

## The Marionette (Bruised Doll)



All day a chilly mist had formed over the seaside town. Once the sun had set, the dock workers and their families had made their way to the fair. It was its first night here, and everybody was curious about what excitements and thrills it could offer.

Dwarfed by the pink carousel and the gigantic Ferris wheel, a lone tent stood in one of the corners. It was hexagonal-shaped and made of navy blue canvas, with two flaps serving as its entrance. Above it, a sign read "The Marionette".

The visitors had been through a hard day's work, and most found this tent's appearance to be too sober: they were looking for something in brighter colors, and offering assured distraction. Even so, a few people wandered in and soon the audience was crowded. Facing them was a small stage. Candles of all shapes and sizes were scattered around it and amongst the audience, their glow flickering and vapid. From the ceiling hung four chains that coiled on the floor.

A man closed the tent flaps behind the audience, and now, deprived of moonlight, the stage turned even darker. The crowd hushed, and from the stage's left side the mechanical and childish sound of a music box could be heard.

A girl danced clumsily onto the stage, her queer choreography that of someone who has just now learned how to move. She was naked but for opera gloves made of black felt. When she turned around, four hooks pierced on the flesh of each limb could be seen. Her skin was pale, soft and immaculate yet no man in the audience lusted for it. Her gaze traveled all over the room. When it lay on any of the spectator's eyes, they turned away in uneasiness.

As part of the dance, she inserted the left calf's hook in one of the chains. She continued to move in her rhythmic spasms and stops and soon the four hooks had found their home. She stopped in the center of the stage and took a deep breath. The man who had closed the tent took the loose ends of the chains in his hands and pulled them. Her flesh stretched centimeter by painful centimeter. Soon, her body was being lifted above the floor. Each limb spread its own way like a puppet; her head drooping in concentration.

She hung in there motionless, not the slightest hint of pain in her body. She raised her head and looked at each of the spectators in turn. She was defying them, making them part of the act. No one looked away this time.

"Who's next?" she asked. At the same time, all the hands in the audience were raised.