“Now kids, I want you to write a letter to your parents,” the teacher begins, passing out colorful and decorative paper to all the young children in the classroom. Many began to excitedly tell those sitting closest to them what they planned on writing about. Then there were some who felt the need to remind all of those in the room that their dearest parents were no longer together and that they couldn’t possibly decide which to write to. The teacher, in a valiant effort to avoid these select few from continuing on, gave them an extra. But then, of course, the entire room felt the need, and want, to request another sheet.

Reese was slowly tuning this noise out though. Her eyes fixated on the paper before her and the task that her teacher had given her. While all of the other children bragged about all they had to be thankful for, Reese found nothing but an empty mind and a still hand. Perhaps she was thinking too hard for this. A quick gaze around the classroom confirmed these suspicions. Everyone else had already begun, pencil to paper as they jotted down what they wanted to thank their parents for.

“I’m going to talk about how my papa helped me learn how to ride my new bike,” one of the kids nearby told their friend. She watched as he scribbled down his idea and then begun to draw a poorly done picture of him and his bike, his father cheering from the side.

“Well, I’m going to thank my mom and dad for getting me a puppy!” The picture she drew was far better than her friends, but it did little to spark any ideas within Reese.

Their ideas seemed simple enough though. Again, Reese was thinking too hard. She began to write down the first things that came to mind when the teacher came to her side, casually glancing at the scribblings on her sheet of paper.

“Oh Reese,” the woman said, trying to mask the pity in her voice and only mildly succeeding, “are these truly things that you’re happy about? That you’re thankful for?”

“My mom got me ice-cream when I wanted it, so yea,” she stated plainly. The teacher sympathetically patted her shoulder, placing down another sheet of paper in front of her and taking her previous one. Reese watched in dismay as she balled the old one away, plopping it in the trash with little concern, before coming back to Reese’s desk.

“Come on Reese, put some effort into these. Think hard, how would your mother feel if you gave this to her and all you had to say was ‘thanks for ice-cream?’ I’ll give you until tomorrow to finish.” With that, the teacher walked away telling the entire class to turn their sheets in before class was over. Reese observed the excitement of her classmates and then looked back down at her own paper, still unsure of what she had done wrong and what the right way looked like.

When she got home that day, she sat in the empty living room, no other human being in sight and her only companion being a robot nanny who seemed far more interested in the nearby wall than Reese’s wellbeing.

She sat on a barstool, swinging her legs back and forth sluggishly as she stared up at the ceiling. She knew that this assignment was just going to be another failing grade. She would either quit and stop caring about it entirely, or her lack of effort in actually adding substance to the decorative paper would be apparent.

She took one last look at the paper and shook her head in annoyance. Perhaps she would do it before the deadline, or maybe she would just wave it away – an action that she has found herself doing more and more of.

“Robot Nanny?” she called out, waiting a handful of seconds before the robot computed that its name had been called. It rotated on its legs, now facing her, “when are my mother and father coming home?”

“Unable to answer question,” the robot told her, “please either restate question or ask another.” It paused, reminding her of people who suffered from stuttering, “Master Reese.” Reese growled at the nickname that her father had programmed the bot with. She had tried to change it, but she was nowhere as intelligent as her father and mother. She recounted the first time she took a look at the bot’s control panel. All she saw was wires and intriguing dots, the circuitry causing her brain to hurt.

“Robot Nanny, call mother or father,” Reese said next, not surprised when the bot commented that it could do no such thing, giving her it’s usual line of, ‘your parents love you very much and will be home soon.’

Soon would be in a month or so from what Reese had learned, though school had tried to tell her differently. She rolled her eyes, looking back at the paper that would be due the following day …

“Who wants to go first?” the teacher asked, observing the class as almost every hand shot in the air eagerly. Reese also noted the many waving hands, everyone begging to be noticed before the other. The only hand that didn’t seem to join them was hers. She shrunk down in her seat, staring at the still mostly blank sheet in front of her. She had doodled on it and then drooled a bit, seeing that she had fallen asleep soon after. The only reason the entire page wasn’t sopping wet was because Robot Nanny had carried her to her bedroom.

