

MICROFICTION

The Rabbit on the Shelf

The Empty Bedroom • Expanded Canon

written by
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The Rabbit on the Shelf

Lily Hawthorne did not remember the room the way the police photographed it. She remembered it by sounds: the low hum of the vent, the click of the hallway clock, the soft scrape of a shoe that did not belong to her father.

Weeks after her rescue, she sat at the kitchen island while Avery Cross placed the stuffed rabbit between them. One ear leaned lower than the other. Its fur had been brushed clean, but Avery could still remember the thin crescent of dust beneath it—the mark that had told her the toy had been moved.

“Do I have to remember?” Lily asked.

“No.” Avery kept her voice gentle. “You get to decide what you tell me.”

Lily touched the rabbit’s ear. “He moved Mr. Button because he was looking for my night-light switch. He thought it opened something.”

Avery’s pulse sharpened. “Did he say what?”

Lily shook her head, then frowned. “He smelled like the garage at the marina. Dad took me there once.”

Industrial lubricant. Salt. Varnish.

Avery did not let triumph show. A child’s memory was not a prize to be won.

From the doorway, Rowan Vale stood perfectly still. Lily noticed him and smiled. “You walk quiet.”

“So do rabbits,” Rowan said.

Lily considered that, then hugged Mr. Button to her chest.

Avery closed her notebook without writing another question. The case could wait ten minutes. Healing could not.

As she rose, Lily whispered, “He said someone would erase me.”

Avery stopped.

Rowan’s expression changed first.

Lily squeezed the rabbit tighter. “But you found me.”

Avery crouched beside her. “Yes.”

For the first time since the rescue, Lily smiled without looking toward the door.

And Avery understood that finding someone was only the first promise. The harder promise was making sure the darkness never convinced them they had disappeared.

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