

BARBIE

by Betsy Luce

“Six hamburgers, six orange soda pops,” my mother called into the speaker.

No choices involved. My mother believed that orange had to be the healthiest choice, so that is what we got, along with milk warmed up in a pan in the mornings to pour over our breakfast cereal so our “little tummies” wouldn’t be cold on the way to school. It was no surprise we all looked like emaciated children from a Dickens novel.

My mother was determined that her kids would never be exposed to anything unwholesome, risqué, or even slightly sexual on her watch.

When I was nine, I knew exactly what I wanted for Christmas. I dreamed of, and longed for with all my heart, a real Barbie doll. That sexy, pouty glamour doll with the high-heel feet and thick black eyeliner, and best of all, large, pointy torpedo-shaped breasts. There was nothing on earth I could think of that was so beautiful, and so mesmerizing, as Barbie.

My cousin Suzi, an only child, had not only bleach-blond bubble Barbie, but Barbie’s best friend, the freckled, red-headed, non-threatening, Midge. She also owned Barbie’s blond, fuzzy-headed, ever-so-slightly endowed boyfriend, Ken.

Suzi was a year-and-a-half older than me, with long, straight, perfect California hair, and a straight, skinny model-perfect body to go with it. Suzi generally held me in contempt, except on the rare occasion when she could find no one else to play with.

Suzi’s house was sparkling clean and blissfully quiet. She had a pool in the backyard and a stocked refrigerator, as well as a snack drawer filled with chips and candy. A true paradise for a kid with five shrieking, fighting, ravenous siblings at home. A bag of cookies lasted all of three minutes at our house.

Her mother, my Aunt Patty, wore a poufy, black, beehive hairdo and large rhinestone earrings, even at home. Suzi had a wardrobe that she tracked on a chart to make sure she didn’t wear the same outfit to school in the same month. Suzi and Patty were the most glamorous pair I knew, and I longed to be accepted by them.

If I had my own Barbie, Suzi would ask me for overnights, and our two Barbies would play together. As it stood, Suzi would allow me to hop Midge around behind Barbie, while Barbie bossed Ken.

On Christmas morning my heart leapt as I saw the wrapped oblong box exactly the size my Barbie should come in. I ripped off the paper, my heart pounding with excitement. I should

have seen it coming. Inside the box was the dumbest-looking doll I had ever seen: a female version of a teenage Howdy Doody. Tammy was freckled, with two strawberry-blond pigtails that poked out each side of her head. Her blue checkered shirt covered a totally flat chest and tied at her waist. Tammy wore frayed hem denim cutoffs and red sneakers on her flat-bottomed feet. I was robbed! My diligent mother looked hard and long to find a wholesome replacement for my too-sexy Barbie.

Tammy went with me to Suzi's house where we gathered for Christmas Day dinner. I pulled her out, hoping she wasn't as bad as I thought.

Suzi howled, rolling on the floor. When she could breathe, she announced adamantly, "Barbie does NOT play with Tammy!" I didn't blame Barbie a bit, and I tossed Tammy unceremoniously under the bed.

"Here," Suzi said, handing me Midge. "We're having a barbeque at Barbie's Dream House, and Ken is coming over."

I drove Ken up in Barbie's Corvette Dream Car and jumped him out as Midge and Barbie cooked tiny burgers on Barbie's grill with a tiny spatula.

"What's cookin' good lookin'?" my Ken asked Barbie.

Barbie looked at Ken with contempt.

"Pull down your pants, Ken," she demanded.

Suzi yanked down Ken's shorts and flipped him on his back. She held the spatula over the grill in Barbie's hand and then smacked it down hard on Ken's nonexistent genitals.

"Sssssssss..." Suzi hissed as she emasculated Ken. "That's what you get."

"Whoa!" I thought, horrified. It was the first hint I noticed that all was not as peaceful as I thought in paradise.