

The Hermit & The Automatons

By

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1 INT. FINN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: 1952

A elderly man, Finn, is lying on his deathbed struggling to breathe. After a moment a priest walks into the room.

FINN

Thank you for coming father.

PRIEST

Not at all my son. I understand that you would like to give final confession.

FINN

Yes father. I am afraid that if I don't atone for my sins, I will be damned for eternity.

PRIEST

I see. Then lets thank the lord I made it to you on time. Please my son, begin.

FINN

I have lived quite a life, and I've always tried to be a good man. But even I--

(A BEAT)

I want to tell you about the man I Killed.

2 EXT. WILDERNESS - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: 1887

Finn, now in his mid-twenties, walks through the wilderness. He's dressed in period appropriate hiking/camping gear. Despite the fact that he looks tattered by the elements he wears quality clothing, and walks with great confidence and stride. It is clear that he comes from high society.

FINN (NARRATION)

In my youth, I found myself afflicted by an insatiable wanderlust. I was born into wealth, and was due to inherit my family's empire once I finished my studies. So naturally I was putting it off But I wasn't my father, and was in no hurry to reveal that to the world.

(MORE)

FINN (NARRATION) (CONT'D)

He was a man chiseled from stone by a lifetime of experiences & struggles. Something that, at that point, I knew very little about. My upbringing was anything but a crucible in which men are forged. I was as soft as linen, and thus far, unfit to lead anything. So on my twenty first birthday I set out to see what I could of the world. Three years into my adventure I stumbled upon the strangest, and perhaps the most important, person I ever encountered.

Finn continues to hike through the wilderness until he hears the sound of wolves howling nearby. He cannot see where they are coming from, but it is clear that he is being hunted.

Finn sprints to get away from danger. Eventually he comes across a strange little house tucked away among the shadows. He runs to the front door.

Finn frantically pounds on the door. The sound of a large steel lock can be heard as Finn continues to panic. The door swings open. Standing in the doorway is a beautiful young woman, Nora, in her late twenties with a blank look on her face.

NORA

(MUFFLED)

Hello.

Nora's muffled voice comes from her, but her mouth doesn't move. She simply stares at Finn with a blank expression. The emotionless woman spooks Finn, but the sound of the wolves howl prompts him to enter the home anyway.

3

INT. LIVING ROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Finn enters the main living space of the home, then returns his attention to Nora. Nora robotically turns towards Finn, then takes a few steps forward and stops.

Finn slowly moves towards her to investigate. Nora keeps her expressionless face looking forward. She remains motionless as he waves his hand in front of her face.

NORA

(MUFFLED)

Hello.

Once again her voice is muffled and her mouth does not move. Finn jumps back in shock & fear.

Finn approaches Nora again and slowly reaches for her hand. He tries to take her pulse. That when he discovers a seam running from her palm, and up her arm. In-fact, her entire body is covered with patches of skin meticulously sewn together. Terrified Finn screams, and falls back.

A man in his late fifties, Laszlo, enters from a back room. Laszlo is a bearded unkept man. His clothes are dirty and held together by leather straps and recycled metal machine parts. He has glasses and where is the top hat decorated with copper pieces and old clock gears.

LASZLO

Who is in my home disturbing my
much needed rest?

Finn gets to his feet and runs to the far side of the room.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

I'll ask you again boy. Who are you
and what are you doing in my home?

FINN

Are you a witch sir?

Laszlo was taken back by the question.

LASZLO

Of course not, don't be a fool.

FINN

Here I find you in the middle of
nowhere, with a corpse as your
servant girl. And you are so bold
as to claim me dim, when you so
clearly hold dominion over the
dead. Certainly there is some sort
of black magic at work here!

LASZLO

You seem like a well educated young
man. You can't possibly believe in
such nonsense.

FINN

Yes, but I am also a God-fearing
man. And I know the devils work
when I see it. She spoke without
moving her lips. There is no soul
in her eyes!

