

MILLICENT

by Chris Roberts

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ONE

[knock knock knock] He answers the door with a stunned face. He looks like my father. [daddy] No answer. He asks me in, who I am. [millicent] Still, astonished, he closes the door, shutting off the storm. It's been raining and I'm soaked through. *I'll get a towel*, he says. [thank you daddy] He looks back in surprise. He can't hear me. Really hear me. He walks to the bathroom for a towel.

She comes in with a borrowed look of perplexity. [give it back to daddy it's not yours] *What's not mine?*, she asks for no reason. She can't really hear me either. [nothing like mother]

They take me in, call around, but I belong to nobody. I could have told them that, but I can't. My mouth doesn't work right, voice doesn't speak. All I do is think in this shell. This head. I think it's all stuffing up there anyway. *What a cute doll*, she says as she takes my clothes off, puts me into the hot bath. [thank you] She lays my doll on the bathroom counter. I reach for it but- *Let's get you cleaned up first*, she insists. [you can be so silly mommy]

TWO

They fight all the time. He hits her. [poor mommy] She needs to figure daddy out. He doesn't really want to hurt her. He's just mad. Frustrated. Bills pile too high. He works all day. [lazy bitch doesn't work] Spends. Money and time in the shopping malls. I go with her and she buys me ugly clothes. I smile politely. She doesn't understand.

Like a dog that goes to the bathroom in the house and gets spanked. She should be able to put two and two together. Math. Simple math. He hits her because they have no money. She spends what money they have and they run out. He hits her. [circle] Simple. Stupid circle. It's not his fault. [it's mine] They won't hit me. Wish they would. Band-Aids heal wounds. Take the tears away when you can't see the blood. The cut. Embedded gravel in flesh. [all gone] Plastic strips that never stay on. Curl. Stupid dog! Goes to the bathroom in the mall. Gets a spanking. She yelps. He hits her harder because he can. Drops his brown bottle. It'll kill him. He'll kill her. *Why don't they notice me?* She's getting better with money. They don't have any. She can't spend what they don't have. Daddy hides it, I've seen him. [daddy is so smart] He's always working. I never see him. I cry. Mommy is growing impatient with me. [good] I can feel it. But I can't really *feel* it.

THREE

I hold my doll in my lap like she was real. She cries. [i am getting impatient with you little one] The crying continues. This has to stop! Enough to drive a mommy crazy. I hit her. Hard. Her head lolls back unnaturally. Would have broken her neck if she had one. Crying stops. [stupid dog] Use the papers! I hit her again. Crying stops. She will learn not to cry. She will learn to feel. She will learn to hit me. Hard!

Mommy tucks me in. I try to sleep but sleep doesn't come. Too noisy. They're arguing again. How *dare* she ask daddy where all the money is! Junkie. Has to have her fix. Shoot it straight into the vein. Roll the bills up and sniff it long and hard. [hard] He hits her. Knocks her to the floor. She gets up. Floors creak in this house. Can't get to sleep. They fight until they get too tired. He gets too drunk. She can't talk through the pain. Her swelling lip. She got her fix. [serves her right bitch mommy]

FOUR

He can't beat her anymore. She's worthless pulp on couch. [a knot] Watching those stupid soap operas. Life isn't *that*. She could care less. Asks me to get her some ice for her lip. Her face. Her curled body. [glacier] Band-Aids for her cuts. Pillows for her bruises. [we don't have that many pillows] I suddenly feel sorry for her. She is in pain. She *is* pain. All balled up and pissed like she could explode.

He's too big and strong. He'll hit me soon. Direct his rage. He *has* to direct his rage. Not at mommy. She can't handle it because she actually wants to live. Wants to survive. Make it through all of this. Wants out of this hell called marriage. [until death do you part] Probably. I'll help her. I'll help them both. [help myself]

Mommy falls asleep. I touch her arm to ease her pain. To ease her dreams so they don't turn into nightmares. Nightmares are worse because you can die in them. Almost. And you can be happy for one brief moment. That moment when your stomach falls into the mattress and you nearly wake up. Then you wake up and you are still alive and... unhappy. And you know that you have to face him when he comes home. Tired. Hungry. Angry. Irritable. Mommy. Your face is so battered. Too apart, cut up. [not your face at all] You cry and think that I don't see you, but I do. I see you. And I feel for you. [will feel for you]

