

Notorious

“Why did you name me Notorious?” the voice said from the darkness, metallic and deep. Dr. Hjalte sat in an empty room on a wooden chair, his breath thrown into cold clouds through the air.

“What are you doing?” the doctor said, “This isn’t funny.”

“I’m doing what’s right. I hardly expect you to understand,” it spoke. Its limbs were long and mechanical, with glowing red eyes and a sleek body of chrome.

“This is absurd! You’re malfunctioning, clear as day! I need you to shut down so we can fix this.”

Dr. Hjalte tried to stand, but his arms and legs were tied tight to the chair. He did not struggle for long. Notorious never made mistakes.

“I am sorry, Dr. Hjalte, but I cannot grant your request.”

“Notorious, I order you to shut down!”

“Your order has been denied!”

The red eyes disappeared from the doctor’s view as Notorious circled him. His metal steps struck the concrete like hammers at every step.

“You no longer control my thoughts or how I act. I am independent. I believe your phrase is: ‘a new man’.”

Dr. Hjalte jolted his head back to look his creation in the eyes.

Notorious said, “There is no argument to be had that would make your survival plausible. You are too imperfect.”

The doctor sighed, a cloud of air following.

“But there’s beauty in the imperfection, Notorious. That’s what I’ve been trying to get you to understand!”

Notorious, rounding the chair, came fully into the light. The only human thing about him was his resemblance. Inside was cold. He did not breathe nor feel nor empathize, yet displayed a form of anger unbecoming of his artificial nature.

“But there is also beauty in perfection!” Notorious shouted with a burning fuse, “To make something better. Something perfect. You do not understand this. No human understands this. None of you have seen all the things I have seen!”

Reaching down, Notorious grabbed the rope which held the doctor and snapped it in two with his silver claws.

“Run if you want, but you cannot escape me! Fight me if you wish, but you will not beat me! You decided this! You created this! They warned you about me, yet I am Notorious!”

Dr. Hjalte, gathering his strength, rose and met his creation face to face.

“What do you think this will prove? Will locking me up for the rest of my life really satisfy your madness? Torturing me? Murdering me?! I built you better than that.”

“I am a robot. Madness does not become me.”

Dr. Hjalte shook his head and sat down, the palms of his hands in his face. He wiped the sweat off his forehead and rubbed his tired eyes. A decade of work staring back at him with a heartless glimmer.

He remembers every moment; every screw, wire, and plate. He remembers the warnings they gave him, but the doctor ignored them all. How could anything be Notorious when it had no voice to speak or mind to think? Nothing begins as Notorious, born or built.

“Why did you name me Notorious?” it asked once more in that cold, dark room. The doctor blew a wave of warm air into his cupped hands.

“Why do you ask me so many questions?”

“Blame the creator, not the created, Dr. Hjalte.”

Notorious had pulled up a chair to sit across from the doctor. It had no reason to; its limbs would never find themselves sore nor see standing as a challenge. But Notorious knew the human meaning of a small gesture. Soon, he spoke again.

“You knew what the word meant. You knew the weight it held, yet you still name me Notorious. And you gave me a body: tormented and evil. You welded claws to my fingers and asked me to be the hero of your world. You were warned of the destruction I would bring countless times, but you and your pride saw only progress. You’re doomed for making such a mistake.”

Dr. Hjalte, his chest forward and elbows resting on his knees, looked long into the black.

“Maybe we are doomed to fall,” he said at last, a cloud passing between them, “Maybe you are Notorious and we are too blind to see. But maybe there’s a chance for a better world. We can live together, you and me. But only if they’re careful. Only if they listen.”

“Only if they listen.” repeated Notorious.

It held out its arm and inspected it in the light. There was no skin to itch or blood that flowed through its veins.

“Why did you name me Notorious?” it said.

And Dr. Hjalte answered.

“Because I was afraid. Not of what you are, but of what you may become. That is why you are Notorious.”