

The Carnival of the Dolls

I must recount to you a tale of wonder and terror
Of how I bore witness, one fateful night,
To the feast of all the hateful toys
And hell-made playthings from all the darkest corners of this world.

It was by strange chance that I happened upon their wicked gathering.
I had only just begun to drift off to sleep,
Under the watchful, glass eyes of my childhood playmates;
My friends of wood and cotton and porcelain.

How they watched me with those eyes;
A deep and sinister knowledge lay behind them,
Belied by their innocent smiles
And their colorful costumes.

But I had always suspected that they knew many things.
Things they would not share with anyone, man or beast,
In fear that their secrets would be revealed to lesser beings;
And at last their greatest and most malign power could no longer protect them.

There was a slightly howling wind outside when I opened my eyes once again.
It seemed just moments since I had slumbered,
But perhaps hours had passed.

When I beheld my dark room,
I was met with surprise.
My toys were not there.
The dolls, the animals, the puppets; all gone.

I heard a tapping sound upon the hardwood floor,
A sound like many tiny feet trekking across the room,
And out the door.
I resolved to follow the sound.

I was enthralled by the prospect.
“Perhaps,” I said to myself.
“Perhaps I was right after all.
It seems my little friends have been keeping secrets from me...”

I stepped lightly down the hall,

Careful not to give my presence away,
Following the sound of the crafty fugitives
As they snuck out the door of my home.

The grounds outside my house were heavily wooded
And the air was thick with fog tonight,
But through the mist I descried the shadows;
Little black forms moving quickly through the night.

I could not keep them in my sight and stay out of theirs for very long.
I soon lagged behind and lost their trail.
But I continued to pursue,
Led by some other sense.

Finally, the sounds came to me;
Music, and revelry, and madness.
There was a chorus of laughter, the likes of which I had never heard.
I drew closer to get a look.

I was in the midst of the old garden,
Surrounded by dark hedges.
I followed the sounds and drew back the wall of branches.
Then I saw the light.

Flames danced, and so did the little creatures.
They frolicked and shouted,
Skipping around a small bonfire,
Waving their swords and wands and scepters.

The ballerinas spun on their toes,
The clowns laughed and juggled.
The bears danced with the wizards,
And the knights waltzed with the princesses.

It was a most peculiar celebration.
'What,' I wondered, 'are they celebrating?'
I prepared to take a closer look,
When I heard a shout.

It was Carl, the night watchman,
Coming with his lantern.
Realizing their festival had been interrupted,
The toys swiftly dowsed the flames and hid.

This is why none have known about them before.
They are careful not to expose their secret
To any living person.
I was merely more clever than they.

Carl had seen the flames
and thought there might be an intruder on the grounds.
He came forward
and demanded the stranger come out.

Forgetting about the toys for now,
I saw fit to reveal myself to the old man.
I was about to rise and say hello,
When the bonfire suddenly blazed up again.

Carl shrieked when he saw the dolls,
Surrounding him with endless numbers.
I feared exposure now more than ever,
For they were not the same sweet toys they were before.

They were all vicious now,
Howling and hissing,
Their eyes ablaze with rage,
Shaking their tiny fists.

It was more than I could bear to watch,
So I turned away as I heard them,
Attacking the poor man
By whatever deadly means that toys possess.

When I looked back,
He was dead on the ground.
And the dolls danced upon his body,
As if nothing had occurred.

In silent terror,
I ran from the place
And fled to my house,
Locking the door.

I returned to my bed
And hid beneath the covers,

Squeezing my eyes tightly,
Hoping that my presence had gone unnoticed.

I lay shivering in the darkness for a long while,
Until I heard the creak of my bedroom door.
The tip-tapping of tiny feet moved across the floor,
And trekked about my dressers on the far side of the room.

When the sounds stopped,
I peered out from my bed.
My dressers were bare,
And all was silent.

I turned my head,
Just slightly,
Searching for them.
Then I saw.

The little feet were all standing straight
On the headboard just behind me.
They did not move,
Nor did I.

Did they know what I saw that night? I do not know.
But I have been careful not to make them suspicious.
I never speak of them, or look at them, nor do I ignore them.
But since then, they have kept a closer eye on me.

I shall make signs for the garage sale tomorrow.