In which Jacob Winsor Became a Doll and the Consequences that Followed

I am in love with Elsie Kay Tolk.

She is beautiful, knows what she wants, and speaks her mind. But at the same time she is reserved, doesn’t flaunt her power, and she is gracious. She is everything I want in a woman, everything that made me want to know and love her.

If only I had a body.

At least I could still be with her, see her, and interact with her. Being in love with someone who is part of the physical realm can be a little tricky, but I managed. I knew what she wanted, needed, and craved.

Information.

Information gathering was more than just a job for her, it was what made her world go round. For as long as I had known her, she was always trying to learn more. Elsie differed from regular intelligence agents in that she had a whole other pool of resources that she could tap into. Being a necromancer allowed her to call upon the spirits both trapped on the living plane and in the spiritual plane. It made gathering information much easier.

All necromancers, by trade, are intelligence gatherers, in one way or another. Most helped magical law enforcement or gathered intelligence for the various magical councils; however, having the ability to become a necromancer was on the rare side. Being a competent necromancer was something else entirely. Necromancers liked being in the shadows, listening to the secrets of their fellow man. It was rare to see one flaunting their powers to anyone but spirits.

The High Council made sure to regulate the necromancers though. Dealing with sensitive information made necromancers powerful and dangerous enemies. Plus, it was never smart to tick off a necromancer, they may have stopped the practice of summoning zombies, spirit warriors, or grims, but that didn’t mean they didn’t know how. On occasion the council had to intervene before such disasters could be realized.

Elsie is one of their best agent. She put all her time looking into organizations and people, driving herself to know more. She exhausted all her resources before making a report, polishing it meticulously of errors and rumors.

That’s where I come in. Ghosts, being dead and within their realm of power, were a necromancer’s biggest source of information. We had access to every part of the world of the living, making us ideal spies and secret keepers of necromancers. We gleaned an awful lot of the world that kept turning without us. We pick up dialects, learn new trivia, and place bets on escalating situations. The physical realm was our television, and we enjoyed watching. However, windows that didn’t naturally open took vast amounts of energy on our part. As such, we asked a price for the information we gathered.

The rules of magic dictated an equal exchange for spells and the exchange of goods. We may be dead, but we weren’t going to give anything away for free. Sure we could give information for free, but the necromancers would not be able to trust their source. Receiving payment compelled spirits to tell the truth, after all, if a necromancer found out the spirit lied, the necromancer was within their right to revoke the payment. Which is a rather embarrassing predicament for the spirit at hand.

Information may have been the love of Elsie’s life, but she was still human. They were there, those physical distractions that tried to grab her attention. Sometimes flowers would grace her grey workroom, giving it a bit more life than what usually appeared in that dank room full of death and documents.

I would look on curiously, wondering if maybe the Elsie I knew was different when she wasn’t in this room. But I knew she wasn’t. Sometimes I checked in on her from the spirit realm. I didn’t do this much, since necromancers can sense when a window between our two worlds is opened near them. They don’t particularly like being checked up on, it encroaches upon their privacy.

Feeling the familiar tug of being summoned, I answered readily, knowing I would see my beloved, even when she couldn’t see me. Light surrounded me, gently taking me to the living world. A world that had left me and my past behind.

Opening my eyes, I was greeted by the familiar room. Boxes full of documents lined the walls, hinting at the obsession of the owner. My eyes flicked to the old, worn, wooden door, as images flipped through my mind. I reconstructed the glimpses I had gathered through my spying.

I started to go through the list of various things I generally asked for payment. I decided I didn’t want any new books, I had already gathered enough as it is. Many of my fellow spirits were in awe of my book collection, but it was truly small compared to what Elsie had. Her library was mostly filled with reports and fact books; Elsie had a slight disdain for the Internet and preferred a physical book for fact checking.

Standing before me with groomed, golden strands rippling down her back, Elsie looked over a notebook. She held it delicately in her gloved hands; questions written in her swirling handwriting. I wondered if she was still investigating Johnathan Boyle. I hoped not, I had found nothing new pertaining to the oil tycoon. Though he was still supplying the underground with dragon parts, the despicable bastard. Dragons were nearly extinct as it were and the councils preferred if poachers would stop hunting the beasts.

Hopefully she had something new, I disliked watching him take apart the fire-breathing lizards. It was a rather messy endeavor.

She looked thinner than before. Her black pants cinched tightly around her waist, while a violet, silk shirt tucked into her pants, hiding her thin frame in the flowing fabric. And a black trench coat tried to shadow the thinness from view. Her cheeks had hallowed a little more, but her eyes, those deep brown eyes framed with dark circles from lack of sleep, still sparkled with curiosity.