LASZLO

I assure you dear boy, there are no
supernatural forces at work here.

Laszlo walks over to Nora and steps behind her. He signals Finn to join him, and he does.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Look at this.

Laszlo opens a metal door on Nora's back revealing the gears & other mechanical mechanisms needed to wind the automaton.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Do you see? She is an automaton,
nothing more the gears & springs.
She's basically a giant clock.

FINN

But how does it speak?

LASZLO

A internal phonograph my dear boy.
A device for the mechanical
reproduction of sound using
vibration recorded onto the surface
of rotating cylinders. A going away
gift from my dear friend Edison.

Laszlo grabs a key from around his neck and puts it into the keyhole on the back of Nora. He turns the key to wind her up.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

As for why her mouth didn't move,
she simply needs to be wound up.

Laszlo closes the door on Nora's back, and walks around to face her. Then he waves his hands in front of her face.

NORA

Hello

This time Nora's mouth moves as she talks, and her voice is perfectly clear.

LASZLO

There, do you see?

FINN

But where did you obtain the human
skin for this abomination?

LASZLO

Human skin?

Laszlo begins to laugh.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

It's pig skin. There's not a beast alive that looks more like our own flesh than that of a swine. I assure you, I am no murderer.

FINN

Tell that to the pigs.

LASZLO

Indeed.

(A Beat)

Well it has been a pleasure. But if you don't mind I need to get my rest. I've had quite enough from rude unwanted visitors for one night. Thank you for stopping by, please don't return, there's the door.

Laszlo jesters towards the door. The pack of wolves can be heard outside the house.

FINN

Please sir just let me stay the night. By the sounds of it, if you refuse me shelter tonight I will almost certainly not see the morning.

LASZLO

Very well. Come, with me.

Laszlo leads Finn out to an adjacent room.

4 INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

Finn lays in bed sleeping as he tosses and turns trying to fight his way out of a nightmare.

NORA (V.O.)

Please let us die.

Finn wakes up out of his dream with a gasp.

FINN (NARRATION)

I've always been prone to night terrors, ever since I was a child. But nothing compared to the nightmares I had while staying there at that house.

5 INT. HALLWAY - MOMENTS LATER

Finn wonders the halls looking for clues to Laszlo's identity.

FINN (NARRATION)

Something about Laszlo seemed familiar. I couldn't get the man or his automatons out of my head. I knew I would be unable to rest until I discovered the truth.

The hallway is filled with knickknacks and relics from Laszlo's life. As well as newspaper clippings and illustrations of some of his accomplishments. Finn examines several items and pictures throughout the hallway.

FINN (NARRATION) (CONT'D)

Of course. Laszlo Bokor, the inventor. It all made sense. No one else could have possibly pulled off those mechanical wonders. There was a time, not too long ago, were you couldn't read a newspaper or walk down the street without hearing about something that was either created or reimagined by Mr. Bokor. Then one day he simply disappeared. No one had seen or heard from him in almost 10 years.

6 INT. DINING ROOM - MORNING

Laszlo and Finn are sitting at the dining room table eating breakfast directly across from one another. Nora, the automaton sits in the chair to Laszlo's right. And to Laszlo's left sits a second automaton, Istvan, that resembles a young boy between the ages of nine and ten.

FINN (NARRATION)

The next morning I was determined to get my answers.

Finn stares at the second automaton with a puzzled look on his face. Laszlo tries to ignore Finn's annoying curiosity.

LASZLO

How's the coffee?

Finn ignores Laszlo and continued to stare at the automatons.

LASZLO (CONT'D)
Okay, it's clear you have more questions.

Finn wastes no time.

FINN
How does waving your hand trigger the speech mechanism?

LASZLO
The internal phonograph is triggered by an interruption of light beams that enter my automaton through the eyes.

Laszlo stands up to demonstrate, by waving his hands in front of the two automaton faces.

NORA
Hello.

ISTVAN
Do you want to play?

Laszlo sits back down.

