

The Puppet of Grissam Lane

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There was something undeniably fascinating about the house on Grissam Lane. It was a squat building, its long frame low on the ground. Built from gray brick and stone, it was almost camouflaged amid the gray wood forest around it. While most of the town trees were just turning amber and gold, the leaves around this house had already withered from their branches and blown away into dust, leaving only a sad yellow grass carpet on the ground. A perpetually dry creek ran along the front of the property, forcing visitors to cross an aged rickety bridge. And under the right conditions, such as the chill moist air of tonight, a deep fog would settle around the house. In Mike's mind, this made the house the perfect Halloween make-out point.

He leaned forward on his steering wheel of his new blue 57 T-Bird. The circular headlamps cut into the growing fog and lit the ground in an eerie yellow glow. He was tall and thin and preferred to wear his bulky red letterman jacket to make himself look bigger than he was. He kept his perfect gold hair swept back to reveal naive blue eyes. Susie was in the passenger seat, her hands up on the dashboard and her face not far behind them. Her own raven hair was pulled into a bouncy ponytail, and her brown owl eyes peered at the house. She wore a tight white sweater and long red skirt and saddle shoes. Her pom-poms were behind her seat.

"It's just a house." She said, her voice stern until she looked at Mike, "Right?"

He nodded. "Yeah, just a house. It's been empty for like ten years now." He had grown up in a nearby neighborhood, one of the rapidly growing subdivisions of the post war era. "Never knew the people who lived here, but I remember that a girl disappeared around here a few years ago. Cops searched the house, but didn't find a piece of her."

"What did they find?" Susie asked. She had only recently come to the town. She was an army brat, living in quickly built base housing, and was glad her family had stayed in one town for almost two years now.

Mike shrugged, "Nothin', the house was completely empty. Didn't even have a speck of dust."

The cheerleader kept saucer eyes on the gray building. She tilted her head and looked at one of the windows on the left. There seemed to be an extra dark spot amid the blackness. Her eyes narrowed as she peered at what might be a shape of something. The more she looked the more she was certain something was there, an appearance that was helped by the ever so subtle appearance of a pale outline around the figure, barely human shaped. Susie noticed that it was swaying ever so slightly. But her rational mind began to take hold of her imagination once again, noting proudly that the figure was too high in the window to be . . .

"Mike, do you see something in the window there?" She pointed.

"I was about to ask you the same thing." He replied, his jaw a little lax and his brow furrowed. "It looks like there's something tied to it's. . ." his voice trailed off.

"Head." Susie finished. "Oh God, did she hang herself?" The cheerleader opened her door and started walking through dead grass and dirt to the house. Mike was right behind her, and grabbed hold of her trailing hand, but didn't stop her. Susie paused for a moment at the aged house door, but found it opened with no trouble.

"What are we doing?" Mike asked.

"Helping," Susie replied. She didn't pay attention to the empty house. In fact, it was too empty and entirely clean. No dust or cobwebs to be seen. She went to the window where she knew she saw the figure, and

gasped when she came inside. There were two objects in the room: a full length mirror that was somehow lit up by the moon, and a marionette. The doll was blank with no real figure or form; it was just wooden joints held together by pins. It wasn't wearing any clothes, and it faced away from the door. The marionette twisted and turned. It almost looked like it was trying to move; as if there was a soul inside of it struggling to show itself.

Susie walked up to it, taking one short step after another. The marionette swayed in the room and cast inky shadows on the gray wood floor. Susie reached up and turned the doll around, and stumbled back when she saw the marionette's face. It was young and beautiful, but the eyes painted on her were wide and terrified, and mouth open and trying to scream.

Susie shrieked and stumbled back. She fell over her own feet, falling to the ground with a hard thud. The shadows in the room grew; a cloud passed over the moon and the house fell into total black. The cheerleader started to push herself out of the room, but something tight wrapped around her wrists. Something pulled her back. "Mike!" She screamed, "MIKE!" Her shouts echoed through the house and forest, but no one heard them. Why didn't anyone hear them?

She opened her eyes once. And then again, fighting off the sleep and the sudden chill of the room. Susie looked up and back to the marionette in the room. But it was gone. Instead, she saw a young woman in the center of the room, delicately rubbing her neck. Susie tried to stand; tried to move, but the fall and the sleep had robbed her of strength.

"Who are you?" She mumbled to the stranger, a fellow cheerleader from the same high school. She wore her blonde hair up in a ponytail and wore a long red skirt and saddle shoes. The stranger looked down to Susie, but didn't bother to respond. The moonlight caught the new girl in its light and Susie saw tree rings fading away on her cheeks.

"Who are you?" Susie asked again, more forcefully, but her phrase came out more muddled and weaker. She tried to stand, but no part of her would respond. "What's happened to me?" She tried to say. But this time

not even a whisper left her mouth. The cheerleader turned away and didn't even acknowledge Susie's presence. *Look at me. Help me. Tell me what's happening,* Susie pleaded in her mind, but the cheerleader left the room and left Susie lying paralyzed on the ground, somewhere between life and death. Not knowing what had happened to her, or to Mike. Not knowing if she would ever leave this house again. Not even able to close her eyes.

And not being able to close her eyes, Susie saw in the mirror something else in the room. A raven-haired, feminine marionette lying against the wall. Her wooden hands and wooden feet were limp. Her eyes, big and brown. The toy looked peaceful and happy, but Susie knew it was screaming inside.

The car roared to life outside, and two teenagers, a boy and a girl, laughed away all the imagined terrors they had felt inside the house. The girl, a blonde haired cheerleader, told her boyfriend that she had found a marionette lying on the ground in one of the rooms. Stripped naked, it had deep brown eyes and a perfect smile.