



Clockwork Heart

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Retold Fairy Tales

“Well, Sebastien. I think that we have finally found it.”

Vivienne burst into the laboratory. Dashing over to the nearest workbench her eyes were drawn to the stationary. This was Professor Winter’s lab alright. The young inventor eagerly looked around. She rummaged through the professor’s abandoned notes and books and marvelled at the machinery. There were gadgets everywhere, some that were covered in dust and others that were still functioning. Vivienne bent down and picked up one of the sweeper droids. Wondering if he was similar to her creation, she pressed against the tiny servant’s heart and was rewarded. The metal door swung open, revealing a chest full of spinning gears.

“Look Sebastien” Vivienne exclaimed with a beaming grin. “He’s your cousin.”

Sebastien walked over to inspect the little man. He frowned.

“My cousin, Mistress Vivienne? I believe that you are mistaken. It isn’t possible for me to have any relations.”

He tilted his head and looked at the girl with concern.

“Has the excitement gone to your head, mistress? Did you forget who you are talking to? I am simply a clockwork servant, remember?”

Vivienne laughed. Even if she were capable of changing her mechanoid to become less of an innocent, she wouldn’t consider it for a second. As much as Sebastien would argue the point, he did have a personality of his own. Altering him was out of the question. She placed a hand upon his shoulder.

“I’m fine. You are the one who needs to work on your memory. You have never been ‘simply’ anything. You are Sebastien, and that is a wonderful thing to be.”

Sebastien nodded, though he still didn't understand why she had called him wonderful. Sebastien was simply Sebastien.

Then Vivienne saw it. She was drawn to the picture that had been in her book. Every since she had found Professor Winter's memoir within the servant's secret library, she had been obsessing over the chair. Supposedly it had the power to bring machines to life with an energy so powerful that it could sustain them indefinitely. Instead of having to turn Sebastien's key every couple of hours, this could give him and all of mech-kind a chance to enter the world and live a somewhat normal life independent from their masters.

"Shall we try it out, Seb?"

Sebastien obediently nodded and walked towards the chair. He was just about to sit down when he remembered something.

"Should we be doing this today, mistress? It is your birthday, after all."

Vivienne stared back at him, perplexed. Then it dawned on her what he was referring to.

"You're talking about that christening scandal, aren't you? I would have thought a mech would have better sense than to believe such nonsense. I still can't believe my parents thought that inviting a fortune teller was a good idea. That witch ruined the whole day and frayed my parents' nerves. If I ever meet Madame Morena, I plan to give her a piece of my mind."

Sebastien looked back at his mistress thoughtfully.

"If Madame Morena's profession is foreseeing the future, then shouldn't we trust her? She predicted that you would become more interested in machines than your tiara and that came true. She said that you would make a discovery on your 16th birthday that would prove disastrous for you and the entire kingdom. Your parents went to such lengths to stop you from ever holding a book because of it. Must we do this today, Mistress Vivienne? It doesn't seem very wise."

Vivienne examined Sebastien. His expression was vacant, but she could swear that there was anxiety hidden behind his artificial blue eyes.

"Anybody would think that you are worried about me. There is no need to be scared."

Sebastien looked at her blankly.

"Scared? Me? I'm not scared. I couldn't begin to imagine what fear feels like."

Vivienne raised her eyebrows.

“I bet that you could. What if something horrible were to happen to me? What if I was forced to go away for a very long time. Would you be scared then? At the very least I’d expect that you would miss me.”

The Princess watched as his eyes widened. For somebody with no feelings, Sebastien was looking very concerned. While she felt guilty for prompting him into an internal struggle, Vivienne had her reasons for challenging him. Her teasing led to questioning and evolution. Sebastian was growing into himself every day, and Vivienne would do anything to encourage him.

“Are you going somewhere, mistress? Please take me with you.”

Vivienne smiled and swept away a lock of chestnut hair away from Sebastien’s eyes. She did not know whether to laugh at the misunderstanding or weep at how sad her mech looked because she would choose to go somewhere without him.

“We’re in this life together, Sebastien” she reassured him.

“As soon as you and I can figure out how to build one of these chairs we are moving out of the palace. We are going to liberate so many mechanoids that my father will have to start giving you all the basic rights that you deserve. We cannot do that until we start testing, so please won’t you sit down”.

“Will that make you happy, mistress Vivienne?”

If you really wanted to make me happy, you would call me simply Vivienne.

The Princess had tried to get Sebastien to drop the formalities several times, but even the suggestion of it had made him uneasy. All Vivienne could do was wait for the day he relaxed enough around her to consider himself to be her equal. Vivienne turned her sigh into a smile and a nod. Sebastien mirrored her smile and sat down.

“Are you ready, Sebastien?”

Sebastien nodded.

Vivienne placed the conductivity pads upon his heart and lowered the wire covered helmet. She double checked the research notes, walked towards the switch and flipped it. As if the room had been struck by lightning, the lab lit up with crackling electricity. Sebastien’s body started to jerk as the electrical current found him. The force of it was so powerful that even the switch received the charge. It was so powerful that the poor princess was zapped by the lethal bolt of electricity and thrown clear.

Sebastien blinked as the sparks lit up the room.

“Mistress?”

He calmly freed himself from the helmet and padding and knelt by Vivienne's side. He shook her gently. Vivienne did not stir.

