

Bad Parenting (inspired by 2002 video game, *bad parenting*)

“Every child deserves a parent, but not every parent deserves a child.” -Vinod Kapri

Ron was the only one watching as the door creaked open. The only one watching as the door swung closed. A mother’s scream ringing in the hollow ears of a young child. A doll whose neck isn’t quite right. A motel littered with liquor bottles. A father’s face turning red. Ron was the only one watching.

Ron lay home alone all day. It was the young boy’s birthday. As a result of his father’s addictions and his mother’s busy work schedule, the boy had no family dinner, instead only a rushed interaction with his mother. “Mummy!” Ron called out excitedly, running to the door in his little deep red and stained white striped pyjamas. “Hello Ron,” said his mother in a tired voice. She had to work all day, and then come home and deal with her husband. She didn’t have the energy to deal with Ron. “Did you get me a present?” The boy asked bouncing on his little toes. “Ron what have I said about asking for things, we don’t have time or money for-” “But mummy, it’s my birthday!” Ron told his mother happily. His mother felt bad for forgetting, so she rushed to produce an excuse. “You know,” she started, coating her voice in enthusiasm, “Mr. Redface brings presents to kids when they go to sleep early on their birthdays.”

Ron didn’t like Mr. Redface, who came only when only when his dad indulged in drinking; that’s when the young boy would see him, face red and contorted, actions dangerous and unpredictable. In those moments, Ron couldn’t fathom the fact that Mr. Redface could be his father- how could he? His father didn’t hit him when he was sober, but when the bottles came out, so did Mr. Redface.

Before Ron could object or run to bed, his father came into the room. No doubt he was intoxicated, but not to a threatening point yet. "Stop lying to the kid woman." Ron's dad spat out; voice slurred.

Ron ran to bed before he could hear any more of his parent's argument, which would continue into late hours of the night. Ron's father had taught him it wasn't normal for parents to tuck their children into bed, and his mother had been too scared to object, so the young boy tucked himself in, pulling the blankets high over his head.

Ron's eyes jolted open as he awoke in a sudden cold sweat, Mr. Redface was staring back at him. The boy's little heart was beating oh so fast as rough callused hands took hold of his neck. His screams were smothered as he sputtered out strangled sounds. As he started to lose consciousness, Ron stared at the face in front of him. That horrible blood-curdling shade of red.

Darkness.

Ron awoke the next morning, as he opened his eyes, he was met with the sight of a doll sitting on his bedside table. The doll looked just like him, only it was made of fabric and stuffed with clay. As the young boy ran his fingers through the doll's black hair, it felt as though fingers were combing through his own. Ron quite liked the doll, it was perfect- except for its neck, which seemed loose.

"Good morning, Ron," the doll chirped as the sun came up. Ron had not been taught that toys don't talk, or that mothers and fathers aren't supposed to hit their children. He was very uneducated. "Good morning," replied Ron.

The doll asked for his toys in the closet, but the closet was locked, hiding the truth- not toys. "I'm sorry," Ron mumbled disheartened, "I can't open it. Is there anything else you want?" The doll responded by asking for food, insisting that if Ron ate, he would no longer be hungry.

After a short trip to Ron's run-down, moldy kitchen, Ron was able to see that there was no food in the refrigerator (except for a moldy clove of cabbage). "There's no food," Ron told his doll. "Your mom didn't make you food?" Ron shook his head. "My mummy is always at work, but I can ask my daddy." "That won't do," the doll said, "my master has already taken your dad away." The little boy furrowed his brow. Usually, by this time of day, his dad would be retching or stomping around complaining about his headache. Ron took his doll and ran to his parent's room. His dad wasn't there.

"Where's my daddy?" Ron asked, sadness seeping into his voice. "He's not here. My master has taken him away," the doll spoke informatively, but gently. "Can you tell your master to give him back?" Ron asked quietly. The doll hesitated, "Yes, but he won't like it." "Please help me find him."

The doll helped Ron reach his father, taking him to the sink and guiding him through the steps to opening a portal, which was done by manipulating water and radio frequencies. To go through the portal, one had to submerge their body in the water. As Ron entered the portal, the feeling in his lungs felt familiar. Like suffocating.

Ron was greeted with a dark room, his vision was blurred, and he couldn't see his own hand in front of him. His small ears heard a voice. "Stop haunting me," a male voice said firmly. "Daddy?" The young boy called out, feeling around the room for his

father. Ron's father repeated the words like a broken record, becoming more infuriated. Ron stumbled over liquor bottles, and he could hear footsteps coming towards him. Ron tripped and caught himself on a table, his small hand grasping a card. The boy felt a strike to his head.

Ron came to in his own closet, which he hadn't been able to open previously. His hand held a card that he couldn't read. He tried climbing out, but the door was still locked.

"Mummy! Daddy! Open the door! Please help me out!" The young child screamed as loud as he could. The ringing in his ears, along with his sharp pants and screams serving as a cacophony. Time slowed- Ron was stuck in a hallucinatory state of delirious Chronostasis. Ron stopped screaming. He stopped struggling. And he gave up.

After two weeks, Ron's mother finally returned to the apartment, a suitcase in her hand for whatever Ron would want to take. She was greeted by Ron's doll, face, and body black, blue, and bloodied. The sight was alarming, to say the least, and made the hairs on her neck stand tall. The doll's loose neck and bug eyes looked back at her. She picked up the doll, walking quickly to Ron's room. "Ron, honey? What happened to your doll?" She asked gently, opening the door to his bedroom. Empty.

"Ron?" The concerned mother called out. She searched every nook and cranny of the small, disgusting apartment hoping to find her son. Well, almost.

Now listen as I tell you, the shock and horror Ron's poor mother experienced as she opened that closet door is not something that I can just describe to you. And oh

god, the scream. The heartbreaking profound expression of grief she let out as she pulled her son- her beautiful baby boy's cold bruised body close. Her poor baby.

After the fight her and her horrible husband had on the night of Ron's birthday, she had vowed to divorce him, saying she would be back in two weeks for Ron. Little did she know her babies' beautiful neck would already have been snapped only hours later. Ron's mom cradled her son's stale body and sobbed.

Ron would be laid to rest only fourteen days later, buried with his doll who once again resembled him perfectly: loose neck and all. His mother was drowned in grief and regret. She thought she was the victim this whole time, meanwhile her sweet boy lost his life because she failed to keep him safe from Mr. Redface. Thankfully though, she did put Ron's findings to beneficial use. That card Ron discovered while looking for the man he called his father was his dad's extra motel card. Police were able to trace him back to an old, rundown motel- which damp yellow-stained carpets matched the ones in the broken families own home. But even after his father's sentencing, the damage had already been done.

Ron rests with his doll to this day. Hugging it and giving it the love nobody ever gave the young boy during his short life. "I wish my parents' hugged me like this," Ron's passed on soul whispers to his doll. Regardless of his wishes, they won't ever have the chance to, and as time passes people heal, people hate, and people learn to forget about Ron all together. But Ron won't ever forget them, and his poor soul will never rest; staring at other children with loving families and wondering why nobody ever loved him that way. Perhaps it's because he doesn't know the full story of what happened in his house. His doll awakes with his soul once again, ignorance can only last for so long.

The end, for now ...