One by one, each student cheerfully skipped to the front of the classroom, taking their paper from the teacher before, essentially, bragging to the class what awesome parents they had. The bragging ranged from subtle ones that included ‘I’m happy my mother had me and loved me’ and ‘I’m happy my father has this awesome job to take care of me,’ to more – extravagant ones. ‘I’m happy my parents bought a mansion,’ ‘I’m thankful that my parents got me the pony I wanted,’ and then others that just caused an envious seed to sprout and blossom within Reese’s gut.

When the last student had told the class what he was thankful for, she noticed the teacher giving her a look. She said nothing, perhaps knowing it was for the best, but that didn’t mean the other students understood.

“Wait, Reese didn’t go,” one of the boisterous girls in class informed. Every eye swiveled her way as she sunk down into her chair, always unnerved when these many eyes were on her.

“I doubt she even wrote anything,” she heard a kid mumble, looking over at her while speaking to the kids in his corner. They nodded their agreement. Anger began to boil within Reese, causing her actions to disobey her brain. Her arm shot into the air as she volunteered herself to go next. Without receiving permission, she grabbed her paper and marched to the front of the class, turning to them confidently. That was until she saw all of their eager faces.

Her heart sped up as they gazed at her, waiting for her to begin. Her eyes fled to her paper, ignoring the coaxing words that were dripped in pity from the teacher. Her eyes went over the words, none of them making sense. Had she written in cursive the other day? What strange entity possessed her to write such a weird language.

“Can she read?” she heard someone ask silently.

“I doubt it, you know they say she doesn’t even have parents,” another added. The whispers continued, causing Reese’s hand to shake as it sounded like they were each shouting. One by one their voices grew louder in her head. Voices and unspoken words mounting.

*She’s so stupid. She didn’t even do the assignment.*

 *She’s adopted. She can’t read. It’s okay honey, just sit down.*

 *She’s a freak. Ugh, why is she so weird. Weirdo.*

Tears stung Reese’s eyes as the voices grew to an alarming volume, plaguing her mind with their insults and questions.

“No, shut up,” she mumbled, shaking her head viciously, “I’m not stupid. Stop laughing at me! It’s not funny.” The more she tried to resist and tell them all it wasn’t true, the more she heard. The louder the buzzing grew and weighed her down, wishing to break her. The air became thick, and the heat seemed to plummet drastically.

*Freak.*

 *Dummy.*

 *Weirdo.*

 *Idiot.*

 *Moron.*

***Freak****.*

“Shut up!” Reese screamed, the windows shattering and the entirety of the class being pushed back by the unseen force. Desks slammed into the wall, papers went flying, children skitted across the carpet, screaming and shouting as they were hit with flying objects. The air settled back down, but Reese’s heart had sped up, her heart in her throat as she looked upon what she had done.

Her head spun as she gazed at the teacher, and the other students, all who looked upon her with fear. Some were crying due to foreseeable injuries, and others screaming at the monster that had infiltrated their classroom. Reese’s heart quickened and before she could think any harder, fled from the class. She sped down the hall as others left their rooms in curiosity. Each having to jump out of her way as she came barreling through. Not knowing where she would go or what she would do. She just knew that she needed to get out of there.

She rushed out the school, tears blurring her vision as she sped towards home, even though she lacked knowledge of which direction her house rested in. She continued on, her legs burning and her heart racing. The people surrounding her glared, and she heard their unspoken thoughts. Many questioning her, others calling her rude, others pondering her wild look and if she was a mutant freak.

She cut through a nearby alley, frantic to get away from the thoughts that poked at the recesses of her mind. She collapsed along a wall, inhaling deeply as the world seemed to rush past her. Her leg ached, and she only then realized that she had scratched it on something. She just wanted to go home, to get away from all the dark thoughts.

“Mother? Father?” Reese questioned loudly as she walked through her house, a house that seemed much larger than usual. Her stomach jolted when she received no answer. She told herself not to cry again, for she shouldn’t be surprised by the lack of a response. But her forewarnings did nothing for her, as she began to whimper and the whimpers became sobs.

“Robot Nanny,” she shouted, leaving the darkness that had claimed the sky some time ago. The night had come swarming in, laughing at her as she tried her hardest to find her way home. Only thanks to a few gentle faces and decent directions did she find her way back.

The robotic nanny zoomed into the room, stopping before her.

