“The Waxmaker”

 The acrid smell of smoldering wax filled the air of the small abode. Vapor the color of dry moss emanated out of the jet black pot in waves. The off-green smoke filtered up and into the cracked, brick-built chimney. It rose through the weathered stone until it reached the top, then slowly crested over the crown and dispersed into the darkened night sky. Over the branches of leafless dead trees and crumbling old shingles the smoke flowed, filling the air and joining together with the misty clouds that covered the full stark white moon.

 The wax itself was a gooey, liquified substance that rested in a cauldron suspended above a roaring flame. The crackling of fire mixed with the sound of the bubbling sludge as the glowing embers pulsated to the rhythm of the ticking grandfather clock. The floor in front of the stove was covered in small burns and thin scorch marks. It had started out as a dark stained oak, but had become a rickety, splintering mass of cumbersome small lips and uneven boards. Dripping slowly and steadily, the wax overflowed from a chipped corner of the metallic, spherical prison. It grew in size while it hung upon its cast iron hook. It ate what was fed, and gave what was taken. It lived, and breathed, and listened, and yearned. It sat in its vessel and waited. Waited for the time where it would become whole. Waited for the time where it would be free. Waited for the time where everything would change. Eventually, it would grow out of the confines of the pot, but before then it was tied directly to its master. A master whose disappearances from the room brought the wax both apprehension and impatience. But as time dragged further on and the clock ticked more, the wait began to shorten. After only a small while the door audibly slammed shut with a ringing clatter. The soft padding of feet on the ragged, stained carpet moved towards the simple wooden coat rack. The Waxmaker had returned.

 The man, hunched and slightly limping, removed his brown coat and placed it onto one of many hooks. The Waxmaker turned towards the hearth, eyes brimming with rage, and slowly stepped forward. He muttered angrily to himself as he grabbed a small log from the stack of wood sitting next to the makeshift stove and threw it into the flames. His grayed, wrinkled skin crinkled and twisted as he bent down to look at the pot. The Waxmaker smiled - his mouth full of yellow, chipped teeth - and grabbed the jug resting above the fireplace. The container itself was made of an old browned glass. Corked and half-full, it represented the one thing the wax always wanted: food. The Waxmaker removed the plug and drained a quarter of the liquid into the cauldron. The yellowish slop glooped into the vessel with a steady spill. As the flow began to slow and then cease altogether, and the mass had settled once more, the shriveled man began to speak, brushing stringy white hair away from his bloodshot eyes.

“They don’t seem to believe me,” the grating voice began. The ire in his eyes had returned, glowing in the dim, inconsistent light let off by the snapping of the burning kindling. “They don’t think I can do it.” The intonation of the rasping tongue rose and fell in disbelief and frustration. The Waxmaker lifted his head, staring at nothing. He swallowed, then continued slowly. “I will prove them wrong. All of them.” His fury had ebbed away, replaced by a soft, longing desire. “You will live how I have wished, by the time we are done.”

 The wax grew excited, and yet impatient. The Waxmaker coughed as the acidic smoke filled his lungs, and slowly turned away. “You will live, my child. You will *breathe*.” The wax churned inside the pot, steaming against the hot metal. The man stepped back from the hearth and towards the rest of the house. It was a dilapidated, derelict home, just one moldering room. The only furniture was sparse, simple, and antique. The man moved to a small kitchenette, and grabbed a glass flask filled with golden brown liquid. He removed the cap and tipped it to his lips. The contents were swallowed quickly, and in enormous gulps. When it was empty, the man put the bottle back down and left it there. He stepped sideways and picked a picture up off an old writing desk, a little blonde girl in a flowery blue dress. Her cheeks were rosy and full, with a gleaming smile and piercing ice blue eyes. The child’s hair was long and flowing, ending just above her waist. Her eyelids squinted as though the camera flash had bothered her, scrunching up a bit of her face in the process. But still, she looked happy and excited, completely unaware of what would become of her.  The man sat there for a while, staring at the photo. He felt nothing but regret, and thought of nothing but the girl. The clock’s moving hands were the only sound in the still quiet. But eventually, the Waxmaker grabbed a figurine from  a nearby shelf, a small handmade doll. It was nearly identical to the little girl. He spoke once more to the wax. “This is what you will become. This is *who* you will become.”

