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All misfortune comes from having a body. Without a heart, how could anything go wrong?

Karolina Krün had dreamed of sitting backstage at New York Fashion Week all her life. When a model agent recruited her from an orphanage in Hungary, she packed her only belongings: some tattered underwear, photos of her mother and sister, and canned peas.

“You’re going to be so famous,” the agent whispered. “Like Tyra Banks and Twiggy. Imagine it now. The Plaza Hotel, a photoshoot with Glamorama, *you* in Louis Vuitton. Give me six months. Six months and you’ll be wearing a mink coat and sipping champagne.”

“I only need a warm bed,” Karolina said in broken English. “And maybe money for my sister’s school?”

“Oh honey, please. You’ll be swimming in dollars. Money. Money. Money. It’s New York City, baby.” The agent wrapped his arm around her, smelling of cigars masked by spearmint. “But you have to trust me. Listen to me. Think of me as your father.”

Karolina never gave up the delusion—even when she ate cotton balls dipped in orange juice to lose weight and snorted cocaine for breakfast, even when she slept on a Times Square street corner with a man dressed like Mickey Mouse. She fantasized over New York Fashion Week.

She felt that the abuse was worth it. Someday the glitterati would have to pay her earned wages. Her family would never starve again...as soon as she walked that *one* prestigious runway.

But when Fashion Week arrived, she never saw a dime.

Instead, she woke up in a dark closet backstage. The smell of body odor and hairspray seeped through the door.

Her head throbbed, and her fingers traced over the blood pooled at her hairline. A thumb stroked her shoulder in lurid circles. She wasn’t alone. She shrieked, but the commotion outside made it impossible for anyone to hear her.

Stars flitted before her eyes, blurring her vision. An air vent kicked on with a rumble behind her. As the cool gust blew over her body, she realized she was naked.

Three minutes until showtime.

Outside, Karolina’s fellow models hunched over in makeup chairs, their peeling skin covered in acne, suffocating from hairspray and astringent. Cigarette smoke hung in the air like smog above them, taming the depression. Artists masked the jaundiced hue of the girls’ cheeks, the heroin shadow around their eyes, and the baby fat that clung to their young faces.

The models didn’t text. Most agencies confiscated their phones. But the few who borrowed the stylist’s cell managed to text their families: “*Te amo*,” “I miss you,” “*je t’aime*,” “*ik hou van je*,” “I love you.”

Outside the venue, the Style Cops judged the fashion of arriving celebrities: “That décolletage is plunging faster than Bill Cosby’s head between the legs of an unconscious

woman,” the Cops said. “If that dress were a baby, it would have been wrapped in tissue paper and stashed in a Walmart shoebox.”

Diamond-encrusted iPhones sparkled for the camera. Vicuña wool was woven into thousand-dollar jackets. Purple and pink cashmere scarves fluttered in the winds of runway fans.

The Manhattan elite had no need to introduce themselves to the paparazzi, their clothing *bespoke* for them.

Two minutes until showtime.

Karolina thrashed and writhed in the closet. Someone grabbed her shoulders and crushed her body to the floor.

Blackness.

A needle found a vein in the crevice of her arm and warmth shot through her with a dizzying nausea. Numbness. She knew that sensation: heroin.

The aggressor covered her body in a slimy leather cloak and attached it by a rope around her neck.

A hairy, scratchy hood fell over her head. She had never smelled anything worse than that coat—not rotten eggs, spoiled milk, or a urine-pooled subway station in August. It smelled like a decaying animal splashed with gasoline, the fabric moist against her naked skin.

The closet door cracked open slightly, enough for Karolina to see the assailant holding a Missoni dress bag. Was her body meant to be put inside?

Karolina was pulled to her feet by calloused hands. When she was stable, the door opened completely.

Sweet tones of Vivaldi’s “Four Seasons, Autumn” played, accompanying the ballet of champagne glasses and foie gras, sashaying through the manicured nails and gloved hands.

Karolina held her breath. Time stopped as the floor seemed to shake beneath her feet. The room spun, Baccarat crystals blinking mockingly at her in Technicolor.

There was the runway, glimmering and calling to her like a skywalk. Karolina Krün would accomplish her dream. She would walk at Fashion Week.

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In the audience, the elite fashionistas sat like cameras with open shutters, passively watching life drift across their lenses.

And Marie LeClaire, chief of the Visage luxury brand, watched nervously as fashion editors scrutinized every misplaced zipper, button, and appliqué.

One model after another strode down the runway with quick stomps, wearing their trademark scowling expressions to make the audience feel inferior. Their bones jutted out like toothpicks under chicken skin, the embodiment of youth and death.

Models were modern art, bodies galloping in a straight line with no destination.

But there was an abrupt pause in the mannequin parade. For a second, the runway sat empty.

A mistake.

People began to murmur, shooting sideways glances at Marie LeClaire. Photographers flashed their cameras more than before, excited to catch Visage's fashion failure.

An empty stage.

Karolina Krün screamed, stumbled two steps and stopped.

The audience covered their eyes. Was the model's screaming a social commentary? And the terrifying coat, a performance of deconstructionist art?

Karolina collapsed to her knees in a splash of blood, and a grayish eyeball rolled down the runway.

That was the moment when the front row knew the corpse coat was made of a real body.

The audience clamored in rhythm with Vivaldi. A ruckus.

Marie LeClaire hid her face in a mink coat.

Cameramen rushed to the stage to take pictures of the disoriented model.

No one tried to help her.

Karolina Krün was wearing a flayed human body as a poncho dress with a human head as the hood. A bejeweled needle conjoined the body's nipples in a button-like clasp.

Flesh was stitched together around the corpse's natural hairs and moles. And one dull eyeball sat above her forehead atop the hood.

A gas mask, a condom dress, and even an animatronic T-Rex had debuted at prior Fashion Weeks but never before had a dead body.

