The Toymaker

           It was morning again. The sun was just rising, its golden rays spilling out across the town of Oaken. The snow shone like gold underneath its powerful gaze. Carver stretched out of bed, his bones creaking. The children called him ‘Old Carver’ for a reason. His hair was snow white and thinning, and veins stood pronounced underneath his translucent skin. But it would be a mistake to say Carver was on his way out. Anyone could see the spring in his step and the clarity in his bright blue eyes. It was clear that he’d be alive for a long, long time.

        For now the cobblestone streets were quiet, holding their breath, waiting for something to happen. But soon the market would open, and the village would come alive with the sounds of people. Carver smiled, looking forward to a new day in the toy store. He fixed himself some breakfast, whistling as the aroma of coffee filled the air. After a few sips of the drink, he descended into his workshop, the faces of toys welcoming him back.

He heard a knock on the door. The toys would have to be saved for later. He climbed the steps and opened the door, light filling the dark entryway. Along with the light came Tim Woodley, a little boy no more than ten years old. He was like a son to Carver. Carver’s face lit up, hugging the boy and gesturing for him to come in.

“I’m glad you came, son. You’ll be excited to see what I made for you,” Carver smiled warmly.

“I bet what I made is better,” Tim laughed, opening his hands to reveal a wind up mouse. He twisted the knob and released it, making the mouse do a little dance around his palms.

“That is definitely better than what I made,” Carver chuckled. Tim lifted his chin a little higher, and a grin spread wide across his face. Carver patted him on the shoulder. “One day, you’ll make an even better toymaker than me. You’ll invent the new Lego. Just you wait and see.”

“I don’t know. Remember the last doll I made? Awful,” Tim shook his head.

“You’re more capable than you think. As for my gift,” Carver pulled a tiny stuffed cat out of his pocket, and placed it in Tim’s hand. Tim grinned, and set it in his bag.

“Better open up the shop now,” Carver said, turning on the lights and restocking the shelves of his store. His wares were extensive, toys inhabiting every nook and cranny of the little store. He always had the perfect toy for everyone, and never disappointed the children that rushed into his store. They were waiting outside now. Tim opened the door for him, and children spilled inside like water from a dam. They greeted Carver and Tim before immersing themselves into the world of toys. Most of them would leave around noon for lunch. For now they oohed and aahed at the walls of toys. When Carver first opened the shop, he’d been overwhelmed by the sheer number of kids. But now he’d grown used to it, and with Tim helping him run the business, it was smooth sailing.

“Aw, can I get this toy? Please?”

“Sweet! This dinosaur is so cool.”

“I’m saving up for the princess doll.”

“Ryan, come over here and look at this one!”

“Hey! I want that one!”

Carver smiled as an argument unfolded about who would get the stuffed kitten. Fights weren’t uncommon.

“You already got the dog stuffed animal. You don’t need a kitten too!”

“Says you, who has a giant penguin stuffie at your house!”

“Yeah? Well-” The argument was cut off by a rap at the door. The children went silent. Only strangers to the shop would arrive at this time. Carver creaked open the door, and a blast of cold wind swallowed the room. An angular woman dressed in rich red velvet entered the store, her heels clacking against the wooden floors. Everyone knew who she was; Ms Woodley had quite an infamous reputation among the children.

“Where is Tim?” She snapped at one of the little girls. The girl stumbled back, and reluctantly pointed to where Tim was standing. The crowd parted for her, and she click-clacked over to Tim.

“I told you I don’t want you here anymore, Timothy. Do I have to explain to you again?” She said coolly.

“Mother, I like it here. I don’t care if you don’t!” Tim said.

“You spend all your days here, Tim. I worry about you.”

“Worry about what? There’s nothing to worry about, mother.” Tim rolled his eyes.

“Nothing to worry about? Ever wonder about what happened to Sarah Hill? Her skull was *crushed*. Several witnesses confirmed that she was last spotted leaving this very toy store. What do you think of that?”

“I think you’re being stupid. How does that even relate to Carver? It’s not his fault that some stupid lady hit her head. Serves her right anyways. Sarah was unbearable.” Tim groaned in memory of her.

“You will take that back right *now* Timothy. I just want you safe. You belong at home, not with this *pedophile* and *psychopath*.” Ms Woodley hissed.

“Shut up! What do you know about him? He’s about as much as a pedophile as you are a good mother,” Tim shouted. The other children gaped. “Carver is the father I never had! And I wish I had him as my parent instead of being stuck with you.”

“Tim, you’re being ridiculous. Look around you. Do you think this toymaker has anything good in store for you? He just wants you to be another little toy he can play with,” She spun around to face the other children. “That’s all he wants from you. He acts like a kind old man. He acts like he has good intentions,” She glared at Carver with her cold eyes. “All he wants are blind followers,” She looked at Tim again. “You better talk some sense into yourself, or I’ll have to do it for you. Now come along Tim. Goodbye Carver.” She spat.

Tim looked forlornly at Carver. Carver nodded, gesturing for him to go. Tim got one last look at the shop, the kids and Carver. Then he was yanked out the door by the red talons of his mother. An echoing quiet blanketed the room. The children filed out, leaving Carver alone. He paced the room, thinking of how he could get back Tim. That woman was a menace. The kids believed her too; he could see the doubt in their eyes as they left the shop. The children would come back. But how long would it be before they doubted him again? How long till Ms Woodley would cause trouble again...

Carver resigned to his workshop, where he started creating a new puppet. He carved out the body first, thin and sharp. After he finished the body - a woman’s, as it seemed - he began carving out her face. He worked with precision. Every carve he made was deliberate. Miniscule, tiny strokes gave the outline of the woman’s features. She had arched eyebrows, a sharp nose and dark red lips. Carver delicately placed curls of black cloth on her head. Finally, her fashioned her a dress of red velvet. Detail was key. For a while he examined the puppet, tossing it between his hands.

“No good. This wood was never made for carving,” He shook his head. He snapped off the head, and tossed it in a pile of discarded toys. Carver glanced outside the window to see that it was pitch black outside. He sighed, and whistled as he tucked himself in for bed.

The next morning started off as a peaceful one. Carver sipped his coffee, studying the empty streets of the village. He noticed a gathering of cars and people around the Woodley’s house. Carver gazed out the window as Ms Woodley was carried out on a stretcher. His eyes weren’t what they used to be, but even he could see that she was dead. Her neck was bent at a strange angle. There was a mixture of horror and satisfaction in the crowd. Ms Woodley was not popular amongst the townsfolk.

Carver slipped on his coat and shoes, exiting his shop and working his way through the crowd of people who surrounded the corpse. He reached Tim, whose sobbing could be heard above the murmur of the crowd.

“It’s going to be alright son,” Carver held and comforted him. Tim nodded slowly. “Let’s get you out of the cold.” The people parted for them, and soon they were both back at the toy store. Carver lit the fireplace, and draped a blanket over Tim’s shoulders. Poor boy. He was only ten years old. But it had to be done.

“Tim, I know you aren’t ready to think about this now, but you know you have a home here with me. I love you like a son and I’ll take care of you.”

“Thank you, Carver. For... everything.”

“No thank you required. Carver smiled. He patted his shoulder, and left him to warm up in front of the fireplace.

Carver sighed and padded down the stairs to his workshop. There would be more puppets like Ms Woodley to carve. There was much work to do. He sat down in his chair and started making a new puppet.

Word Count: 1,574