

A Permanent Position – Part 2

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Air was caught in his chest, as the young man read his own name, engraved into that derelicted monument.

David made himself step down, off the plinth.

The ground felt hard underfoot, as he pushed legs into motion, to carry him back towards house and stables. His gait was rigid, rocking atop frozen hips, a lumbering motion which made each pace a labor.

None of it made sense.

It was impossible all.

Enough, David Carson declared to himself.

However good the pay, and whatever dire times he might be returning to, down in the town below, he would take his chances. At first light he would be off, and leave the misnamed Elysium Ranch far behind him.

Stiff fingers clenched into a ball as he found his resolution.

His eyes still scanned the darkness, however, mind and body both alert.

Almost beyond perception, he had become aware of *something* up ahead.

Something realer than any reflection.

Something *moving*.

Straining against the frozen night, he saw the shape shamble unevenly through a patch of mottled moonlight, and discerned a head and part of a shoulder, mid-stride.

There *was* someone out there, after all.

Perhaps a man with a wooden leg? It might even be the same person who had taken the jockey.

Only now he was heading towards the mansion house.

Where Lady Jane was sleeping.

A powerful urge warned David off interference, yet he thrust himself forward in that absurd, shambling stride all the same.

The Mistress had been good to him. Taken him in and given him a chance. It wasn't her fault that all this was happening.

David wasn't certain even what 'all this' actually referred to.

But whatever it was, he had to warn her.

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Digits clattered against a rounded doorknob as David tried to make his way into the mansion.

His hands felt stiffer than ever, all flex absent in his outstretched fingers, but he managed ingress by pressing the metal ball between his similarly-hardened palms to turn it.

Rocking his torso brought his leg up, over the lip of the threshold, and his foot came down on the marble flooring with a clack.

David refused to think about how bare skin could make such a sound.

Ahead, down the decadently-decorated hall, a door hung ajar, the hidden entrance opening out of a featureless stretch of wall, visible even now only thanks to the faint glimmer of light bleeding through the crack, wavering with strange energy.

Alarm reasserted itself in a clouded head, as a hand clattered against a brow which bore a sheen, even without sweat.

David felt more confined than ever, *constricted* in those light, loose nightclothes.

Yet the thought of the Mistress spurred him on, as the *throb* between his legs renewed, and the beat inside his chest accelerated.

Jane might be in there.

She might need him... or want him.

Shambling forwards, the groom made for that sinister beacon, pushing the door open as quietly as he could.

It seemed to creak as it swung, yet the sound persisted as he wobbled on, into the corridor beyond, the noises dogging his every step, punctuated by those inexplicable clatters.

Chest and waist groaning in protest, David pressed against the similarly-solid body of the door at the end, and it too swung open.

Amid a sea of books and scrolls, lit in the flickering wash of candle and lantern, was a figure.

At first it seemed impossible, limbs emerging at odd angles from impossible places, but as the shape turned, David saw a face.

Jane.

She was holding something against her, a smaller shape.

A second body.

David groaned, from his lips this time, as he watched hers meet that other man. As he watched that interloper kissing her back, hands gripping at her bare thigh and back, holding her so intimately.

"No," David squeaked.

Their heads turned, as if noticing him for the first time, and the groom recognized his charge at last.

The wooden statue.

That carved mock jockey stared out, from a face too-real, eyes *alive* and *animate*.

A hand tightened around Jane's back.

Between them hung a gleaming mote, resting amid her bust, reflecting the candle-light to shine as though it were itself aflame.

The lucky horseshoe.

The lovers smiled, as they followed his eyes, and the jockey, that bizarre, impossible creature, gripped the pendant in a hand far more mobile than David's own.

"I must thank you for this," he said. "And for your service."

His voice began dry and crackling, yet grew more vital as it went on, words become smooth and flowing... just as his motions were.

"Yes," Lady Jane murmured, "David was the godsend we were waiting for, truly."

They kissed again, and the groom shuddered, as he felt the brush of those lips on his. He pressed into that sensation, his fears melting with her warm touch, as the aching sensuality of his body returned. The pleasure, the *need*, the consuming *passion* for this mysterious woman. No wonder he was captivated. He was hers, after all, her lover, despite how he'd tried to delude himself.

Yet it was the *statue* Jane was kissing.

Was David not the human? The animate, living being?

His hands reached for her, but found only his own hips.

A hand hit that hard knot between his legs with a *thunk*.

Surely that was wrong. A human wouldn't have that surreal, solid bulge of *wood*, throbbing between his thighs.

His fingers slid off the dense ball of tingling desire, without finding purchase or structure of any kind. David had nothing there to grip. No anatomy to satisfy.

The couple before him renewed their union, but now the clothes were peeling from the body of the jockey. Not lacquer coating, being stripped away, but actual fabric, slid off supple, living skin.

