

PUPPET SHOW

by pwatson1974

Rachel Morris allows herself a long sigh as she reaches her dressing room, the applause still lingering but, after two curtain calls, enough is enough. And anyway, you should always leave them wanting more. She flops back into the thickly padded chair, kicking off her high-heeled black shoes, tossing the ubiquitous top hat lazily through the air onto its stand. She sinks into the chair, running her hand through her lustrous black hair, curling up. Which is, of course, when someone knocks on the door. She scowls. *This better not be another tiger incident.* "Come in!"

The door swings open, revealing a youngish man standing lazily in the doorway, a jacket slung over his shoulder, hair just unkempt enough to look tousled and not scruffy, the collar of his shirt hanging open. "Evening, Rae. Quite a show."

Her scowl doesn't noticeably lift. "Huh. Didn't see you in the audience, Tony. Surely you wouldn't have snuck in without paying cover." She pushes herself out of the chair, this is her room after all, and starts to smooth down the open black jacket, flipping the tails away from her bare legs. "Would you?" she asks, only then looking back at him, her tone suggesting that she'd have some trouble believing him if he said he had.

"At your prices? I'm surprised anyone can afford them."

She shrugs, "People are obviously prepared to pay for the real thing." She smiles sweetly, giving a little turn to show off the athletic body her costume does nothing to conceal.

"Oh, please, what they are paying for is not real. Not unless you meant real silicone."

Rachel stops, glaring at him, hands on her hips, "Hey! These are all real! And you know it! I mean, ok, they're magically enhanced a bit, but none of that surgery crap!" she lets her eyes roll, wishing it wasn't quite so easy for him to get under her skin, "Please."

"Kind of hard for an honest guy to compete." He presses on, ignoring the sharp bark of laughter that produces, "Fortunately I'm not an honest guy."

"I was gonna say..."

"So I get to cheat a little."

"So, seriously, what brings you by? I didn't even know you were in town. Haven't seen your obnoxious advertising covering up my posters."

He gives that infuriating smirk he has, grey eyes giving a little bit of a sparkle, "Thought I'd just stop by, say hello, surprise you before I take over this place."

"Well, consider me cautiously surprised."

He gives a half-shrugs, "Ok, I'll consider you cautiously surprised. Want to see something new I'm adding to the act?"

Rachel sighs, not really caring how rude that is. After all, she didn't invite him in this time.

"Alright, sure." She settles back into the chair again, leaning back, "Looking for some pointers?"

"Nah, I know what I'm doing." He waves her away, reaching under the jacket, pulling out a foot-long artist's mannequin, a blank human-form in dark wood, all attached to a pair of wooden crosses by numerous threads. He fiddles with the controllers, the mannequin bowing, one arm crossed over its stomach, the other flung out extravagantly.

"Ooooh, marionette work!" she leans forward, eyes gleaming, face lightning up as she watches the doll, "That's almost a lost art these days."

"Too much hi-tech. No one appreciates simplicity and subtlety anymore." He flexes the controllers and the marionette begins dancing a jig, leaping over the floor.

Rachel nods, leaning in closer to the marionette, impressed despite herself, "This is neat, can't deny that, but it's gonna be a tough sell with today's crowd, to be honest."

"Oh, it's just something for the small segments. Besides, there's a bit they're sure to love." The marionette kneels, one hand over its 'heart', the other flung out, in almost perfect parody of 'Romeo below the balcony'.

"Heh, cute."

The marionette stands, hands behind its back, twisting from foot to foot, the head looking down like a nervous teenager before his first date. Rachel giggles, getting on her knees to get closer to the marionette. It extends a hand to her, offering to shake. Chuckling, she reaches out, taking the tiny wooden hand in hers. At which point her mouth opens in a gasp as she feels her hand sticking to the wood. No, not sticking, sucking. She watches as her hand sinks completely into the tiny wooden hand, turning it into a pretty good representation of her hand.

"Hey!!" she shouts, trying to draw back. The puppet doesn't move an inch, and, in fact, draws her arm into it, reshaping into her jacket sleeve. "HEY!"

"I cannot believe you fell for that. Honestly, Rae, touching a magical object without precautions?" he shakes his head in disappointment, tutting slightly as the pull increases.

"Dammit! Call this thing off!! It didn't give out any magical aura!"

"Of course not. I'm not a complete chump who gets by on her unnatural cleavage."

