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The Gilded Man

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The Gilded Man

Rachel Morton

She screamed as she beat against the glass cage that held her. Her knuckles were red, but the cage kept moving along the path. She punched the glass again. The glass didn't break, but blood dripped from her knuckles, running in rivulets down her arm. Tears streamed down her face as she stood there hopelessly, leaning against her palms on the glass.

Her eyes blazed as she stared at her captor marching in front of her. His back was towards her. His entire body was composed of gilded gears that spun fluidly at a monotonous rate: never quickening, never slowing, never stopping.

The girl continued to scream, continued to beg her captor to stop. She wasn't ready to move forward, she didn't want to push onward. She wanted to stop right here, right now, even if just for a little while longer.

"Please!" she pleaded, her face covered in tears.

Her captor didn't stop. He didn't even turn around to look at her. Her heart ached as emotions stumbled and crashed as they ran past one another. Her eyes stung from crying and staring at the road behind her and the road to come. Her hands hurt from trying to stop the cage from moving. She took a deep breath and collapsed on the ground.

"What do I have to do to be free?" she asked the gilded man.

"You will never be free of me," he replied without turning around, "but if you stop dragging your heels you can instead march beside me."

She looked up and her heartbeat sped up as if it was running to catch the last rays of sunlight. She watched the world plunge into darkness as it did every night without fail. Another day behind her, one less day in front of her. She couldn't take it any longer.

"Stop dwelling on yesterday; it's almost tomorrow."

The girl looked over at the gilded man's sparkling gears as she listened to his words. She watched him continue to march in that never changing beat. She looked at the road in front of them. She saw how long it was, but knew that she wouldn't reach the end. She would stop somewhere along the way. Still, she stood up and wiped her tears. Her end would not appear for many more years and until then she had to live out every year, every day, every second because all of them counted. Every moment would present itself only once, she had to stop letting them slip away. It was time to stop trying to stop, she could only move forward.

"I'll march with you."

"Good;" the golden man said. "You'll only travel this path once. Make it count."

The glass prison vanished and the girl walked over to where the clockwork man marched. She matched his rhythm as she marched beside him.

Tick tok tick tok tick tok.