LASZLO
There, you see?

FINN
But why? Why make them in the first place?

LASZLO
Their my assistance, of course.

FINN
Assistance that need to be wound up every hour doesn't seem very effective.

LASZLO
Well you are right about that.

FINN
Let me stay for a while. I'm a fantastic cook, and by the looks of this place you could use someone to tidy up as well. And the best part is you won't ever need to wind me up.

(MORE)

FINN (CONT'D)

I ask for no payment, only shelter
and food for the time I'm here.

7 INT. LASZLO'S HOUSE/TIME PASSING MONTAGE - DAY

Montage of Finn doing various chores around Laszlo's house. Dusting, mopping, cooking, laundry, etc. Several weeks pass during this montage.

FINN (NARRATION)

Laszlo, of course, excepted my offer to assist him. For the next several weeks I lived at the house doing all manner of chores and general maintenance.

End of montage.

8 INT. BASEMENT LAB - NIGHT

Finn Investigates a dirty, old, empty, subterranean laboratory.

FINN (NARRATION)

While my days were full of wonder and discovery, my nights were nothing but terror and unrest. I found myself plagued by nightmares every night, disturbing and dark images that I was unable to decipher.

At first all of the tables in the laboratory appear to be bare. But randomly flashes of light filled the room. Every time the lab illuminates pieces of scientific equipment appear then vanished again with the dissipation of the light. Finn here's the sound of Nora crying coming from the large center table. He slowly approaches it. Finn begins to hear the sound of Istvan crying as well. The closer he gets the louder Nora & Istvan sobs become. Until finally Finn reaches the table. Suddenly there's another flash of light and for a split second Finn can see Nora & Istvan lying on the table bleeding out. Nora's head quickly whips around to face Finn.

NORA

(SCREAMING)

Why wont you let us die!?

Finn is so frightened by Nora's screams that he trips and falls on his butt, waking him up from the nightmare.

9 INT. GUEST BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Finn wakes up from his nightmare, once again gasping for air. After a moment he gets up out of bed and leaves the room.

10 INT. LASZLO'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

From outside Laszlo's bedroom, Finn approaches.

FINN (NARRATION)

There would be no more sleep that night, so I decided to seek out Laszlo for council. Perhaps there was some scientific reason for my visions.

The door is cracked open and he can see lights flickering from within the room. Finn slowly enters the bedroom. The source of the flickering light was a primitive film being projected on the wall by the automaton Nina. She sits on a sofa perfectly still while the film is being projected from one of her eyes. Laszlo sits next to her watching the film and sobbing.

FINN (NARRATION) (CONT'D)

I had never seen anything like it. Moving pictures made with light I was so captivated by the site I almost didn't notice what the images where revealing.

The images being projected are of Nina & Istvan. Only they are completely human in the film. The film is very short, about 30 seconds. And is being played over and over again in the loop. In the whole movie we only get a chance to hear Nora say "Hello" and Istvan saying "do you want to play?"

Finn, blown away by the revelation that Nina & Istvan were actually living breathing people, is unable to remain silent.

FINN (CONT'D)

They were real, they lived.

Laszlo turns to Finn, surprised by his presence, but quickly let it go.

LASZLO

Yes, they lived. They were my everything. My beautiful wife Nora and our son Istvan.

(A BEAT)

They were taken from me.

(MORE)

LASZLO (CONT'D)

Back then I spent hours in my workshop, just tinkering with whatever I could. I was obsessed with finding the next great discovery. My wife often accused me of loving my work more than her. Which, of course, wasn't true. One night I arrived home late to find my house had been burglarized. I frantically searched for my family only to find that I was too late. They had been killed.

(A BEAT)

How could humanity allow this to happen?.. That's when I made the decision to leave it all behind. I came here and build my new family. And finally after years of work I've been able to successfully transfer a small piece of their souls into their new bodies. Soon, I will truly have my family back.

FINN

But How?

LASZLO

I'll show you.

