

The Box
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It was a cold December night, wind pounded outside, when it arrived, no clue where it came from. An unmarked box, it had no return address, no sender slips, no nothing. Sitting by the fire, we pondered where it might have come from.

"Maybe you bought something on accident?" she asked.

"Maybe you," I mumbled back.

Still, something about it felt unnatural, something felt off. Something about it made the hair on the back of our necks stand at attention.

"You sure no one was at the door when you opened it?" I asked, eyes glaring at her.

"No, I swear. The bell rang, I opened the door, and no one was in sight, except for this box," she insisted, shooting daggers back at me.

It sure was strange, my mind pondered as to what could be inside. The thoughts ran from one side of the room to the other until I decided to reach for the neatly wrapped top, as if I were compelled to, sort of like a trance.

"What the hell are you doing?" she screamed.

"You didn't order it. No one was out there to deliver it, and your first move is to open it all willy nilly?" Max said, shaking her head in disbelief.

"Hush up!" I said, turning back the package, "I just want a peek, a small peek can't hurt, can it?"

Her eyes said no, but her face gave a faint expression of curiosity as well. The heat from the fireplace illuminated the walls of the house. That brief moment of silence, coupled with the light of the flames, revealed small marks on the box that felt familiar.

"Huh," I said.

"

What, did you actually buy this thing?" she asked, holding back a laugh.

"No! This looks familiar, reminds me of the box we put that girl in, remember?" My eyes grew wide.

"Yeah, I'm almost positive. This is it!" I said, standing up.

"W-w-what do you mean the same one?" she shuttered.

"What girl, what are you talking about, babe?" she asked, growing concerned.

The fire cracks. We both stare at each other, then at the box. It's very presence starting to remind me of that tragic accident. My mind sunk, and my thoughts flew. The crackles of the fire echo throughout the house, the room grows silent, the heat crackles become loud until the sound engulfed the entire room, until nothing. No noise, no crackle, no nothing.

Then, knock, knock! A loud, sudden knock on the front door as if someone were planning on knocking it down. Again, knock, knock, the sound grew louder and louder.

"Go see," she said.

The knocking continued, growing louder until I couldn't think straight. I look at the box sitting on the table in front of the fireplace. Staring, engulfed in it. The pounding intensified until I couldn't take it. I grabbed the box and tossed it into the flames. We watched it catch fire. As if magic, the knocks stopped. The sound filled the room again. I collapsed back onto the couch beside her, clenching her hand.

"The noise, it stopped?" I said, stuttering madly. I sighed in relief.

"What the hell was that?" she asked. "It sounded as if the door was going to break down." She squeezed my hand back.

As if magic the pounding ended, the noises gone. My heart sank as chilling memory flashed over me. The car, that little girl, the way she looked after our car smacked her. I felt guilty, though I had tried to bury those thoughts. Mostly, it's a blur. I couldn't remember much at all. What I remember is what lengths we went to hide the truth. As if a cruel joke were being played. The door, the knocking began again. My heart almost sank.

"Stay here, okay?" I said.

I crept towards the door, making no sudden noises and avoiding unnecessary steps. I peeked through the peephole into the endless December winter.

"Anybody there?" she asked squeezing the arm chair.

Her words fall on death ears as I reach for the doorknob fearing the worst, but I muster the courage to turn and open it. A cold rush of air invades the house chilling me to the core. Outside stood no one. There wasn't a single soul in sight. I sigh, my head falls, and my eyes meet it. Sitting there was the same box without a single sign of fire damage. My heart sunk deep in my chest. Words escaped me; I was in disbelief.

"Impossible," I thought. "This can't be happening."

I slam the door and lock it, leaving the box where it sat outside. I rush back to the living room, my heart nearly jumping out of my chest.

"Babe! Baby! You won't believe it, the box-" I stop. The room is empty.

The fire had grown dim, and she was nowhere in sight. The air had turned frigid and stagnant. How could this happen? The whole house felt dead. A few minutes ago, the house was warm. Now, it felt like death grasped the entire place. I frantically looked for her, searching the lower floors, the kitchen, the bathroom, the living room, and I couldn't find her anyway. I hear Max scream from upstairs, "Help!"

I rush up the staircase into complete darkness, waving my arms through the dark hallway, reaching into the seemingly endless dark, I reach into the darkness, hoping to reach the bedroom door.

"Help!" she screams again.