She had forgotten to eat and sleep again.

Magic kept her alive, but only barely. There was some benefit to being a necromancer. Magic flowed through her veins pumping life through her body. She had a bad habit of forgetting to eat and sleep while doing her job, deciphering information. Sometimes, I could get her to eat or sleep as payment to me. Other times she refused, shoving a romance novel in my hands and sending me on my way. For some reason she assumed that when I asked for a book that I wanted a romance novel. I sometimes wondered if Elsie had a stash near her bed, the bindings gave hints that they had been read.

“Hello Elsie.” I said. I ran a hand through my hair, hoping that this time she would be able to see me.

“Took you long enough. Still looking at me with those doe eyes?” Elsie asked, not looking up.

“You haven’t been eating or sleeping.” I said. She might have perfect hygiene but that wouldn’t matter if her magic faltered.

She grunted. Flipping the notebook over, she asked, “What would you like in payment?” Leveling her pen at me, she added, “Don’t ask for me to eat or take a nap. I wasted an entire day in bed from that.”

I floated around the perimeter of the circle that had been drawn around me, contemplating what I would ask for. She had used salt again today, instead of the necromancer preferred, Grade A red paint.

Red, such a dark color. Images of my knee being shattered and my best friend standing over me, leveling a gun flitted behind my eyes. Elsie stopped using red paint after I let this slip. She did care, in the non-showy way.

“I don’t have all day for you to decide.” She said. Scribbling something into her notebook, the wheels always turning.

My eyes landed on a doll, one of the seemingly rare male dolls, sitting precariously on the edge of a shelf between two brown, nondescript boxes. “Enchant a vessel for me, so as to allow me to travel between our worlds.”

The easiest vessel would be the doll, being the most human like thing in the room.

“No,” She responded.

I froze. “Why not?”

“Lack of a body.”

I curse. She grunts in disapproval at my language. If only I had told the reaper to go screw himself, I might have a chance. Then again, she might not travel to the middle of nowhere to find a ghost. Having a piece of my decayed body made it easier to enchant a vessel, giving that extra connection to the spirit.

“That’s my price.” I said. Steeling my spine. Elsie could figure it out, she just needed a push.

Her dark brown eyes looked up, studying the air to my left. She still didn’t know my face. “Why? It’s a dismal world, it hasn’t changed.”

“Doesn’t matter.” I said shortly. “This is my price.”

“Fine,” She agreed. “I’ll call you when I am done. In the meantime you might as well look into Hamish Wall, it seems the council is most displeased with him. I want to know if there is even cause for concern.”

Elsie was honorable in that sense, she never asked for information if she wasn’t positive she could pay.

I almost got a thank you in before she reversed the spell, pushing me back to the spiritual plane, to this dismal world muted in color. Nothing was substantial, we didn’t have a purpose here, except for wishing for something we never would have again. Life.

Buildings floated through the space, while small platforms littered in between the buidlings. Spirits gathered on, near, and even in the buildings and platforms, talking with each other. It was sort of like the real world, except there wasn’t much sense of direction. Something could be hundreds of miles away, though it would only take us a minute, while other destinations would look closer but would take more than an hour to get to. The spiritual plane was fickle like that.

The array of spirits were as diverse as those that were living. Some got bored enough to learn to control their forms. Currently, the trending fashion right now is to show how you died. Those who died in their sleep were slightly out of luck; they perpetually looked like they were sleeping if they followed this trend.

Last year it was fashionable to look like you have been beaten to death. The molted colors hadn’t made the best results, and many of the spirits had looked more like muted peacock than anything else. The year before that, grotesque deformities were in.

Even in life, I still didn’t understand the draw towards fashion. It all looked very silly. Especially when they were hoping for more vibrant colors. Colors were severely muted in this world, most of them looking more like shades of grey than anything else.

I wonder if our brethren trapped on the natural plain also went through phases. Sometimes I do wish I had stayed, but then I would have had to watch my ex-lover and ex-best friend have a family, survive, and live life happily.

Truthfully, I don’t even know if they were happy, I never checked up on them. In my nightmares they are laughing over my corpse and having a merry time. Celebrating that they were free of me, though I don’t know why. It wasn’t like I was a horrible person, I like to think I was rather nice. Plus, I haven’t seen them on this plane, so I have to wonder if they stayed on the natural plane. I would assume so, I have traveled to every corner of the spiritual plane and still haven’t run into them. Or we could just be missing each other at every turn.