“Master Reese, what may I do for you?”

“Call my mom and dad,” she practically shouted.

“I am sorry Master Reese, but I am unable to do as you have requested. Your parents would … very much … They wish for you to remember that if it is an emergency …” The more she heard the robotic voice, the more her heart shattered. Her heart grew sore, and she felt lost. What was she to do? There was only one rule, ‘never show your power.’ And she had done just that. Her parents would be furious. But she couldn’t help it, she wasn’t stupid! It wasn’t her fault, she just didn’t want to do the foolish project, not everyone had some glorious tale to tell.

She found herself hugging the robotic nanny who stood without a word, accepting the embrace simply because it was functioned to do so. The frigid, smooth steel didn’t soothe Reese’s heart, in fact, it did the opposite. It reminded her that of which she was missing. While all of the other kids could be thankful for their parents, what was she grateful for? A robotic replacement?

Reese slammed her fist down onto the surface, and then again. Each time she heard the thump of her hit, she did it harder. She punched the robot, wishing she knew how to use her telepathy to just push it away. She wanted to tear the robot apart. To rip every available wire clear from its body.

“Please Master Reese, please do not do that. Master Reese, please cease such actions.”

“Shut up!” she shouted, pounding harder, as she looked up into the cold, clear eyes of the robot. “Just shut up,” she whimpered weakly, “my name is Reese.” She fell to the ground, wrapping her arms around herself as she rubbed her arms. She wanted, craved the touch of another that cared for her. She only wanted her mother and father. She didn’t want a robot, she just wanted her parents.

Two months.

Two months passed by before Reese’s parents returned to the house. They had come mid-day, at a time when Reese was supposed to be in school. But due to her actions, she had decided that returning was idiotic. They came into the house, both speaking about their recent job and running data by one another. Their conversation only came to a halt when they eyed Reese sitting at the dining table, a sandwich on her plate.

Reese looked at them with wide eyes, not knowing whether to run into their arms or to stay where she was. Her heart battled with itself, her brain joining in every once in a while. She decided on staying put as they came to her, glaring at her in confusion.

“Why aren’t you in school young lady?” her mother questioned, gripping the chair and staring at her, awaiting an answer. Reese knew this would be the main topic of discussion, but she had thought that she would at least get a hug first.

*What do you have to be thankful for?*

Her heart hurt as her mind still failed to present even one answer. Again, tears rushed to her eyes as she looked at both of them.

“I messed up,” she murmured, “I accidentally used my powers.” Her words caused both parents to gasp. They spoke over one another as they tried to figure out what could have led to such a thing.

“Your telepathy or your intangibility?” her father questioned, ending the conversation with a raise of his hand.

“Telepathy,” she answered. They both seemed somewhat proud, yet unhappy at the news. As mutant parents, they had failed in truly teaching Reese how to fully control her abilities. In fact, most of the credit was to be given to the robotic nanny, for it was only with her help that Reese could control as much as she could now, which was saying very little.

Her parents murmured amongst themselves, both taking seats at the table as they did so.

“Are you okay thought baby? How have you been?” her mother asked, shifting the conversation to include her. Reese’s heart fluttered as she looked between them. Their care evident on their face as they questioned her well-being. In between every question was an apology for how long they had been away, promising her that such a thing would never transpire again. Reese hadn’t felt this well in a long time. Her heart floating to highs that only birds had ever experienced, birds that had escaped their dull cages and made for the soft blue, cloud-filled skies.

“Mom?” Reese whispered, but her mother heard her regardless. She turned her dark brown eyes to her daughter, admiring her growing beauty as she waited for her to finish her sentence.

“Can we get ice-cream?” Her mother grinned softly, nodding to her father who nodded as well. The family spent their day outside, visiting the park and making sure Reese had the ice-cream that she had been craving. And for Reese that was her ideal day. Hand in hand with her parents as they walked through the scenic park, simply enjoying each other and the family bond that was slowly being repaired due to distance. Reese wrapped her arms around her father’s arm, her eyes softly closing as the breeze gently caressed her face.

