

Welcome anyone! This is one of our unfinished episodes. The script is mostly unrevised, so any grammar check/sensitivity reading will have come after. You may see some highlighted parts, which are usually notes to check accuracy or pronunciation notes for our cast. Here, you get to see our writer's stream of thought, so please be kind and remember that what you see in the final product is never a first draft! With that, enjoy the story!

EPISODE 15 - DOLLS

In Hardizan, status matters. Performing who you are, and who your family are, can be vital to maintaining a well-groomed and presentable image to those around you who might be in a position to extend a hand to you, pulling you up to yet loftier echelons. In [city], the nursery of the Maynard household is stacked wall to wall with the latest innovations in clockwork dolls. Pristine pieces with neatly pressed dresses, carefully formed ringlets, and delicate porcelain faces. They are finely tuned instruments of demonstrating status. Each time a new one is announced, lovingly illustrated in trade cards hand-delivered or in the windows of speciality shops, the Maynards are sure to purchase it shortly after. And every dinner party, just like clockwork, the pride of the collection, Abriel Maynard, is wheeled out. And at each dinner, Abriel knows the routine.

Their reputation precedes them. Each dinner guest coos with delight at the intelligent eyes set in the skull of the infamously learned child. Abriel takes their seat near the head of the table and listens intently, until one of the dinner guests passes a comment that they've learned an opinion about. Then, they swiftly seize the opportunity to voice it.

"Yes, Mr Grenville. I've heard about the [lore]. If you ask me [opinion on lore that's kind of sassy]!"

"Certainly, Mrs Thorpe. Smuggling at our northern border is a serious issue, but the reason is quite frankly beyond me. Talsorians are all flash, no substance. There are much classier, more - ahem - *real* ways to show one's sense of style without decorating oneself in screens. It's rather gauche. Shallow aesthetes competing for who can be the newest, without any appreciation for anything *classic*! Where's the timelessness? The heritage? I tell you, there is very little one could want that you couldn't acquire as an heirloom - aside from my lovely dolls of course."

"Oh, Mx Abernathy, I've heard a lot of talk about [lore]. But I can't help but feel that many fail to consider [other element of lore]. Don't you think [cognizant opinion]?"

Their father and mother beam with pride at every introjection, and their smiles grow even wider with every startled comment from a guest at Abriel's vocabulary, articulation, and comprehension of such complex ideas to develop opinions really worth discussing at the dinner table. And when the guests adjourn to the drawing-room, Abriel is carried away, and always falls asleep in the arms of one of the servants before they are tucked into bed, exhausted, all their springs unwound. Their dreams were haunted by possibility.

BEGINNING OF SEGMENT [1]

[OUTDOORS. THERE'S SOME SCRAP METAL BEING MOVED AROUND AND GRAVEL CRUNCHING AS CHARLIE AND PEACHES MOVE AROUND.]

CHARLIE. She said it was somewhere around here.

PEACHES. This is definitely a place Eshe would hang out. Look at all this cool stuff!

CHARLIE. That's just a screwdriver.

PEACHES. Yeah, but it's got engravings on it. Which is awesome.

CHARLIE. It should be just over here.

PEACHES. There's so many abandoned buildings around here, how does she know which one isn't being surveyed?

CHARLIE. She just knows these things. Probably a lack of cameras or maintenance in the building.

PEACHES. I can't wait to see it, though. We'll finally have a proper headquarters! Like professionals... We need a name, Charlie.

CHARLIE. Do we?

PEACHES. Of course we do! It adds to our credibility.

CHARLIE. That's true... What kind of name?

PEACHES. Hmm. Something like... "the community... group." Hmm. "The helping group." Something like that.

CHARLIE. It doesn't really say much about us as individuals, though.

PEACHES. Yeah...

CHARLIE. What about "the Worker's Brigade?"

PEACHES. Ooh! That's got a ring to it!

CHARLIE. Glad you like it. Oh! This should be it!

[BEAT.]

CHARLIE. I'm not sure how to get in.

PEACHES. The door looks bolted, maybe there's a side entrance or something?

[CRUNCHING FOOTSTEPS.]

CHARLIE. Hmm.

[GLASS CRACKS BENEATH FEET.]

PEACHES. Oh, Charlie! Here!

CHARLIE. What did you find?

PEACHES. This window is big enough to fit through.

CHARLIE. You're right. But here, hold on.

[CHARLIE BREAKS SOME OF THE GLASS OFF.]

CHARLIE. Now it's a bit safer.

PEACHES. Woah, you just broke a window! I'm proud of you!

CHARLIE. Oh hush, it was already broken. Come on.

PEACHES. I'm right behind you.

[THEY CLIMB IN THROUGH THE WINDOW, AND THEIR FOOTSTEPS START TO ECHO. THERE'S A BIT OF A BREEZY SOUND IN HERE.]

PEACHES. Wow.

CHARLIE. *Wow.*

PEACHES. Wo-how-how. This is nice.

CHARLIE. What's that?

PEACHES. Hm?

CHARLIE. Over there.

[FOOTSTEPS.]

PEACHES. It kind of looks like that radio Eshe gave us. But bigger.

CHARLIE. Way bigger. Do you think it's a radio?

PEACHES. We could ask Kass.

CHARLIE. We could! Let's look around a little first, and then we'll walk around to see if there's a place we can contact them.

END OF SEGMENT

The morning after a particularly boisterous dinner party that had cracked the cask on several vintages, Abriel spoke up at breakfast.