"I do not!" she looks down, her arm absorbing into the little wooden doll, "Call it off!"

"But that would spoil my act."

She scowls, her free hand flexing, flickering webs of magic weaving out, all to fizzle against the varnished wood. Of course, magic takes time and by the time the last one fails, the doll's chest has ballooned to ridiculous, cartoon proportions, a black dinner jacket over a painted white shirt and bow tie. She feels the tugging accelerate, sucking in her other arm, and running up her neck. She's still deciding whether to make her last words a stream of curses or another unworking when the doll renders that decision moot. She smiles fixedly out from its face, a frame of black wooden hair resting on her shoulder, oversized blue eyes staring out. She looks out at the room as she feels the doll absorbing her legs.

"Come on, Rae, give me enough credit to protect this against your usual routine."

The wooden face remains serene, but the stream of curses coursing through its head would blister paint. Of course, as they're only inside the doll's head, they don't do much in actuality. She feels a tug on the strings, her doll's body dropping into a curtsy, and then, the strings collapse as he lets go, her body flopping onto the floor like, well, a puppet without its strings.

He reaches down, lifting up the doll. Inside it, Rachel struggles, screams, curses, tries to even blink, or just stop damn smiling, but not one thing happens apart from flopping about in his hands. He tucks her under his jacket, plunging her into muffled darkness, closes the door and walks out. *Damn it! Let me out of here! This isn't funny!* She silently rages as the strings tangle around her wooden limbs.

Eventually, Rachel feels herself brought out from the jacket. The strings surrounding her are untangled. The doll is placed on the table in a much less extravagant dressing room. She tries to scowl, fold her arms, pout, scream, but just flops forward, "So, how's my Raerae doing?" Rachel seethes. As if this whole thing wasn't undignified enough, she's told Tony she hates that cutesy nickname. Repeatedly. And that grin on the smug bastard's face let's her know that he remembers. "Ready for our show tomorrow?"

Show? Tomorrow? No! I have a show tomorrow! This has gone on long enough! You got me, ok? I admit it. Now change me back! She thinks as loudly as possibly, but instead feels a twitch on her strings and her head nods a couple of times.

"Good girl. I like you much better like this, Raerae. Much easier on the ears."

Rachel says nothing. She thinks an awful lot of thing, many anatomically impossible, and all unprintable outside of certain highly specialised publications.

"But it's time for little dolls to go to bed while I advertise."

Put posters over mine, you mean, you cheapskate. But she feels the strings twitch, her arms opening out in an invitation for a hug. *No, no, no! Don't you dare!*

He leans in closer and Rachel feels herself lean forwards, pressing her painted on lips against Tony's cheek. And yet it feels exactly like a normal kiss.

He smiles as she pulls back, "Night, Doll." He grins at his own cleverness. Rachel tries to scowl but doesn't get very far as she's carefully picked up and packed away like the prop she's become, staring up as the box closes, still smiling.

Ooooh! I am soooo gonna get you for this, Tony!

Time passes in a mixture of cursing, delicious thoughts of revenge, more cursing, before the case opens onto bright stage lights, *I'd better not have missed my show, Tony, or there will be BIG trouble.*

"Now, I want to introduce you all to a close personal friend of mine..." she feels herself being lifted, set on the stage, still smiling the same damn smile and feeling the strings controlling her movements. She looks out from the stage, the lights dazzling her until finally she makes out the audience. "This is Raerae."

No, no, no, NO! If this is his show time, that means... She feels herself bow to the audience.

"Now, Raerae's a performer herself, aren't you, Raerae?"

Rachel feels herself nodding to that, the audience laughing, some coos and awwws at how cute the doll is, *But I AM! Stop making it look like I'm giggling, dammit!* She stops, hearing the horn music blaring out. It takes her a few seconds to recognise 'The Stripper' but she manages a split second before the audience, laughter and some pre-emptive applause washing over her, *What the, he can't be serious, he wouldn't dare!* She feels herself slowly strutting across the stage, hips swaying provocatively, *No, no, this is all a joke. That's it. Just a little joke before he starts the real little show.* She stops, facing the audience. She feels her hands reaching up, hands on the painted lapels of her jacket, still wiggling her little wooden hips as provocatively as she can. The audience laugh and then gasp as the lapels begin to pull away. She feels herself half pull the jacket off, revealing the painted white shirt beneath and then slides the rest off, letting it drop to the stage, ignoring the strings that should have gotten in the way. *Oh, come on...*

"What a naughty doll! You should be ashamed of yourself, Raerae!"