All the while, David was feeling the reverse.

Fabric seized in place around his chest and limbs, hugging too tight, a straightjacket of bedclothes, sealing to his body. The design was all wrong too – his night wear had never included a jacket or cap, let alone *boots*, yet the outfit congealing about him was full riding dress, breeches, silks and all. The garments were stiffening as if setting there, glued to his flesh.

David writhed, pawing at the materials, yet his hands wouldn't close to grip, his fingers moving as one mass, clumsy and rounded, unable to gain purchase.

As the man in Jane's arms removed his jockey wear, that garb was becoming David's own.

Their eyes met, and Jane smiled.

"This... can't be...."

The words were a rasp of wood in his throat.

"But it is indeed," the man replied.

He stood taller than Jane now, even as she too seemed to grow with each moment.

The desks and shelves stretched upwards too.

Or rather, David was shrinking.

His height matched that of the statue now, just like his clothing. Even his build was shifting, growing slight, the shape of a horse racer, not a laborer.

"I am sorry about this, you know."

Jane's voice was soft, tender even, a sound he had never heard from her.

She brushed a hand along her partner's cheek, and some phantom echo of her touch seemed to grace David's own hardening skin.

The horseshoe throbbed between bodies, a flaming arc of passion, mirroring the lust of those lovers, and the impossible pleasure of his petrifying flesh.

David was turning to wood, yet he ached with erogenous sensuality.

"Try to relax... to let it happen. It will all be over soon."

He had to leave, to get out now, while he still could.

David took a step back, towards the door.

Or rather, he tried to.

Enclosed in the hardened layer of his altered clothes, his body was stiffer than ever, his torso one solid *trunk*, the beams of his legs unbending, ending on those rigid, gleaming boots, which slipped against the equally-smooth floor.

It seemed so wrong, to feel those soles slide, as though they were somehow his actual body.

Rocking in place, he struggled to turn about, and raised an arm towards the door.

It thumped, wood on wood, as the solid end of his arm met the paneling.

There was no sensation of fingers even trying to bend.

The stylized carving on the end of his wrist had no such level of detail.

His arm ended in a simple wooden shape, shining lacquer giving the impression of skin to the inanimate lump of oak.

"What... are you... doing to me?"

The words clattered out misshapen, from lips that knocked together with an absurd rattle, but Jane seemed to understand well enough.

She had the grace to blush.

"I didn't want to have to do this," she said, "but it's the only way to save my poor dear Joseph."

In her arms, the man smiled, a knowing, wry expression on his rejuvenated countenance.

"It's really my fault. I went and got myself cursed you see – turned into that silly *statue* of all things. Jane, the dear sweet creature she is, has spent years trying to find a way to undo it. To make me human again."

"But there's no *unmaking* a curse," she said, with a wistful sigh. "Instead I hit upon an alternative possibility. Not to break the curse, but to *transfer* it."

David stared at them, even as he felt his body pulse with strange energy, in time with the beat of his pendant about her neck.

"Why... me? What... did I... do to... to... deserve this?"

Jane gave a sad shake of her head.

"Nothing at all, my dear. You just showed up at the right time. A man with no connections or history, no roots and no-one to miss him. When the sun rises tomorrow, and the other hands wake, no-one will question where you went – with my dear husband returned, after so many years 'missing', it's only natural that my dalliance with you would end – and that you'd leave in a huff, never to be seen again."

David gaped at her.

At him.

There was so much more he had to say about that absurd, selfish scheme, yet to speak would have needed breath.

No air moved within his chest.

No pulse beat in his breast.

Jane grinned, flashing him that playful, imperious smile of hers.

"I should think you'd be honored really, to do something so special for me.... Now, we must put you in your proper place, once and for all."

The lovers kissed once more, and David groaned, the timbre of timber reverberating through his figure.

His was moving again, but not by his will.

Staggering forwards, body rocking and clattering, the wooden man walked out of the room.

His boots throbbed where they struck the marble flooring, passing down the corridor, but the displeasure eased as he reached the lawn outside.

The landscape around him was a silver painting of impossible stillness.

He moved through it slowly, fighting his own legs as they carried him on that inexorable march, turning ever towards the lake.

It shone through the trees, calling him onward as he staggered ever closer.

Towards that accursed plinth.

*His pedestal.*

David's boots clacked, as they stepped up onto the masonry.

Each planted there, and seemed to set at once, as though his body were taking root somehow in the stone.

The irony was not lost on him.

That great mirror below stretched out, beautiful and dead, lit by that vast eye within its depths.

It no longer terrified him.

Inevitability was the antithesis of fear.

As he stared out, across the water, it simply showed him his own image.

A garishly-painted young man of wood and lacquer.

A statue of a jockey in full racing dress.