11 INT. BASEMENT LAB - NIGHT

Laszlo leads Finn into his basement laboratory. The laboratory is set up exactly how it was in his nightmare. Except all the equipment was there. On the center table, where Nora & Istvan's body was, sat two human brains, which were held in large glass jars filled with some kind of fluid. There are electrical wires leading from the brains to other equipment around the lab.

LASZLO

This is all that remains of my family. I've managed to keep their brains alive. To preserve their souls.

FINN

By preserving the brain?

LASZLO

But of course. Where do you suppose the soul of a man resides?

(MORE)

LASZLO (CONT'D)
If not the brain then where?

Laszlo continues to explain as he moves around the lab switching on steam engine powered technology and lighting Bunsen burner's.

LASZLO (CONT'D)
I've discovered by sending electrical current through the living brain it is possible to extract recorded memories from the subject. You see, that's what we were viewing upstairs, A memory.

Laszlo steps over to the center table. He takes the end of a wire, that is connected to the floating brains, and connects it to a small metal box with a turn dial on it. He hands the box too Finn.

Laszlo then runs over to the other side of the room and turns on, what looks to be, a primitive radio. With an attached handcrank.

He begins to turn the crank. The sound from the video that was playing upstairs Blears through the speakers of the primitive radio. Laszlo gestures to Finn telling him to turn the dial. When fin does the sound changes to another audio memory.

LASZLO (CONT'D)
Do you see? We are listening to actual memories plucked from the mind of my dearly departed wife. With every turn of the dial I can monitor and record another piece of our history together. When I finally finish transferring every last memory, I will truly have her back.

Finn is speechless. He can't help himself but to continue turning the dial and listening to various audio memories. After a few different turns, Finn turns to a channel of just screaming. Fin recognize the sound from his nightmares, it was Nora and Istvan's painful screams.

FINN (NARRATION)
That's when it all made sense, suddenly I understood what my dreams were trying to tell me.

Laszlo runs over to switch the dial to a different channel.

LASZLO

Forgive me, I can't bear to hear that again. I believe that is the memory of my poor wife's last moments.

FINN

You're mistaken sir. That is the sound of your family now, in the present. What you're doing is causing him great pain. You must stop these experiments at once!

LASZLO

Don't be absurd! My family is dead!

FINN

Not yet, you've trapped them in hell. They cannot see nor touch. They don't know where they are and they're in constant pain.

LASZLO

Stop it, shut up boy!

FINN

You must release them!

Finn quickly starts to pull wires from the jarred brains, and smashing the equipment connected.

LASZLO

Stop! They're all I have!

Laszlo lunges at Finn causing him to knock over the center table smashing the jarred brains onto the floor.

Laszlo looks at the destroyed brains, then at Finn on his back lying on the floor. Laszlo is overcome with rage. He jumps on top of Finn and starts to choke him.

LASZLO (CONT'D)

They were all I had!

Laszlo continues to choke Finn. Finn tries to force Laszlo off of him to no avail. Laszlo is about to squeeze the life out of him. Finn, left with no other options, grabs a large glass shard from the shattered jar and reluctantly stabs Laszlo just under the ribs and into his lungs. Laszlo gasps for air as blood pours out of his mouth. He is dead seconds later.

12 INT. FINN'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

ON SCREEN: 1952

Elderly Finn is laying in his deathbed, finishing his story to the priest who is sitting next to him.

FINN

When finally I left, I set the house a blaze, and plan to never return. And I never did.

(A BEAT)

Please, tell me father, is there ever a justification to take a life? If not just to save my own, but in an attempt to save two others. I believe if I knew definitively that's what I did I would finally be able to sleep at night. Tell me father, and my monster, or a savior?

PRIEST

I'm afraid I don't have an answer for you my son. Every savior has been another man's monster. Good and evil is black and white only to God. Unfortunately it's merely shades of gray to us mortals. All I can say is, I forgive you. As for the Lord, I'm afraid you'll just have to wait-and-see.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END.