Artemis Allison

Word Count: 1045

Whole Once More

“You know, Miss Tilarom, having –”

“No,” Tully interjected. There was a fire breathing life into her maroon eyes – some options about her body were made far before she even had a chance to violently disagree with them – as she stared down the doctor across from her, each word deliberately placed as she flatly reminded, “I do not want to replace it with a cybernetic, nor have I ever, nor *will I ever*.”

The doctor took in a deep breath as his own eyes closed, and he took a more gentle approach to his words – his attempt before had been reckless, he realized, to try and be so casual about it – as he reopened his eyes and said, “Tully, your mother is concerned about your ability to function with only the one arm. You’re a prime candidate for a cybernetic replacement: you’re young, relatively in shape, and because you’re –”

“Me missing my arm *does not* make me any weaker, any my ‘mother’ should know that,” she spat, earning another sigh from the doctor who, finally, realized and conceded that he was going to get nowhere. Not this time.

The doctor nodded a few moments after Tully was finished. “Alright, Miss Tilarom. Beyond that concern, you seem to be extraordinarily physically healthy, the only exception being the… concerns about your smoking.”

“I’m not going to stop,” Tully flatly said.

Another sigh. “Have you considered changing over to some sort of vapor-based products? If you’re interested, I have numerous—”

“I’m not interested.”

This sigh, Tully recognized, was from the fact that the doctor was finally realizing that there wasn’t going to be any kickback at all from this appointment from any one of his sponsors. “Alright. With that then, you’re free to go. Make sure to see the receptionist on the way out to schedule another check-up.”

Despite the receptionist’s objections as she left, Tully made sure to do exactly not that, the click of her boots not stopping for a second against the tiled floor. Her glare was on a mild swivel as she found herself back out among the crowded street; despite all of the people surrounding her, she found it just mildly easier to breath. The clinic had had a suffocating aroma, the same one all hospitals had, in how sterile it smelt, overly clean. She’d spent too much time in a hospital as a child, too much time as an adult; she was glad to be out once more.

The doctor’s words bounced in her head. Physically healthy. She had to stop herself from rolling her eyes when she was sitting across from him, but now, as she fished into the pocket of her blazer to pull out a package of cigarettes, she had all of the freedom to shake her head and sigh at that. Of *course* she was physically healthy, she lamented mentally, her parents – no, her mother – had spent millions designing her to be so.

She felt her left arm – where it should’ve been, at least – begin to burn as she planted a cigarette in her lips, returning the package to its pocket as she pulled out a lighter. It took all of her restraint to not bite through the butt of the cigarette as she made her way through the crowd, of which she was a full head taller than most of. Height was another option mother had picked.

At least, combined with her glare and the relative swiftness of her pace compared to the meandering of the crowd, it made people give her some semblance of berth. The people who didn’t, of course, were the ones too enthralled by either their phones or their feeds to recognize the world around them. The cigarette didn’t burn as she took a drag on it, returning the lighter to her pocket besides the packet. The crowd gave her more space – even those on their devices – as she breathed the smoke out.

Just a little bit longer until she was back to her apartment. Taking one more drag, Tully’s gaze drifted skywards, her features softening slightly. The neon glow of the advertising screens attached to all of the skyscrapers around her diffused softly in the mist that was falling down; had the screens been used for any other purpose, she might have found the aesthetic almost attractive. Even her apartment building had one of those screens hanging off of it, but at least there wasn’t one blaring back into her eyes.

If there was one thing that she was thankful for her mother’s money for, it was that they could afford that luxury. Tully’d spent time in apartments that couldn’t. At least those districts had banned them from playing audio.

The lock on the door to her building read simple instructions: “Present biochip”. From the back pocket of the dress pants she was wearing, she pulled out her wallet, flicked it open, pulled out an ID card, and tapped it against it; inside of it was her only concession to the digital world. She couldn’t bear the thought of one of the biochips inside of her hand, especially if it went wrong – there were reports of them violently exploding, and that wasn’t something Tully could risk for obvious reasons. More than that, though, was the one thing her and her mother agreed on.

The elevator up was fast enough to force her to yawn to get the pressure out from behind her ears; the door to her apartment was opened in much the same way as the door to the building. Part of her yearned nostalgically for an old-fashioned key, even if she subconsciously knew that a lock was as easy to pick as these pads were to hack. She left the ID and her wallet in a cup near the entryway; she was once more incognito to the world around her. No one and no thing to listen to her, to follow her, to look at her, to dare intrude on her life.

In her mess of an apartment, an apartment that would’ve been considered luxurious if it wasn’t for her trash and mess strewn all about it, Tully Tilarom was alone once more.

And that, in her wholeness, is what she loved most about her apartment.