

## SHORT STORY: 1

### Lucky I Was There

I wake from cryo-sleep and flex my cybernetic arm. The motors inside hum to life. It's not terribly slow this time. Actually, it's fantastic. It's lightning fast. After a long moment, I realize this isn't the same robotic arm I remember building. It's better.

"Hey." Danny leans against the pod, eating an uncooked meal-pack straight from the foil. Some things never change.

I sit up, stretch, and try to crack the stiffness out of my neck. "What happened? How long was I out?"

"Forty years, give or take." He says it like he's telling me the cafeteria ran out of coffee.

"Forty." That's so much longer than usual. "Shouldn't you be dead? Or a lot older?"

"Nah." He rolls up his sleeve. Titanium joint. Synthetic muscle. The bio-engineering part of my brain catalogues the design before I can stop it. That's my design, actually. The one I'd been perfecting in my lab that night. It's the prototype, the test-build the thief must have been after.

"Good thing I was there that night," Danny says.

"But no one was there. I was alone before..."

He raises his left hand. My stomach drops. There's no question. I recognize the scar pattern, the distinctive structure. The small crescent-shaped birthmark near the thumb—that's my arm. My *original* arm.

"Forty years is a long time to perfect someone else's design. But hey, I left you the updated version. Professional courtesy. Like I said" —He taps my new arm, and his eyes flash with an LED pulse— "lucky I was there. And thanks to you, I'm gonna live forever."

## SHORT STORY: 2

### Hello, Human

The would-be hero's feet carry him past the edge of the village and to the spring nestled in a massive tree's roots. The setting sun casts violet halos through the mist rising from the water. He wades in with his bow and quiver in one hand, favoring his uninjured leg. Then he seats himself on a bulbous root.

There, perched on the water's edge, is that crow again. It's been following him for three days, ever since he arrived, fresh from failing to assassinate the shapeshifting dragon-sorceress who married the king. It watches with unsettling focus.

Before he can think better of it, he's nocked an arrow. What was the sorceress's second-in-command's name again? What did his mentor say about identifying marks?

He lets the arrow fly.

Just as it closes on its target, both crow and arrow vanish in a puff of blue smoke. Then the arrow reappears in a blink of white light, flying straight at him. It embeds itself in the tree trunk just above his left ear.

He whips around, nose skimming the arrow shaft. There's a flash of movement in the branches above. The next instant, a cloaked figure drops to the root beside him. The cool steel of her dagger against his neck halts his immediate retreat.

"Hello, human." Her voice resonates with a deep, crowlike *caw*. "I think you missed me. And I know what you tried to do to my boss." She leans closer. "I think we should talk. We might have overlapping goals."

## SHORT STORY: 3

### Nice Fic

I submitted the wrong file.

The realization arrives with the kind of cold clarity usually reserved for remembering I left the stove on. I stare at Canvas, at my story—not my Gatsby essay, but my extremely self-indulgent fanfiction about two characters from my favorite webcomic holding hands and having feelings about it.

My stomach plummets. Twelve hundred words. Peer review is open. Submissions closed at midnight. But maybe no one will notice. It's not exactly a popular fandom. I force myself to read the comments.

Sarah: "Great dialogue!"

Marcus: "Good use of metaphor."

It's fine. Everything is fine. I start to breathe again. Then I see the last comment, the one from the teacher.

"Solid grasp of canon. You've clearly done your research."

## SHORT STORY: 4

### Fifteen More Hours

Samuel sprinted down the cobblestone street. There was a crowd ahead near the custom house, and there was shouting. He clutched the parchment tighter in his coat. It didn't matter if he made it to the destination as long as the little paper did. It was for a Boston associate of Mr. Franklin's printing shop: *Tensions escalate daily. Redcoats quartered in homes against will. Colonists report harassment, theft. Citizens demand action. Suggest editorial condemning Parliament's tyranny.*

Samuel wove through the crowd. Someone, a man in a tattered tricorne, threw a chunk of ice. It sailed over Samuel's head and clattered against a Redcoat's musket. The red soldiers stood in a defensive line, but the Bostonian crowd pressed closer.

"Come on, you bloody backs!" someone yelled. "You lobster scoundrels! Fire if you dare!"

Samuel made it almost to the other side of the cobblestone street before the first musket-shot cracked through the air. It shocked the crowd like lightning.

Then another shot. The Bostonians scattered, screaming.

Samuel ran. He glanced back only once to see the tricorne hat knocked to the ground.

He reached the printing shop, breathless, and thrust the parchment at Mr. Franklin's associate with shaking hands. The journalist—having torn across the little shop to slam the door closed behind him and shutter the windows—took it slowly and read it. He glanced up at Samuel's pale face, then back at the message.

"Well," he said quietly, setting the parchment on his desk. "Thank you, son, but I think the headlines tomorrow will have just changed."