My frantically searching is interrupted by a light emanating from under the door. A chilling red light growing stronger the louder her screams got. Again, the noise left the home still, a blank void took its place as the cries grew silent. At the end of the hall, the light emitting a bright red hue, I reach for the handle. It was locked, I yank and pull the door to no avail. The red light growing brighter.

"Babe? Babe! Open the door. Please open the door," I said, my voice trembling...

My words made no sound. I tug and pull as hard as I can wrestling with the door, hoping to budge it open. The silent noise turned into a violent wail, its noise brought me to my knees at the foot of the door, the bright red hue growing more intense. The sound rattled my brain, making it unbearable to think straight.

"Make it stop," I said, tears in my eyes. "I'll do anything."

"Anything?" a voice asked.

"Anything," I reply.

As fast as it came, it vanished. The red light, the piercing noise, both gone. The sound comes back, and my senses return to me. Finally, things seemed to make sense again.

"Who was that?" I said, reaching for the door.

This time the door wasn't locked, but Max's voice was silent. I hoped everything was alright, I prayed. I turned the knob and pushed the door slowly. I fell to my knees in horror, there on the bedroom floor lie the box. Not her, not her body, but the same little box.

"No, No, No," I said, shaking my head.

The box that we had put that little girl mangled body. That terrible accident I buried deep inside. The images of it all flashed in my mind, making me sick to the stomach. Max was gone, nowhere in sight. The room felt as cold as ice as if life couldn't exist here. I wept and cried at the realization that I caused this like this was the norm for me, grief quickly took those thoughts away.

"This is all my fault," I said, "It was an accident, we were young."

It didn't matter, the voice was gone. I had paid the ultimate price. Reeling from what was happening, I noticed a note on the top of the box, small and discreet. It was tucked in the upper wrapping. Written in what looked like crimson red ink.

A grim look fell upon my face, the realization of the meaning of those words. Something took Max for what we did. I was convinced of that fact. Being in that room made me sick to my stomach. I dropped the letter and ran out of the room, leaving the box on the bedroom floor. Sitting in the hall with my head hung low. I felt like I was losing my mind. The things that were happening didn't make sense. There wasn't any explanation for what was going on. I had almost given up when I heard a knock on the front door. Hopeful that it was her. I rush downstairs, darting straight for the front door swinging it wide. Outside stood no-one. Falling deeper into madness, I hang my head, again the box sits there with a message carved into the wood.

It read, "Open Me."

I hesitate for a moment. Then reach for the top of the box willingly.

"What do I have to lose?" I said.

Slowly I take the top off and peer inside to see a disc, almost brand new, marked multiple times.

"Play Me."

I took the disc downstairs as fast as I could. In the closet, I searched for the old DVD player.

"Damn it," I said. "Where is it?"

As I searched and searched for what felt like hours, I couldn't stop thinking about Max. It was my fault that she was gone, tears flew from the left eye, I quickly brushed them away.

"That's not going to help anyone," I thought.

I reached further into a pile of thrown away junk until I felt the old DVD player. I yanked it out, pulling a pile of garbage with it. I rushed over to the TV in the corner next to the fireplace. Fumbling with loose wire and cords, I tried to fix the TV.

I reached for the disk in my pocket, mashed it into the player and hit play. After a second, a retro black and white funeral appeared. The surrounding of the funeral looked modern, but the display flickered and warped. The camera focused on a crowd of sad souls piled in a room, crying and holding each other over a small casket. The video had no sound, and the image was grainy, but I could make out what was transpiring. The people in the video were in pain. Pain that can only be experienced by losing someone, I felt that pain with Max was now gone. The video pans over to the coffin, and my eyes tear up. The casket was empty, the body wasn't there, how could it be it was never recovered. Only Max and I knew where it was buried.

"She's still where I buried her," I said.

The video flashed to black, and the impact is bright. We had done something wrong, something cruel. The events of the night flash over me, the drinking and driving, the arguing, the screaming, not seeing her in the road. All of it led to this moment. It all flowed back to me, and the guilt had engulfed me. I wanted to end it, but something prevented me, something began to come over me like a force that compelled me to live.

"You know what you need to do now?" a voice asked.

The voice that appeared gone had returned. It was there from the beginning, that little girl's voice haunting me again.

"Do you know what you need to do now?" she asked.

This time I knew the answer, this time, it was clear.

"I do."

