

ALL WOUND UP

COMMISSION STORY

BY CHALDEACHANGE



“Is this *really* the room she was using during her stay in Nod Krai?”

The Traveler, Aether, looked over the mess of a room in the Nasha Town inn that he had been led to after asking which room the Marionette of the Eleven Fatui Harbingers had been renting. Apparently, that woman had possessed the budget to rent the room for a full year upfront, and so it had been left in the same state it had been in when she had died several months prior. Or, at least, that was how things were *supposed* to be, but...

“Paimon can’t help but think someone broke into this room, right? How bad is the security around here!?” The fairy-like creature floating at the young man’s side, Paimon, brought up the very possibility that had crossed his mind. The windows and door were all intact, but someone or something had *very* clearly been rooting through all of Sandrone’s thing without permission. They hadn’t even bothered to hide it.

That said, why was Aether even in that room in the first place? It hadn’t been an intended stop of his, but he was following through on a request. The Knave of the Harbingers, Arlecchino, had sent him that request via letter. Apparently, there was something she needed from Sandrone’s old room for a ‘project’, but she didn’t provide any further details regarding what that project was.

All he could really do was make an educated guess based on what the item he’d been asked to fetch *was*. **“Do you think they took it? Arlecchino said it should be well hidden at least.”** Could the

person that had robbed the place have been looking for it too? Doubtful. It was more likely someone had caught wind that the recently deceased Harbinger had kept a room in that inn, and they'd been looking around for things to pawn off... or use as blackmail against the Fatui.

“Why do you think Arlecchino even *needs* that, anyways? If the Marionette is dead, then...” Paimon raised a good point. What Arlecchino had asked him to find was a *key*. Not a key to a door, but a key not unlike the one the late harbinger had always had spinning in her back. Neither Aether nor Paimon had ever really understood how it *worked*, but if there was no mechanism that required the key, then why would the key be needed?



That said, neither of them really knew where to *look* for that mysterious key even *if* it hadn't been stolen. **“Paimon is going to ask the lady at the front desk about the state of the room! Maybe she knows something!”** Paimon declared after a few minutes of searching, and Aether sent her off with a wave. That was a surprisingly good idea for her, so he didn't have any complaints.

It just left him alone in the room for the time being. **“If I was Sandrone, then where would I hide something?”** Asking that question wasn't actually all that *useful*, namely because the Descender barely understood the Marionette's thought process at all. She was a genius, and the type to

never let you forget it, so surely she wouldn't use a practical hiding spot.

This line of thinking eventually led him into a small closet in the back of the room. It wasn't for clothing, but instead for cleaning tools and supplies. Your common thief *likely* wouldn't look there, instead assuming any valuables would be held in a less run down space. And yet... **“What do we have here?”** There was an inconspicuous string hanging from the ceiling with a *barely* visible trapdoor above him. *That* looked like a good place to hide something.

Unfortunately, pulling the string didn't seem to do any good. It barely even budged. **“...Maybe this is bait?”** It *did* sound like something

she'd do. Create a decoy to make any potential thieves frustrated so that they gave up. That could have even been why things were such a mess. Naturally, turned to leave the small closet with the intention of looking elsewhere. But when his back was turned to the trapdoor above?

It suddenly opened, and something dropped. "**Huh!?**" Whatever it was, its weight gripped onto his back and forced the young man down onto one knee. "**What was that!?**" Was whatever it was *stuck* there? Aether could feel its weight even as he rose until he was standing straight again. Or, well, *trying* to stand straight. The weight of the object kept pulling his back to arch.

Mostly in the doorway, he turned as he tried to get a look at the item, but he heard the sound of metal clank against the frame. It was *larger* than he thought? He finally decided to reach a hand behind himself to check. "**What even is...?**" His fingers ultimately brushed against cold steel, and he began to try and grip at the item to get a sense of its shape. "**Wait, isn't this the key!?**"

The one he'd been looking for? But why had it attached itself to his back? *How* had it attached itself in the first place? Then again, he'd never really gotten a good look at how Sandrone's had been connected in the first place. Columbina had told him a story about how she'd once made her wear a key, so supposedly they could be attached to a human? "**How do I get it off?**" He felt around, pulled, and tugged to try and remove it. But all he managed to do was... *wind it up*.

