

Detective Bearbones and the Mad Marionette

Chapter 1

It was a devilishly cold night in the shaded streets of the Toybox. Mist hung low in the air, rendered a shimmering silver by the glowstick streetlamps. High time when all the decent folk would be away to sleep, leaving the dark building-block alleyways and twisting playhouse lanes empty of good. Yet not quite empty altogether. For these were the hours where scoundrels came out to play, making mischief in the dark around every corner. Crooks ruled the world when the light was gone, and only the lost souls were mad enough to make their ventures through the dark.

The General was one such soul. A toy soldier out on the job, waiting in the dark with a crime scene at his back. It was a damned trade, clearing up the streets, and one that he'd sworn to give up years ago. But there was never a time when innocent toys didn't need help - he knew that first hand. For as he stood, lonely in the night, the General found himself as a scared toy in need of assistance. He needed a specialist. He just hoped his message had reached one in time.

Suddenly, in the alleyway ahead of him, the General noticed a shift in the silvery haze. A figure was approaching through the mist, and dread seeped into every fixed joint of the toy soldier's body. He huddled tight to the wall of the alley, peering off into the dark to try and make out the shape of the oncoming silhouette. Wind whipped ominously through the fog, and the General could just about see that the shadow belonged to a stuffed toy. He breathed a sigh of relief.

Detective Bearbones stepped out of the mist, shadowed in the night. A black crayon was protruding from the side of his mouth, waxy and glowing, billowing out a sinister smog. The teddy bear approached the toy soldier with curiosity glistening in the edge of his beady eyes, stopping at the opposite end of the alleyway.

"Whatever this is," he growled, "it better be good."

The General nodded, his green face warping into a downcast expression. "We've got another one."

"I coulda guessed." Bearbones pulled his textured poncho tight around him, breathing out a mouthful of black crayon smoke. "And you think its linked?"

"We're almost certain."

"Fuzz," the Detective cursed, spitting up a bit of fluff and watching it hit the floor. "Crime never has an evening off. But you can explain the details on the way," he began to trudge over, clapping the General on the shoulder. "If it really is *him* then we need to get moving."

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He was getting too old for this. Tramping along the unlit streets towards a crime scene, damp hanging in the air. There wasn't enough justice in all the world to justify it. Detective Bearbones felt his fur bristle in the cold, and he clung tight to his poncho to steady himself against the wind, still suckling on the end of a smoking crayon.

"The victim is unidentified as of yet," the General explained, walking alongside. "An action figure. One of the expensive ones."

"In this neighbourhood?" Bearbones scowled to the downcast scenery around them. "What was a toy like that doing in a place like this?"

“That we also don’t know.”

The Detective scoffed. “Gonna be a busy night, then.”

The pair of lawmen rounded a corner and reached the crime scene, cordoned off by lines of thread and ribbon. Toy soldiers manned the perimeter, patrolling in pairs. The General nodded to them, ducking under the ribbon and holding it up for Bearbones to do the same. The Detective puffed out a mouthful of crayon smoke, walking along behind the toy soldier until he gestured to a broken toy strewn across the ground.

“Our victim,” the General announced, starting to list off the details of the case. But Bearbones had stopped listening. The Detective bobbed down beside the broken toy and frowned, analysing the face of the broken action figure.

“Kurt,” he whispered, putting a paw to his mouth. “He used to drink at Tyke’s Diner. I knew him.” And now Bearbones could see him laying broken on the street, with his poor head separated from the rest of his body. It had been popped right off.

“I’m sorry,” the General looked down at the floor, but that was it for his sympathies. “The crook used a wire. You can see the lines it left,” he gestured to the lonely head of the action figure. “You know what that means.”

“It had to be *him*.” Bearbones dunked his paws into his pockets, brooding. “The Mad Marionette. Kurt is just one more body on the pile.”

The General nodded, turning to one of his toy soldiers and fetching a binder of information. “The events of tonight make your friend our third victim,” he declared, holding the binder out for Bearbones to take, but the Detective pushed it away. He wasn’t in the mood for logistics. Instead, he crouched back down next to the body, getting a good long look at the wire marks around Kurt’s neck. It was the Mad Marionette alright, Bearbones would know those wounds anywhere.

“But *why?*” the Detective asked, voicing his thoughts aloud. “None of the victims have any relation to each other. First the puppy princess, then poor old Nancy. And now Kurt. They ain’t connected.”

The General was sporting a concerned expression on his green face. “The Marionette must have some personal motive,” he claimed, but there was an unsure tone to his voice.

“Nah, that ain’t it.” Bearbones pawed gruffly at his fuzzy chin, chewing his mouth around nothing. “I think someone else is pulling his strings.” With a lethargic groan, the Detective got slowly back to his feet. “I don’t like this, General. Not one bit.”

“Nor me,” the toy soldier gave a wary look around the crime scene. “Where does one even start on a case like this? There isn’t exactly much to go on.”

“Well... I’ve got one lead,” Bearbones grinned, taking one last puff of crayon smoke before discarding it to the ground. “But it’s a long shot.”

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End of Excerpt.

Written by Cameron Dickson.