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Max

Floyd Skloot

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MAX

His still steady furrier's hands worry the crease he worked into page one, folded back as he reads. "Fifth time today," she says. "Reads the morning paper over and over and remembers nothing. Say hello, Max."

He looks up, smiles politely, nods back to his Daily News. Before him two strangers, great grandchildren he has never seen, dance and chatter. Hugging my tiny grandmother, I watch them hover too close, fear his mean streak might surface in one quick kick.

Her voice firm in his mind after seventy years, he shuffles after us in to the common room. "Four people here that I can talk with. The rest are disturbed." She drapes her mink across the glass-topped table. They pose, an arm around each child. "Max, smile at her. You're frightening the poor girl."

He fiddles with her coat
lining, approves the material,
flips the hem up, back
down, up. "This coat.
I made this for you,
Rosie, remember?" He fingers
the lining, collar, pockets,
defines inch wide strips
of pelt with thumb and forefinger.
"We had cutters and fitters,
a blocker, a stitcher, a finisher.
This was some special
thing, this was. A good
coat like this, you could
tell just from the lining"

"Alright, already, Max.
They don't care about
such things. Leave the coat
alone." He is gone
before she stops, nodding
at me without recognition,
smiling gently. He turns
to my daughter, strokes
her hair. "Nice boy."