His silks were finely recreated by the hands of an expert crafter, his features rendered with immaculately conceived and painstakingly-preserved detail that made him seem almost alive, merely frozen in temporary stillness.

Yet that petrification was absolute.

David was that wooden body, those painted clothes and layers of coating.

Sealed in place, hands at his back, legs spread, he was one solid piece.

A sculpture, no more capable of motion than the trees and hills around him.

In the gaze of the moon they were *all* petrified. Existence was frozen, lifeless and eternal, as though nothing had *ever* moved in this surreal world.

Only the dull, burning throb of his solidified form still moved within him, as he felt his remade body.

The pulse of that knot in his loins, and the tingle of the faintest whisper of wind, as it caressed his surface. Every part of the sculpture was alive with pleasure, calling, *pleading* to be touched, to be released in *every* sense, yet the more it ached with sensation, to more clearly it felt its petrification.

Absolute denial, wrapped up in unfathomable arousal.

The jockey was naked, yet there was nothing to expose. It had no genitals, no digits or features, not even limbs or organs. All was mere wood now, carved and polished, painted with the designs of a face and clothing, those paintwork details sealed with the lacquer which hugged every fiber of that sensual form all at once.

Wrapped in a gown of her own, and hugging her lover at her side, Jane smiled, as she regarded her new decoration.

"He turned out wonderfully," Joseph murmured.

"Yes," she replied, as she leaned in, to stroke those unmoving lips.

The jockey seemed almost to shiver, yet the effect was a mere illusion of the light and shadows.

"Such a beautiful piece. I shall have to come visit it often."

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Even after Jane and her lover retired for the night, David remained there, conscious and alert.

Wooden as it was, his head was clear at last, after months of haze, thoughts racing while his body stood fast in place.

He understood now, how they'd duped him.

How he had played into the scheme, with his pride and stubbornness... and lust.

Desire dominated his mind even now.

The aching, *creaking* stimulation of his nullified form burned hotter each time he recalled the Lady Jane, the woman who had done this to him.

She had taken his sex, as she had everything else, yet in that absence his body yearned all the more, eroticism percolating through his every moment and idea, as the statue shuddered without motion atop its stand.

As the moon at last sunk down, below the hills, and the sun rose up, to dapple the grasslands and tint the ocean beyond with those rich, deep hues, the mist rose in the valley, and also in his thoughts.

It was a new form of fog, settling over his mind – the haze of *lust*. Desire for a pleasure, a relief, he was no longer capable of feeling.

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David's owner was as good as her word.

Jane's walks in the gardens stopped by the lake each day, to linger with her would-be suitor and drink in the gorgeous sights.

At times, Joseph joined her, the two laughing as they told their statue all about the day they were having, and their plans and pleasures yet to come.

The gratitude was clear in both, yet... at times the statue struggled to recall why.

Or to understand what interest they would have, in speaking so animatedly to a wooden sculpture.

Still, they were always welcome visits.

So too were the times when a small bird would flutter down, to alight on its cap, or a deer would amble over to the lake, to take a draft of the cool, refreshing waters.

In truth, it was seldom lonely by the lake.

Butterflies danced about the rushes and dragonflies raced overhead. Field mice and rabbits, even wildcats, came and went about their lives. Each was a glimpse into a whole other world, an existence utterly unlike that which was observing them, crossing over only momentarily, as their path took them through the statue's spot.

When night crept up the valley and quiet did finally come, the sculpture would simply stand there, as ever it did, and feel the tightness, the constriction of its own form. The motionless, reassuring solidity of wood and paint, tingling all over with sensation yet devoid of structure and denied all wants.

If a leaf should tickle it at the ear, the jockey could only be tickled.

Totally helpless at it was, the statue found that oddly peaceful.

Unlike those times when a human would come, to clean and polish it.

To massage hard and unyielding oak, until it sang with stimulation.

The statue liked it best when the lady herself took on that task.

She knew just how to knead and stroke it.

Her hands always lingered just right, on those tautest tangles of fiber which ached between thighs and behind lips.

When she touched it, the statue *burned* for her. For her softness and warmth, and for her beauty too. For her to give it that pleasure it so needed, the release its every fiber was demanding.

It couldn't even put form to the want – it knew only *that* it wanted. Yet it knew too, that its wish could never be.

Somehow, that impossibility, that absolute, abject denial, only focused the passion.

Heightened the pleasure and frustration, in equal measure.

The statue had no choice.

It could *only* feel, and so it felt everything, all at once, in exquisite detail.

Even after Jane left, it would tingle for hours on end, feeling, experiencing, sinking into the sensations of its world.

The breaths of the trees and the lapping of the water.

The rustle of grass and the babble of brook.

All enclosed it, teased and stimulated it, as it looked out across the enchanting demesne which was its everything.

Elysium.