

It Belonged In The Trunk

Every time she turned around, the doll had crept ten paces closer. Its golden locks of hair were more like dreads, thick as snakes. And those eyes. Black buttons devoid of life. She shuddered. Shuddered and stared.

A pile of unopened envelopes, mostly bills, formed a heaping mound at the front door. On the end table by the entrance, a photo of her ex-husband smiled. You're not the woman I fell in love with, he had said before handing her the papers. I'm sorry.

Normally Mia was the kind of person who bounced around a party, taking pride in how much people liked chatting with her. Always moving, always happy. She was supposed to be good at putting on a smile.

But she had looked away too long. The doll now stood halfway down the dark wood hallway, the one leading to her childhood bedroom. That's where the doll belonged. Locked inside the metal trunk, with its straps snug and secure.

Unblinking, she approached the doll. Six feet away, its smile turned upside right. Three feet away, it reached out, as if asking for a hug. A foot away – Mia pressed desperately against the wall – the doll's face tore open, revealing a gaping black hole. No stuffing. Nothing.

Mia yelped, scooted to the far end of the hallway, and slammed against that towering sepia photo of her parents, sour and rigid. The doll's face was normal again.

"God is with me. God is with me. God is with me," she whispered, entering her old bedroom and locking the door.

The trunk lay there wedged between a bed too small and a dusty crib. Purple paint and Venetian blinds absorbed most of the room's light. She could still make out the framed picture of Nancy Drew, though. Her challenging eyes warmed Mia's heart. Everything was so much easier as a child!

Mia started opening the clasps to the trunk, reluctance nipping the back of her mind. She thought of the books she used to read, of her favorite playground, the one where she could throw wood chips with her friends, of oatmeal that she would pick raisins out of.

The door creaked. Mia flipped around into a low crouch, hands still fumbling with the second leather clasp. The doll stood there smiling.

Memories of her job at the office, filling out Excel spreadsheets day in and day out, of the never-ending fights with her ex, the hour-long commute tumbled through her mind. And for what?

She blinked. The doll was nearer, arms out. She recalled years of religious guilt, stories of hell, the first time she had sex and felt eternal damnation.

She held out her arms and blinked, long and luxurious. The doll hovered by her side. Stuffing ripped open. The mouth went wide, filling the room with a clicking throaty rasp.

Warm. Damp. Inviting.

Mia climbed into the endless hole, a child again, crawling back into her mother's womb.

How nice it would be to smile again.