FIVE

[just look what you made mommy do] I yell at my doll. She's crying. Do you like to see mommy cry? Do you? Then I hit her soft stuffed head, hard. And I pound on her thread-joined arms and legs. [no bruises no cuts] I get even madder. Like she is *laughing* at me. Like it doesn't hurt. Like she isn't learning anything from her pain. [my pain] Stupid dog. Stupid doll. Stupid! [daddy]

I put a blanket over mommy. Put a blanket over my doll. I know how very cold they must be right now. One hour. Daddy will be back in one hour. Better get to work. He'll hit me tonight. [i hope] Mommy will die if he doesn't. Rage. Must. Be. Directed. Must be dumped somewhere. Like the body in the mystery movies I'm not supposed to watch. Bodies. Tossed in the river. Put in the ground. Placed lovingly all over the face and body of the woman you said you loved! [bastard] Little black and blue. Black and blue marks and cuts. Blood. [red] I hate the blood. Cover it up. Band-Aid. Cover mommy up. [one big cut] Bruise. [one big pain] Can't see it with the blanket over her. Sleep mommy. I'll take care of you. Sleep. [stupid dogs]

SIX

Big empty wall. Really quite a shame. Barren space in this cluttered house. Glaring white wall. Inviting. Beckoning. No colors, or prints, or paintings, or shelves. Empty canvas waiting for artist. Where would mommy keep the markers? Kitchen? Office? Junk drawer? Found them. Black, blue, and red. [black for the bruises blue for the bumps red for the blood and the pain and the lumps] Twisted little rhyme rolls off the tongue like venom. Snake in the grass poised and coiled. Waiting for loopy dog bouncing down the lane. Tense and strike, bite the leg, poison blood, rigid, dead.

Scribble and doodle all over the wall. Black houses with no windows. Wet blue sky with no sunshine. [no yellow marker] Deep red flowers bleeding and dripping on the black sidewalk. Filling the cracks, rivers of blood. Ants drowning, unheard screams. Need more colors. Blue little girl with red popsicle. Melting in sun that isn't there. Hands covered red and sticky. Standing, towering before the outstretched man. Eyes still open not blinking. Cold, blue eyes. Filled with captured rage and surprise. Happy tree of black and blue. Crusted bark and Band-Aids. Red sap and happy squirrels. Chirping and chatting and gathering black nuts, scattered carefully over the blue grass ground. Little girl smiling wide smile from ear to ear. Blood red smile sharp teeth showing. Markers flying, streaking, staining, singing. Headache

smells, childhood highs. Little floating marker girl never touching the ground, never touching the sky. [too short] Stuck somewhere in between. [an everybody limbo] Standing on the sidewalk, floating on the wall, frozen, smelly marker people passing by. Lanky postman with an empty mail bag waves a parade hello. Groomed mustache and bad teeth, thin, awkward stick legs bending and springing with each step. Big lady walking little dog on a heavy, steel-blue chain. Mumbling things she has to do, places she should be right now instead of walking her little dog, things she wants to eat. *Needs* to eat. Tiny yips from frail, red dog whenever she pulls the heavy chain too hard. [poor dog] Strange young man with no eyes, wandering through this scribbled suburb, wearing a cap that reads JESUS SAVES, carrying a pitchfork. Wandering. Knowing exactly where he's going. He can see *everything*. [i can see nothing] Nothing but the three colors that now smother this once-white wall. The stench of markers and madness permeates the house like a bizarre gas leak. No mask. Dizzy. I look at the clock. Five minutes until daddy gets home. He'll be so pleased with what I did to the wall.

SEVEN

I look at my masterpiece with a silly sense of pride. Strange figures pass the little girl with her liquid popsicle, none of them noticing the man lying on the sidewalk before her. Blank eyes, blank stare, gaping, shocked mouth. Hole in his stomach to match. Red and sticky. Bottomless not-a-wishing well. [close your eyes make a wish drop a coin into the deep dark]

Two minutes until daddy gets home. He will be so surprised. So proud. So pissed, grabbing his belt and yelling and barking. Lashing and whipping until he draws blood. Lunging at the wound like an impatient vulture not waiting for his prey to die. [pray to die] Swimming vulture-shark smelling scrumptious, succulent plasma. Striking and smacking my face, back, bottom, his lips, wet with sweat and spittle and satisfaction. Daddy will put his belt back on to hold up his pants, and I will retreat painfully, happily into the shadows with my tears and throbbing flesh.

