

Florian's Tale

<https://www.patreon.com/ralwatt>

Chapter 5

Garbed as he was, Florian could as well have been destined for some mummery of the summer as the social event of the season, but as oafish as his uneven steps appeared to all eyes, the costume wearing the man was clearly above such trivialities.

Lesser guests and serving staff alike parted in the gallery, as Wooster led him with a paternal hand towards the source of the buzz of jollity ahead, where there awaited his master – Wooster's, and for that night, Florian's also it would seem.

Two footmen went before them, hastening to see to the towering halves of the principal door.

Silence fell as they parted.

Grand would have been an impertinence, in describing a ballroom so fine.

Every surface glittered with the artisan's touch, gilt engravings and fine-wrought metalwork decorating wall and window alike, the latter rising up as black obelisks, framing the night with their cross-patterns of golden glimmer.

Over the heads of states and institutions, hung crowns of finest crystal; three of an otherwise singular kind – chandeliers more magnificent than burning fountains of flame, any one of that radiant triad surpassing all others in the nation.

Under polished riding boots, Florian felt the rigidity of marble, surface filigreed with the Grosvenor family colors and crest.

It seemed somehow presumptuous to tread upon such an image, but atop that great foundation there stood the figures of his fellow guests, and the artist appraised them as he might any composition.

Fanciful as the attire that evening was, his lordship's guests had not the clarity of vision or boldness of will to throw all of themselves into their roles. Many donned a simple faux-nose and wore mere slips of embroidered fabric or hand-drawn cutouts as ears in their hair – paper tigers all. Likewise were the impersonations. Numerous Napoleons were presented in varying heights and degrees of devotion, some appropriating merely a suitably military jacket and concordant posture, trusting to imagination on behalf of the viewer to complete the picture. Others had selected less villainous roles for the night, posing as men of her Majesty's government, or other dignitaries of the land – identified more by their vocal

insistence to their role than any quirk of carriage or manner. Then there were the predictable appearances of a half-dozen highwaymen, and a proliferation of persons biblical in nature, naturally still robed in the finest modern styles of eveningwear.

Not all were so mundane, however, His eye picked out too a multiplicity of the most fashionable contemporary figures of fiction. There were a score of Dickens' latest caricatures, a selection of figures from the minds of the sisters Brontë, and impersonations of a startling number of Austen luminaries. He saw even an especially daring brace of impressively-realized patchwork creations, a couple which could only have stepped from the pages of *The Modern Prometheus*.

These last notwithstanding, however, it was a poor showing for a costume ball.

Lacking, as most outfits were, Florian felt all the more cognizant of his own quality, for good and ill.

Even those monsters of Shelley's hand could not claim to have a more compelling presentation than he.

That dubious honor was proven, as the horns from the distant stage announced his arrival.

Tension gripped the artist once more as all faces turned upon him, and he recognized in them many a former client... and unknowing victim of his past indiscretions.

Spouses too were known to him, for they had been his accomplices in those transgressions, yet they showed none of the longing or adoration now which had so gripped and bound them to him on those past occasions.

'The moustaches', he thought, 'the powders and rouge! Even my own mother should not know me tonight!'

The thought was a great comfort.

"Presenting Mister Florian Clay," Wooster boomed.

"Forward.... March!"

The booming voice of Lord Grosvenor was a compulsion not to be defied, and Florian stumbled forwards bashfully as the orchestra struck up a march, full, absurd bombast dripping from each militaristic bar.

He found himself suddenly grateful that his blushes were concealed, as he made a spectacle of his person. Each step was a challenge, his limbs too stiff for a proper stride, his boots slipping on the polished floor, and in his perturbed state he could not have been said to entirely rise to it.

The rumble of mirth was just audible under the music, as less than welcoming eyes followed his progress, towards the middle of the grand chamber, where Lord Grosvenor awaited.

His lordship was in full military dress, a dazzling figure, medals gleaming and gold trim aglow, and his soldier for the night made all haste, not to keep him waiting.