Dear Mom and Dad,

 *1. I’m thankful you never spoiled me.*

I vividly remember that day in class. Puppies, gifts, love, even one kid said that they were grateful that their parents were alive and well and that they loved them. The amount of applause that he got for that one line was disgusting. One by one, they each went up there and talked about what they were grateful for. And though I have heard it before, I saw how spoiled half of these kids were … or maybe I was the weird one.

I remember feeling envious and upset, struggling to find a way to turn this around to seem superior, or at the very least, subpar. I wanted to experience what they felt, to at least know what it was like to have a possession as soon as I ask for it.

I wished on the one shooting star I saw, and when Robot Nanny baked me birthday cupcakes, I would blow the candles and wish. I would pick up dandelions and blow them, watching as the now free seeds were swept by a barely present wind. And yet, none of my wishes came true. But I also didn’t have much to wish for. I suppose, in the end, all that wishing was stupid to begin with.

I didn’t wish for much, a toy here and a pet there. But perhaps I didn’t get my wishes due to my lack of actually *wanting* them. The toy would probably break in a week, either that or I would abandon it to some dark corner of my room. The pet would grow and the longer I had it, the more boring it would be to me. Plus, I was hardly responsible, and the thought of even taking care of myself was scary. A pet would suffer under my protection.

So, I stopped wishing. I told myself that I was better off. All those kids, they would grow into spoiled adults who believed they deserved anything just because they wanted it. Everything I worked for, I would earn it. I would work and make sure to put all of my energy into achieving and granting my own wishes. Where they had a fairy godmother on their side, I had nothing but my own willpower and a nanny bot.

In the end, I don’t know if that even made sense. Making it seem as if I would achieve it all over those who barely worked. But all the same, it made me feel better. It made me lift my head just a bit higher, and though I hid it, I did smirk.

 *2. I’m thankful you gave me a robot.*

I look back and wonder if I should have given my robot a name. Walking around that large and empty house, screaming out Robot Nanny all the time got old, as well as just being too much of a mouthful since a command had to follow it. Yet, that piece of machinery was more real to me than the people who had built her. Whereas I saw you, my own parents, every two months at the most, I saw her every day. I came home from hard days to her metallic face, questioning me on my day.

I grew used to her hugs and her robotic voice. She was the one I played games with and who taught me how to get even a slight grip on my power. I knew her face. Hilarious, is it not? That I think of a robot as a parent over my own parents, especially when they were the ones who programmed her.

I realized long ago that I didn’t need another human in my life, it wasn’t like I had one growing up anyway. Of course, Dianzo was there for me, but it was too late for me. I had grown accustomed to the touch of cold metal, pressed up against my skin and providing no amount of comfort. I was taught to not rely on another’s support, no matter how much I craved it. No matter how much I sat in the corner of my dark room, clawing at my own skin in hopes of feeling an inch of something.

It was once odd to wake the following morning and see the markings. It gave me a strange sensation, one that was almost numb. I would trace my hand over the scars, and for a minute, I felt that tender touch.

*3. I’m thankful you never talked to me like I’m stupid.*

That day and forth, it didn’t take my telepathy to figure out what people thought of me. To see the pity and irritation that resided in their eyes. To know that they grew tired of me asking questions, not catching on as fast as them, and not knowing as much as them either. It was always weird to know that my parents were geniuses, and yet, I was lesser than that. I never believed myself slow, but then who would? I liked to think that it just took me slightly longer than others to understand some things. And even then, there were things that I just didn’t know anything about.

At first, I cried from the looks they gave. I allowed myself to take what others thought about me and I let it affect me. People who didn’t even know my name would never see my face again, who never cared to get to know me in the slightest. So why did I let their opinions affect me? I felt stupid, giving some total stranger that power over me. The ability to shift my entire day and to bring the darkest of clouds back into my view. And who would I run to for that comfort that I always sought? My absent parents? My Nanny Bot? Dianzo? Each was either a lost cause or someone that I didn’t wish to push my issues onto.

Despite my brave face and the smirk I wore. Despite my slight chuckle and how confidently I rolled my shoulders into a shrug, it hurt me. Their words echoed through my brain for the entire day, causing me to double think everything I said. On the darkest of nights, I agreed with them. I was stupid, dimwitted, an idiot. The thought always stuck with me for a couple of days, causing me to stay quiet and not ask anything. I didn’t wish for others to gaze over at me in confusion, struggling to understand how I lack comprehension.