As if instinct, I stood up and walked towards the door. The force that had come upon me earlier, now controlling me. A whisper in my ear guided me, my mind has gone blank. I look down and see my feet moving at their own slow and methodical pace. I move further and further into the December snow. I didn't feel the cold air on my skin. The air felt dry and stagnant rather than frozen and harsh. I looked up at the white flakes dancing in the air, my mind is drawn to happier times of Max and me before the accident. A time before all the

bullshit trickled in. Lost in my own paradise, I lost sight of where I was actually going, just walking with no real destination until I hit the main road where Max and I had argued, drunk

and loud. I snap back to reality to find myself standing dead center in the street, unable to move, locked in an upright position. The road looked so familiar as if I had been here before. I turn to find any noticeable landmarks or signs in the darkness. The moon's light hits a sign illuminating it enough for me to make out the location. My heart drops when I recognize where I had drifted too.

"This is where we killed that little girl," I said. "What the fuck," I continued, fear gripping me.

My screams turn to silence as I hear the roar of a car engine, fast approaching, I try to move my legs, but can't. I'm stuck in place as the headlights come into clear view. At that moment, I saw the driver before impact. A man and woman looking drunk as hell and were arguing like no tomorrow. As I lay there on the cold, snow-covered road covered in my own blood, the light fading from my eyes. I see the man stagger out of the damaged car, the woman following behind.

"Fuck, fuck!" the woman said, panicking. "What're we gonna do?"

"Would you shut the hell up?" the man said back, trembling, "We gotta handle it, that's all."

I look behind the couple. Beyond the scared faces, beyond their arguing that reminded me so much of you and me. I look beyond and see that little girl and a woman standing almost out of view, my vision going blurry, practically unable to recognize them.

"Max, that you?" I said. "Irony, ain't it?" I ask, the light beginning to fade from my eyes.

At that moment, that one moment of pure untainted bliss, I can see. I can see the couch where we sat, the quaint little fireplace that illuminated the whole house, I see it. The nights we held each other, the nights we hated each other. I see it, but it isn't true. Don't get me wrong, I see us there sitting, but something felt wrong, felt off. As if tonight had to happen, as if it needed to happen. As my motionless body lies on the frozen, snow drenched road, I truly see it, I genuinely know why that box came to me.

"You weren't there, were you, Max?" I mutter, barely making out words.

My mutters draw the attention of the arguing couple if only for a moment. The man rushes over, standing over my battered body.

“Fuck, this guy is still alive,” the man said, panicking. “Get over here,” urging the woman near the now beat-up dented car to come near him.

She rushes over, immediately plants her knees in the drenched snow road, and reaches for me. The man quickly jerks her hand back.

“Are you nuts?” he screams. “We can’t leave any trace of us on this guy.”

“What’s wrong with you?” she replied. “This guy’s still alive, we can make this right.”

Their arguing begins again more nervously than before. The light, once so bright, now so dim and low, makes the world look dark and cold in my eyes. I can’t make out shapes anymore, only voices, only sounds. Even still, I can’t hear they’re arguing, my mind still in shock from the truth.

“You weren’t there that night, were you?” I silently think to myself.

That realization makes my motionless body ache and shiver, not from the cold around me, but from the sheer fact that I was blind, but I knew now. We killed that little girl, not intentionally, but we did kill her. I thought you had brushed it from your mind, but I was wrong. You didn’t forget, you couldn’t. Same as me, you let it fester and grow until you couldn’t take it. You ended it. A tear falls from my eyes, freezing on my check.

“I remember it all now,” I whisper.

Memories flash for me, like a movie with one viewer. I see you shuttering around, sloughed over and devoured by guilt. I just chose not to see it, to see you suffering. None of it mattered though, not until I saw you there, lifeless, in the tub wrist slit wide. That image, that reality broke me. So, you weren’t there. Not after that night, no after that, I made you be there, I forced you. The man glances over to see me crying in the middle of the road and freaks. He demands that the woman with him get into the battered car and drive out of there as fast as they could.

The car whooshes by, and they’re gone. The screeching of the tires grows silent, and I am alone again, alone as my thoughts. The snow hits my face, I don’t feel it anymore. I don’t feel

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anything anymore. Alone with my thoughts starts to get to me, I can't feel anything, but it weighs on me so heavy. Tears pour from my eyes. The light now pitch black, nothing is visible. I'm left alone with my thoughts as they become more apparent and more precise. I have accepted it. I understand it. I call out to the two figures from earlier, trying to repent.

"I'm sorry, I truly am," I say, tears pouring from eyes, "I should have done more, I could have done more."

My confession turns to pleas of mercy. They go unheard as the darkness consumes me for the final time. I felt nothing, I was alone, truly alone.