

Walking home after finishing a long day, I was feeling quite euphoric. The air around me seemed to buzz with happiness and all seemed right. My medium length dirty-blonde hair billowed as a gust of strong wind made my green eyes water. I shivered but did not lose my happiness. Tomorrow was Saturday and I had no work. I walked down the street my normal route. First to Main. Main to Marconi. Marconi to Brentwood. Nearing my apartment, I stared up at the old Volgram manor on the corner of Brentwood and Maple. Abandoned and in need of repairs, it sat there looming over the small neighborhood that surrounded it, a monster standing over a young child in a dark alleyway, waiting to strike.

Then a slight glimmer caught my eye, calling to me, saying 'Robert, come to me.' Needless to say I can't resist the call of curiosity very well. I slowly made my way up the disheveled step onto the leaf covered porch. Following the shimmer, I walked over to one of the columns near the front door and looked at where the sparkle originated from. A small patch of the column looked as if it were a small door but with no discernable knob or handle in sight I tried the next way that came to my mind. I pushed on the door until I heard an almost inaudible *click* and let go. When I let go the door shot outwards and inside was the origin of the glimmer.

Shining in the small amount of sunlight that made it through the cracks, a small black metal key sat, looking as if the metal were from another world and just been polished. I picked it up and looked over it in the sunlight. It was as if the sunlight was being filtered and magnified through it. Not only that, but the key was strangely shaped. The part you hold the key at was shaped like a small globe but spikes came from multiple places on the globe into a core inside the globe. The opposite end was not all that strange other than the fact it was an old timey key

with a gun shaped piece coming off of it. I looked from the key to the column to the door and decided to take a look inside.

I slowly walked towards the door to the Volgram manor. I put the key in the keyhole and turned very carefully. With a silent click it was as if the rest of the world went quiet, awaiting my entrance inside. Pushing the door open I stepped inside and looked around at the dusty room that had been left uncleansed. Looking over the entrance hall, it would've been grand in its heyday. White marble covered in a thin layer of dust and dirt was the floor and stairs of the manor. The walls of the first floor were cherry wood with a rich stain and the walls of the second floor were evergreen green. The rails of the stairs were either brass or another metal that had been gold-leafed. The curtains that hung on the windows looked as if they had been hand made with a pastel blue silk to add to the room's other-worldly feel. Six hallways split off of the entrance hall. Two from the sides, two straight back and two to the sides upstairs.

After basking in the manor's old time charm, I walked to a door. My boredom with the entrance hall led me to go into the room. It was an immense study, with books for who-knows-what lining the walls. I flicked a light switch on the wall beside me and got a better look rather than just seeing all the books. I walked to the back of the study to a large ornate wooden desk. On the desk were some papers, some scissors, a stapler, usual miscellaneous desk stuff. I looked behind it at a mirror on the wall.

The mirror was a strange predicament in and of itself. First off, it seemed like whatever it was made of was darker than the usual stuff that mirrors are usually made of. Secondly, it didn't reflect the study as most mirrors would but it wasn't possible that it was a window. Who would leave a giant window in the middle of a room? In the reflection was a dark room with paintings with searching eyes, floating chairs, and man-eating pianos but what stood out the most

was that there was a unfinished life size marionette standing there, its eyes not entirely painted and an undefined smile. I got closer to take a better look, almost up against the mirror but before I did the marionette ... twitched. I took a step back as the, seconds ago seemingly lifeless, marionette came very much alive, a shark tooth smile growing wider upon its insanity filled face. I took another step back as it slowly began to move towards the mirror. I took three steps back as it began to walk towards the mirror. I grabbed the scissors and took off running towards the door as its hand went through the portal.

“Too late!”

A nasally voice dripping with insanity permeated the air. I was almost there but just as I got within five feet of the door, it was there panting and smiling with its evil grin.

“I wanna play. Do you wanna plaaaaaaay?”

I now understood that the marionette was talking and even worse it was talking to me. I took a step back

“I have a game I always luuuv playing with new friends.”

