Someday - Jacob Ernest (Note from Cam—this is not the entrant’s name—it’s the title of the submission)

1432 words

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Today’s the day. I can smell it in the air as soon as I wake up. It smells like dust and tension. It looks like light filtering through tattered curtains that sway above my bed. The sounds of the early morning city drift through my open window.

I roll out of bed and the frame squeaks loudly. I stay on my toes to avoid the cold ground against my bare feet and hobble my way to my dresser. I pull on threadbare socks, trousers, and my comfiest shirt, then wrap my scarf around my neck and breathe it in. It’s nothing special, in fact it’s quite itchy, but it covers the scarred lower half of my face and it smells like my short and broken childhood.

I don’t bother with breakfast. Hunger makes me sharper. My thrift-quality automaton fixes me a cup of coffee, which I take gratefully. I pull my scarf away from my mouth to take a gulp, then place it back over my lips.

Leopold, my automaton, is a copper jumble of worrisome cogs and gears. Theoretically, automatons aren’t supposed to have emotions, but he seems perfectly capable of every emotion an overprotective mother might experience.

He also has no tact.

“Master Jacob,” he says in a tinny voice. “I don’t think you’re ugly.”

“You don’t *think* at all,” I snap back. Sometimes you need to be firm with Leopold.

He flinches as well as a three-foot robot on wheels can, and stiffly bows his stereo-shaped head. “Y-yes, Master. I am a mindless tool.”

“Always so dramatic, Leopold.” He’s really not so bad. I gulp the rest of my coffee and pat him on the head. Slipping on my boots, I reach the door of the flat and yank it open. Truth be told, I *am* ugly. I’m ultra-thin and gangly, like the perfect wire for an automobile engine. Half my hair sticks up and the other half lays flat, my eyes are muddy, my face red and picked raw, and my jaw, neck, and chest are criss-crossed with burn scars. My mother never told me where I got them, and now that she’s been dead three years I’ll never know.

I shake these thoughts from my head. I can’t be distracted today of all days. I’m halfway out the door when I hear Leopold’s fans start whirring over-time in his metal skull. I turn around, arms crossed.

“M-master?”

“Yes, Leopold?”

“Do be careful.”

I scoff. “That’s not the point.” The door slams shut behind me.

There’s the building. It stands like a parthenon above every ramshackle brick complex spewing smoke and steam, uncountable marble steps leading to its gleaming front door. Smack-dab in the middle of the filth it seems to say, “See this? You can never have this.” Grecian pillars hold up layers of floor and ceiling like some giant’s wedding cake, and at the very top, a dome like the top of an egg. Up there is where the sharks can be found.

Distinguished gentlemen, as they like to call themselves, wearing crisp suits and frilly cravats and golden pocket watches. They’re up there, smoking cigars and talking about their profits and stroking their well-oiled mustaches while the rest of us wallow in poverty.

Makes me sick.

Or maybe that’s just my empty stomach.

The sharks make all the money off the oil, but they don’t work in the rigs like I do. Like we all must do to survive. It’s dangerous work too. I’m lucky I haven’t lost a limb yet.

I don’t need to waste a second. I start climbing the steps.

Gilded glory sings above me as heat boils in my guts. I always get angrier the closer I get. I don’t get scared though. I never get scared.

The doors are large enough for artillery to fit through, and they’re always open during the day. It’s practically an invitation. Who can blame me for trying to walk right in? As it turns out, wide-open doors do not mean you are welcome here.

A constable stops me as I reach the door.

“Your business?” he asks primly, looking me up and down in disgust. He’s shorter than me, like most people, but he holds his chin up as if somehow it will make me shrink. I don’t recognize him. That’s a good sign.

“I’m here to see my father.”

“Do you have an appointment?”

“Does a son need an appointment to see his father? It’s urgent. I must meet with him as soon as possible.”

The constable sniffs, then seems to decide he’ll play along. Like it’s some kind of joke.

“And who is your father?”

“Chairman Samuel Ernest.”

The constable’s eyebrows disappear into his hat.

“Don’t believe me?” I say in a mocking tone. “Go up and tell him I’m here. He’ll insist on seeing me, I assure you. I’ll just wait right here.”

The constable looks from side to side as if someone might catch him.

“What are you standing around for?!” I huff. “My father will be dreadfully angry if he discovers I waited here all day. Go on, go!”

He scurries off into the building.

Once I’m sure he can’t see me, I stride right in. I know my way by now, and a round-about way it is. I take a side hallway and pass through the kitchen, startling kitchen automatons of fine-crafting. The scents of fresh bread, soup, cheese, and shrimp delight me as I pass. My stomach grumbles and I can’t remember the last time I’ve eaten.

I run up flights of white stairs and collide with a serving automaton. A bottle of champagne crashes to the floor. Human servants arrive to investigate. I’m booking it now.

One more flight of stairs. Here’s the hallway. There’s so much finery in here. Great works of art, so much porcelain and candlesticks. I start to smell the cigars. I’m close. I can hear shouting now. There are footsteps behind me, cries of “stop!” I know they have guns, but they won’t shoot in a place like this. My legs are long. They can’t catch up to me.

I’m almost to the egg.

“CHAIRMAN ERNEST!” I roar as I burst into the room.

I’m grabbed on either side by security. They were waiting for me. I swear and thrash as they drag me backwards. The sharks are looking disturbed. They raise their hands to their mustaches and cravats in indignation. My father is the only one standing. We make eye contact. My scarf has shifted and the scars on my jaw are visible.

“YOU RAT!” I call as they drag me back into the hallway. “YOU LEFT US WITH NOTHING! SHE’S DEAD NOW BECAUSE YOU DIDN’T BOTHER TO ASK IF SHE WAS WELL! YOU WERE NEVER THERE!”

My shouting falls on deaf ears. The doors close. I’m dragged down flights of stairs past flabbergasted men and women. I’m dragged all the way to the bottom of the stairs and thrown out. I’m out of breath and ready to throw up.

I lie there at the bottom of the stairs and catch my breath as onlookers try not to stare. Some of them look at me with pity, others with condescension. I wrap my scarf protectively around my face and breathe deeply.

I’ve been doing this every Gregorian month for three years now. Ever since my mother died. They didn’t used to have constables at the door. That may have been my fault.

Still, I’ve never gotten this close before. Never got that close to his pale face, his dark hair greased back, his eyes devoid of remorse or any sort of emotion. I’m glad we look so little alike. I am glad I inherited my mother’s hair and smile, even if I don’t wear them as well as she did.

I just hope it hurts him when I do this. I hope it reminds him of what he left behind and leaves a needle of pain in his chest.

I don’t want to want it, but I want him to care. I want him to feel sorry. I want him to love me. I want him to hate me.

He doesn’t care.

Someday he will.

Someday I’ll hurt him so much that he’ll have to acknowledge my existence.

Someday I’ll have his attention.

For now I’ll go back to my flat. Leopold will chide me. I’ll dust off the black-and-white photo of my mother, nurse my broken pride over more coffee, possibly eat something. Possibly cry. Possibly break things. Fall into fitful sleep. Dream of someday.

Someday when he’ll care.