

Chekhov's Gun

This was a mistake.

I should've seen it coming. I sighed, strolling along the beach. I've never been one for parties, but my mother was 'worried about my social skills' and 'concerned with the direction my life is heading'. I scoffed, who needs social skills? I'm fine by myself.

I kicked a pebble, staring into the ocean. The sun was setting and the sunlight bled orange and red into the darkening sky. I always thought of myself as introspective and *majestic*. That's why I don't have friends, everyone is intimidated by me.

Yeah, that's why.

I was startled out of my thoughts when a wave splashed at my feet, drenching my socks.

"These shoes are new..." I muttered, brushing off sand. After feeling something knock into my leg, I realized sand wasn't the only thing that the ocean dumped on me.

I turned my head. Pressed against my heel was a small glass bottle, the kind you see tiny model ships in. I picked it up, examining it quizzically. It didn't have a tiny ship in it, but a sheet of yellowing paper and a vintage train ticket.

I sat on the beach and yanked the cork from the bottle's lip, its contents spilling onto the damp sand. The paper unrolled, displaying a fancy title reading 'Chekhov's Gun'.

"Chekhov's Gun.. Chekhov's Gun... Where have I heard that before?" I mused, reading further. "*If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off...*"

I was about to continue investigating, picking up the train ticket, when the strangest feeling came over me. It felt like the sea itself was consuming me, dragging me into its depths. I closed my eyes to fight off the feeling, and when I opened them, I wasn't sitting on the sand of Huntington Beach anymore. Instead, I found myself standing before a teller's box in the midst of a Victorian looking train station. A termite-eaten sign hung from the ceiling, reading *Bethnal Green Train Station*. The room was warm, lamp posts lining the sides of the station. The ceiling

of the teller's area was low, but rose sharply at the mouth of the station. The concrete was as cracked as the glass of the train teller's box. How on Earth could the teller see?

Wait, the teller? As soon as the panicked thought shot through my mind, a gruff British voice grumbled from the teller's box, "Well? What're you waitin' for? Yer gonna miss the train if you loiter any longer."

I examined the teller's box nervously, fidgeting with the drawstring of my hoodie. "Uhm, sorry, sir. I, uh, have to get back home."

"Ah, an *American*." The teller leaned forward, all I could see was a singular, beady eye. "Haven't got an *American* here in good ol' London in a while. Where's yer ticket?"

I don't know why I slipped the old train ticket from the bottle to the teller instead of doing the obvious thing, screaming about how I most definitely should not be in Bethnal Green, let alone London.. Maybe I realized there wasn't a way back, for now. Maybe the teller intimidated me. Who knows, all that matters is I was now sitting alone in an old seat in a train that reeked of mildew in the middle of *Bethnal Green, London*.

This was really *not* my day.

An incomprehensible voice crackled over a loudspeaker hidden somewhere in the train. I was relieved when the voice quieted but immediately wished for it back as soon as the train lurched forward and sped off to god knows where, leaving my stomach far, far behind.

I tripped off the train, hair messy and face flushed, praying I was anywhere else than that train station.

I was face to face with a dark skinned man with a head and beard full of white hair. Goggles rested on his head, and he wore a respectable looking suit, devoid of any dust. He walked hurriedly over to me and spread his arms wide. "*Welcome to the Society of Literary Artifacts, young man!* Hurry along, we mustn't waste time! There's so much to see, hurry, hurry!"

The man yanked me along by my arm, pulling me through piles of labeled items and boxes of what I assumed to be the aforementioned artifacts.

I barely had time to process what was happening and who this man even was, when a stern looking young woman stepped in front of me and the man. "Henry, I *know* we haven't had any guests in awhile, but you haven't even introduced yourself." She turned to me, placing her hands on my shoulders. "I'm sorry, dear. My name is Miss Tallulah, and this is our head curator, Dr. Federman. What did you say your name was?"

"Uh, Terrance. Terry."

"Good to meet you, Terrance. If you'll follow Dr. Federman and me, we can give you a tour."

I was about to protest when Dr. Federman spoke sheepishly, "I know you want to get home, but the next train doesn't come until early morning."

"I... well, I guess it couldn't hurt," I murmured.

Dr. Federman grinned and clapped his hands together, "Splendid! Right this way, lad." He rushed to grab my hand again when Miss Tallulah gave him a glare, and he just beckoned me.

Our tour was quick, but I did see quite a few artifacts, most of them literary rules taken literally. Some ones that stood out included Occam's Razor, a literal razor used just how you expect it to be used, a shaggy dog story, the first few lines read "*This was a mistake. I should have seen it coming*", and a Deus Ex Machina, which looked suspiciously similar to the train ticket I used to get to the museum. Now we were approaching our final destination.

"This is our most *prized* artifact," Dr. Federman looked giddy, "behold, *Chekhov's Gun!*"

A rifle was hung behind fancy looking glass, with a gold plaque underneath. I examined it as Dr. Federman rambled on, detailing how the Society managed to collect it. It unsettled me, the way the rifle hung on the wall, like it was begging someone to take it off the wall.

I tore my eyes away, just as one of the curators burst into the main hall.

"Dr. Federman! Dr. Federman! It's the AAH, they're here!" The curator shouted, and Dr. Federman rushed over with Miss Tallulah.

"So soon? Oh dear, we're hardly prepared!" Dr. Federman sputtered

I looked from Dr. Federman to Miss Tallulah, bewildered. Miss Tallulah explained. "The Authors Against Henry are Dr. Federman's worst enemies, to put it dramatically. They think that our artifacts shouldn't be on display."

"Right you are, love," a tall, shadowy figure strode out from behind a stack of boxes, "Dr. Federman should be thrown in *prison*."

Dr. Federman glared at the figure, "Mr. Whitlock, it's been a minute."

Mr. Whitlock loomed over Dr. Federman, a hoard of angry people behind him. "Today is the day your precious *Society* crumbles to dust."

Dr. Federman spat, "You'll never take the Society while writers like Mr. Terrance still live."

"Hmm," Mr. Whitlock turned slowly to stare at me. I felt a shiver go down my spine. Fast as lightning, Mr. Whitlock grabbed Chekhov's Gun off the wall and shot.

That was it, the end.

Until the bullet crashed into something glowing surrounding me... armor? A hush fell over the room, everyone's eyes fell on me.

Dr. Federman pointed at the ethereal armor on my chest.

That's when I noticed there was something written across it.

"*Plot armor?*"

Miss Tallulah grabbed my arm and ran off through the museum just as it fell into chaos. Yells from the curators and the members of the AAH, glass breaking, and crates falling over. Miss Tallulah breathed heavily, "Come, if you have plot armor, then there's a way for you to get out of here."

She led me to the Deus Ex Machina, the train ticket identical to the one I found on the beach. Miss Tallulah looked at me frantically. "Take it, you mustn't dilly-dally,"

I reached out, and there I was. Back on the beach, the sun had set.

"Sheesh. Now I know why I recognized the shaggy dog story. That was anticlimactic."