Aether didn't have time to work out the science behind how that was even possible. It didn't feel like the key had entered his body, but he began to *feel* the object winding. He hadn't realized that a red diamond had hardened from his skin where the key met his back, and that from it? A number of changes had begun to spread throughout the inner workings of his body. It was discreet enough that he didn't notice, because his visual resemblance to a living human remained consistent.

And yet? His beating heart became a beating *core*, beneath his skin his joints soon more closely resembled those of a doll, and wires and oil wrapped through artificial flesh rather than nerves and blood. Even so, it didn't feel much different to *him* and didn't have any dramatic visual implications at first aside from maybe *one*. Blue rings of light had wrapped around his pupils, glowing brightly before that light pushed to the outsides of his irises instead.

Inside of which...? Some paler *gear* shapes began to turn around her eye's centers.

“Come on, get—!?” All the while, he’d been *winding* the key as he struggled to remove it, assuming that doing so wouldn’t lead to anything since he *wasn’t* a living doll like the Marionette was. And yet, the moment he removed his hands? The key began to move on its own in the opposite direction, and his body ultimately seized up. **“What...!?”** That was the most he could vocalize with his teeth clenched. It felt like everything was *way* too stiff, and he couldn’t really move. He could barely even move his head!

But he didn’t *need* a full range of motion to realize that something had gone very, *very* wrong. After all, even though he was frozen in place? Aether could tell that his eye level was slowly dropping, even though he wasn’t standing on a moving platform or anything like that. At the same time, his clothing began to feel baggier... was he *shrinking*!? He *was*, in fact. The Descender was pretty average height for a guy of his physical age, but he ended up dipping all the way down to a meager 5’0”.

The base of his cropped top had dipped down to his bellybutton, while the gloves upon his limp arms ended up slipping because those hands had grown smaller and daintier. He reasoned that a similar fate might await his boots if he tried to lift his feet, because they *did* feel spacious. **“What is happening here!?”** The key’s turning had become steadier, and with this occurrence his body’s movements were becoming looser – in no small part because his bones had finished shifting into more *clockwork mechanical* counterparts.

Still, he noticed his voice. **“W-Wait! Why do I sound like her!?”** Aether even recoiled at the bite at the end of his sentence. That sort of inflection wasn’t normal for him, but it *was* normal for the woman whose back that key belonged on. Without a mirror handy though, he was incapable of knowing for sure just how bad things were. If you looked at his face though? It would have been pretty obvious that they were *really* bad.

At least if the intention had been for Aether to retain his original appearance. Much like his body had become smaller, the shapes and design of his face had done the same... largely. The distance between his chin and forehead certainly lessened, giving his face a design that appeared wider and, ultimately, rounder through cheeks that grew rounder on the sides of a cuter, tinier nose. His eyes had *already* changed in color, but their blues became more abundant thanks to his eyelids growing bigger and rounder.

“This is unacceptable! Why am I even speaking like her!?” And he couldn’t stop. The sensation of the key spinning was almost *soothing* in a sense, but that couldn’t quell the uncharacteristically abundant agitation that he felt towards his current circumstances. Still adjusting

to his ability to move returning, it didn't quite register with him that his hair was changing too, much like he hadn't noticed what had happened to his face.

His long, blonde and braided ponytail was unwound as this hair thinned and shortened, not become *too* short but only reaching just past the center of his back at most. His ahoge flattened away, merging with some of the raised hair that almost made it look like his hair had exhaust vents as bangs were swept to the right and lengths both curved in at the sides and hung down to his chest near the ear to frame his face. And yet it wasn't only a change of length and style, but color too courtesy of a soft chestnut shade that stole away the blonde he shared with his missing sibling.

