?

Disappeared with your neighbour's RoboWife W7?

Normally, we'd want to get him in to run some diagnostics. But since he's no longer on site, I need to transfer you to one of my colleagues. Are you okay if I pop you on hold while I explain the problem to them?

~

Thanks for holding, Mrs Hoskins. You're through to Carly in Spares and Upgrades. I understand your RoboHub H2 has gone missing.

Yep ... yep ...

Yep, sounds like a technical problem we call Mid-Marriage Meltdown. Don't worry, you're fully covered under your warranty. I'll get an H8 out to you for Friday. Lean or Hunk?

My mistake, Mrs Hoskins. Wrong of me to make assumptions. Male, female, or gender neutral?

Thank you for confirming, Mrs Hoskins. The H8 is low-plastic, guaranteed emission-free and comes pretreated for dandruff, with two cardigans, paunch-control pants, and an alcohol limit of six beers on Fridays.

No need to be shy, Mrs Hoskins.

Quite right to ask. User-controllable all the way from Every Night to Blue Moon. And, Mrs Hoskins, the H8 has a series of optional DIY plug-ins, right up to Master Carpenter, and—

Your H2 built his own shed? Our marketing people would love a photo of that for our website.

Wow. Sounds like a palace fit for an H9.

Well, the H9 package is a subscription-only husband, but it includes a singing voice to crowd-pulling Karaoke standard, scheduled prostate rebore, end-of-the-world holiday of a lifetime, and a send-off with two hymns and a five-minute eulogy by a professional actor.

Absolutely fine, Mrs Hoskins. I'll order you an H8. Now: tweeds and brogues, skinny jeans and cowboy boots, or lounge pants and sliders?

Thank you. And what about politics? We've just released our XR model—Climate Change Activist. Comes preloaded with one hundred slogans, a tube of glue, and a Get Out of Jail card.

No? How about a Burt Reynolds lookalike? Still very popular.

And what sort of temperament? Life and Soul of the Party or Moody Bastard?

Thank you. I'll put you down for Topsy Wallflower. What about money? Spendthrift or Stingy?

My apologies, Mrs Hoskins. I should have explained. We no longer offer repairs on the H2. It's all those transistors—

Yeah, it's been chips with everything since the H4.

Well, normally we strip them down and recycle what we can. But the silicone's invariably past it on these older models. Did I mention the H8 is guaranteed nose-hair free for life and comes with two sets of pyjamas, summer and winter? Except no summer ones on the Hunk, of course.

"Love your husband"? I'm sorry, I don't recognise that expression. I'm only trained up to Repair or Replace. I need to transfer you to one of my colleagues. Are you okay if I pop you on hold while I explain the problem to them?

~

Hello Mrs Hoskins; you're through to Maureen in Relational Support. So, I understand you've lost your hubby. I'm afraid the early models can get twitchy when they hit fifty.

You know: training for a triathlon, getting an earring, blasting out Van Halen on repeat.

No, I'm sorry, we can't re-programme him remotely, seeing as he's only an H2.

Quite right, love. My hands are tied, I'm afraid. What I'm going to do is escalate this to one of my colleagues. Quick word of advice. Have a good think about what you *really* want. I'll just pop you on hold while I explain the problem. You can have Vivaldi or Gloria Gaynor.

~

Hello, Mrs Hoskins, you're through to Pavel in Complaints and Restitution.

Well, thank you ... Suzy. Now, Suzy, it looks like you've had a bit of a rough time recently with your H2.

But it does sound like he was at the end of his useful life even before he went next door. So what we'd like to do, Suzy, is ask you to test our new RoboHub H10.

No, it's a free six-month trial.

Excellent, Suzy. Now, the H10 comes with the manners of a diplomat, the looks of a George Clooney, the stamina of a stallion, the wisdom of Sol—

Fine, I can switch that to a Ryan Gosling. Nice choice. Now: hipster beard, designer stubble or—and this is quite new—baby's bum smooth?

Excellent. No messy washbasins. And that's guaranteed, Suzy.

Me? I'm clean-shaven. My mum reckons they'll ask me for ID when I start at uni.

Yeah, just doing this to save some money first.

English Lit.

No way! Which university?

A Masters! Smart lady, eh? I'll tell Technical to programme your H10 with an ode for every occasion.

No, because what I'm pre-authorised to do for you, Suzy, is drive your H10 up to you tomorrow, so I can set him up exactly the way you want him.

Absolutely. All part of the service. I should be with you late afternoon. Would that suit you?

Gosh, that's extremely kind of you, Suzy, but, I'm actually vegan, so I wouldn't want you to

—

Really?

Sure, I love curry.
Of course. Red or white?
Something fizzy? Good idea. We'll toast your new H10.
Well, that's really very kind of you, Suzy. Are you sure?
Yep, mustn't drink and drive. Quite right.
Settled, then. I'll bring my toothbrush.
Don't worry. If he turns up, just pop him in your trash can.

Bio: Chris Cotton lives near Macclesfield, UK. His work has been published by *100 Word Story*, *Fictive Dream*, *Flash Frontier*, *NFFD NZ*, *NFFD UK*, *Oyster River Pages*, *Roi Fainéant*, *The Phare*, *The Lascaux Review*, and other fine places. In the early 1970s he lived next door to JRR Tolkien.