

The Eyes Weren't Plastic – Alyssa, Year 7, QLD

Bringing back the ones you've lost teased his mind.

Matthew, a taxidermist, was usually stuck in his head with wooden planks over the doors, and often found himself holding a corpse, one with a beak, or talons, or razor blade teeth, and a compact sewing kit and a surgical scalpel. The process made the gears in his head turn. He was intelligent. His mind thought of wonders one couldn't possibly perceive. Thoughts of things filled with rouge and chartreuse, weaving in and out of nerves and equations, dancing in dimly lit moods.

He couldn't share his knowledge with anyone however, living in a bunker deep in a place called Cronia's darkly thought of catacombs. Company was scarce, forcing him to make company himself. His eyes, hooded as the darkest cave, had a vision for reincarnation. Where he got his specimens, nobody knew but him, all that was uncovered being oddly sized packages, with paper as brown as a tree trunk bearing golden leaves. Faint red stained his creamy grey apron and mechanical goggles. Animals large and small laid and stood and stared in his small, cobweb infested room. Some were mounted against a large, imposing post south east to other so called residents. Lamps and glass mason jars illuminated their pupils, giving them a ghoulish glow that gave them a sense of life.

Nevertheless, they were the only thing Matthew cared about anymore.

Trapped in a cycle of everyday life, Matthew grabbed a package on the smaller side, wrapped in mildewed grey paper, a symbol something was out of the ordinary. As he turned it around in his hands, he noticed something.

The addressed label read a series of symbols he recognised. "Moteetrap Neighbourhood Asylum".

As his eyes wistfully glided over those three words, memories flooded back to him, causing his eyes to go wide like saucers and his hands to tremble like mad.

Of course he'd remember that name.

Of course, he would remember the very place where he watched his mother die. Of course he'd remember all of the suffering he went through. But of course, Matthew couldn't come face to face with it once more, so he shook his head and went back to his doings. Funnily enough, the creature who was curled up in that package was an owl, his mother's least favourite bird.

Elucidated by the light of oil lanterns, the silken fur of the mummified creatures lighted the way through the labyrinth of a bunker. Matthew, like a mole stirring from beneath the ground, tumbled out of his room, his blood stained hands quickly going to work, attentively slicing open the stomachs of fist-sized creatures and sewing back the ears of a floppy skin

suit of what used to be a living, breathing mammal. A taxidermist's work, you'd guess. More like a morning's worth of gore which was hardly scratching a mounter-of-animal's amount of brain power and the focus of these people are like a laser.

Just as he was sewing the frontal lobe area of a well-fed jackal, a small thump could be faintly audible behind him. One of the mounts hanging atop a dresser had toppled to the ground, scratching a small, bleeding cut into the hook it stood on.

What Matthew saw next, may stand as something the hospitalised may hallucinate. The lifeless, yet ghastly, plated hare wriggled its way out of the oak wood back-board & dragged itself across the creaky floor panels, leaving a trail of molten blood behind it.

Peculiar as this was, Matthew brushed it off as a normal, everyday occurrence. He arched his back, took a sigh and hauled his shut down body to where the path of iron cordial ended. There lay the hare's (now COMPLETELY dead) corpse laying on soft dirt, surrounded by wires and (you guessed it) more blood.

Matthew cupped the body in his stressed, veiny hands and walked back into the yellow, warm darkness of his secluded living.

Days passed, more odd things happening with time; ears twitching, eyes flickering, heads jittering. They were brushed off as ordinary. He, deprived of sleep and rest, found himself misplacing certain parts of the body, on one occasion he placed a tail on the upper abdomen and another a beak where one's eye should be. Occurring more and more frequently, Matthew finally succumbed to the gods of resetting, flopping onto the mink fur sofa, his eyes flickering before finally letting his mind decompose for a few hours.

Middle of the night. He was awoken to an idiosyncratic royal blue glow haunting the pale darkness. Body limp with sleep, Matthew woke to all of the mounts and creatures' eyes and mouths emitting a ghastly glow, their extracted intestines somehow squeezing out of ears and noses, muzzles stained with unexplainable fluids.

As ancient chants filled the air, Matthew was left speechless upon raising himself off of the mattress of skin to get a better look. He gawked in utter consternation when all of the reptiles and mammals finally took a screech at a volume of a thousand decibels, the macabre shapes of white irradiating the lonely room. It all came to a close with the organs rising, then falling to the floor, the radiation and volume shaking the ground, and pushing Matthew to the edge of the room.

Meanwhile above the earth's surface, a minor earthquake occurred directly above his residence. The local authorities, curious about the racket and the so-called "volshebnyk", had begun searching all around Cronia County for a solid few days.

He was never found at the surface, so they started searching for his creations, rather. Like him, they weren't found, so their final resort was to dig deep below the ground. However, his

bunker began to crack open under the impact. At long last, the roof began to crumble. Shards of asbestos and soft wood rained from above, making Matthew aware of the current situation and frantically began trying to unlock his dishevelled front door, before ultimately having to resort to kicking it down with steel toed boot.

Pacing through the lanky tunnels of the catacombs, Matthew came to an issue. All exits had been blocked, forcing him to be stuck in between all of the crushing rubble.

Surprisingly, he welcomed death with open arms. He quickly and silently acknowledged his past; the pain, the suffering and the refuge he had in the arts. He then had finally realised why he loved taxidermy; it was like the hugs from the mother he lost.

His expression softened. Then he realised he was ready to meet his fate.

But when authorities finally arrived, nothing was left except the taxidermist's children, their eyes moist with mould.