

“Quick, don’t let them see you!” Evelyn cried, almost dragging her brother into a bush as she noticed one of their pursuers drawing nearer. Rick yelped, the thorny stems and leaves of the strawberry plant scratching at his skin and clothes as she did, and he turned to scream at his sister before she clamped a hand over his mouth, keeping him silent. Peering through the darkness, they could see one - one of the inhuman automatons giving chase.

One red, glowing eye shone through its empty armour, and it clanked with every move it made, scanning the berry fields for the two escaping teenagers. Evelyn’s breath hitched as it seemed to look directly at them and pause, and she thought that it might be over, that that was the end for them, but it seemed she was worried over nothing, the Hero’s eye moving on-

“What did we even do that was so bad, huh!?” Rick yelled, standing up and charging the Hero, seemingly trying to catch it by surprise and of course forgetting, like usual, the thing wasn’t truly *alive*, and therefore couldn’t be caught by surprise. The Hero drew its weapon in one smooth motion, its blade colliding with Rick’s as the boy tried to split it in two. “All we did was look at that stupid old picture thing!”

Evelyn bit her thumb. Rick didn’t get it, though she had never expected him to. The Tapestry was far more than some ‘stupid old picture’... and the feeling of it, hidden in the bottom of her bag, almost seemed to burn with the guilt she felt. The Hero didn’t respond to Rick’s question - it couldn’t. Instead, the mummified remains of what had once been human opened its mouth in a silent scream, effortlessly pushing Rick back, before charging him and pushing him on the backfoot.

The swordplay of whatever legendary hero this had used to be before becoming... this, was too much for Rick to handle by himself, as talented as he was. Evelyn knew she had to step in, that her brother needed her help, but... she also needed to take the Tapestry back, to tell everyone what they had all thought were legends about their history were actually true - she needed to bring them all hope again.

But... she couldn’t just leave her brother here to die, or worse - be turned into a Hero himself, She grit her teeth, mentally steadying herself to step in, but stopped, her hand clasped around her summoning marbles as she felt a presence that made her blood run cold. She looked out of the strawberry bush as quietly as she could, fear stilling her hand as *he* began to approach, the Hero stopping fighting Rick at once as he glared at the person approaching.

“it’s you... Bastard!” Rick shouted, running and charging at the red-haired man, the man in question simply smirking arrogantly, hands calmly in the pockets of his dark cloak. Rick leapt upwards, and brought his sword down with a ferocity Evelyn had never seen from him before, clearly aiming to cleave the man in two from head to toe. However, the red-haired man seemed to have other plans.

His expression didn’t change at all, as he calmly brought up his arm, before catching and stopping Rick’s attack with his bare hand, without flinching for even a moment. At Rick stared at

him in shock, the red-haired man's expression changed for the first time, at first raising his eyebrows and almost guffawing in amusement at the boy, before his smirk turned cruel, and he raised his free left hand, throwing out a single marble.

Evelyn sensed the danger immediately, and she opened her mouth to scream her brother's name, but it was far too late. With a snap of the man's fingers, the marble detonated, engulfing himself, Rick, and the Hero stood by him in a conflagration, while immolating the strawberry field, the explosion sending Evelyn flying.

The flames cleared almost as instantly as they had appeared, revealing the red-haired man stood unharmed, holding an incinerated Rick by his collar, the Hero by his side also completely fine. "Well, that took longer than I expected." He chirped, before chucking Rick over his shoulder without a care in the world, not being one to care about broken toys.

"Take that one back. He might make a decent one of you, he wasn't the weakest bug I've squashed today." He murmured to the Hero. The automaton nodded, picking up Rick's still smouldering body and heading back from where it came, while the red-haired man stared into the distance, that arrogant smirk on his face and hands back in his pockets as he watched the girl run away with the Tapestry.

If he let her go, he knew he would be in for it. No doubt people would say "How could they possibly screw this up?" or "I suppose all the rumours about him are exaggerated." behind his back, but that wasn't his problem really. It would be far more fun to kill her when it was actually a challenge, and heaven knows there was no one else around who could give him one.

And besides... was it such a bad thing to allow the Tapestry out to the masses? Those said to be 'above' him thought it was, but they were all morons. "Let's see what happens." He whispered, before turning and walking away.

He was just curious to see how the world will change.