



BREATHE

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Hot tears crept down my cheeks as I looked around with eyes red and swollen. The room seemed to be closing in on me. It was dark, almost spooky. Near the ceiling, a thin ray of sunlight was streaming in through a small slit that barely passed for a window. The walls were damp with mould and tiny specks of dust filled the store-room, making it harder to breathe. The place smelled stale. I was reluctant to step any further; afraid of tripping and falling anywhere in this graveyard for battered boxes, abandoned suitcases or showpieces left behind to rot. All unwanted and forgotten items, very much like myself. I was alone, scared and the icy silence that hung around the store-room did little to alleviate my fear.

From a corner of the room, I caught the glint of two bulging blue eyes staring at me. Sitting atop a broken footstool was the nightmare from my early childhood. Frizzy black hair, dirty frock and lips as red as blood; just like I remembered her.

The eyes didn't blink, they followed. Covered in dirt and grime now, a recluse spider hung from her hair. Just the sight of her made my throat dry up. I never did like that doll.

My conscience pushed me, and I knew I had to escape from this room, but I also knew that there was no way out. I could imagine my stepbrother laughing at me, with my stepmother by his side. As his plump, round face grinned at me in my memory, I felt an overpowering urge to punch him on his nose again, like I had done earlier that very morning. Even though that led to me being locked in here by my stepmother, I knew what I had done was right. I did not regret it for an instant. How dare he say that I was unwanted here? That father doesn't even love me anymore and would be happy to get rid of me? *How dare he?*

Even as his words echoed in my head, a biting shiver bolted down my spine. I knew in my heart that his words may all be true. *"No! I have to get out of here, I have to confront them,"* I thought to myself.

Breathe! The room was beginning to choke me. I tried to calm myself down and think more rationally. Slowly, I made my way towards the rusty old door and tried the knob again. Twisted and turned it desperately, but it wouldn't budge. I looked up at the tiny window near the ceiling. No, it was too high and too small for me to squeeze through anyway. I frantically searched for other possibilities in my mind. There weren't any. With a heavy heart I slumped by the door as all hope of escaping left me. I would have to stay here, locked in until someone felt pity for me. With my father abroad however, I knew that the chances of me being unlocked anytime soon were almost negligible.

A rat scurried off somewhere, squeaking and hissing, sounding somewhat menacing in the otherwise silent room. I gave up trying to escape. Right beside me, on the cold damp floor lay an empty bottle of perfume. I couldn't help but pick it up; it was her favorite. Holding it near my nose I took a deep

painful breath. The smell was still there. It smelled like her. It was her.

From the pocket of my worn-out blue jeans, I took out a small photograph and, with trembling little fingers, tried to smooth out the crinkled edges. The darkness made it impossible to see clearly, but I didn't need any light to see the kindly smiling face of my beautiful mother. I wanted so badly to be with her. I felt locked in, not only in this room but in this entire cruel world. Not a moment went by since she had left that I did not resent her dying and leaving me all alone here to suffer. With my entire body trembling and tears rolling uncontrollably down my cheeks, I got up, made my way to the farthest corner of the room and crouched down on the floor. Holding the photograph near my chest, I closed my eyes to let my mind escape and join my mother in heaven, where she surely was.

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