From balconies high overhead were focused the rays of a set of newly-installed lime lights, another flourish of the bold new age. Their dazzling white beams focused on a spot just a pace shy of his lordship, where all eyelines converged.

Florian faltered once more in his uneven stride.

This was a great deal more than simply attending in costume.

The valet, Wooster, gave him the final shove which sent the man staggering into the limelight, teetering on his toes one moment, then wobbling back as his rigid limbs found balance.

“Salute!”

The word boomed through body and mind, a drumbeat which he must surely follow – he was compelled, *gripped* by his master’s voice.

It ought to have been a foolish thing, to bark orders at a party guest – such a command could, nay, *should* have been disregarded as a matter of course – yet Florian’s arm raised before he had even contemplated disobedience.

His leathers felt tighter than ever, as his body twitched in that cruel brig of his breeches, as Florian realized the power this man held over him.

It felt... natural... *proper* even, that he obey the imposing presence around which the whole mansion orbited.

The figure looming at the center of his own thoughts.

It was absurd, he reminded himself – he was a man grown, yet he was acting giddy as a schoolboy.

“At ease!”

He shuddered as he hastened to heed the instruction – the imperative.

“This young gentleman has kindly agreed to join me tonight, as my guest of honor.”

Lord Grosvenor was speaking once more, yet the words and the meaning were disassociated in his mind.

The former were sounds more than speech, powerful, *resonant* utterances, which seemed to wash over and through him, and press in on all sides.

Tight leathers and cotton layers were not all which gripped and restrained him, the pressure of those powder layers and the grip of that nonsensical codpiece like masterful hands on his skin.

They seemed to tighten, as Lord Grosvenor spoke on, dragging him down into the depths of that voice, as if he were sinking into a sea of sound.

All Florian could see were those eyes, glowing moons shining into the oceanic depths of his mind, as all other lights were doused.

"I am most displeased with the conduct of my soldier of late," spoke his lordship.

With those words, the darkness seemed to harshen, as the soldier shuddered in place.

His marching had been clumsy, it was true, yet... was this not all a mere play for the night? How could it be that he felt real fright, the fear his master might be displeased by his actions?

"If you are to continue to serve me, you shall want for retraining, and so I mean to begin at once. You must learn to serve your master *correctly* and *diligently*."

Of course... that was only natural. Only proper. A thought as compelling as any young lady's affections, for a soldier must ever obey his commander, faithfully and well.

It was... all part of the act. He had to put on a good show, for his lordship.

"Thank you, Master!"

Florian had not thought to speak, yet the words came as easily as breathing.

"And, by all means *chastely*," Lord Grosvenor continued.

The laughter was the mere lapping of waves, far overhead.

Those meaningful glances, passing between lord and gathered ladies, the twinkles of distant starlight, too far and profound for a simple soldier to perceive.

"It was many years ago now, that I first encountered the late giant of the field of human compulsion, Franz Mesmer, and his techniques of voice and affect have proven invaluable ever since in bending the weak-minded to my will. With a mere word, even a look, I can exert influence."

Lord Grosvenor turned his gaze back upon the soldier, and Florian stiffened further to attention.

“Such as over our guest here, the *Casanova of Hyde Park* as he so charmingly styles himself. He is not simply my soldier tonight, and I not merely his commanding general – this evening young Florian shall be my *possession*.”

The shiver passing over him at that word said everything, as Florian tensed in his restraints.

“Which shall, as a matter of course, make myself his *owner*.”

Nethers tensing and twitching at such a twisted, taboo thought, a breathless whine escaped Florian’s lips.

Those eyes were staring deep into him once more, through the veils of knowledge and learning and experience, to the primal firmament atop which those layers of artifice had been painstakingly built.

“You are not a man, Florian, you are a *toy*, not a person and guest, but a *plaything* for my amusement, made ready and eager to serve me, however I should desire.”

It was an affront, surely, to speak to any visitor so... yet as aware as Florian was of that on the surface, the eyes captivated him all the same, as the words acted upon him too fundamentally to ever challenge.

