

Dummies

By Leah Jenkins

It was a cold, dark, and rainy fall night. The rain drizzled on us as we walked along the bustling streets of New York City. It was Zoe's birthday, and I had a big surprise planned for her. "Can't you just tell me where we're going?" Zoe begged.

"No, that would ruin the surprise," I said. I was taking her to the world renown ventriloquist, Charles Smith. "Ok, we're almost here so close your eyes."

"Fine," said Zoe.

I cautiously guided her for two more blocks, until we were in front of the bright, crowded theater.

"You can open your eyes now," I said full of pride and excitement.

"Oh—my—gosh!" Zoe exclaimed.

She couldn't stop smiling! I was beaming because this was the happiest I had ever seen her, and I had known her for 10 years. We found our seats, and the curtains began to rise.

“Please welcome the one and only Charles Smith!” the announcer yelled. The theater erupted with applause. But being Zoe, she screamed at the top of her lungs. She had always loved ventriloquism, but I had always thought of ventriloquism as slightly creepy. There was just something about the puppet’s creepy, realistic faces. I had to hold in my feelings though because it was her birthday and I didn’t want to bring her down. We watched the show and Zoe was in hysterics the whole time. I wasn’t necessarily in hysterics, but I thought it was funny. Charles was a wonderful ventriloquist, so good that it almost seems like he wasn’t moving the dummies mouths—like they were saying it themselves.

After the show, it was about 11:00. I was so exhausted after a day of nonstop activities. Zoe had to go the store to pick up God knows what, but I was too tired to tag along. Instead, I headed back to our apartment and fell asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow.

I woke up around seven, as I always do. Then, I made Zoe and myself some coffee and got changed for work. I usually make the coffee for Zoe and me, because Zoe can not wake up early for the life of her. I knocked on her door to wake her up but she didn’t answer. I banged my fist against the door again and again but nothing. I opened up the door... and no one was there.

‘Huh, maybe she went to work early, I’ll just call her.’

I called. She didn’t pick up.

I called again and again and again, but she still didn’t answer...

'Maybe her phone just died,' I told myself. She was supposed to just go to the store and come home, but she obviously never showed up. I called her boyfriend to see if she went over to his apartment, but he said she never came over. I called her office seeing if she'd gone in early but no one has seen her. My body all of a sudden filled with anxiety and fear.

I tried to calm myself down—and told myself that she was ok.

But I knew deep down she wasn't.

'Where could she possibly be?' I kept asking myself. I called the store she said she was going to, but they said they don't remember anyone coming in that late at night. It was about 11am by now. I had been calling people for hours, yelling her name while walking along the street.

"Zoe! Zoe Hutson!" I yelled.

But she never responded. People gave me stares and whispered things, but I could care less. All I wanted was to find Zoe, yet she was nowhere to be found. I tried every option, I had been down every street, and called everyone I knew to call. *'Where could she possibly be?'*

I panicked.

I started hyperventilating.

At that moment, I fell to the ground—gasping for air.

I tried to catch myself. The rough, bumpy, and sharp pavement tore up my hands. Tears streamed down my face. I slowly got up taking deep breaths as I went. I sat down on a bench I found and started calming myself down, but it didn't work. *'Where is she, WHERE IS SHE!'* People must have really thought I was insane by now. Not only had I been running up and down the streets screaming, but I had fallen to the ground crying. With very little doubt that it would work and running out of options, I called the police department to file a missing persons report. I couldn't go to work today—definitely not like this. I called my boss telling her why I couldn't come, and she sent her prayers; I knew that they wouldn't help.

I sat and thought for hours just thinking about Zoe and crying.

Actually, I sat for days on end without any response from the police, or any news about Zoe at all really. *'Huh, I guess the police had better things to do.'* I had officially no hope left.

Two weeks passed and still nothing. I went on with my day like normal, but my heart was still missing a huge piece. After several months, I was 100 percent sure Zoe was dead.

I was reading the news when I stumbled upon something. Charles Smith would be back to perform, and in honor of Zoe, I thought I should go. I worked up the courage to get ready and go out to the show. I walked up to the theater and my body flooded with memories and emotions. Just six months ago I was here with Zoe, and now I'm here without her. I put on a fake, happy face and hid my true feelings of sadness and despair. The show started and the whole theater

was filled to the brim with laughter. Then he brought out a new dummy and I noticed something.

Something wasn't right.

The dummy looked exactly like Zoe. Her long, straight, black hair. Her glistening green eyes, and fair, gentle skin. *'Maybe I just miss her so much that I'm seeing her in the dummy even though it's completely normal. Am I going insane? No. I couldn't be, I could feel her, I know it is her. How could this be possible though? It can't be. Can it?'*

I tried to ignore it.

'It's a completely normal dummy just relax.' But I couldn't relax. I couldn't control my thoughts. I don't know how, but this dummy is her and I knew it. I saw the Zoe I know and love trapped inside of a dummy. It was impossible, yet it made complete sense.

