

## The Music Box

In the echoes of the early morning silence, the laughter reached Elsa in a circular and anguish way. First she felt it like a sleeping vibration in the music box where she kept her jewels and from where those guffaws emanated in the nights and became unbearable. For almost two weeks the noise from the box awakened her and although she did not open it, the din penetrated the storm like a tide. Anguished, she screamed, and her screams awakened her parents and older brother who were sleeping in their rooms.

A good friend of the family had recommended a psychiatrist who specialized in schizophrenia. Elsa had gotten evaluations from psychologists, analysis from internists and even otolaryngologists, but her screams continued to awaken everyone whenever she heard the laughter. Where in the box was it coming from? It was definitely the ballerina spinning around the magnetic mirror to the beat of "Claire de Lune," who was laughing.

Or was it some magic spell that was converting the gentle musical notes into explosive bursts of laughter, unbridled blows of air, hysterical howls? Was it one of those ghosts that are embedded in things, which make wood creak, that close doors or hide objects that one can't find even though one knows where they were left and why are they not there?

In a moment of calm, Elsa tried scientifically and patiently to get to the bottom of the laughter. She had let the music play until the string in the box ran out, but the laughter arose like a swarm of insects from within the wood. It ran over her skin with its slender feet, it touched everything leaving her sickened. That night she also tried to separate the ballerina from its mirror, leaving her in a room in the box in another.

It was in vain.

The laughter was heard, first from where the ballerina was, then from where she had left the box. She felt it in unison, the guffaws came from the walls, from the rooms. The whole house amplified the laughter. Desperate, she threw the box, the ballerina and the contents of the box out of the window. Elsa, with her eyes popping out of their orbits, observed contentedly that the box landed near the tamarind tree, the squalid and sad, adorned her garden.

Finally there was silence. Nothing was heard. For four minutes, she lay on her bed with an air of satisfaction. She felt tranquil, breathing peace. She was far from all of it, forever. But, only four minutes later her breathing, like a waterfall, went from gentle to a quiet panting and then to an asthmatic whistle. Her breathing was smoke that inundated the air, filled the cracks in the wood, the frames of old photos, the molecules. As though pulled she felt herself levitating towards the window. The box still laid on one side of the tamarind tree. This time she saw it. She saw the laughter was approaching her languid and with a miserable face to torture her. Elsa felt when it hit her head-on with a gust of teeth consuming her brain. After the burst of laughter, the burst of nerves.

Nobody heard the laughter more than Elsa, nobody felt the horror enclosed in the little box until, that night, they saw her disheveled and covered in mud. Alongside the tamarind tree, the hole that she had opened with her hands. Embracing the diminutive rotting body, enveloped in a cloud of deathly pallor, filled with fat white worms, which she separated with her fingers covered with dirt. The hook with the coagulated blood leapt twisted from the hole. It was not until they confronted her to ask her why she kept the name of the father quiet, why bleed in silence, when finally they all heard the terrifying laughter, the sound resounding on the walls, the awakening of the neighbors, the guffaw choked in saliva, the hysterical wave, the sirens, death, insanity.

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