Speaking slowly, with purposeful rhythm, Lord Grosvenor’s voice resonated with a *geological* depth, as if his voice were the reverberations of a great mountain, shaking Florian to the very roots.

“That is why you were made, *carved* into my ideal figure, from a corpus of *wood*, not flesh. Yes... you hear it, and you feel that it *must* be so. You are a wooden model, an amusement crafted in mere imitation of a man.”

Hearing those incoherent assertions ought to have been comical, yet as his host spoke, Florian felt truth in how his body grew stiffer, rigid clothes no longer the restriction on soft flesh, but quite the reverse.

“With such a body of wood, you cannot move or flex as a man would – your dowel joints can only pivot with the clumsiness of a doll, your limbs quite unsuited now, to touch or entice those upon which you should not lay hands....”

The words were emerging as tectonic rumblings still, yet they seemed to ripple over him, to gather and focus wherever his lord described.

It was as if all pronouncements were inarguably so - his joints felt frozen, refusing to turn or twist, as stiffly segmented surfaces met at impossible locations and angles. Indeed, he imagined he felt the very parts described, as he struggled to operate his arms, the tightness of his attire perfectly simulating the surreal friction of *pins* in his elbows, connecting

together the rods of limbs more like trunks, appendages settling into the set tracks of a model.

Florian would have bent forward, to better examine himself, but his coats were too tight, keeping him rigid, as if a hardening chest was holding him appropriately upright.

“You wear not the honored colors of her Majesty’s guard, but a facile facsimile, a crude wooden body, carved, painted and lacquered to impersonate most impudently a true man. I may say also, that you shall steal no hearts with such a form, so far from your usual, *fanciful* fashions, so deftly calculated to entice impressionable young ladies to sin.”

Impossible as it should be, the soldier could feel just what he was told, as though it had ever been that way.

His clothing was unnaturally flat against his skin, folds and creases forgotten in the smooth surfaces.

He felt his flesh tingling with a sense of queer exposure, of *nudity*, as though that shining expanse of reds and blues and beige meant to conceal his true self *were* his body. He could feel everything, could sense his curving lines and planes, clear as if he stood wholly bare in the middle of the ballroom. He perceived the cool marble under naked feet... only they were boots... he felt the wafting air of the warm room, waving over un-textured skin and rough whiskers... only they were clothes and costume... he endured even the tantalizing grinding of wood layers, as he flexed his joints... which must surely be flesh and blood.

His mind railed against his senses, as they assured him of his altered reality.

Certainly, he had worn fabric earlier... yet now he was smooth, with the sheen of lacquering.

For all that he knew to be true, Florian felt sure only of the words which were spoken directly into his soul.

Enticing him so commandingly to adhere to their will.

Insisting that he were really, merely a wooden toy.

In a moment of defiant boldness, Florian determined to prove his manhood, if only to himself.

Raising a hand unordered distressed him somehow, but he brutalized that emotion as he struggled with his limb.

It would not *turn* as he wanted, stopped with a thunk, that abominable, *erogenous* rub of wood against its own permitting only for his arm to rise straight ahead, and granting his elbow likewise a sorely restricted range. His clothes must have grown tighter somehow.

Clumsy, awkward and uncertain, his oaken appendage was manipulated into something akin to the place he desired.

His hand *clacked* against his thigh.

Feeling the sharpness of hardened, coated timber meeting its like, quite dissimilar to the yielding, pliant flesh he expected, the soldier shook in place, joints creaking as he probed for some sign of the humanity which must surely lie hidden under that befuddling outer coat.

None was revealed, as he explored up and down the wooden surface.

“A mannequin, more than a man, as you see,” the voice stated, trembling every fiber of his grain as it spoke in summation of its absolute ruling.

“But we cannot not abide licentious misconduct from my possessions, nor permit any notions thereof to linger,” Lord Grosvenor went on in sentencing.

