Alice stood anxiously, eyeing the brown parcel on her desk. She approached it cautiously. Every frightening story she’d heard about the gift clawed at her mind. Rumours at her school often gained the credence of absolute fact, although Alice had never been the kind to submit to generalised thoughts and opinions. She brushed off her doubts, convincing herself that it was obscure to be so fearful of something that each of the ten-billion people on Earth will, at some stage, experience for themselves. She reached for the package. Holding it gently, she read the words emblazoned sharply on the side of the parcel, which read:

*Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.*

Alice had heard those words countless of times before, the phrase being transmitted each morning into the houses of all individuals.

With technology rapidly advancing and devouring the affairs of society, religious groups had stepped in to govern the population, reminding all to place higher value on traditional and simplistic religious values than on machinery. Alice often found the extensive focus on religious tiresome, although, even with her troublesome tendency of unrestrainedly expressing her thoughts, she held herself back in fear of the dire consequences that befall those who display a lack of disciplined beliefs.

Carefully unfurling the brown paper, she felt her muscles clench and her lips tremble with fearful anticipation of what was inevitably inside. Alice gingerly withdrew the object and held it up to her eyes for closer examination. The doll was fashioned from tan-coloured cloth and, although its eyes were crafted from buttons and void of expression, they seemed to bore intensely into Alice’s own, sending an icy shiver down her spine. It was adorned with black spidery hair, which stopped halfway down its stump-like, fingerless hands. Thick, black stitches stretched unpleasantly across its face, which was peppered with freckles and frozen in a
permanent, dull expression. After examining the doll’s appearance, Alice flipped it in her hands, feeling the unexpected weight of it. Upon turning it over, she stared wide-eyed at the same phrase, branded on its back in big bold letters: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.* Despite the doll’s small size, Alice knew the extent of its power.

The government had been imposing the power of voodoo dolls on Earth ever since religion and politics had merged as one, their purpose being to retain religion as an ever-present force in society. A voodoo doll is gifted to every person on their sixteenth birthday, as they come of age, and it stays with them for the remainder of their life. Every person is linked with a randomly selected, anonymous individual, and they each receive a voodoo doll of the other. The policy was based purely on the principle that a person must treat another well and with care in order to expect the same fair treatment in return. The voodoo dolls bring this principle to life, with a person not wanting to inflict any harm upon their gifted doll as their counterpart, upon feeling the voodoo-induced pain, would feel inclined to impose the same punishment on them. The dolls, although responsible for millions of people taking Bible verses literally and becoming more considerate of others, were the authors of many evils. Although the government attempted with all its force to silence the words of disagreeable citizens, it could not be helped that, from time to time, horrific stories would surface and circulate through the city. Alice had been particularly scarred by one account of a man, asleep, who suddenly woke up, choking and sputtering for breath as though invisible hands were wrapped around his throat, clenching it with relentless force. The man had scraped his fingernails desperately and helplessly against his sheets, sickening wheezy gasps escaping his mouth, until he slumped against the bed, his life literally ‘squeezed’ out of him. The malicious attack had been entirely unprovoked. With such tales circulating in her mind, Alice clutched her assigned doll protectively, mentally vowing to protect it with unwavering vigilance.

Alice sat at her desk in her bedroom, her body arched forward onto its surface as she read through the Bible passage assigned by her religion teacher. She enjoyed the sweet aroma of a candle as it wafted deliciously through the room, the flickering flame softly illuminating the pages. The passage was becoming increasingly tedious, and Alice found her concentration rapidly
waning. Her eyes drifted away from the scriptures and glanced up at her voodoo doll, which sat obediently opposite her on the mounted shelf. Looking at the doll no longer gave Alice the same feeling of uneasy dread as she felt when she had first received it. Instead, the sight of it merely prompted unanswered questions to come soaring back to life. She questioned the voodoo doll’s authenticity, although she was very well aware of the soaring heights which technology was reaching: Could it really be possible that someone, likely to be thousands of miles away, could feel pain through the mediation of a doll? Her mind buzzed with theories.

Alice reached for the doll, knowing that there was only one way to cast off the shackles of dysphoria that had plagued her since the doll’s arrival. She could conclusively banish the notion that she could dictate another person’s life through the use of voodoo, and that they could do the same to her, by proving the theory untrue herself. Alice grasped the doll and lowered it into the candle’s flame until its mangled hair was alight. She watched with satisfaction as its hair continued to burn, with no unordinary repercussions. Just as she felt the weight of uneasiness lifting from her body, she saw the flame travel through the doll, over its now bald head, and its stitched mouth part into an open-mouth scream of pure torture. The same scream sounded in Alice’s head rather than in front of her from the doll’s twitching mouth, yet this fact didn’t make the pain of the doll and the horror that Alice felt any less real. The howl of agony was the most horrendous noise she had ever heard, its sound piercing her body like a razor-sharp icicle. Alice dropped the doll in terror and released her own cry as it leapt out of her hands and onto her desk, writhing, twisting in excruciation. Alice could do nothing but watch in unadulterated horror as, within seconds, the doll’s cloth body disintegrated, leaving behind nothing but two accusing button eyes.

In the dead of the night, Alice lay in her bed, the voodoo doll’s tortured face as vivid in her mind as it had been the previous evening when she had witnessed it. The weight of her crime, of brutally murdering an innocent person, the person she was supposed to protect, crushed against her with lethal force. Her mind conjured and failed to rid itself of the image of a real person, shrieking and twisting as they burn alive under the heat of an invisible flame. The cloak of a moralist had always sat poorly on her shoulders, but now she had experienced the
devastating consequences of allowing her curiosity to engulf her common sense. Alice attempted to convince herself that it was an accident, that she had never meant to inflict pain on anyone, that it was simply to rid herself of the fearful state in which the powers of voodoo had forced her to live. The words ‘The road to hell is paved with good intentions’ had never sounded truer to her. With unyielding guilt gnawing away at her, Alice crept, with ghostly silence, out of her room and into the living room. She drew near to the fireplace; only a few embers remained from the previous night. Alice added wood and prodded it until the fire burst back to life with renewed vigour. She approached the roaring flames, preparing herself for a similar fate to what she had inflicted upon the linked individual embodied by the doll. As she stepped into the fireplace, the flames already lapping at her ankles, the words ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’ were on her lips.