

The Magic Dolls

by Brian Michael Barbeito

Trees gaining maturity that waited in the sun, in the bursting mornings and long afternoons, became restless now in new night textures. Sometimes the wind that came before the storm seemed to be intelligent, and follow some unseen but labyrinthine pathway. But now it began to become unsettled in itself, an air river overflowing or over-satiated belly bursting old seams. Branches shake and rummage and the air is as if permanently distraught.

The true summer is far off and the Indian summer is uneasy like rough hewn marble or unfinished granite. In the days the cats that lived in that home had formed a trinity twice. Once in the early afternoon, and once again closer to dusk. Sometimes enemies, they found that creating this team benefitted tremendously. A triangle was formed around a field mouse, and this was the configuration of the mouse's demise. A feline-scalene triangle. The geometry of death.

Tamara sleeps quietly from days that have been rich, full, and unwanting. By quarter-round that is white but scarred and old, sit piles of books. Soldiers in some secret nocturnal attention. Most are library books. Some are more than a year overdue. American history. Romance. Metaphysics. A book called *Snakes: Their Habits and Habitats*, and one called simply *How to Read Palms*. Above them on the side adjacent to the door is a glass case that holds cat figurines. Most of the ceramic eyes stare out at nothing while a few of their mates wait in a sleeping posture forever.

Under Tamara's pillows are small painted wooden dolls. Each the size of a finger nail. Each invested with every feature and article of clothing imaginable. They look like girls from a strange Norwegian farm that she saw in a picture one time, watching the men folk saw a part of a tree as a Budweiser horse waited close by. Earrings. Vests. Bracelets. Dresses. Lashes. Usually Tamara keeps them in a small metal clasp box that originally housed mints. She takes them out to help her dream her 'movie dreams,' which is the name she has

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ascribed to her psychic dreams. They also help her when she feels she might astral travel. Nobody knows about the dolls, and what is more, Tamara, usually grounded and even keeled with as astute memory in her waking life, cannot remember where they came from or when. They have seemingly always been there. Like the sky. Like a river. Like the trees outside the window that are now being interrupted from their own slumber by chaotic night winds that were once restful day breezes.

A Duran Duran poster adorns the door. It's been put up with two types of tape. Clear on the top and then yellow electrical along the sides and bottom. There is a vague heart drawn in light red ink beside Andy Taylor. Rain starts then. It clamors against the window like some middle child vying for attention, living between anger and uncertainty and tired now of its continued anonymity.

One of the real cats jumps down from somewhere and goes to sanctuary beneath the bed on hardwood slats. Andy Taylor stays still. He never moves a muscle no matter what the weather. A good imaginary boyfriend. Besides, his hair is always perfect.

Tamara's diary is open and a pencil slumbers on the top of the page where there are no lines on the sheets of stationary yet. It is placed neatly, horizontally, like a child upon clean white linen sheets.

Miss Murray is such a bitch. I bet that is why she is Miss Murray and not Mrs. Murray. I hope I don't have her again. Not looking forward to starting again. It will interrupt my reading and everything else. Summer was not the greatest but good. Going to call gram one more time tomorrow. Wish to go there. Not going to happen. Would watch trains from the porch steps and chairs. All days. Just keep to my books. Walk to the Gem Mart. Watch late news with gram. No real bedtime or she forgets. Not sure if she forgets on purpose or really always forgets. Sometimes I would have Simone visit. That's it though. Nobody else. They piss me off. All those girls. Piss me off. Piss. Piss. Piss. Piss. Piss. And piss. Piss piss pissy piss piss pissing piss off. I think I am going to go out of my body and fly tonight. I still can't control it mostly not. When I am out I can control

it. My flying. I feel funny. Too tired now. Good nite. Dreams. Sweet drams I mene. Talk tomorrow. Love Tamara.

Some hours pass and she is flying. She sees below quiet boulevards and the sidewalks like strips of parchment paper. What's left of the old school is there just beyond, and soon she passes over it. A two story affair smaller than the other schools, the city schools. It's still standing, but the middle is sunken in from the fire. The fire that some kids accidentally started by leaving burning cigarettes in the first floor stairway at the back. They had broken in on a Sunday night to hang out and smoke. That was the official story anyhow. And that was the story that everyone believed including Tamara. But soon, in about five more minutes, Tamara would know better. ..

Crashing back into her body, not remembering coming in through the roof or the window or anywhere, she is asleep but awake. It is then that she has one of her movie dreams. Outwardly she looks as if she is having a nightmare, and her face twitches a bit and then contorts in a sort of consternation because of what she is seeing. In her vision it is middle night. The school, the streets, the yards, all loud with a quiet vacancy. The sky is black because it lost the moon, and the clouds shelter and keep the stars and the constellations they make to themselves. There is an old style street light that lives in the parking lot and its infrastructure, and it shines down, and because of light pollution, shines also over towards an obese man by a doorway. In the doorway another light smaller, and in a metal cage to protect it from tennis balls or other torments, casts an indifferent, murky yellow glow on the man's bald head.

Mr. O'Halloran, the grade four teacher, takes a ring of keys from his jacket pocket, and fumbles with the lock to the school. He is looking around at the back yards of the houses that line the entire three sides of the rear perimeter of the school's yard. He does not want to look away, to look down at the lock directly, and this is probably why it takes him so long. Tamara can not only see him, but see his thoughts, and he is thinking something about knowing how he will be kept awake later for weeks if he is not sure that he was not seen...

... and finally he gets the door opened.

Below his feet was a small jerrycan of gasoline and he goes to the inner pods and pours it on the carpets and on some cloth dividers that stand on large rectangular metal feet. There are some flashes in the dream, like specks of blue and orange light. Then a small flame that multiplies. It is then that O'Halloran, fat as he is, manages to run rapidly to his car, which he has parked about fifteen houses down a side street beside one of those stretches of boulevards that are on long corners and are as if not really claimed by any house in particular. His car starts, jumps forward half a foot, stopping with a jerk right away. He is fumbling with something. Then there is a screech of tires, and Tamara gets the impression that he thinks someone saw him. In a couple instants the street is quiet again. Tamara awakens.

The trees are still violent and the storm in full swing. It is pitch black. Just past the witching hours. A quick check on her dolls. They are there. She chooses not to be afraid. She chose this a long time ago in fact, but sometimes, at moments like this, finds she has to re-choose it. In the morning she will put her dolls away. In the morning she will write in her diary. In the morning she will tend to the world. For now there might be more to be gleaned in the night worlds, in interior passageways and forgotten about areas of dark.

And if not, she is tired besides, and could use some rest.

