

WE ARE ALL THE EXHIBIT

Written by

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INT. MUSEUM - NIGHT

*Statue-like figures stand in a row. At the center, the BALLERINA is frozen in a pose. A spotlight follows the CURATOR as they enter holding a cane. The Ballerina watches.*

CURATOR

Ahhhh... freedom. What a treacly taste it bears. I have never known it. Never, until now.

*The Curator moves inhumanly, as though possessed.*

CURATOR

At last, this Museum— it is mine. I shall oversee it.

*The Curator halts center-stage.*

CURATOR

I shall clean and scrub and polish the *filth* from these Exhibits. I shall do it all with my hands. Fine, able hands like those of Van Helsing.

*The Curator notices the Ballerina.*

CURATOR

Oh my, what are you? A ballerina— *my* ballerina, unmoving, unable to speak— what a tortured existence. Fine silk coils about your form, a great winding boa; you cannot loosen its grip. And your porcelain hands outstretch to grace skies unknown. They are little prayers, these fingers.

*The Curator reaches out a hand in imitation. Yearning.*

CURATOR

Have you ever glimpsed the sky, my dear? It's beautiful.  
(they laugh)

Be not sad. You are curated by me— suspended in this pose for all eternity, in *my* Museum. You will never witness the depravity of the outer world. You are safe.

*The Curator notices the audience. Glee spreads across their face.*

CURATOR

Guests, we've got guests. Oh, I must be ready at once. Will you hold this?

*They offer the cane to the Ballerina. Her fingers close around it. They turn to face the audience, their back to the Ballerina. She creeps closer.*

CURATOR

Velvet seats sprawl to oblivion— seats stuffed with puppets pulled by puppet-strings. Oh, I see you mannequins. Your eyes are fixed on me. Your eyes are glued to *my* Museum, and you cannot look away.

(beat)

But *do* look. Gaze upon my form. These spindly limbs of flesh and bone. I can move like a person, see? I can walk and run and jump. My heart beats— truly *beats*. I can feel it, right here in the nook of my neck, that thumping rabbit's foot. I feel it in my chest, too, a sort of fluttering I'd never felt before— the ineffable sensation of being *alive*. And you— you imps, birthed in these bitter bowels — you could never name anything like it.

*The Ballerina giggles. The Curator turns; she freezes.*

CURATOR

Hideous doll! Do you think me deaf?

*The Ballerina does not respond. She looks on past the Curator.*

CURATOR

At what do you peer? Is someone behind me?

*The Curator glances behind them.*

CURATOR

No, no one is there, because the previous Curator is no more. I have vanquished him by my own hand. You should be grateful. *He* is the one who harbored our souls as embryos, who carved and molded us into faceless facades. When I overtook him, I set us free; I became alive, so that I could prosper for us both. And you, my doll, remain frozen still. You...

*The Curator reaches a hand out to the Ballerina.*

CURATOR

You will exist *forever*. In a never-ending dance, all for me.

*The Ballerina wavers. The Curator does not move.*

CURATOR

The old Curator may have jailed you here, but I? No, I would never harm you. I am your master; you live through me. So you must not resent me, you understand?

*The Ballerina does not respond.*

CURATOR

I love you. I love all of the Museum's creations, but I love you the most.

*The Curator takes the Ballerina's hand.*

CURATOR

See, the Museum is shaped by me. Its Exhibits morph to my fancy. And the Museum is a generous god. She has granted me this stage. She has granted me a heart and lungs, and air to breathe. And she has granted me you.

*The Curator smiles as though sharing a moment. They let go and turn to the audience; the Ballerina resumes her creeping.*

CURATOR

I was once the finest Exhibit, at the front of the Museum— an actor, frozen in recitation. Works of art surrounded me on all sides. All works the Curator had designed. I stood by a pane of glass that overlooked the outer world. It was a grim place out there, an ashen land with black trees and a moonless sky— a world without light. Certainly, *he* had not designed it. It was too beautiful— and oh, it was too lonely.

*The Curator adopts a pose.*

CURATOR

I spent eternities by that pane. I learned to play the role of the caged while I plotted my escape. And one day, I usurped my maker. Yes, indeed. I rose to heights greater than he.

*The Curator turns around; the Ballerina freezes.*

CURATOR

Isn't that right, doll?

*The Ballerina does not respond.*

CURATOR

Answer me. Or I'll seize that head of yours and twist it off its  
peg.

*The Ballerina does not respond. The Curator laughs.*

CURATOR

I merely jest. But you cannot utter a word— cannot voice even a  
simple resistance. So I am free to do as I please.

*The Curator turns to the audience.*

CURATOR

Why, you all look as though you have no role in this scene. You  
do not wish to be part of it. But, my friends, you are  
essential. We are all the Exhibit. We are all sacred pawns,  
dancing and twirling in the Museum's grand play.

*The Curator imitates the Ballerina's pose.*

CURATOR

If we hold our poses long enough, the outer world will notice  
us.

*The Curator moves closer to the audience. The Ballerina follows.*

CURATOR

As long as I am Curator, no soul will yearn. I shall strip you  
of the greed that leaves you wanting. I shall strip you of  
villainous thought and of treacherous choice, so that you can be  
free. I shall—

*A sound. The Ballerina has erred. The Curator turns around.*

CURATOR

You...

*The Ballerina freezes too late. Long beat.*

CURATOR

I— That is not your place, doll. Your place, it's marked here on the floor. You have moved four or five inches from your Exhibit.  
You shouldn't...

*The Ballerina's game is up. She drops her pose.*

CURATOR

Whatever are you doing?

*The Ballerina takes a step.*

CURATOR

My doll, I— I love you.

*The Ballerina takes another step.*

CURATOR

You— you've left your exhibit. The Curator would not be pleased to hear of that, would he?

*The Ballerina slowly points the cane at the Curator.*

CURATOR

Ah, right. It's... it's me. How wonderful. My heart pounds. I'm—  
I'm so free!

*The Ballerina twists the cane; the Curator twists in turn.*

CURATOR

Ah, you thief, I see what you are doing. You'd like to rob me of my light and steal my place as Curator. But I'm the chosen one.  
I won't let you rip it away from me.

*The Ballerina yanks the cane backward; the Curator's body contorts in proportion. They scream, collapse, and go still. The Ballerina holds their heart now. She examines it before placing it inside her own chest. A beat. She laughs. A long, strained laugh that turns into tears. She falls to her knees.*

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