





One of my first memories is of my doll putting her hands around my throat.

I was four. Maybe five.

I was in my bedroom, playing with my toys—a stuffed bear, a stuffed bird, and a princess doll. Princess Honeysuckle was my favorite. We went on the most exciting adventures together. Sometimes we flew to the moon and ruled over aliens. Other times we cast magical spells over our enemies. This time, I think, we were playing house. It's hard to remember.

I just remember that one moment, I was lying on the ground, playing with Mr. Bear and Ms. Parrot.

I looked over and saw that Princess Honeysuckle wasn't on her throne, ruling over her kingdom.

It wasn't the first time she'd gone missing like that.

But it *was* the first time it happened in the middle of playtime.

Normally, she just vanished when I went to bed, and I would blame my sister for coming in and stealing my toys while I was asleep. Not that Josie ever admitted what she'd done. The dolls would always show up after I yelled at her, though. In a day or two.

I was about to call out to Josie—maybe she'd snuck in while I wasn't paying attention.

And that's when I felt it.

Two tiny hands on my neck.

Wrapping around my throat from behind.

I yelled and sat up, tossing my stuffed animals to the side as I grabbed for whatever was squeezing me.

I found Princess Honeysuckle smiling at me.

Her lips and eyes were tinged with red.

Her arms were open as wide as my neck.

Maybe it was my imagination, but I remember her head twisting around—all the way around—and

a giggle coming from somewhere deep inside her plastic body.

Then my mom came in. She had heard me scream.

“Are you okay, Anna?” she asked.

“The doll,” I said. “She . . . she . . .”

Except when I looked at Princess Honeysuckle again, she looked perfectly normal—plastic smile, dazed eyes, arms serenely at her sides.

Mom took the doll. I never saw it again.