Floating along, I watched as little ghostly children imitated play. They still believed that they were alive, just in a magical world with simpler rules. The necromancers never called on children, it was too dangerous to call upon children after all. One never knew when they were calling a demon or a child; they felt very much the same.

As I continued along, I remembered when I had first met Elsie, she was summoning her first spirit. Red paint decorated the floor, keeping me within my bounds. I cringed a little, still reacting to the color red after all this time. Circles and sigils were drawn with a sure hand, I recognized the protection and entrapment sigils surrounding my circle. Surprisingly not all spirits were kind and helpful. There were some who would want to do an 18 year old girl serious harm.

Her mentor stood in the corner, permanent frown in place. I never heard the man say a word of encouragement to Elsie, actually I never heard him speak, but she always held her head up high never faltering. Maybe he said it in private, wouldn’t want us ghosts telling the other necromancers about their weaknesses after all.

Elsie had looked healthier back then. Cheeks plumb, brown eyes still sparkling. She was still as angelic as she was now. I still looked like I was 20 years old, ready to take on the world, but stopped before I could reach my potential.

I was a little surprised to see a necromancer so young summoning a ghost, most don’t summon their first ghost until about four years into the apprenticeship. Necromancers didn’t take anyone younger than 18. Most didn’t show potential before then. But it seemed this girl was special.

It wasn’t surprising; prodigies were what moved the magical realm forward. They were rare, but not unheard of. This girl had probably been showing signs of being a necromancer at an early age, and now she was prepared enough to be welcomed into the fold of information gatherers.

She was just beginning the hands on training. I was her first ghost. I knew because we spirits like to gossip about the apprentices, and I hadn’t heard anything about this girl. Most who were chosen as first ghost liked to keep tabs on the apprentice, just in case their young necromancer out shown the others. It was a source of pride being able to say that we were their first.

Though, summoning spirits is dangerous, especially if you get the symbols and circle wrong. A broken circle will not retain a spirit, and could very well release a spirit into the world. Now this isn’t generally a problem, unless that spirit leans towards antagonistic behavior. Spirits are creatures of energy and we can do quite a bit of damage when we need to.

“Hello child.” I greeted. One can always tell what kind of person someone is by how they react to being called young. There were people who took it as a compliment, those who brushed it off, and those who were offended. I wondered what kind of woman she was.

“Greetings sir.” She said formally with a bow.

I raised my eyebrows, surprised by her formality. Few necromancy mentors taught any manners anymore. It was answer this, answer that, no pleases or thank you’s. They generally had to be reminded that we needed payment. Which gets annoying after awhile.

I smiled kindly at her, reclining my head in recognition of her honoring me. “What is your name angel?” It was a bit out of line for me to call her angel, but she was a breath of fresh air in an otherwise dull and ungrateful world. I watched as her mentor took a step forward, warning me to back down. He didn’t like that I had complimented his apprentice in such a familiar way. “I mean no disrespect of course.” I amended, not wanting to be sent away before I knew her name.

He didn’t have to do much to make others intimidated, what with him standing at six feet, bald, black and muscular. Before I knew his name I referred to him as Mr. Smiley. Of course I wouldn’t tell him that, especially when I found out his real name, Carl Smith. Not necessarily a terrifying name, but I still wasn’t going to bring it up.

Carl was a world-renowned necromancer that had never taken on an apprentice. Not even when the council had forced apprentices on him. He was scary enough to scare the magic right out of the apprentices, which is quite a feat unto itself. Most of the spirits who dealt with him never even though of toeing the line, not wanting to anger such a renowned necromancer. With such a reputation I was surprised that he even had an apprentice.

This girl was special indeed.

I had requested her name for the sole reason of keeping track of her. Knowing names would allow me to know when she was searching for a ghost again. How she said her name gave a sort of feel to her magic and spells. It was like a finger print, distinguishing one necromancer from the next.

Elsie graced me with a stone face, still with a touch of emotionless grace. She didn’t even react to Carl moving or me calling her angel. Maybe I had read her wrong. Looking her over, she had the stance of someone who had been trained in etiquette. Poised, emotionless, and the manners gave her background away. I looked at her mentor, he didn’t seem like the one who would have taught her such things. Maybe her parents before she moved here.

“You may call me Elsie.” She said evenly.

