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The Girl in the Portrait

Margot stumbled through her apartment door, cursing as she tripped over the uneven step. She carried three large bags on each arm, letting the bags slide off her arms, she walked towards the fridge. She grabbed a simple chicken salad from the fridge. Less calories, she thought.

Margot ate silently as she contemplated the day, her mind immediately wandering back to the first shop and the painting. She looked down at her tote, a strange compulsion enveloping her as she stared at it. An irresistible urge to hold the painting, touch it, see it, took control of her as she bent down, grabbing the painting from the bag, a crazed look clouded her eyes. Her thumb traced the outline of the girl's profile, hands stopping as she realized: she wasn't in profile before, was she? A cold sense of fear washed over her as she continued to stare at the painting, her body was struggling against her to put it down, but she couldn't. Margot banished those thoughts, paintings can't move, she repeated.

Regaining her composure, Margot lifted her gaze to the clock perched on her kitchen wall, 12:30 a.m. It was probably just exhaustion from the day that was making her so paranoid. She should rest, she thought. Margot trudged to the couch, leaving the painting, and the rest of

her salad on the kitchen counter. She sank against the pillows. As her body relaxed into a deep sleep, she began to hear a distant, resounding whisper calling out to her.

“Margot... Margot.”

Her voice was intoxicating, dragging Margot further and further into the awaiting abyss.

“WAKE UP.”

Margot was jolted awake, cold sweat covered her body as she frantically looked around for the voice that had assaulted her ears just moments before. The apartment was empty. How long had she been asleep? She grabbed her phone checking the time, 12:30 a.m. She tried to remember what had happened, if she had had a dream, but all she could remember was fear. A feeling so powerful, it trapped her, making her unable to move. The sound of her phone chiming interrupted her thoughts.

Bea. She texted asking if everything was okay. Shutting her phone off, Margot decided she would answer tomorrow, besides, the pounding in her head made it difficult to concentrate on virtually anything.

“Treacherous girl.” The voice suddenly growled into her ear.

Margot, startled, turned her head towards the kitchen table where the painting stood against the wall, the girl now facing Margot, eyes piercing through her as it watched. An invisible force pulled at her as she stood from the couch, tumbling as she disorientedly made her way to the kitchen.

“She’s the reason” the voice spoke again, slithering like a worm inside her head. “She did it, she did it, SHE DID IT.”

“Stop, stop, *stop*.” Margot cried, hands flying to cover her eyes. Curled up against the side of the couch, she parted her fingers just enough to get a clear view of the painting. The girl in the

painting penetrated her with a hollow stare. Her heart raced as the painting pulled her towards it, her body sliding painfully against the wooden floor. With every pulse of her heart the painting drew her nearer, closing her in and forcing her back into the darkness of the abyss.

“Watch,” the voice spoke “Watch Margot.”

“No. Let me go.” Margot cried.

“Let me show you what she did to you Margot.” the voice whispered

“Let me go, let me go.” Margot pleaded.

Margot felt herself sinking into the darkness. Before she knew it her body slammed against a hard wooden floor. She lifted her head with a groan, analyzing her surroundings. It was a stage; one she knew well. It was the Royal Albert Hall.

“Watch.” The voice faded.

“Beatrice.” A man called, it was Raúl, our choreographer.

Margot swiveled her head to watch her friend walk in.

“Where’s Margot?” he asked, concern was clear in his voice

“Still practicing, you know how she is.” Bea sounded concerned but the feeling did not reach her eyes.

Margot’s heart began thrumming in her chest.

He sighed, fingers pinching his temples “Can you just make sure she’s ready in her costume by 6:30.”

“Of course,” Bea smiled.

The man left with a nod. Bea was alone. Margot watched her intently as she walked off towards the wings. Margot followed her, leaving a few paces between them. Bea suddenly stopped, bending down to grab a pair of pointe shoes, Margot’s.

baby powder. Margot recognized her shoes. Bea began adding a generous amount of baby powder to the sole of Margot's pointe shoes, too much. Every dancer knew that too much baby powder under the shoes could result in someone... slipping.

Margot gasped as the realization rammed into her. She stumbled back

“See what she did to you?” the voice, once quiet now boomed next to her as a cold hand slithered from behind, grabbing her jaw, forcing her to watch as her friend betrayed her. “She ruined you Margot, stole your spot, your life.”

“You're lying.” Margot screamed, a raw sob escaping her.

The woman's hands slid down to Margot's throat, fingers tightening around her neck.

“Now watch closely.” She whispered in Margot's ear. Bea's form began to dissolve into another, slightly less familiar face. Margot's Mother, they hadn't spoken in years. Margot watched in disbelief as her mother turned to another girl standing behind her, handing her the pointe shoes covered in baby powder.

“Here!” Her mother smiled

“Thank you, Ana.” The girl from the painting said, only she looked alive, sweet and innocent, a stark contrast from who she has become.

“You see Margot,” the girl's cold hands were still wrapped around Margot's neck. “I was like you were once, and she took everything from the” she growled, looking towards Margot's mother handing her the tampered pointe shoes. “So now I take them, I take them all.” she cackled. “And you, you are my greatest reward.”

Margot eyes tore open.

A dream, it was just a bad dream, she convinced herself as her heart raced in her chest. A stiff feeling took over her body as she tried to move. She couldn't. Desperation began to seize her as she noticed a young woman approach her.

"What a pretty painting." The woman commented, her fingers gliding across the frame.

"Fer you, I'll sell it for 10."