Cognizance tingled through his thoughts, even as spoken contact raked his baser nerves.

Lord Grosvenor referred not to unsatisfying performance at the ball, but of the litany of erotic escapades and near-scandals which had followed Florian there.

“That *member* of which you are most proud is a tawdry and lewd feature of which no soldier of mine should boast.”

The words were a hand on his hips, encircling his loin to grip, to *squeeze* as his breeches constricted his sex, and Florian gasped, as the pressure intensified, pushing forward into the touch of that mesmeric tongue as he felt the surface of his crotch.

And nothing more.

“No longer shall your *weapon* be put to such wholly unsavory purpose – for I pronounce you wholly *disarmed*.”

That paltry, imprisoned mound of maleness ached, throbbing with desire, beating in time with the throb of speech from his possessor, yet Florian felt in that exaggerated expanse of carved nethers nothing. No more than solidity and dense, taut tension, as the perfectly painted stitchwork of his trousers tingled with erotic pleasure.

He felt that clearly as though it were a part of his own body, the design of the clothing, printed, *painted* onto him ached, even as all notion of the manhood beneath was forgotten.

His hand met the expanse of wood with a clunk, and the soldier gasped through stiffened lips, in delirious, wanton desire, fingers slithering over the unyielding surface, finding nothing there to slake the thirst that very same mound kindled like a fire throughout his hips.

His proudest appendage, that impressive shaft and head which formed his imposing phallus... was gone.

In that loss, he felt his paintwork *ache* with pleasure.

A stimulation which demanded response... yet the only answer was one for which he retained no capacity.

Florian could not defy the will of his possessor – was in fact wholly incapable of pursuing such improprieties at all – for the man had deprived him of manhood.

So that he could better obey.

Even his flesh heeded that all-encompassing imperative, the need which beat as a drum at the core of his being, to submit to his master.

In that realization, so perverse in magnitude and impossible in sheer reality, he reeled with the rush of satiety, at so diligently surrendering his sex on command.

Fingers squeaked against his own blanked body, feeling the annulment of his most precious bodypart, reduced to mere lacquered patterning on his hips, his artfully composed picture of loins perversely exposing a blankness of wood more sensual than ever it was as flesh.

Wordlessly he cried, mouth hinging open in tones of simulated passion, emerging as the notes of a music box, *imitating* the humiliated disarray of a man.

It was the sound of a toy, reveling in that intoxicating intensification of pleasure from the sacrifice of even release, that it might better follow the will of its possessor.

So very many eyes were staring at Florian in that moment, as his body creaked with terrible desire and taboo delight; the faces of all London and much of the Empire beyond, gathered to see his willing denigration.

“Yes, Florian Clay, you are a toy soldier,” the lord went on. “Even those once skillful hands are mere clumsy lumps, shaped merely in semblance of fingers, rather than being possessed of any articulation or ability.”

The former painter stared, as the truth was spoken into being upon his very body, seeing, feeling how his digits had lost their dexterity, as they lined up like soldiers on parade, implacable and immobile atop the hand-shapes which tipped his inflexible arms.

No matter how he might try to bend them, it was to no avail, as he felt not even the presence of musculature, let alone the freedom of disparate, animate appendages to his palms.

“You need harbor no doubts in that excellently rounded chest of yours, nor suffer any uncertainty to enter that wooden head atop your shoulders – thoughts are the preserve of

those equipped to think them, and you are a mere doll. A facsimile, *suggestive* of a person, yet decidedly not one. Even your face is proof of that. A simplistic *painting*, not unlike those you used to produce in fact – a crude yet effectual representation of something you are not.”

Frozen hands jerked upwards, and clattered uselessly into the carving of a man, layered powder and blush a mere appliqué over worked wood, his brows, his nose and whiskers, even his eyes all hard and still, frozen in the stern stare of a toy soldier.

It was all so... totally impossible, an opium dream conjured up by the affectations of his imposing host....

He was a wooden puppet, his master’s doll, shaped in simplified imitation of a person.