The worst were the teachers. I heard them discussing amongst each other my intellect. One would say that I should be moved to easier classes, another saying that perhaps I should just be given different kind of work, and the last stating that I was just another stupid student who understood nothing.

Pity.

I hated pity. It inflamed my blood and allowed the anger inside me to reach boiling point. I became aggressive, cursing teachers and caring little for their orders. I was already looked at like a freak. Everyone pondering if I was another mutant freak who had somehow infiltrated their less than precious school.

By the time I was a teen, making my way through the intricate details of high school, I had found that such words would always haunt me. Those believing me dim of wit. Me thinking it as well.

*4. I’m thankful for that ice-cream.*

Or perhaps I’m not. I don’t know anymore. It was my favorite flavor and was the last ice-cream cone that you had ever bought for me. I remember the feeling of being between the two of you. The love that I felt in that moment, and the superficial idea that everything would always be okay. My arm tightly grasping father’s as we walked through the park. To a stranger’s eye, we were a regular family. We were like anyone else. And I craved that.

I craved that when you left the next day, with nothing more than a pre-recorded message on my Robot Nanny, telling me that you had another job and that you would see me in a month’s time. Of course, I counted those months, it ended up being four before you returned. Each time you left me alone, I drew further away. It was as if I had been pushed into the darkest and deepest abyss. You were to save me from drowning, but instead, you suffocated me further. Has my back hit the bottom yet? I doubt it.

All I wanted was the two of you. The two of you in my life, to love your daughter. Was that really too much to ask? I didn’t ask for this.

**I DIDN’T ASK FOR THIS!**

I didn’t ask to be some horrible stain on your life that you felt obligated to visit every few months! That you thought only deserved the love of a robot! I didn’t ask to be ridiculed by humans because of my powers, and then by mutants because of my lack of comprehension over said powers. This is your fault! Not mine! So why must I pay! Did you believe your daughter deserved that?

And here I was, every night hoping that I would wake up to your faces. That ounce of hope never wavering as I continued to count the days until your return. I needed my parents. Even when I picked up the blade for the first time, wondering if this would gain your attention, would cause you to stay just a little longer. Not even that could earn what I needed. I never thought myself proud, so why did I never beg you to stay? Why didn’t I shove my sorrow and my pain in your face where you would be forced to face it?

Maybe it was my fault. Maybe wanting this love was as artificial as the love that the Robot Nanny held for me. I thought, ‘at least to help me understand this power.’ Sometimes I doubted you even recalled I held such gifts. My arms became decorated with the regrets that I never voiced, with the thoughts that chimed inside my head day after day. And even that got numb. My own soothing touch was not so soothing anymore. To feel so dead inside because of two people in a world full of trillions.

At the end of the gotdamn day, all I wanted was some more ice-cream, for us to share that ice-cream! This was the one lesson that I was still learning. The lesson you taught me that for some reason, hasn’t completely settled within this dimwitted thick skull of mine.

I needed to get my own ice-cream.

*5. -*

There is no five. Twelve years later and I still struggle to find something to be thankful for when it comes to the two of you. Perhaps in twelve more, I will come up with something worth putting. This letter will never grace your hands anyway. Twelve years later and that one stupid assignment still rings loud in my mind. And even as I write this, I can’t, for the life of me, figure out the last thing to add. I could say that I’m thankful that, as my mother, you gave birth to me. Thankful that you helped me figure out some stuff, or that you gave me that one book I asked for. But all of those things seemed trivial. The birth part just seemed like another cop-out.

I detested that teacher, but I do think I understand what she was trying to get me to see. Or perhaps she just liked the idea that one of her students were struggling and she could finally look down upon someone. Either way, I couldn’t bring myself to writing down any of those previously stated things. In the end, none of those taught me a lesson that stuck with me to this day. They were as memorable as the taste of a cold bowl of porridge.

I wonder if Dianzo could make this list, and how fast they would do it in? In fact, I wonder what the others would do if faced with a list such as this. I can imagine most of them shrinking up, the others snorting as they questioned what parents even were.

But this letter is not to dwell, or to compare myself with the other unfortunate souls I see on a daily basis now. But to finally complete an assignment that has long since been due. I doubt it’ll help my grade out much though.