

The Walking Girl

Mindy struggled with her oversized bags searching for the perfect spot to set them down on the sidewalk on Riverview Drive. She didn't seem to mind at all that her orange bikini top clashed horribly with the bright red shorts she wore. She did have a problem adjusting her shorts to fit however, since they appeared to be a size too small and all the tugging at the bottom hem of the shorts didn't make a difference. The blue ribbon hung loosely from her shiny ponytail as she fumbled and struggled to tie a firmer knot. Finally, she was satisfied to begin her daily ritual and proceeded to pick up the trash along the road.

Ryan and Nathan peered through the bushes across the street contently munching on their candy bars. Mindy had their complete attention as she moved her bags obsessively from one location to the next. The boys, both twelve years old, laughed and shouted obscenities each time

Mindy walked past their view. Ryan was dark haired and thin as a rail, while Nathan's chubby face was framed with his unkempt, dirty, blond hair.

Mindy heard the commotion as the boys continued their shouting and abruptly turned around, scowling her brow in an angry glare as she searched across the street, only catching a glimpse of the boys as they ducked behind the bushes.

"Look at her!" Ryan shouted, as he watched her repeat her actions over and over.

"I know...look at her! What's her problem?" Nathan agreed laughing.

An old red mustang, screeched, slowed down, and veered to the side of the road. A man in his mid- forties, with a balding hairline and wiry mustache, rolled down the window and motioned Mindy with a wave of his hand. She promptly sauntered over to the car and had a brief conversation before getting in the car. The engine revved loudly as the mustang peeled out, leaving a trail of exhaust and burnt rubber permeating through the air.

"Did you see what happened?" Ryan blurted out practically choking as he swallowed the last bite of his candy bar.

Nathan was busy licking off the last morsels of melted chocolate from his fingers when he interjected his hot disdain. "I knew it! You don't get that reputation for nothing!"

Ryan and Nathan scrambled across the street as they continued observing the red mustang tear down the road and disappear from their sight. Ryan elbowed Nathan in the side to get his attention.

“Ouch! What did you do that for, Ryan?” Nathan shot Ryan an angry stare while he rubbed his side.

Ryan pointed his finger back at the spot where Mindy’s bags were lying on the ground. “Look, it’s the perfect time to dig through her bags and see what she’s hiding and why she has to drag them around with her.”

“Alright, let’s go!” Nathan shouted darting off as Ryan followed.

One by one, they picked up Mindy’s bags, scrounging around the contents, pulling items out and scattering them across the ground.

“It’s nothing but her clothes?” Ryan said perturbed, as he flung a pair of old jean shorts at Nathan.

“Huh?” Nathan looked confused grabbing another bag and throwing out several pairs of worn, high heel shoes. “What’s going on? Does she carry her whole wardrobe around with her?”

Ryan shook his head. “I don’t know, but this is weird. Let’s get out of here before she gets back.”

Clothes and shoes were strewn everywhere on the sidewalk, when Mindy was dropped off. Fumbling with the crumpled money in her hand, Mindy lifted up the bottom flap of her bag and retrieved a flattened wallet. After counting the bills three times, she added the money to her other stack of twenties, then staring at the ground, cursed at the mound of clothes and shoes sprawled on the sidewalk. She looked around to see if anyone was watching her, especially the two boys

she had seen earlier and with no one in sight Mindy inhaled deeply, sighed and carefully organized her clothes packing them neatly away again.

The sun's rays shined on Mindy's angered face making the lines around her eyes more pronounced as she stared down at her bags. She finally grabbed her large, dark green bag that was ripped from the weight of all her clothes and shoes inside. Mindy hastily dug around inside until she was satisfied with her find and kicked off her sandals. She bent down and slipped on a black pair of high heels admiring her choice several times before she tucked her sandals away.

Mindy continued walking down the street, juggling her bags and alternating them between each shoulder, until her feet ached for relief. Her belongings were carefully placed on the side of the ice cream shop, as Mindy casually walked in. As she neared the counter the sales girl gave Mindy the once over scrutinizing her choice of clothes and heels before she mechanically recited in a condescending manner the ice cream special of the day.

“Hi... what can I get for you? Our special today is Rocky Road ice cream. Buy one scoop and get the other one free.”

Mindy searched through the glass shelves, eyeing the assorted flavors with serious anticipation.

“What flavor do you think I should get?” Mindy mumbled to herself. “Chocolate or vanilla? Oh, chocolate, okay.” By now, both of the girls behind the counter were softly whispering amused exchanges and giggles, behind her back.

Mindy glanced up and smiled. “We've made our decision. I'll take the chocolate.”

“Ooh, okay.” the girl faltered, furrowing her brow confused and leery of Mindy’s response. She immediately turned around to cast an apprehensive and amused grin to her co-worker, who cupped her mouth to avoid laughing out loud.

Once again, she grabbed her bags outside the door and started walking down the street with her eyes focused on a couple office buildings down the street. Mindy set down her possessions, along the side of the building and waiting until no one was around quickly slipped inside. Mindy had taken one small bag with her and sought out the nearest restroom that was conveniently located near the front door. Inside the bathroom Mindy hastily put on a strapless, form fitting black dress, which emphasized her thin frame immensely. She finished pulling up her fishnet stockings and squeezed in her black heels that were scuffed and worn with years of wear.

