

Dolls

Nujhat J.

King's Mill was a small town. A quiet little square hidden by the trees on the cliffed coast of Oregon, reserved for the few who found seclusion to be an idea of serene. It only had a few dozen people inhabiting it. Somewhere around sixty, maybe. The sky was always blue, the rustling of the lively green leaves of the trees mixing with the sound of waves rushing against the cliffside to fill the soft breeze with an intoxicating sound. It was pitiful.

The folks enjoying its quiet were like chain and gears. Everyone was on one schedule. Women either cooked and cleaned at home, made fabric and clothes for all the residents, or taught the children. Men went into the woods to cut lumber, built houses, made shoes, et cetera. The children went to the one school the town had, only to grow up to the clockwork lives their parents ran.

That was it. Wake up, eat, go to work, come home, eat, sleep, rinse and repeat. No reason to work, no reason to eat, no reason to wake up, or go to sleep in the first place.

For what was sleep but simply another part of a list set into place by a gathering of purposeless dolls in their own little corner of the world? What was it but another chore to be done in limited time?

Nothing.

Which is why they loved it so much. Because all they needed was something to follow, even if it was unspoken, unwritten, unrealized. There was no point in it, but they did it anyway. As if someday, at some hour, some moment, they'd get to finally stop their relentless routine and say "I did it." As if some day they'd get to say "I'm happy."

Humans are strange creatures. They want something bigger when you tell them to but tell them nothing and you've found yourself a herd of sheep. No push, no movement, no difference. But give them one change...

The days got shorter. The sun set an hour or two before it was supposed to. It was a bit bold, since they based their little doll lives around its rise and set, but it led to some interesting events.

They cut their time to sleep short. Not that shocking, since most of their work required being able to see clearly. So another few hours got cut off. A few

patches of grass suddenly disappeared and reappeared in the wrong place, changing their routes to and from work.

What changed them the most was the grass. Then they realized how much shorter their days had turned. They were now only working for five hours and sleeping for fifteen. That was all that was actually different. But once they were set off, there was no putting them back on.

As they realized the differences, their sense of order shattered and they let all their insanity out. Every little thing turned into a change or fear or demon.

Every single one of them went crazy, blaming demons and each other. They pointed fingers like the change in the size of a building meant certain death for those living in it. They spread their sick little mind sets to their children, making divides in the playground, the woods, the mill. Everywhere.

Everyone was against everyone. No one was good and no one was sane. It didn't matter if it was because they started scapegoats of each other or if it was because they were all just imagining the houses getting taller. Either way, the town had gone mad.

Then one night, while they lay under their covers, possibly afraid of their own children or the person next to them in the bed being possessed by the "demon" causing all this, they all felt the air thicken and fill with sickening smoke.

As they walked out of their homes, throats ready to make another accusation of demons or insane neighbors, they all witnessed a hellfire like one never witnessed by mankind. It towered over the town's center, spreading terrifyingly fast. It was then that they reached the first reasonable conclusion of all of them in weeks.

They spent two hours of dragging buckets and buckets of water to the fire to make no visible change, go back into their hoses and wells, and come to find it spreading to the next house over, then the house after that, and the one after that.

It was an unstoppable force, like a glimpse of the eternal fires in the deepest pits of that place that the priest liked to go on about. And that's what they felt as it swallowed the whole body of the town, pulling their bodies into it like it had a gravitational pull and scorched their skin and filled their lungs and crawled up their clothes.

But its hunger still wasn't satiated. It kept spreading to the trees, burning the whole forest down to the ground. It only stopped when it had consumed every

possible thing within its reach, ceasing to exist in a wasteland of its own creation, filled with lost lives and futures.

Because of one little change in this herd of dolls, they ended up killing each other. Because they were so stupid to let a change in their regular environment and schedule, they turned against each other. They lost all logic and forgot every sense of realism. They put their self-worth in their meaningless routine and it ended up killing them in the end.

That's why I don't regret making their sun go down sooner. That's why I don't feel a hint of remorse over their lives. Because sooner or later, they would've ended up dead anyway, either at their own hands or because of each other.

I found amusement in watching their useless efforts to set out the fire that killed them. It was inevitable. Every schedule diverts at some point, and these dolls were too idiotic to settle with the changes.

At the end of it all, though, I feel a little disappointed. King's Mill was the last seclusion I could mess with and not set off the whole human race. It'll be a few hundred years before they build another one, I think.

Oh, well. They were only humans, anyway. I could probably entertain myself more by watching a rat scamper around than I did by watching them. I'm underwhelmed at this species. I should've made them a little more interesting. It's too late now, though. They're stuck in their routines.

But I guess I shouldn't expect much more out of them. After all, they're just my dolls.