She feels her hands cover her still smiling, always damn smiling, mouth, lowering her head in contrition, but the hands are soon moving, sliding her skirt down her legs. She feels it sliding down as if the wooden legs were really hers, and feels herself kick it away, leaving her standing on the stage in her little painted on black panties. She feels herself give a startled little jump, hands slamming down to cover her wooden modesty. Which is the first time she's actually acted like she wanted to since she got caught in this damn doll, but she doubts it's anything other than part of the act.

"Hey! She's blushing!"

The audience laugh as she feels her wooden cheeks glowing, a pair of large red circles appearing on them. And then, she feels her hands resting on the stupid, overstuffed, gigantic bosom. *Oh, no!* She feels a button undo, the painted on shirt loosening. Then another, and another, slowly undoing the shirt, exposing the doll's generous cleavage of flesh-coloured wood. The audience laughs, with some catcalls as she feels herself slide the shirt off, whirling it over her head, through the strings, to land in a heap on the stage, leaving her standing there, hands on hips, in just a painted on black bra and panties set. And that damnable smile.

Ooooooooooh! You are sooo digging your grave, Tony!

She feels herself strut across the stage, the audience laughing, feeling every bit as embarrassed as if it were really her standing there in her underwear. She feels herself stop, turning back to the audience. She catches a wink from Tony as she feels her body bend over, running her hands along her legs, giving the audience a good long look at her wooden arse, feeling it shimmy.

“Yeah, shake it, baby!” someone shouts out, to a new wave of laughter.

Rachel tries, for the who-knows-how-manyth time to stop herself as she stands back up, but feels her arms reaching behind her, letting the audience watch her as she undoes her bra. She feels the strap slip off one shoulder, peering over it as coquettishly as possible while the audience laugh. Still burning with embarrassment, she feels the other strap slip down, her hands moving to press the cups against her wooden chest. She feels herself turn back to the audience with a shimmy, feeling like she’s really standing there half naked, with only her hands protecting her modesty. One hand whips the bra away, the other flung across her chest and shimmies around so her back’s to the audience once more. She feels herself half-turn, wagging an admonishing finger at them, while simultaneously receiving a cheer as she reveals herself.

Teasing, alluring, damnit! This is the last thing I expected from you! Even after you caught me in this damn doll!

She feels her body turn to face the audience, baring her chest. They give her a huge cheer as if she was as flesh and blood as she feels and not a foot-high little wooden doll. Her hands leap up to her cheeks in theatrical shock. And slowly, with a sashay of her hips, they slip down her body towards the only clothing she has left.

I hate, hate, hate you! I hate how you’re making me feel like I’m the one doing this! That I’m choosing to do this! You’ve made it feel so natural you, smug bas...oh, no! Not the panties, too! Don’t you dare!

She feels herself shimmy around, bending down low to slide the panties off, her wooden rear shaking as she kicks them aside. She feels her hands placed on her hips as she turns back, protecting her wooden ‘modesty’. She hears the music building to a crescendo, dreading what’s going to be revealed for the finale. The music builds to a clash. She feels her arms flung out wide. The lights and audience blur as her vision shoots up. The smell of beer and cigarettes fills her nostrils, feeling the soft breeze from the air conditioner as she stands on the stage, arms spread, fully restored and naked as a jaybird. She blinks, realises what’s happened, blushes even more fiercely as the crowd roars their approval, and desperately tries to cover herself.

“Ladies and gentlemen, may I present my very good friend, Rachel Morris, currently starring in her own show at the Grand.” Tony smiles, leading the applause as the lights begin to dim. Rachel manages enough stage presence to give a dazzling smile, as if she had been in on the trick all along. She even gives a wave, exposing her breasts again before scampering backstage.

“I am totally going to kill you for this.” She mutters as she scampers past Tony.

He grins, infuriatingly, “I’d expect nothing less, Raerae. You’d better hurry, though, or you’ll miss the start of your show.” He gives her a light pat on the bare cheek, “I think you can probably still make it if you start running now. It’s only across the main street, after all.” Rachel growls something as she races through the backstage area, desperately trying to remember a clothing spell before she reaches the doors.



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