Only six months ago, I was here with Zoe at the same theater, same show. Then that night right after the show she went missing, and now the ventriloquist has a dummy that is completely identical to her. It made sense in my head but a big part was still not lining up—how could this be possible? All I knew was that Zoe was trapped inside of a dummy and was being tortured by Charles Smith the so called “world renown ventriloquist” and I had to do something about it. I remembered thinking at the first show something wasn't right, the dummies seemed so realistic—too realistic in my opinion. I could tell Zoe noticed me, she was trying to say

something but she couldn't. She was being tortured inside this wooden body for six months, while I had been at home moping around doing nothing to help.

I had to do something, but what? My mind was spinning with all the information by the time the show was done. I acted as if I was walking out, but I turned and found my way backstage. I tiptoed trying not to make any noise knowing it would cost my life if he heard me. Backstage was dark, except for a circle of candles around Charles. There were weird symbols on the floor. He was speaking, but in a language I couldn't understand. It must have been some sort of spell, or some sort of black magic. Then I heard a scream from the corner, but it wasn't Zoe. It was a little girl being held captive in a cage. She must have been his next victim. The poor girl was curled up in a ball with her brown hair hiding her scared, innocent face. She screamed, kicked, and cried.

Then the room lit up.

I saw all of his dummies lined up. I almost screamed. Twenty something people trapped inside of a wooden doll and being tortured into insanity. I saw the dummy who was at the beginning of the show. He must have only been eight or nine. I thought of how sad his family must have been, and all the torment he had been through. He had golden blond hair and ice blue, beautiful childish eyes. There were children, grandparents, women, mothers and fathers screaming for their release, but their mouths were sealed.

I saw Zoe.

Her beautiful smile gone and hidden behind a painted one. I was hiding from Charles, but she managed to spot me. She was screaming for help but all she could manage were murmurs. Murmurs full fear and anxiety filled the stage, yet Charles wasn't phased one bit. He continued to chant. I had to do something, but what? How could I save all these hopeless people? Then, I realized that there was only one way.

"Charles Smith," I yelled.

I rose up from my hiding spot and into the vulnerable light. "I know who you are and what you've done," I said with a spark of courage that would soon be lost.

"Oh, well do you now?" Charles questioned devilishly. He was intimidating up close. His tall and lanky body topped with black hair looked like the villain in a book only a few people would dare to read. You could tell he was quite tired, by the way that huge bags hung heavily under his eyes.

I quickly became nervous, the boiling adrenaline that was once running coursing through my veins had gone cold and had turned into fear. *'Why did I get myself into this.'* *'I can't do this, I'll just end up being a dummy with everyone else.'* *'No, I can't let myself think like this. I have to save her, I have to do this for Zoe and the greater good.'*

"You have taken all these poor innocent people hostage and have turned them into your toys," I snapped back.

“Well, aren’t you a smart little one,” he replied with a horrifying smile that showed off his decaying, yellow teeth.

“Look I don’t know how you did the things that you did, but listen here,” I said, “I will exchange myself to you for eternity if you let all of the other dummies free,” I bargained. “I will never say anything you don’t want said, and I will be your perfect dummy.”

“Hmmm,” he pondered, “it does sound like a good deal.”

“Please, just please take me instead of all these others,” I begged.

“I will only take you up on this offer under one circumstance. The other dummies must never say a word about any of this, and I mean it,” He explained. “If anyone of you stupid little dummies say anything I will find you and turn you right back,” He said.

“Fine, just please let them go,” I said.

They all continued to murmur, all of them nodded except Zoe. Her head stayed perfectly still, just like the doll she now was. I knew Zoe could get over losing me, and it was better if I was the dummy.

I had to do this. *‘Come on you can do this, be brave!’* It was for the greater good. I love Zoe so much, I couldn’t stand to live another day knowing that I did nothing to help her.

“Fine I’ll take you,” he agreed.

He grabbed the little girl that was in the cage and shoved her away. She ran away crying, traumatized from what she had seen. He pushed me forcefully into the cage. I closed my eyes and covered my ears. I couldn’t bare to hear Zoe’s muttered screams any longer. I knew that in the end this was the right choices— even if it meant I was stuck inside a dummy for eternity.

I heard a deafening scream— then I opened my eyes...

I was paralyzed.

Laying flat down. The only thing I could move was my mouth and eyes. I felt my perfect glass eyes come together as I blinked. I sat in silence while Charles maneuvered me in all sorts of ways. Making me say stupid jokes, and laugh like an idiot. I felt so helpless—like I was just a piece of wood with a face. I missed Zoe everyday, I missed her positive energy, her sarcastic remarks that always made me laugh. *‘I did the right thing, I saved Zoe and many other innocent people.’* I had to tell myself that everyday to get through the endless torment.

Turns out the malicious liar didn’t even turn the other dummies back. I would visit them every night after my show. In pain and agony, I watched his collection of dummies grow larger. I couldn’t bear it. Everytime someone would join, I would just cry letting the tears fall down my flawless painted face. The most heartbreaking was when a kid would join the group. I still remember vividly when our first child joined. He was so scared. He was only seven years old,

with dark black hair and forest green eyes. He reminded me of so much of Zoe. I saw him everyday since then, he looked frightened out of his mind. His poor soul trapped inside a stupid doll. All their childhood and innocence stripped away from them. But, I knew that there was nothing I could do—or anyone else.

Not since I was trapped inside a wooden dummy for eternity.