

Moments

by Holly Via Gorski

*Author's note: I'm writing along with StoryWonk's "The Dollar Short."
This story is for February 2016.*

Naomi knew why they had chosen her for the historical interview. She was compliant, young enough to still be considered attractive on film, and had been doing the job long enough to handle questions in the unlikely event the historian went off script. As she approached the ornate doors of the Museum of History, she wished any one of those things were not true. She didn't want the responsibility or the risk. She wished they would interview Irina, her friend in the corporation's public relations office, instead. That was what PR people were for, but the historian had wanted an actual career counselor, and the corporation had chosen her: Compliant. Attractive. Experienced.

The historian, who introduced herself as Veronica Davis and had a museum badge that confirmed it, met her inside the marble-appointed lobby. Veronica escorted her through a side door, down a drab hallway of administrative offices, down one flight of stairs, and into a small conference room set up for filming. Naomi knew the Museum of History had asked to film her in her office, but the corporation had refused. This small studio must be their back-up plan. She could see that on-location filming would have been more interesting and potentially instructive to a future audience, but understood the corporation was protecting its interests.

Veronica smiled, offered her coffee, and tried to put her at ease. They ran through a few questions from the script Naomi had been provided in advance, then Veronica switched on the camera. Naomi tensed slightly as the indicators on the camera's scanner displayed her blood pressure and heart rate, but breathed through it before the numbers could change.

From her position off-camera, Veronica said, “This is an historical interview with Ms. Naomi Graham, Career Counselor. Ms. Graham, please tell us about your profession.”

Naomi smiled into the camera. “Career counselors help connect individuals with the work they are best suited to perform. Choosing one’s profession is the decision of a lifetime.” *Helping you with the decision of a lifetime* was the corporation’s slogan. The pleasant expression on Veronica’s face flickered. Perhaps she would edit it out; historians liked to think of themselves as impartial.

“Please explain to our audience how this is done. Remember, future viewers may not have the context that we do now.”

“Everyone has a defining moment; one action or reaction in the course of their life to date that reveals the core of their nature. Individuals come to us with this moment saved in a storage capsule. Career counselors have a machine that reads the storage capsule and determines, based on the individual’s moment, their dominant innate characteristics.”

“Can people choose which moment to use?” Veronica asked. She was, predictably, staying on script. Naomi relaxed.

“No. Something with such far-reaching consequences can’t be determined by individual preference. It is scientifically managed. The storage capsule is implanted at birth and programmed to capture significant moments as they occur. As a child grows and their experience of the world widens, older, less-significant moments are overwritten by more recent and accurate ones. By the time most individuals come to us – age 17 or 18 – their moment is set.”

“So, the machine reads the moment and gives you a list of innate characteristics. What happens next?”

“I compare the individual’s characteristics to profiles of professions to find the best internal fits for the individual. Then I research occupational employment projections, educational requirements, and projected salary information for the top five internal-fit professions. From that research, I am able to determine the best two or three external fits.”

This sounded very complicated and probably had been a difficult task for the developers who, at one point in the corporation’s past, had created the software Naomi used each day

to do it. The reality was it took her very little time to produce reports. She kept smiling and tried not to shift too much under the heat of the lights.

“Do you give information on the top external fits to the person?”

“Not the raw data. I go over the information with them and help them decide on the best path to pursue. The individual walks away from my office with a step-by-step guide to that path.”

“Back to the defining moments. Do you watch them?” Veronica’s eyes widened.

This was off-script, but not unanticipated. Naomi adopted as open an expression as possible. “There is no reason for me to view the moments. They are read and interpreted by machine.” She did have a lot of free time in her work day, however. She watched the scanner indicator lights for any movement. None.

“What are the innate characteristics that make an effective career counselor?” Oh good, Veronica was back on track.

“Compassion,” she answered. Another familiar lie; ‘discretion’ would be more accurate. “Intelligence.” Shrewdness, maybe. “And a preference for structure.” Compliance. The one that had landed her here. Caution was a silent fourth, one she had learned on the job.

“Does career counselor itself come up as a match for a lot of people?”

“It may come up as a good internal fit for individuals, but it is a limited-growth profession, so that path is rarely the one an individual chooses.”

“‘Limited-growth?’ Wouldn’t it be more accurate to say that entry into the profession is tightly controlled?”

She blinked. “No.” She inhaled steadily. “Population analyses estimate workforce growth. There are only so many career counseling offices, and therefore, only so many available positions. When the anticipated workforce grows, new offices are opened up. It’s a slow process.”

“And all the offices are run by the corporation?” Veronica’s smooth voice held a hostile undercurrent. This was not an approved question and they both knew it.

“Yes.” Her eyes flashed toward the scanner indicators. Small jump; yellow light.

Veronica leaned forward, nearly visible on-camera. “Is it true that sometimes people are imprisoned after the machine reads their moment?”

“I don’t think you’re an historian.” The camera’s scanner indicator light flashed red. Naomi stood up and turned towards the door.

“Have you ever seen a moment that led to a person’s arrest?”

Once.

She fled the room. At the top of the stairs she looked back. Veronica was not pursuing her. The conference room door was closed. Naomi walked slowly through the administrative hallway, out into the main lobby, and through the front doors. No one called her name.

Outside, it was raining. She gave herself permission to hurry to her car; onlookers would see she had no umbrella. Her fingers shook on the car door handle. Inside, she turned on the heater and defroster before calling Irina.

“Irina? The interview was wrong. I think she was a journalist.”

“What do you mean? What happened?”

“She asked me if entry into the profession was ‘tightly controlled,’ and questioned all the offices being run by the corporation.”

“What did you say?”

“I think I handled it well, but it shook me up. The blood pressure light came on.”

“Damn.”

“Then she asked me about criminal moments.”

“She did what? What did you say?”

“I said that I didn’t think she was an historian. Then I ran.”

“You ran? Out of the room?”

“Yes!”

There was silence on the other end.

“Irina?”

“What?”

“What should we do? I mean, for damage control?”

“Damage control. Yes.”

The line went dead.

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