I nodded my head, satisfied with just a first name. Names were powerful, and all she gave me was enough to recognize her magic by. Nothing more, nothing less. I was impressed. I nodded towards her mentor, Carl had been thorough with his teaching. Many mentors had to step in to stop their apprentices from spilling everything about themselves.

I was surprised, though, as she stared slightly to my left. Looking around me, I checked to make sure that she hadn’t accidentally pulled in another spirit. Though if she had, her mentor would have stopped the spell. The symbols on the ground are only powerful enough to retain one spirit. Two could cause a backlash of protective energies. When this happened, authorities write it off as a gas explosion.

Moving a bit, I watched her eyes. They stayed riveted to the left of me. Well this was interesting. I had never heard of a necromancer that was blind.

Coming to the edge of the circle, I asked, “Elsie, can you see me?”

Something flashed across her face. Anger? Sadness? Contempt? Reaching behind her, she pulled a notebook in front of her. Flicking it open, she asked. “I have questions pertaining to the late Marcie Prouder, what is your starting price?”

It seemed that I had hit a soft spot; she wasn’t going to give up such information, so I left it at that. Listing off the possible things I would want in return for the information, I studied her. I kept studying her throughout the years. Watching her grow, learning to wish for the world of the living once again. The memories of my betrayal were still fresh in my mind, and I thought of ‘if only’s.

If only I could forget everything but her.

It didn’t take long for Elsie to finish the preparations, or at least it didn’t feel like that to me. She summoned me back, her workshop still as meticulous as I had left it. Three circles surrounded the selected parties, precise, painted black ruins decorated the outside of the circles.

Elsie thrummed with power, I couldn’t tear my eyes from her. Her staff hung from her hands parallel to the floor, the beads and tassels clinking together as power gathered in the focus. An old leather book floated in front of her, pages pinned as her eyes scanned the page over and over, her mind racing as she went over the details in her head.

“I’m here,” I said quietly.

“Then let’s get started,” She said.

Syllables that I didn’t recognize spilled from her lips. They were musical as her voice rose and fell, I was entranced. Magic made itself known, lifting her hair, driving the wind, and flooding all those in the room with a sense of awe. My eyes flitted and danced, trying to catch everything all at once.

Then the pain started.

My eyes blinked open. There was white everywhere, or at least what made up my field of vision. It was a little disconcerting to only see white, and not any color.

I didn’t recognize anything. Nothing.

I didn’t even recognize myself.

Was I waking up from a dream?

Going into a dream?

My eyes flicked to the left, picking up movement. An angel stood before me, though she looked rather gaunt and heavy clothes tried to hide her beauty. Were all angels this skinny and modest?

A small smile graced her lips, and I wondered if I had glimpsed heaven.

“How are you Jacob? Ready to answer my questions?” She asked softly.

I turned my head looking for this Jacob, slightly jealous that she was smiling at him and not me. I wanted an angel to smile at me.

A hand crossed my vision, cradling my cheek. She moved my attention back to her. She looked worried, and slightly angry. “We had a deal Jacob. I would give you a vessel and you would answer my questions.”

Am I Jacob? It would make sense. “What deal?”

She cursed, warping her angelic self. She sighed, leaning back onto her heels, “Knew it went too smoothly.” A notebook appeared in her hands and she began to scribble. “Can you leave that body?”

I tilted my head in confusion. Leave my body? How does one leave a body? Is it a physical thing, or is it mentally driven? Squinting my eyes, I tried to force myself out of the body, but nothing happened.

Sighing in defeat, I said, “No. No I can’t leave my body.” My self-worth started to deflate, the angel was not pleased with me.

The angel sighed, and turned to leave. Her heels clicked as she started to glide towards the door.

I sat up, reaching out. “Wait! What will happen to me?” Fear bubbled up. I didn’t know anything, I was vulnerable and new. I needed guidance. My eyes flicked to my hands, and I gasped.

My body was made of cloth, it wasn’t as smooth as the angels. She had perfect, gaunt skin. Was this why she was disappointed? Was I a failed creation? Sadness washed over me, threatening to sweep me away.

I heard a sigh, the angel turned her head. “I guess I’ll have to find something for you to do.” The pen tapped against her lip, “You can maintain the house until I can figure out how to reverse this.” She waved at me to follow her.

The sadness and fear halted within me. I had a purpose, and the angel wasn’t going to leave me. Scrambling down, my cloth status forgotten. “What is your name angel?”

A sad expression shadowed her features before disappearing. “You never change do you?” She crouched down and ruffled my yarn hair. “You may call me Elsie.”

Happiness brimmed as I felt hope well within me. I had found my home.