I rose the scissor and shook my head no. He was moving forward again and where had he gotten those knives from? He suddenly moved right up next to me.

“It’s a little game I like to call ‘Slice and Dice’”

I took off running towards the portal maybe I’d have a chance to hide. I ran to the portal and tried to go through but I couldn’t.

“But I wanted to play with you! Why would be so mean?!”

He flung the giant desk that was easily a 3-man job to lift, across the room into a bookcase, crushing it.

“When I say it’s time to play, IT’S TIME TO PLAY!”

I was down on the ground now, crying and holding on to the scissors as if they could actually help. “Stop!” a woman’s voice reverberated through the study. Suddenly, the marionette was back to his giddily insane self.

“Ooooooh more friends to play with.”

I looked up to find three around me. One, the woman was standing at the ready with a rapier, wearing a light teal sundress with black and white striped hair. She smelled of flowers and cotton candy. A guy with a neon blue Mohawk stood to her left, wearing black cargo shorts, a black t-shirt, and a black studded choker, brandishing a Desert Eagle. The third was crouched next to me, trying to help me up. His hair was long and unkempt yet he dressed as if he were a butler, complete with a metal serving tray. The only thing I found strange about them was that none of them were wearing shoes of any sort.

“Weeee! I have so many friends to slice and dice. Theres one... two... three...four. Four friends for me to slice and dice! This’ll be so much FUN!”

The hippie hair butler helped me to my feet and walked me to a place where I would be a good distance from the marionette. Then he walked back over and stood there with the tray raised above his head as if ready to strike. Were they going to fight that thing? As if she had read my mind, the girl turned towards me and smiled, as if to say “We’ll be alright.”

As they fought the marionette I noticed that something strange began to happen. All three of them began to change they each began to take on more animalistic forms, to the point where you could say they were anthropomorphic, which would explain the lack of shoes. The girl was a neon purple and black skunk, punk rocker was a neon blue wolf, and butler was a black cat. Each shot fired, each strike of the blade, every crash of the tray, they would become more and more animalistic. Then I noticed something else.

Looking back at my hand I realized that I still had the scissors in my hand. I hadn't noticed it before but the marionette's weakness was staring me in the face so I did what any sane person would do and ran headfirst into the battle.

"My fourth friend came back to play and looks like he wants to play too."

I held the scissors in my hand and ran up behind the marionette. I opened and raised the scissors and closed them on my target.

Schnick.

The marionette's right arm fell limp.

"Hey that's playing dirty."

I swung over to his other side, dodging his strike.

Schnick.

"Stop it now I can't play."

Schnick.

"Owie. All I wanted to do was play."

Schnick.

“Nonono. Okay, Okay I’ll play nice.”

Schnick. K-thunk thunk thunk.

The marionette’s body laid on the floor. I had cut all its string and now it couldn’t be controlled anymore. The wood of the marionette faded away and some jewelry and gold coins were left in its place. I picked up a jewel and a gold coin, wondering if it was real, if all of what had happened was real. Maybe Helen had slipped a pill into my soda before I left work and all this was some strange acid trip.

Something tapped my shoulder and I nearly jumped out of my skin. I turned holding the scissors as if they were a knife. Standing before me were Skunkgirl, Punkwolf, and Butlercat. Then my brain shutdown from sheer confusion and I crumbled to the floor.

“Hey. Are you alright.” someone said as my vision began to clear. I felt fur as the person helped me to my feet again. I looked at them as my vision cleared. It was the skunk girl from before. I nodded as the realization that all of that had indeed happened hit me. “Why didn’t you take that key out of the column like I told you, James?!” she said, directing her attention to the punk wolf. “Well I’m sorry, Lexa, but I forgot!” he said mocking her tone. James and Lexa continued fighting like this as I slowly began to back towards the door. The butler cat walked in between them just as they started to really fight. He hit them both on the head with what sounded like heavy hands, calmly saying, “Stop it you two. You’re scaring our guest.” “Ow” they both said simultaneously. “Michael, just saying something would’ve been enough. I told you your hits hurt.