

Bottleface

by Brannon Hancock

I could not open the closet. It did not matter how badly I needed the item located inside the closet, I knew I could not open the door. I knew she was there, on the top shelf, waiting to offer me her evil grin and demon eyes. At least, the last time I opened the closet, she was certainly there. The vision of that face haunted me, day and night, consciousness and sleep. Of course, I could not be sure that she was there. I was definitely not going to ask my mom if she was still there. (No, I'm much too brave for that...I think...)

The Bottleface was ugly. To this day, as she lurks in my parents' attic in Goodlettsville (rather than the top shelf of a closet of my childhood home in Brunswick, Ohio), I have yet to learn of the origins of the Bottleface. She may have been a homemade wedding present from a strange friend or a crazy aunt. She may have been a failed (I would hope!) high school home-ec project from long ago. She may have been bought at a garage sale or an odd thrift store merely out of intrigue. But one thing I do know is that she was ugly.

The Bottleface had a strange, smiling face. The face was either drawn with magic marker or painted with tempera paints on an old, white, plastic carton of some sort. I do not know what type of carton it was; it was larger than a milk carton. The face was mainly red and black. The face was a woman's, with

large, red lips and dark, wild eyes, heavily bordered with make-up. The woman's face was not a human face, but more like a cartoon representation of a woman's face – almost a caricature. That's it – painted by a satanic artist, disgruntled after being fired from his job drawing caricatures at a major theme park. An evil man whose only goal now is to fill the world with bizarre pieces of artwork that frighten little children.

Not only did I never know where the Bottleface came from, I was never really sure what she was for. Naturally, I never looked at her long enough to know what was inside her. Maybe my mother used her to store scraps of fabric, remnants of old clothing that would possibly come in handy for patches or Halloween costumes or rags to clean the toilets with. Maybe she held old books or cassettes or photographs, or socks that had holes in them. I never knew her purpose, and do not to this day. I prefer to keep it that way.

It is possible that my mother never understood just how much the Bottleface disturbed me. Maybe if she had, she would have gotten rid of her, or at least put her somewhere other than that closet – somewhere I would never have to go or ever want to explore. I prayed she would take the Bottleface out into the back yard and burn her so I could watch the plastic melt and shrivel up. I could laugh as the paint of the eyes and mouth began to bubble and burn. I could rest assured knowing that the Bottleface was dead and would haunt me no more. *"Ding, Dong,*

Bottleface's dead / the Bottleface / the Bottleface / Ding, Dong, the Bottleface is dead...!" I at least hoped she would just throw her away.

I have never spoken to my mother about the Bottleface. I have never asked her to answer my questions, to help me solve the mystery of the Bottleface. Maybe some mysteries are best left unsolved. Maybe some fears are best left undiscussed.

To this day, whenever I venture up into the recesses of my parents' sauna of an attic to fetch an old magazine or some Christmas decorations, I still avoid looking at the Bottleface. There she sits, still, undisturbed, smiling demonically, thinking thoughts that no one could ever know. Sometimes I think about speaking to her, telling her that I am no longer afraid of her, that she no longer has any power over me. Here I am, in the attic, after all. I know this is her lair, but here I am all the same, of my own accord. I want to tell her that now I am grown up. I am mature. I am brave. I am no longer a child, easily frightened by a silly object. By a silly *inanimate* object! *Inanimate?* Yet...who knows. Still, I never speak a word. I remain silent out of fear that if I ever speak directly to her, that ghoulish grin might answer me.