

RENDER STILLSKIN

Written by

Big Bad Woof

Address
Over the river and through the woods.

FADE IN:

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

From her wheelchair, MARIA, 10, lovely and innocent, pencils the portrait of a CUSTOMER seated before her. Other samples of her work are displayed on easels.

Her beautiful MOTHER, an adult version of Maria, lovingly moves a lock of hair from her daughter's eyes while she works.

Maria finishes and her mom accepts cash from the satisfied customer, who leaves with his portrait.

MOTHER
I'm gonna get us some hot
chocolate, be right back.

Maria frowns, a knowing look.

MARIA
Mom...

MOTHER
Back in a jiff, scout's honor.

Now distraught, Maria watches her mother leave.

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM(MCDONALDS OR SOMETHING) - DAY

Mom sits on the seat of the toilet and rolls up her sleeve. Wraps a rubber band around her arm.

Dripping sweat - needle poised - a junkie in need of a fix.

But she fights it, lowering her head and sobbing instead.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

Maria, alone, draws a girl that looks much like herself...only dancing and with no wheelchair.

A gang of thugs surrounds her. Let's name a few: CHIP TOOTH, SCRAWNY, and RAIDERS CAP.

CHIP TOOTH
Baby, you got a nice set of wheels.

Scared, she says nothing.

RAIDERS CAP
Let me take it for a spin.

Scrawny flips through the drawings on her easel.

She grabs his wrist and stops him.

SCRAWNY
Ooh, got some fight in her!

INT. PUBLIC BATHROOM(MCDONALDS OR SOMETHING) - DAY

Mom punches the stall wall, still fighting her need.

EXT. CITY PARK - DAY

Chip Tooth wheels Maria towards the top of a steep hill which leads to a pond.

She tries to throw the chair's brakes, but he bends them.

CHIP TOOTH
Let's see what this thing can do.

MARIA
Please!

RAIDERS CAP
Don't worry, if you can't swim, one of us will pull you out. Maybe.

The thugs laugh.

MOTHER (O.S.)
Let her go!

They turn.

Mom has her syringe at the neck of Scrawny.

SCRAWNY
Fuck!

MOTHER
Do it now or this goes through his throat!

CHIP TOOTH
So what, ain't my throat.

Scrawny grimaces in fear.

SCRAWNY
This bitch is serious!

Bored with it all now, Chip Tooth walks off, leaving Maria.

CHIP TOOTH
I was just kidding anyway. Let the
junkie have her kid.

The other thugs follow him off.

Mom releases Scrawny and runs to Maria.

Wheels her back to the artwork - scoops it up and hurries
them away.

Mom, still in need of a fix, is sweating profusely.

MARIA
Mom?

Fighting the monkey on her back, Mom says nothing.

MARIA
Mom --

MOTHER
Come on, let's go home.

MARIA
And the rent?

Mom says nothing again. Maria knows, and we know, what
happened to the rent.

EXT. PAWNSHOP - DUSK

Snowflakes in the air. Seedy part of town. Maria wheels up.

INT. PAWNSHOP - MOMENTS LATER

She shows the CLERK a handful of jewelry.

He shakes his head.

She shows the watch on her wrist. He shakes his head.

She unrolls a portrait, but already his head is shaking.

He slides her a business card:
"Render Stillskin: collector - 10 Grim St."

EXT. 10 GRIM ST. - NIGHT

Just a door between shops, no windows.

A HOMELESS MAN, face invisible under a hood, sits on the sidewalk. Maria wheels past him to the door. He shakes change in a cup held out for donations. She tries not to see him.

She struggles to pull the door open.

The homeless man spits.

She finally gets inside.

INT. 10 GRIM ST. - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

A long, dark, narrow hallway.
She wheels slowly towards the door at the end.

A sign: "Render Stillskin, collector".

She tries the door. Locked.

Pushes a buzzer. The door buzzes open.

SHOP

A tall, SLENDER MAN just inside the door appraises her. Ugly toupee over an odd, lifeless face, almost like a mask.

VOICE BEHIND COUNTER (O.S.)
Come in, come in.

She wheels slowly towards the counter, nervously eyeing what fills the shops: mannequin busts - on the table, on the floor - filling the place. Many wearing lifelike masks.

She arrives at the counter but sees no one.

VOICE BEHIND COUNTER (O.S.)
Help you, help you?

She cranes her neck to see: a grotesque little creature of a man sitting behind the counter - RENDER STILLSKIN.

Hands trembling, she unrolls her portraits.

Render hops onto the counter, barely glancing at her work.

RENDER
Not life, not life.

MARIA
I can do better.

The little man jumps to the floor beside the wheelchair.
Reaches up to touch her face.

RENDER
Like this. Very pretty, very
pretty.

MARIA
I guess I can do that. I'll need
some time though.

RENDER
Tomorrow morning, you sign now,
tomorrow enough time.

The creature hands her a wad of cash and places a contract in
her lap.

RENDER
Morning, I send for, tomorrow
morning. Give me finger.

MARIA
What?

RENDER
Finger. No contract, no money.

She reluctantly holds out her hand.

He seizes it and punctures her index finger.
Blood begins to bubble.

MARIA
Ouch!