She focused on her image in the mirror, combing out her stringy, blond hair, and firmly securing it with a rose-colored barrette. Before leaving the restroom, Mindy pulled a huge wad of paper towels down from the dispenser, and gave a thorough cleaning of the sink until it almost shined like new. She left the building in a hurry to avoid any obtrusive questioning of her presence there. Her obvious display for attention continued as she walked down the street. She eventually caught the eye of another motorist passing by, and was offered another profitable proposition.

This time the man eyeing Mindy’s figure was heavy set with a full head of gray hair, puffing on a cigar that he occasionally held out the window flicking the ashes. He leaned over and opened the door, waiting for Mindy to accept his offer. Mindy had a twinge of doubt before getting into the man’s car since his breath reeked with alcohol. She reluctantly complied anyway

when he coerced her with a stack of bills he waved back and forth in his hand grinning as if he knew she'd accept.

This daily ritual seem to followed the same pattern for years, but lately, approaching forty, Mindy found the ordeal became much more difficult. The use of rest stops was required more frequently. Her skin had developed a leathery tan, weathered from years of exposure to the outdoor elements, and her body ached and longed for adequate nourishment.

After another hour of walking, Mindy finally spotted a bench to sit down and ease her weariness. Crossing her legs, she lay back exhausted, waiting for the next opportune time for her to be approached for a lucrative proposition. As the motorists whizzed by, a dusty gray, dilapidated truck finally stopped and signaled her attention.

Mindy promptly stood up, unable to stop her dress from riding up, exposing the top of her ripped stockings. She felt her legs throb when she walked, but wasted no time climbing in the truck, while her next transaction began listening to the customer tell her all about his adventures on the road and how he needed companionship that he would compensate for very well.

Ryan nudged Nathan as they walked out of the drug store, pointing to the truck pulling out. They both stared at the familiar bags, leaning against the bench, and remembered they were exactly like the bags they had seen years before.

“Can you believe that Nathan?” Ryan said motioning to the bags on the ground.

“I can't believe she's still doing that! But it's like I said before, everyone around town knows her and she has made her own reputation.” Nathan answered firmly.

Ryan paused rubbing his brow and added, “I just keep thinking there has to be more to her situation?”

One more encounter later that day, piqued Ryan’s curiosity even more. After leaving the grocery store, Ryan saw Mindy sitting alone on a stoop outside the store. Her clothes were worn, and her hair no longer held any luster, while it hung limply on her shoulders. Ryan cautiously approached Mindy mindful of how he would question her.

“Excuse me?” Ryan’s voice cracked as he nervously approached Mindy.

Mindy abruptly looked up, startled as to why this attractive, younger man would want to talk to her. Her eyes appeared dark and swollen, lined with heavy bags underneath. The tone of her skin had taken on an ashen color and it appeared drained from any hint of color. As she parted her pale lips, Ryan detected a faint smile, when he glanced into her pleading eyes. Moving closer, Ryan noticed the prominent wrinkles were now deeper than ever, sprinkled all across her face.

“Yes?” Mindy said gruffly, pushing away the gnarled hair from her eyes.

“Hi, um...I remember you from years ago, before I left for college. I’d see you walking around town all the time with your bags and well, I wondered if...?” before Ryan could finish Mindy stood up.

A little sparkle shot in Mindy’s eyes when she mumbled a broken reply. “It’s twenty dollars to start and more for each...”

“Wait...hey...you’ve got the wrong idea. I’m not looking for anything. I only wanted to know if you need any help. What’s going on with you?”

Mindy’s eyes narrowed for a closer view of Ryan’s face. She recognized the genuine sincerity in his eyes, and apprehensively let her guard down. With painstaking guilt, she hesitantly divulged traumatic details of the sexual abuse that happened to her as a pre-teen, and how she couldn’t cope with the pain. She thought life had no meaning, and opted to living on the streets. Her parents tried to get her help but she refused them knowing they were part of the problem. She emphasized her embarrassment of how she was eventually put on medication for her schizophrenic episodes, but as a result of her condition, couldn’t remember to take it.

“Now, I’m really tired. I don’t know anything else. This is all I do.”

Ryan saw the uncomfortable stance in Mindy’s demeanor, and the desperate plea for relief on her face. “I know some agencies that can help you get back on track.” Ryan offered cautiously.

“It’s too late.” Mindy stated flatly. The years of pain and suffering that were kept hidden behind her stoic façade now slowly surfaced, shedding a little light of her vulnerability to Ryan.

Ryan desperately wanted to offer some kind of hope when he saw the despair on Mindy’s face. “It’s never too late and I’ll show you.”

“Not yet.” Mindy drawled tiredly, picking up her bags and heading down the road.

The hour seemed to drag on forever Mindy thought as she trudged down the sidewalk painfully aware how badly her body ached with every move. She cast an occasional glance over her shoulder until something altered her walking pattern and this time she suddenly stopped. A stifled tear now rolled freely down Mindy's cheek followed by a faint smile when she recognized the figure following her.

Chewing on his bent straw as he casually walked behind her, Ryan was following Mindy's daily walk down Riverview Drive.