

Smiley Frowner

by Robert Burton Robinson



GENRE: Fantasy/Horror. LENGTH: 1,908 words. SYNOPSIS: Five-year-old Jessica doesn't go anywhere without Smiley—the handmade doll that protects her from the evils of the world.

Amber had been driving to Wal-Mart with her five-year-old daughter, Jessica, when she spotted the garage sale sign.

“Why are there so many dolls?” said Amber.

The woman sighed. “Because it’s the only thing of value my sister owned. She didn’t believe in savings accounts or investments...or burial insurance.”

Then it clicked. Amber remembered the horrific story from a recent newspaper article. The cops said it was a murder-suicide of a little girl and her foster parents. The young child

had been strangled in her high chair. Then the man stabbed his wife in the chest and slit his own throat. These dolls had belonged to that poor woman. Perhaps a few of them had been the little girl's.

Amber began to get the creeps and wished she hadn't stopped. Most of the dolls were too expensive anyway. She walked down to where Jessica was standing, in front of a box of dolls priced at five dollars. Most were missing arms or legs.

"Look what I found, Mommy," said Jessica, clutching an old hand-sewn doll. The smiley face and pink dress had been drawn onto the off-white material with some type of markers.

"Oh, Honey, it's dirty."

"I don't care, Mommy. I want her."

Amber took the doll and examined it carefully. She pictured the child in the high chair holding the doll. She saw the girl's little arms go limp as the life went out of her.

"I don't know, Jessie."

"Please, Mommy. Please."

At least there was no blood on the doll. Hopefully it had not been in the room. She gave it back to Jessica. "Let's go talk to the lady about it."

They walked back down to the woman.

“So, you’re asking five dollars for this one?” said Amber.

Jessica held up the doll.

When the woman saw it, she immediately looked away. “That doll should not have been in the five-dollar box.”

Jessica’s hopeful smile faded. She turned the doll around to look at its face. The doll’s smile was gone too. It seemed just as sad as Jessica.

“So, how much do you want for it?”

“Nothing. It’s free,” said the woman, still looking away. “Just get it out of here.”

The doll’s frown turned into a smile, and Jessica hugged her new best friend.

Once they were back in the car, Jessica said, “Mommy, I love Smiley.” She hugged the doll with all her might.

“That’s a good name for him.”

“Her,” Jessica corrected. “Her name is Smiley Frowner.”

Frowner? Okay—kinda weird, thought Amber. Hopefully by the end of the week Miss Smiley would find her rightful place at the bottom of Jessica’s toy box.

Twenty-seven year-old Brandy was on her way out of Wal-Mart when she passed a woman about her age with a young

girl. She looked familiar. Then it hit her: it was the woman from the newspaper—the one who married that rich old fart.

That's what I need, she thought—a sugar daddy. Ryan was never going to amount to anything. She should have dumped him in high school.

“Mommy, can I please get a new coloring book?”

“Jessie, I just bought you one last week.”

“I know, Mommy, but I want a different one.”

Jessica had already discovered the persuasive powers of a sad face.

“Oh, alright.” Amber squatted in front of her daughter. “You can stay here and pick out a coloring book while I go right over there and look at the purses.”

Jessica grinned. “Okay, Mommy.”

“But you have to promise to stay right here until I get back.”

“I will, Mommy. I will.”

“Okay then.” Amber gave her a quick peck on the lips. “I’ll be back in just a few minutes.”

Jessica and Smiley had been looking through the large collection of coloring books for several minutes when Brandy rushed up to her.

“Little girl?”

“My name is Jessica.”

“Good. You’re the one I’m looking for. Your mommy slipped and fell down. They’re taking her to the hospital.”

“No, *my* mommy’s right over there,” she said, pointing to the purses. But she didn’t see her mother.

“No. She’s on her way to the hospital. And she asked me to take you there.” Brandy held out her hand. “Let’s go.”

Jessica began to cry. “I want my Mommy.”

“I know, Sweetie. I’m gonna take you to her.”

“I thought we were going to the hospital,” said Jessica.

“Your mommy’s gonna come here to my house and pick you up.” Brandy killed the engine. “Hey, how about a big glass of milk and some chocolate chip cookies?”

Jessica frowned.

“Don’t be sad. Your mommy will be here soon.”

Brandy took Jessica into the house.

Her boyfriend, Ryan, was lying on the couch watching TV. “Who’s this?”

“This is Jessica. Her mother had an accident at Wal-Mart and had to be rushed to the hospital. I told her I would watch Jessica for her.”

“Come over here and sit at the table, Sweetie, and I’ll get your milk and cookies.”

While Jessica was eating her cookies, Brandy walked over to Ryan.

He grabbed the TV remote, lowered the volume, and whispered, “What are you doing?”

“I’m about to make us rich.”

Ryan glanced over at Jessica and then looked back at Brandy. “What have you done?”

“Don’t you recognize her?”

He took another look. “No.”

“You know the woman who married that rich dude? What’s his name? The *old* guy. It was in the newspaper a couple of weeks ago.”

“That’s the daughter?”

Brandy smiled. “Yeah. And they’re gonna have to pay a lot of money to get her back.”