"Do they really have boxes full of dreams in Talsoria? Where you can be anyone? Like a book you can be inside of?"

Mr Maynard rustled his newspaper sharply and gazed over it at Abriel with a sharply cocked eyebrow. "Probably. They have all manner of superficial, ridiculous, airheaded things up there." He punctuated his point with a roll of his eyes.

Abriel tried a conspiratorial smile. "I think it sounds rather interesting."

Mr Maynard did not smile back.

When Abriel was in the thick of lessons with their governess, Mrs Maynard sent the maid to go and fetch them. When Abriel asked why, the maid simply replied that Abriel had a present in the foyer, something she had been told they wanted ardently. Abriel thought back to the conversation at the breakfast table and dared to hope that perhaps their father's callous silence may have been contemplation.

The box in the foyer was tall and thin, but that did not dissuade them. They did not know what kind of shape a Talsorian contraption might take. They carefully removed the packaging to find only a neatly pressed dress, carefully formed ringlets, and a delicate porcelain face. They tried to hide their disappointment as they looked up at their mother's grin.

"Go on, turn the key!" Mrs Maynard encouraged. They did, and the doll performed a slow and jerky dance.

Abriel performed gratitude admirably as the servants carried it to the nursery, and returned to their lessons feeling sulky.

At the end of the day they were glad to hear that there was to be no dinner party. They walked *themselves* up to bed and was just settling

down to sleep when they heard a clattering from outside. Their window looked out onto the alley below, where the household rubbish was left at the end of each day. Someone was down there, picking through it.

"Hey!" Abriel called.

The child started and looked up. "Keep your cog-damn voice down, will ya?" they hissed.

"What are you doing?"

"What's it look like? Hunting for scraps. Got any to throw down?"

The child had a bag slung over their shoulder. They readjusted it as they spoke. As it shifted, a long and thin arm reached out and steadied it on their shoulder. Abriel gasped.

"Is that--"

"Huh? What? It's nothing." They took the bag off their shoulder and jostled its contents, as though in reprimand.

"No, no! I saw it! You have something from Talsoria in your bag!"

The kid's head whipped around, looking for witnesses. "Alright, alright! If I admit it will you shut the hell up?"

"What's your name?"

"Luka."

Abriel mustered up all of their dinner party training into the next words. "Well, Luka, I'll do you one better. You get me something I want and I'll make it well worth your while."

Luka stared back at them for a moment and then laughed. "You're ridiculous. But rich, so I guess that's allowed. What do you want?"

Abriel stumbled over their thoughts for a moment. What were they even looking for?

"Something from Talsoria."

Luka raised their eyebrow and started taking things out of the bag. There were six contraptions. None with screens. All of them appeared to be arms, and the four of them detailed enough to tell the difference were all left arms. Abriel shook their head.

"Not that."

Luka sighed and tossed one of the smaller arms limply onto the ground. It pulled itself upright indignantly. "Talsoria's a big place. Got lots of stuff in it. You've gotta be more specific."

[idk how to fix this :') someone with more distance pls read it. I know the problem is here somewhere. It's too quick but its not like giving up the doll is a difficult choice for Abriel since the whole point of them is that they are more for their parents than them. Should there be more emotional weight given to the disobedience? Maybe underscore that the choice is difficult not because Abriel likes the dolls but because they don't want to give away any of their status, because that's kind of what the dolls represent here???

A week later, and the Maynards were once again preparing the house for guests. Mr Maynard, who would normally be supervising the table setting, was instead pacing about the nursery searching.

"I can't fathom how you lost it, Abi. Brand new and everything. [expensive amount of money] down the drain. Did you even bring it out of this room? Nevermind. Don't tell me. And don't bring any of the others out in case you lose them too, even though the best one's gone already. And don't mention this at dinner. I would have liked to brag about it but it seems that option is off the table."

Abriel nodded along to the tirade earnestly. When their father was satisfied he left to oversee the preparations. And, from under the dolls, Abriel retrieved a slim device, the size of both of their

splayed hands with a screen covering its surface. They switched it on and a mechanical voice greeted them.

"Welcome, new user. Input name?"

BEGINNING OF SEGMENT [2]

[RADIO STATIC.]

CHARLIE. Almost got it.

PEACHES. We should just leave it on Arcadia's channel.

CHARLIE. I know. It just gets jostled in my bag sometimes.

KASS. -ches, Charlie, can you hear me?

CHARLIE. Hey, Kass! Can you hear us?

KASS. Yeah! Hi guys! I heard you might have found a radio station?

CHARLIE. We did. Peaches and I did a little sleuthing and managed to find the name of an old radio company on most of the equipment. It looks like it hasn't been used in a really long time, but maybe we can try to fix it up.

KASS. That would be awesome! You guys could get in contact with me anytime, and you could even broadcast to Arcadia!

PEACHES. Wait, really?

KASS. Pretty sure! That'd be so cool!

CHARLIE. Then we'll definitely look into fixing it up! Our friend Eshe is handy with these sorts of things-

PEACHES. And I'm going to ask her if she wants to come help us spruce up this place after work tomorrow!

KASS. Ah! I'm so excited for you guys!

PEACHES. We are too!

CHARLIE. Ah, if you wouldn't mind, once we get these fixed up, would you be able to help us figure out how to use it?

KASS. Of course, guys! I'd love to help.

PEACHES. Awesome. I can't wait to get this place up and running!

END OF SEGMENT