*Things Forgotten*

         The Collector stood amidst broken machinery and the twisted bodies of factory workers. Alarm’s blared, bouncing off the stark hallways and rattling pipes. Sounds of panicked workers echoed through the cavernous metal rooms and found the Collector’s ear, who remained unmoved. The only motion to be seen was the occasional ripple of nanites, which surged through and around the Collector’s body. Their skin was nearly jet black, save for hints of neon blue circuitry and light peeking out from the surface, focused on their arms and chest, and giving the impression of eyes on its face.

         Over the alarm, a woman’s voice echoed out from speakers placed all around the factory.

         “This is the Primary Architect; a situation has been reported in sector D. Evacuate the area until the issue is addressed. In the meantime, move to sector B and continue your work; you *will* be expected to keep your deadlines.” The Collector bristled and another wave of nanites shot down their body, shifting and altering their body as they absorbed the information. The voice on the speakers was Rosalyn: Defense Architect, trusted ally of the Director, and The Collector’s latest target.

         With sudden purpose, the Collector strode to one of the intact bodies, a middle-aged man with greying hair, and more importantly, a security keycard. They knelt down over his body and rested their hand on his face, as if praying. The body began to twitch, and the nanomachines still living in the corpse were compelled by the Collector’s signal to crawl out through his face, through whatever gaps were most convenient. Once they had made their way out, the body became still once more, and the machines flowed up and through the Collector. When they finally reached its head, the Collector let out a noise, a guttural gasp of pain as new memories and sensations were transferred into its consciousness. The visions were always too intense at first. The sensations in these memories were strong. The panic and confusion of a young child with a broken arm, the emotional pain of a lengthy divorce, and a dread that sank deep into his heart as the Collector approached, followed by the fear and regret of a dying man. As the memories processed, other voices stirred as well. The hivemind was always provoked by new experiences.

         Finally, the memories were absorbed, and a flood of chemicals released into the Collector’s body, suppressing errant thought, and returning control over its mind. They could now sift through the knowledge as they wished. The Collector could see the memories of the dead man’s routine, which included a daily visit to Rosalyn’s office. The path was clear.

         Rosalyn had been sitting at her desk when the Collector threw open the door. They stood in the doorway but made no further move. A gesture of respect to a worthy adversary, or perhaps an opportunity for her to beg for her life.

         “Well if it isn’t the Collector. I must say, you’ve given my workers quite the scare.” She paused, waiting for a response. The Collector had no interest in banter.

“Rosalyn. I have come for your Remnant. It will be easier if you give it willingly.” The words were lightly distorted, and seemed to emanate from the Collector’s entire body, but a sort of jaw shaped itself from its head, snapping open and shut in a crude mimicry of speech regardless. Rosalyn smirked.

“Interesting. You were not designed with the ability to emulate facial structure. Perhaps the effects of Collection are more… potent… than I had anticipated.” The Collector cocked its head quizzically to the side.

“What knowledge would you have of my design?” Rosalyn chuckled.

“Poor little Collector.” She stood up from her desk, walking around it to face the Collector, unobstructed. “Doesn’t even remember where they came from.” She stood a few feet from her uninvited guest, now, holding a small silver device behind her back, running her thumb over its several buttons. The Collector bristled, parts of its skin hardening and forming into protective armor, preparing to attack. “Of course, you think killing me will bring you closer to the Director, don’t you?” The Collector hesitated for a moment.

“How did you know?” But Rosalyn only grinned, before flicking a switch on the device she held, at which point the Collector collapsed on the ground, convulsing and writhing in pain. Rosalyn however, remained calm and collected.

“I should’ve realized it was a mistake to let you run around unchecked. Look how arrogant you’ve become! Attempting to kill your own creator? It’s almost adorable.”

The Collector attempted to recover, but another press of Rosalyn’s remote, and pain shot through them again. “Of course, you wouldn’t remember. The memory suppression works, at least. But I wonder, how many have you collected at this point? Surely enough to keep you awake at night, if it wasn’t for the suppressors.” The Collector, for the first time in its existence, felt a total loss of control. They had come thinking Rosalyn would be just one more step towards finding the Director and had only now realized that Rosalyn was not just dangerous; she was completely and utterly above them. The Collector, for the first time, was afraid. “Why don’t we let the voices speak for a change?” She turned down a dial on the device, and the voices flooded into the Collector’s mind, the different memories and personalities finally interacting and bickering and flooding their mind with information.

The Collector, in the miasma of memories and experiences, staggered to its feet, clutching at its head. The hivemind was beginning to realize what had happened to them. As the collected victims shared memories and thoughts, they all found a common refrain, the memories of their death at the Collector’s hands. Soon their voices echoed through the Collector’s head, combining and twisting until they were shouting in unison, ‘Why? Why? Why?’ There was no answer. In a flash of confusion and anger, the Collector lashed out at Rosalyn, missing her, but knocking the device out of her hands, which the Collector proceeded to smash with its foot.

Footsteps echoed through the hallway as guards rushed to Rosalyn’s aid. Rosalyn herself had pulled out a small gun, primed to stun anyone hit by it. This was not a fight that could be won. Not while the hivemind wrestled for control of the Collector’s thoughts. The Collector gracelessly ran to the head of Rosalyn’s office and through itself through a window, falling several stories and making a hard landing on the ground below. Guards peeked out through the window, and Rosalyn cried out for them to fire at the Collector, but even as she gave the order, it was running away, past the wall around the factory and beyond the sight of any rifle. It was a short time later when the Collector collapsed into the ground again, unable to keep running as the voices in their head screamed with every step. They demanded answers. They demanded explanations. Most of all, they demanded control, clawing and scrabbling at every corner of the Collector’s mind, desperate to reclaim the agency they had been deprived of. The Collector could not stay awake, not if they wanted to reign in the hivemind. Its body began to shut down, lights dimming as the Collector entered a forced hibernation, its last chance at finding some way to control the voices again. As they realized what was happening, some of the voices cried out, fearful of a second death, others celebrated, claiming victory over their captor. Even as the Collector began its hibernation, its jaw unhinged, and it managed to speak one last time before its body locked up and it retreated into its own mind.

         “I will not be consumed.”