He returned to his place over the vessel and extended the doll towards the wax. “Can you see it?” The wax had no eyes, and thus should not have been able to see anything, but the man was so far into his delusions of desperation that he no longer cared to realize so. He had become numb to the world, no longer able to differentiate between the living, dead, and never been. The artificial could live and breathe and the natural could exhale and die. No more could the mind out withstand the body. The man inhaled sharply before continuing. “Can you feel the-” The Waxmaker suddenly coughed again, a vile retching that made his whole body shake. He lost his grip on the doll, which fell into the cauldron with a small plop. “No!”

 The doll rose, and floated to the top of the pot. The Waxmaker stared at the figurine. His work, his life, his dream, his *daughter*. His need and his incessantness boiled over far beyond any temperature the slop in the vessel could reach. The Waxmaker’s eyes intensified, bulging out of his head as the figurine began to melt in the wax, features growing unnatural and aqueous. He couldn’t take it anymore, and reached in to grab it. Just as he was about to plunge his fingers into the bubbling goop, the man stopped. His hand pulled back in reflexive reaction as he watched the wax slowly rise out of the cauldron and reach back. He smiled again, even broader now, as the wax extended further towards him, forming a makeshift hand dripping with green substance off of the long fingers. The Waxmaker stared with wondrous amazement as a head, then a neck, and finally shoulders rose up out of the pot. It was the little blonde girl. But she was different. Her features were sloppy and actively running down her face like wet mud off a shovel. Her body was also weirdly tinged. The girl’s expression was blank, emotionless, nearly unseeing. She sat there, in the cauldron, skin and flesh melting off like hot wax. The Waxmaker reached out towards the girl, and cautiously, gently, grabbed her hand. He screamed and wrenched his limb back in pain, which was now coated in a hot, wet, green substance.

 The Waxmaker shivered in pain, before smiling another time, and stared back at his child, which had now recognized its father. The wax continued to reach for its maker, extending its appendage. They shared a moment there, beside the pot. The two sat there, both drinking in the company of the other. A silent, tender second passed. The Waxmaker had finally succeeded. He had created a living being out of nonliving mass. He sat there, enjoying his success, and whispered to the greenish sludge, “Now you will live anew, my daughter. We’ll be together once more.” Then the arm reached further, and brushed its index finger against the Waxmaker’s cheek. It seared the man’s skin, but he couldn’t care less. His family would be whole again. The wax slowly moved its fingers back off the man’s face. Suddenly its face contorted into a scowl, and lunged. It wrapped all five fingers around the Waxmaker’s neck and squeezed down tight. Its face changed again, this time into a sinister, smirking grin. The man screamed, but it was muffled down into a quiet murmur by the moss-colored hand. He twisted and turned, steam rising up off of his face as his skin melted under the wax. But eventually, his movement slowed, and then stopped altogether.

The wax, now satisfied, laid the Waxmaker down on the floor. It brought its gooey hand over his face, and closed his eyelids in a solemn goodbye, dripping green gunk onto his face in the process. The goop straightened, then poured completely out of the pot, into a thick puddle on the floor. It rose again, swallowing itself up into a humanoid form. The wax took its arms, hands, and fingers and molded itself human features. It changed its appearance as drastically as it could. What was once a pile of acrid slime formed wrinkled skin, chipped teeth, and stringy hair. When it was finished it grabbed the Waxmaker up off the floor and brought him in front of a small desktop mirror. The “man” compared itself to him, then dropped the body on the floor and walked to the coat rack. It grabbed the brown coat off the hook and slowly tugged it on. Then the tinged duplicate simply opened the door, and walked out into the cold, still night.

The Waxmaker had wanted to change the past. To give meaning to loss and a purpose to life. He wanted to go back in time to what could have been, and he attempted to get there in the most desperate method possible. Refused to move on, ignored pleas to move forward. Instead, he chose the wax. The man shaped the wax. Fed it, molded it, loved it, gave his pain, grief, and agony to it. The Waxmaker poured his loss and anger into the wax. He stirred into it hate and fury, seeded it with sadness and regret. The wax drank all of his pain up, internalized it, and gave meaning to it. Then the wax gave him the pain right back.