He points to the spot on the contract. Slowly understanding,
she blots blood there.

MARIA
But what if I can't...?

He points to the nearest mannequin covered with the lifelike
mask of a young woman.

RENDER
Like this, good, like this.

MARIA
Oh, a mask, I guess I can --

RENDER
First thing in morning, in
morning...bye bye now.

The Slender Man wheels her out.

EXT. 10 GRIM ST.

Maria wheels herself out the door - starts up the sidewalk.

Then remembers the homeless man.

She returns and puts a bill into his cup.

MARIA
I'd do more if I could, but that
should buy you dinner.

She starts to leave. He grabs her hand.

Examines her pin-pricked, blood-smeared finger.

HOMELESS MAN
Go back! Go back inside before it's
too late!

MARIA
What do you mean?

HOMELESS MAN
Go! Give that money back.

He takes the bill from his cup and stuffs it in her hand.

MARIA
I need this the money...

HOMELESS MAN
You don't understand...

The man lowers his hood. Crude bandages where his face used to be. Muscles and tendons show in the gaps. He's faceless.

Maria gasps in horror.

HOMELESS MAN
Stillskin...steals skin!

She wheels to the door and seizes the knob. Locked.

She pounds at the door. Nothing.

She takes the contract and reads it silently a moment.

MARIA
...and the seller agrees to provide
this lovely face, or suitable
substitute, within one day.

HOMELESS MAN
He will collect, if you don't show.

MARIA
But how will he know...?

HOMELESS MAN
Where you live? Render will know.
And his butcher will take it.

MARIA
Or suitable substitute...

She wheels off in a hurry.

INT. APARTMENT - LATER

Maria's mom paces, checking her watch, overcome with worry,
and struggling with her demon.

She crashes onto the couch, producing the needle, tying the
rubber to her arm.

Ready to inject...

A key jiggles the apartment door.

She hides the needle - runs to help Maria, who carries a bag
of art supplies, inside.

MOTHER
Where have you been?!

Maria studies her mom's tormented face closely.

MARIA
Mom...are you ok?

But it's obvious she's not.

INT. APARTMENT - MARIA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Working at a table, her art supplies spread all around, Maria
uses balloons to make paper mache masks of herself, a big
mirror on the table to guide.

Mom, still twitchy with need, comes to check on her.

MOTHER
Masks?

MARIA
What if I told you I might be able
to get us some help?

MOTHER
Is that what this is about?

MARIA
A special customer.

Mom grows more worried.

MOTHER
Maria, what have you got yourself
into?

MARIA
Nothing, just a customer. But I
have to do this.

MOTHER
Tell me what's going on!

MARIA
We have to get you help.

Mom overcome by guilt and shame and need.

MOTHER
I h-have it under control...

MARIA
It's ok, Mom, just a little longer.

Mom puts her arms lovingly around her daughter and hugs her
hard enough to fight back her own tears.

SERIES OF SHOTS:

- the CLOCK, the hour hand moving fast
- Maria struggling to create a mask
- the Clock, faster and faster
- Maria smashing a mask
- Mom hugging herself and rocking on the couch.

INT. APARTMENT - LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mom fishes into Maria's coat...and pulls out the wad of cash,
and on top of the wad, Render's business card.

Trembling, she struggles a long moment with what to do.

Finally, she takes some of the cash and puts the rest back.

Then puts on her own coat and leaves.

INT. BEDROOM - LATER

Maria looks at the clock - finishes painting another mask.

Compares it to her own reflection.

Slams it down dissatisfied.

Wheels out into the

LIVING ROOM

MARIA

Mom?

She wheels over to the pantry.

MARIA

Mom?

Realizing Mom has left, she drops her head in dismay.

MARIA

Oh, Mom.

She wheels into the

BATHROOM

Takes a straight edge razor from the closet.

Studies her face in the mirror.

Takes the blade to her chin.

Begins to slice.

Blood drips into the sink.

Tears drop from her face and dilute the blood.

She slams the blade onto the sink and studies her face again.

MARIA

Mom...

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATER

Mom comes home, high as a kite. She checks in on Maria.

QUICK SHOT: Maria in bed, wearing a hoodie, her face under the sheet.

Mom closes the door quietly.

Enters the

BATHROOM

Spots a small blood stain in the sink. Wipes with her thumb.

INT. MARIA'S BEDROOM - MORNING

Maria's face still under the sheet.

A DISTANT POUNDING at the door to the apartment.

She slowly stirs.

More DISTANT POUNDING.

She jolts up in bed. Her face fine other than the small cut.

She struggles to her wheel chair.

POUNDING again.

She grabs her best mask in hand and hurries out into the

LIVING ROOM

Mom has already opened the apartment door. Her back to us.

The Slender Man visible in the doorway.

Mom hands him a plastic bag.

He accepts it and leaves. She closes the door.

MARIA

Mom?

Mother lowers her head. Her back still to us.

MARIA

Mom!

Maria wheels hard, riding over Render's blood-soaked contract on the floor.

Spins her mother around.

Her face is gone, carved off, muscle and tendon showing, nose missing, lips gone, the only remaining skin her eyelids.

An object falls from Mom's blood-soaked hands: the blade.

FADE OUT.