Aether clicked his tongue. **“But if I consider all of the evidence, then doesn't it mean that I might be becoming... NNGH!?”** Well, if *she* needed evidence of the worst-case scenario she had considered becoming reality, then she didn't need to wait much longer. The most definitive proof interrupted her very sentence, prompting her to keel over with the weight of the key behind her not helping any. **“D-Did my... thing... just disappear?”** She had *very* much become a woman, and one that subconsciously saw the word ‘dick’ as too ‘unladylike’ to speak aloud at that.

She made no effort to check physically, as the emptiness she felt between her legs was enough. At the same time? Her awareness of the *side effects* of changed sex heightened, namely in the fit of the outfit she had been wearing as Aether for a very long time. Her pants had naturally loosened when she had first shrunk, but the risk of them slipping from her waist was removed when her hips parted several inches wider.

But even then, those hips were only a foundation for what was to come. The woman he was transforming into was petite, but her figure was surprisingly competent even if her clothing tended to hide it. Her hips *needed* to widen, because the weight that pooled within her thighs and ass burgeoned an incredibly amount. Her thighs rapidly swelled thicker than her waist, while the extra was fed to expand the caboose within her masculine boxers. Her ass grew so plump that she almost had the silhouette of a pear.

And yet, her waistline above was pinched in just in time for her to notice her cropped top had become a little tight around the chest. **“Oh no.”** Considering everything else that had happened to her thus far, there was only one thing that Aether could conclude logically... and his ability to deal in logic had been greatly enhanced along with the rest of her

intellect. Of course, that wasn't the sort of enhancement *she* was referring to.

Where her chest had been flat, albeit neatly muscular before, pools of fat had begun to gather beneath her nipples so that the skin was stretched around them. Her nipples likewise grew puffier and more sensitive, the sensation of them rubbing against her shirt rather *distracting* at first. It eventually had to conform around the DD-cups that blossomed, but they remained fully covered thanks to the room provided by her prior loss of height and narrowed shoulders. “**I need to... to...**” Part of the woman was trying to fight back, but...

Her new smug self-importance! Her genius! Her curiosity! It was all too powerful!

“**Well, this is quite the change of pace.**”

If it walked like a Sandrone, and talked like a Sandrone, then it was most likely a *Sandrone*. Such was the fate of the one who'd had her spare key affixed to his back. Aether was still *in there*, and this Sandrone held an



awareness of his presence, but she had no means of giving him full control. “**Thinking analytically, I should probably record what I can about this. After all...**”

Because she had the original's intellect, she could see the writing on the wall. She had no answers for *how* she had changed, but she could tell that she would continue to function as Sandrone so long as her key was wound. Did that mean she would turn back into Aether the moment her key stopped spinning? Well, that was a preferable outcome to *dying*. But she didn't have to wait long for her answer as she paced about in an outfit that didn't really fit her properly at all.

After taking about ten minutes to clean up the room and jotted her notes down in *her* notebook on the sole desk within the room, she felt the key mechanism in her back finally *stop*. “**Oh! I'm back... to normal?**” The Marionette's pompous, intellectual demeanor faded the moment the key stopped turning, but she also didn't *die*. ‘Aether’ was able to regain control, but much to her dismay... “**I'm not turning back!?**”

Well, there went *one* theory. She was stuck looking like Sandrone!? What was her way forward like that? Would anyone even believe her if she told them!? What was she supposed to— “**A-Ah?**” The small woman froze. Someone had grabbed the key from behind her and had begun to wind it up again!?

“**WHY YOU!?**” She growled *just* like Sandrone would as her original personality and motivations were repressed again, finding her staring at *one of the Katheryne’s* when she turned? “**What are you doing here? Your Adventurer Guild duties have nothing to do with me.**” But why did she get the sense that the Katheryne doll was *supposed* to be there?

**“You’ll need to come with me as ordered, Lady Sandrone.
After all, the original has big plans for you when she
recovers.”**

What did *that* mean!?

“But we should fetch you something else to wear first.”

That much she could agree with.