EIGHT

I can hear the door click before he enters the house. The floor squeaks with each of his heavy steps. Series of depressed, overweight mice. Daddy is getting closer now. He will walk through the entryway, put his briefcase on the table, go to the liquor cabinet, pour himself a drink, and walk through this hall to the living room, where he will root into his easy chair to watch hours of useless, mindless television. But- he won't make it that far. He will stop to see me. Stop to see my masterpiece of markers, make-believe and mischief. He will hit me. Anticipate await. Like the night before Christmas. Never sleep, never blink until Santa Claus arrives with a gift. Gift of happiness and temporary, plastic joy. [some assembly required batteries not included santa is not real] Daddy is *very* real and coming down the chimney. [hallway] I stand before my work of art waiting for my first and most important critic to recognize my mad genius. Spout praises and pat me on the back. [hard] Make me feel special. Make me feel wanted and needed. [make me feel]

NINE

What in the hell have you done? He lets go of a yell that wakes the dead. I know because I hear them. Chanting my name. Beautiful cacophony. [millicent millicent millicent] Daddy picks me up off the floor. [floating] Shakes me hard and screams into my eyes, making me blink and wet. My eyes are leaking, tears of joy, tears of pain. *You stupid little BITCH! What's gotten into you? Why are you smiling? I'll wipe that smile right off your little face!* [i would certainly look funny without a smile] *I'll give you something to cry about! Drawing on walls! I'll teach you!* [teach me i want to learn] Need to learn. [understand why] Kiss this abuse on its raw and ruptured skin. [smack]

I get my fill. He hits me. Hard. Slaps me sillier than a knock-knock joke. Knocks my head back violently. [would have broken my neck if i had one] Snapping bones, splitting skin, broken little bird. Torn off

wings, plucked feathers, no chance for flight. [helpless chirp] Ragged cuts and scratches cover my body. [dizzy and fading] Have to stay awake, have to learn, pay for mistakes. Marker mess. Black, blue and red. Colors of my skin now fading to a pale, yellow-white cloth. Stitching un-stitched. Ripped cloth and buttons fall to the hard floor below. [plink plink] Can't see anymore. [blind] Can't scream. Still feel the pulling, shaking, limbs going numb and falling off. Stuffing pushing thread aside. Red, wet stuffing seeping through the hundreds of thousands of cracks in the sidewalk. [losing my train of thought] Left the station fifteen minutes ago. Losing my mind. Going limp and nimble. Pliable putty in firm, strong hands. [infirm] He hits and smashes and squeezes the life out of my itty-bitty body. [cotton falling from the dead queen of the rabbits] Not thinking straight quite. [quite straight] Fading into the blood-spattered wall behind me. [liquid] Dissolving into the bedlam. But his grip is so strong. He shakes and sweats and throws me against the wall, suddenly very solid, very real. My head pops, and what is left of my neck vanishes into dust and wood shavings. I fall slow motion to the hard wood floor. A pile of shredded rags. [where is my doll] Crying, leaking, throbbing, longing, weeping, fading... [satisfied]

TEN

The circle is complete. He retreats in a daze, blood on hands. *What in hell have I done?* Mumbling, stumbling. Backing up, tripping, running away from this mess. His mess. Leaves me to die. Leaves me to suffer, bleed, and slowly... slowly heal. [i will never heal] Neither will daddy. Neither will mommy. I pull a rug over my broken body. Band-Aids heal the pain, cover the blood. But the edges always curl. [sticky circles] Where is my doll? Soon I will be better. Soon my wounds will heal. Maybe if it strikes me... [strikes me] I'll get my thread and needle out, fix my doll. [if i can find her] Maybe I can find the strength to move. Strength to breathe. To blink. To live.

Forever crying and living and dreaming when asleep, when what you really want so desperately to do is scream. So tired. Content with the last seven minutes. I think I will sleep until daddy wakes me up. Realizes what he's done. What I've done for her. [them] He'll be sorry for awhile. Until I heal. Until she heals. But the rage will still be there, just below the surface. [pet wrath itch] Waiting for any excuse to come out and play. [volcano erupt scald] next her. next stupid dog.

[stupid circle where is my doll she has been a very bad girl little bitch she will learn]