

Bestest Present Ever!

By: EL_Refresho

As my mom was fond of saying, ‘today is a day for hurrying.’ Which she was right about, because getting ready for an eight year old’s birthday isn’t easy. Still, I took a break when I passed the photo in the living room. We were on the beach; mom, dad – my real dad – and I. We were hugging, and Mom and I were overshadowed by Dad’s grizzly-like arms. That was almost nine years ago when I was fourteen. A few weeks later, everything would be different.

I would find out that Mom and Dad were faking their smiles; that they were destroying the only world I had ever known and ending their marriage. The divorce was bitter, and it was several years later that I discovered that Mom had used me like a dagger to cut at Dad’s heart. She dangled me in front of him, saying that she wouldn’t fight for custody if she got the car, then the house, and on and on. But somehow I stayed with her when the verdict came down.

Still, by the time I could drive, I slept over at dad’s house a few times more than his visitation allowed. I was practically living with him by the time I was seventeen. When I turned eighteen, Mom wanted to throw me a huge birthday party. I told her I was coming to it even as Dad booked us tickets to Florida.

There was, however, one part of mom’s new life that I liked: my step sister Jennifer. To Mom and Gary, my step-‘dad,’ she was sugar, spice, and everything nice. She was a bit of a brat to me, but I still loved her. She was

the only reason I ever came back to Mom's house. Today was her eighth birthday, and today was a day for hurrying, so I turned away from the picture that I hadn't seen in Mom's house for several years and ran up the stairs to where Gary was preparing presents. I tossed a box to the ground near him.

"Could you wrap that for me, Gary?" I asked.

He picked up the box filled with markers, crayons, brushes, and paper and gave me a strange look. "You know Jenny really likes Barbies?"

I shrugged, "You know that she's eight, and will probably outgrow Barbies in a year or two?"

"I wouldn't be too sure . . ."

"Look, Gary, of the two of us, I'm the only one who's been an eight year old girl," I said, while noticing a long blonde wig on his desk, "I hope that's not part of your and Mom's sex games."

"Actually," Gary said, "It's for you."

"I'm not going to be a part of your and Mom's sex games."

"It's just an extra present I thought up for Jenny. I thought you could dress up like a Barbie doll and play with her today. You know, be her living Barbie."

"Well, I had planned on drawing with Jenny today, so I don't think I'll take up your offer." I walked out of the room, "Just get my present wrapped," I yelled back.

Two hours later a whole gaggle of girls, elderly relatives, Mom, Gary, and myself laughed and talked while Jenny opened presents. Apparently, everyone else thought that Jenny was *only* into Barbies, and she must have gotten seven of them, as well as a car and a pink playset. Like clockwork, she said 'Oh, it's so pretty' to everyone. And then, she opened up my box of art supplies.

"Oh wow!" She cried while pulling the wrapping off. "This is the bestest present ever!" Jenny jumped up and hugged me, "Thanks, sis." While I hugged my step-sister, I looked at Mom and laughed at the steam

curling off her devil horns.

“Anytime, sis,” I said, letting the exuberant eight year old go.

“Are there any other presents?” Gary’s mom asked. I looked at the ground where the presents had been, but between the carcasses of wrapping paper and the second graders already playing Barbie for Jenny, I couldn’t see much.

“Actually, there’s one more,” Gary said, standing over me.

I never even noticed him, and began to turn around when he put the blonde wig on my head.

“Gabby’s going to be Barbie for you guys.”

I started to say something, but the hopes of twenty bright eyes looked back at me, so I put on my happy face and said,

“Yep, you can just call me Barbie.” If it wasn’t for the kids, I would have strangled Gary. Then I noticed the girls all looking at me in amazement.

“Whoa.” One said.

“That’s amazing.” Another said.

I started to frown, but immediately found I couldn’t. I began to shrink, compacting from a leggy five foot nine inches to a much more childlike three feet something. My arms bent slightly at the elbows and refused to move, while my feet arched so they could slide into high heels. Jenny inspected me, her jaw completely lax. She moved my left arm, and I heard a plastic squeaking sound. “Oh wow,” Jenny whispered, “You’re the bestest present ever, sis.”

Three hours later, and I still wasn’t quite sure if all this was real or a dream. I stood in front of a mirror, dressed in a blue gown and tiara. I still marveled that the Barbie in the reflection seemed to be me. I had a hectic afternoon, constantly juggled between elementary girls vying to play with a living Barbie. I never actually did

anything Barbie didn't do. But that, apparently, didn't matter. Now I had a brief moment of respite as the girls had left and Jenny was taking a nap.

Mom appeared in the mirror, smiling more broadly than I had ever seen. When she came to me, she knelt down and looked at my reflection. She brushed my Barbie blonde hair away from my face. "This is what you get for choosing that cheater over me." Mom kissed my cheek, "Sweet dreams, Barbie."