“You idiot! She’s seen our faces.”

“No problem, Baby. We’ll move to Mexico. Cancun.”

“You’re crazy. Absolutely nuts.”

“Yeah, I’m crazy. And we’re gonna be crazy rich.”

His scowl turned into a greedy grin. “We’ll never have to work again.”

“We’ll just lay out on the beach all day.”

A special news bulletin interrupted the TV show.

“There she is—that’s the mother.”

“Are you sure?”

“Turn it up.”

As they listened to the news report, the reality of the situation began to sink in. Jessica’s parents were not rich at all. Brandy had kidnapped the child of some middle-class couple.

“Great,” said Ryan. “Now what are we gonna do? We’re not going to Cancun. We’re going to prison.”

“No, we’re not. I’ll tell the police I was just trying to help the little girl. I’ll say she was wondering down the sidewalk and I picked her up.”

“What about the lies you told the girl? You said her mother had an accident and went to the hospital. She’s gonna tell the police.”

“Go outside and have a smoke,” said Brandy. “I’ll take care of this.”

“What are you going to do?”

“Go!”

Ryan grabbed his cigarettes and lighter and walked out to the front yard.

Brandy went into the kitchen. “How are those cookies?”

“Good,” said Jessica.

Brandy walked over to the sink and turned on the cold water. She flipped a switch and the garbage disposal came to life. Then she opened a drawer and selected a very large, very sharp knife.

She turned around and said, “I’m afraid your mommy’s not coming.”

“Why?”

Brandy walked toward her with the knife.

Jessica dropped her cookie on the table, picked up Smiley, and looked into the doll’s face. “I’m scared, Smiley.”

Smiley frowned.

Jessica turned Smiley around to face Brandy, who was now standing over them, holding the knife in the air.

Brandy looked at Smiley's face. It unnerved her to see that the painted-on smile had somehow changed to a frown. But it wouldn't stop her from chopping Jessica into pieces and stuffing the little body parts down the garbage disposal.

Suddenly Brandy felt her body being sucked back toward the sink. Her spine hit the edge of the counter with such force that she dropped the knife. She couldn't bend over to pick it up. She couldn't move. Her body would not obey her brain.

Smiley's head suddenly ballooned into something monstrous. The expression on its face was more frightening than anything Brandy had ever seen. Her heart pounded ferociously.

The knife flew into the air and hung suspended directly in front of her.

"Jessica? What are you doing? Please don't hurt me!"

The knife juttred toward her and then back—the movement too swift for her eyes to follow.

Had she been cut? She didn't think so—until she saw something dripping from the blade.

She felt a twinge in her left shoulder. Then excruciating pain. Blood began to gush down her left arm. Her shoulder popped out of its socket. Flesh ripped. Her arm fell to the floor like a fresh cut of beef.

She screamed. "What are you doing to me?"

The knife flashed again. Her right arm tore off and hit the floor. Smiley's head grew even larger, until it filled the room. His horrifying face was two inches from Brandy's.

She trembled uncontrollably. "No. Please."

She had forgotten all about the garbage disposal until she heard the grinding behind her.

She turned around to see one of her detached arms being gobbled up. Her fingers seemed to wave goodbye as they disappeared into the drain. She heard her grandmother's wedding ring clanging around for a moment.

Her other arm went down fast, as the drain seemed to open its mouth wider. She could see the shiny, buzzing teeth.

Brandy's legs suddenly yanked in opposite directions, dropping her torso the floor. Her legs shot up to her sides until both feet kicked her in the head. Then they mercifully dropped back down—only to be chopped off.

Once the disposal had chewed and swallowed the two legs, she felt herself begin to float. Smiley manipulating her body like a puppet master.

The drain grew even larger. What was left of her began to rise above the sink. The rate and volume of blood pumping out of her body began to surpass that of the water flowing from the faucet.

She went into the sharp metal teeth head first. Once her head was chewed off at the neck, the drain expanded further, and her torso was sucked down whole.

Finally, the disposal turned off and the water stopped running.

Smiley was back to normal.

Jessica turned her around and hugged her. Jessica had not heard or seen anything.

“Are you okay, Honey? Maybe you should sleep with Mommy and Daddy tonight,” said Amber.

Surely Jessica would have nightmares. According to the police, the boyfriend had cut up his girlfriend’s body and put it down the garbage disposal. Then he had stuffed ten cigarettes down his throat and choked to death. Very strange.

Jessica said she hadn’t seen anything. But what if she was just blocking it out of her mind? What would happen when it all started to come back to her?

“Really, Jessie. I think you should sleep with us.”

“Smiley and I want to sleep in our own room. It’s her first night.”

“Well, okay. I guess we can try it. But if you and Smiley get scared, just come and jump in bed with us.”

“Okay, Mommy. But we won’t get scared.”

She kissed Jessica.

“Kiss Smiley too.”

“Okay.” She kissed the doll. “Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Mommy.”

Amber turned off the light and walked out, closing the door behind her.

Jessica could see Smiley in the dim rays of her nightlight.

“I love you, Smiley Frowner.”

The painted-on smile broadened.

Jessica held Smiley in her arms as she drifted into a peaceful night’s sleep.

THE END

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