

The Rhyme of the Ancient Barbie In Five Parts

Argument

How a Mother is driven into her young daughter's bedroom by the premonition of an unnatural event; how lying next to the sleeping child is a beloved toy, the same Barbie doll that used to belong to the Mother as a girl; and how many strange and profound judgments pass between them as the child slumbers peacefully.

I

Mother picks up
her ravaged old
doll

It is an ancient Barbie doll
Storm tossed upon the bed
That stops me with her tangled hair
And strangely twisted head.

“Poor Barbie, you are badly used”
I try to put her right,
When in her frozen blue-eyed stare
I think I see a light.

I dropped that Barbie like a stone
But she sat up and glared,
“You’re just as bad as she is, then,
I thought at least *you* cared.”

and hears a
Spirit talking.

“I do,” I choked, “I mean, it’s just
I don’t know how to feel.
I’ve heard of rabbits doing this
But Barbie, are *you* real?”

II

Barbie laments
of her false
perfection

“Me real?” snuffed she, “get real yourself,
Wherever did you see
A grown up real-life woman who
Looked anything like me?”

“Dear Barbie, though I’ve always thought
Your head shaped like a pin,
Your boobs a bit too ample and
Your waist absurdly thin,

There might be some who fit the bill
Though few and far between,
I only wondered how you *spoke* –
I wasn't being mean."

and of how she
despises the
sleeping child.

She touched me with her skinny hand.
"I'm so fed up!" she said,
"Keep your obnoxious little brat
Away, it's her I dread.

Clumsy fingers, sticky lips
She leaves me all undressed,
She cannot get my clothes on me
Oh, I am sore distressed!"

Mother cries out
against the doll's
ungracious
remarks,

"Now Barbie, though I see your point
You are a tad abused,
To hear you call my child a brat
Well, I am not amused."

"Did I say brat? Oh, silly me,
Best child that ever walked,
If not for her and all her kind
I never might have talked.

She is my penance, my delight,
My challenge and my joy
But seeing how she mistreats me
She should have been a boy!"

but in pity,
forgives.

"Take heart," said I, "though she is young
You'll see it plain as day
She hopes to have your glamour's grace
When childhood drops away."

"Now there's a laugh," her high voice shrilled,
"She's in a rush to grow,
So she can spend the rest of life
Suspended on tiptoe?"

Bemused, Mother
beholds the doll's
antics

She pranced and minced with feet on point,
Turned stiffly on her clicking joints
And tried a graceful leap:
A clumsy horse on hurdles course
She fell down in a heap.

and listens as
Barbie bemoans
her fate.

“You see,” wailed she, “I have no skills.
I’ve never learned to dance,
Can’t even sing or write a poem;
At least *she* has a chance.

I’m past my time, a living Death,
My face, my clothes, my hair,
Are all that I can think about
I really must despair.”

III

Mother feels
constrained to look
for a bright side,

“But things have changed,” said I, “since you
Were fashion’s pretty face,
Now Barbie can be anyone
All careers, any race.”

“They ethnicize and advertise
But can’t supply us hearts
We’re all the same vacant smiles
And matching plastic parts.”

yet commits a
grievous error.

“But Barbie, dear,” I searched for hope,
Your Ken is surely one
Who loves you for yourself alone,
Don’t you and he have fun?”

Her bright eyes shot me such a look,
They say such looks can kill.
I feared her then in her cold skin
And shivered as with chill.

Barbie continues
her complaint.

“Some fun,” she hissed, “those Kens are stiffs,
They think they’re really sports,
But how can you abide a man
Who can’t pull down his shorts?
The only love they know about
They find on tennis courts.

No, life’s a drag, a pain, a bore,
It’s really getting old
My looks are shot, but I can’t rest
Until my tale is told.

IV

As Mother stands
spellbound,
constrained to
listen,

“When I was new you pampered me
And brushed my yellow hair;
I knew you would grow up too fast
And leave me, how unfair!

I fought against the time and tide
That all dolls must bemoan,
And wormed my way into your soul
(Since I don't have my own.)
Convinced I had you in my spell,
Sure I was so clever,
I was heedless of the truth
That dolls aren't loved forever.

Remember back in '64
When we were best of friends,
I let you pet me endlessly
And marry me to Ken,
Ignored the writing on the wall
The year that you turned ten.”

Satan stalks from
the doorway

Her discourse stopped, her face went pale
As if a ghost she'd seen,
Then I saw Satan's yellow eyes
Appraise her mouselike mien.

and must be
banished.

“That cat,” she squealed, “would make a fine
Fur coat for any doll.”
The way he stared I thought it best
To shut him in the hall.

“Continue, Barbie, do go on,
What happened to you then?
A lot of years have passed you by
Since ever I was ten.”

Barbie relates of
her strange and
remarkable
journey,

“My Spirit spread its gilded net
In magazines, TV;
Commercial magic woven by
The phantom, Vanity.

And as you grew I watched you from
My elevated shelf,
And while you tried to be like me

confesses her
trespass against
Nature,

with curlers, makeup, and perfumes,
I loved it as you cried and fussed:
I was an evil elf.

and her
seduction of the
child.

Then when you chose a plainer course
I still would not be through;
(I could not let another girl
Be quite as plain as you!)

I plotted thickly from my height
To conquer callow youth
Though you grew wise, *she* brought me down
To seek Vainglory's truth.

V

The agonies of
false Vanity are
told.

“And so I have been given speech
To cleanse me of my sin,
And warn all girls that life is Hell
If you're a mannequin.

So listen, lady, listen well
Perhaps it's not too late
To save young girls from what the world
Might cruelly make their fate.

For it may be that they will judge
Themselves against the Grail
Which says that they must look this way
But guarantees they fail.

Too fat, too thin, too short, too tall,
That's where it all begins;
It ends with diets, illness, pills,
Expensive regimens.

Barbie's
penance
ensues.

Who knows what grace and wit and sense
May lurk beneath their skins,
Though in *her* case I have my doubts,”
And here she slyly grins

“But it would be a shame I guess
To have her worry so
About her hair and shape and skin
That she neglect the glow,

The glow that comes from being *real*.”

And when I saw a tear
Run coldly down her plastic cheek
To comfort I drew near

The doll departs.
Mother remains,
amazed, yet
wiser.

But she was gone without farewell,
She vanished out of reach,
And left me there with saddened heart
Determined, though, to do my part
Her loving tale to teach.