"Don't fight me on this, Mistress Vivienne. You never want to wake up in the morning, but I always get through to you in the end. I'm not going to leave you alone so you might as well wake up now."

Sebastien continued to gently shake Vivienne, at a loss at why it wasn't working.

The perplexed mech only noticed that he was in the way when the sweeper droids bumped into his leg. He turned around and apologised.

"Please won't you clean somebody else? I need to wake my mistress".

The droids beeped with annoyance. Two of them grabbed at Vivienne's limp wrist. The other climbed onto her chest.

"Broken" came his tiny assessment. He looked to his friends for confirmation.

"Definitely broken" another one confirmed.

"Undeniably broken", nodded the third.

"Broken?" Sebastien repeated. How was that possible.

"Mistress Vivienne is not a mech. She cannot be broken."

The three droids exchanged a glance. Then they decided it was better to retreat and clean somewhere else.

"She won't be waking up again, the last one remarked as he zipped past. Sebastien was still confused. Just as he would always wake up with the turn of a key, humans always woke up from their sleep, didn't they? He shook Vivienne some more, determined to prove the droids wrong but once again she did not stir.

"What if I was forced to go away for a very long time. Would you be scared then? At the very least I'd expect that you would miss me."

When Sebastien slept, he felt like he disappeared somewhere very far away. Did Vivienne also disappear when she slept? Maybe there was a distance between them now, even though they remained at each other's side? If the droid were right, if Vivienne never woke up again, that distance would always be there, separating them. Never again would she tease Sebastien or smile just for him. She would never run her fingers through his curly hair or give him a hug before leaving the room. Sebastien had never cared about any of these things before. It was dawning upon Sebastien that he actually cared about Vivienne an awful lot.

"I would miss you, Mistress Vivienne."

That admission was the beginning of a change within Sebastien. Without any prior consideration, he let out a wounded scream. Though he had no tears within him to shed, that didn't stop him from sobbing and shaking. 'I cannot fail her like this', Sebastien thought as he rocked Vivienne in his arms. 'Mistress Vivienne called me her friend, and yet I am doing nothing to help her. Think, Sebastien. What can I do?'

"What happens next in the story, mistress?"

Suddenly Sebastien was transported back to the secret library. With an unquenchable thirst for knowledge, it was Vivienne's favourite place within the palace. It was also somewhere that she could bring Sebastien without the risk of running into her mech-phobic father.

"I still don't understand why you enjoy these fairy tales so much. They are always so over the top and sweet. I always got my nursemaids to tell me ghost stories as a child."

"They are sweet," Sebastien agreed, failing to see the criticism within her critique.

"Please tell me what happens next".

Vivienne continued to read.

"At last the Prince had reached the top of the tower. He looked down upon the sleeping princess, knelt down and then gave her true love's kiss. The princess opened her eyes and smiled. She and the Prince then lived happily ever after."

"Vivienne is a Princess and she is sleeping. Maybe I can give her a happily ever after."

Sebastien bolstered himself up first.

"I am a handsome prince. I am a handsome prince," he affirmed, just in case that identity would give him some kind of power. As soon as he felt princely enough, he gazed down upon Vivienne and knelt down before her. As Sebastien's lips pressed against Vivienne's the mechanoid was changed again. His thoughts became consumed by Vivienne, her kindness, her brilliance and her beautiful smile. Sebastien struggled to understand why he had found it so hard to give her anything in return except for a false smile. He would have given anything to smile for her now.

"My breath is yours. That has to be right because you brought me to life. Breathe me in and let it bring you back to me. You always insisted that I had a heart. If that is true then hear it beating and come back to me. My heart is yours as well".

As Sebastien placed a hand above Vivienne's heart, it started to spark. The electricity that flowed through him

now, thanks to Professor's Winter's chair zapped the Princess. Underneath his fingers, Sebastien had felt her heart beat, just for a moment

"Vivienne," he called, suddenly optimistic. "Come back to me. You promised that we are in this life together." Sebastien placed his hand upon her heart again. Once again there was an electric discharge. At last, Vivienne gasped and opened her eyes.

Sebastien grinned. He pulled Vivienne towards him and hugged her tightly.

"I thought that I had lost you, my love."

Vivienne hugged him back. She was overcome with gratitude to her rescuer and for the fact that he had finally said the words that she had been longing for. When she met Sebastien's eyes at last, she was giving him one of her beaming smiles.

"It took you long enough to work out that you are my handsome Prince."

As strange as it was, Vivienne had loved Sebastien in secret for many years now. This was the reason why she had always been challenging his emotions. She had been praying for the day that he might love her back in return.

Sebastien's jaw dropped.

"Am I really a handsome Prince? I thought that I was just pretending," he exclaimed. Vivienne laughed, pleased that Sebastien hadn't changed too much in her absence.

"You're my handsome prince, even if nobody else in the kingdom will accept it."

Sebastien smiled back at her. It was a wide, genuine smile which lit up his entire face. He felt the rush of euphoria and laughed as well. If this was what happiness felt like, then he wanted it to be a part of his life, always. Then his eyes shone with excitement.

"Does that mean that I can be your happily ever after, Vivienne? Please say that I can."

Vivienne nodded. Sebastien had already given her so much happiness from his clockwork heart. Now that it was beating for her, she could not wish for a better happily ever after.

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