

Slut Whore

by Cami Park

Slut Whore has every Barbie on the market lined up sitting on the windowsill along her bedroom wall, and all their best clothes and accessories. She invites her friends over and they dress and undress the dolls, snapping and unsnapping tiny outfits over thermoplastic breasts and backsides.

Slut Whore lives in the part of town known as Brody's Woods, where all the poor people are. In this town, "brody to the max" is a slang term for anything especially undesirable, but to Slut Whore's friends, it's just another way of life. Dinnertime, for one thing, is different than the food pyramid-based meals they're used to. They'll have baked beans and hot dogs, or a noodly casserole, and watch "I Dream of Jeannie." Television during dinner is taboo at their houses, and everything around them feels exotic, in a stagnant, underwater sort of way. They are adventurers, learning Slut Whore's ways.

Mostly, though, it's about the Barbies. Slut Whore's friends don't understand how she gets them all. No other girl in town has so many.

Slut Whore's mother is a big woman who likes to wear flowery, tent-like dresses and eye shadow the color of fresh bruises. She argues with Slut Whore's father, a bald, puffy-lipped man, over money and bills. He sits with his plate in front of the television, staring past it into the overgrown front yard as he eats, grunting occasionally. Slut Whore's mother moves around the kitchen, stirring and pouring things in pots and bowls. She doesn't understand the Barbies either.

After dinner, Slut Whore brings her dad three beers, and opens one for him. She puts a cigarette between his bloated lips and lights it, keeping her eyes fixed on the flame like a prayer, until she blows it out. She places the dead match in the ashtray, carefully. Smoke circles her face and settles into her hair as her dad reaches under his chair for a paper bag and shoves it at her. *Slutwhore*, he mutters as she walks away. She steps a little to the side, but doesn't turn

around. Her friends remember she used to have another name. One friend thinks it might have been Terri; the others aren't sure.

Slut Whore brings the bag back to her bedroom. They marvel at the new Barbie, and bring the others down from the window to play. Some of her friends notice marks on Slut Whore's neck, covered mostly by her hair, spidery flowers the color of her mother's eye shadow. They don't comment; it's part of the mystique, like noodly casseroles and dead matches.

Slut Whore and her friends finish with the Barbies. They comb out the shiny plastic hair of each one, bend their legs just so, and line them back up along the sill, their backs to the window. The dolls are all smiling. Their eyes are all open, wide.

