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Chapter One: How I Became

JonBenet by Kathy Acker

Boulder is an ugly snowglobe that someone bought in a cheap airport gift store and stuck at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. Boulder is the snowglobe in which I've been trapped for eight years. Somewhere between the Island of Misfit Toys and the Valley of the Dolls lies my maximum-security snowglobe. The air is thinner here than Jacqueline Susann ever imagined, and the silence lasts forever. I'm drowning in a vacuum, surrounded on all sides by the yards of gravel and bark that my neighbors consider landscaping.

The silence is a threat, ready at any minute to tear into shrieks, gunfire, explosions. But it never does. Therein lies its power—the threat that is silence in small-town America, smugly silent like a rapist in a stocking mask. This silence is more than just that of menacing individuals, it is the sound of institutions quietly, efficiently, unstopably at work, altering DNA codes, slipping radioactive waste into the landscape, readying weapons for new wars. The very trees that line the—silent—strips of sidewalk have the swagger of this silence. Every night at 10:30 sharp the citizens of Boulder emerge from their cozy quiet cottages with the Siberian husky-Labrador-coyote-Chow-German shepherd mix that every home in Boulder has as a totemic animal, straining at its leash, ready to take a shit before retiring for the night. And the same game plays itself out every morning, again, at 7:30 exactly.

How they smile, the citizens of Boulder, nodding quietly, little dreaming of the strange and terrifying metamorphosis that has occurred in their midst, miraculous as nuclear power, violent as genetic engineering. You see, Boulder is the place where I've turned into JonBenet, a grown-up doll who looks in the mirror, sees nothing there, and likes it like that. How did this happen? An accident of radioactive waste, a side effect of tampering with gene codes? A mistake of military technology, wafted on the wind from Colorado Springs?

But my transformation is unremarkable here. Can a snowglobe contain the whole world, hold all the threat of the universe? Boulder stays a toytown, a snow village even in full summer.

Nothing happens under the thick Plexiglas Colorado sky that domes this snowglobe in which I've become JonBenet. It's midday, and very warm, and I'm in a Boulder bathroom, with dingy floral linoleum and no windows. Bathrooms never have windows in Boulder. But they do have mirrors, solid as the ones in mental hospitals, except that this mirror doesn't show me anything of my perfect face. It's afternoon in Boulder. It's summer. Everyone's happy and silent except me, for I listen, heart pounding, for shrieks, gunfire, explosions.

I'm not really JonBenet. I'm a plastic doll that looks exactly like her, her double, precise in every detail.

I'm not really a JonBenet doll. I would have told you the truth sooner, but I didn't think you would believe me, and I wanted to get your attention and win your confidence. You see, I'm really Kathy Acker, a dead woman writer come back to life in this village of the damned. I'm a bigger, better O now than I ever was. Kathy-O. When O was a young girl, alive then, above all, she wanted a man to take care of her. In her dream, the town was the repository of all dreams. A town that was always decaying. In the center of this town her father had hanged himself. This can't

be true, Kathy-O thought, because I've never had a father. In her dream, she searched for her father.

No, let me tell you the real truth. Bear with me. Anything can happen in Boulder.

I'm a dead writer trapped in the body of a plastic doll.

I'm a plastic doll trapped in the body of a dead writer.

Both of us are trapped in a snowglobe.

I don't know who's writing this, Kathy or JonBenet.

Chapter Two: Kathy Acker™ Speaks

Adorable, unpredictable moppet that I am, I've just snuck out of my impressively secure Tudor house, and I'm off to the Toys-R-Us store on 28th Street. In blue gingham and curls, adorability makes me invincible; moppethood puts a force field all around me. Like a Shirley Temple assassin, like a Killer Kewpie, I take those whimsical bus lines—the Hop, the Skip, the Jump—all on my own, like any adult, paying a quarter that seems awfully big in my childish fingers each ride. Today I'm JonBenet, Kewpie, and Shirley Temple doll in one and the same toy body.

I'm not allowed to be out on my own, not really.

But today is special, better than a birthday, or a pageant, or Christmas.

Today is the day the Kathy Acker™ doll gets released.

“Where are you off to?” ask the grown-ups, the drivers, the ladies, the techno-hippies, on the buses. I bat my eyelashes and giggle. It always makes them shut up: giggles and eyelashes—the best weapons in a doll child's arsenal.

Still, once I get to Toys-R-Us, I can't help but be struck by how little the toyshop resembles the magical emporium of models and make-believe that one would expect from fairytales. This is no enchanted carrousel, with garlanded griffins, lolling-tongued unicorns, gilded geldings, ingratiating tame dragons ready to fly anywhere out of Boulder. At least

Toys-R-Us is a bit less Puritan than the Play Fair Toys across 28th. Less Puritan perhaps, but the Toys-R-Us on 28th still looks like a supermarket in some stark regime of totalitarian capitalism. Like Boulder itself, I guess. The Toys-R-Us store could be a dead ringer for a penitentiary, one of those Big Houses for which Colorado is famous, only this time, it's a Big House for Little People. Everyone's a prisoner here, even the toys. It's a necropolis for stillborn childhoods, I muse, briefly sidetracked by my reveries, tilting my head in a manner calculated to melt hard hearts.

But I've a mission to accomplish. Security's tough—metal detectors and alarms loom to discourage theft, dour and muscle-bound uniformed store guards wait to deal with shameless or desperate shoplifters who aren't awed by alarms and metal detectors. Boulder believes in private property. And it's fiercely private about its property, like Little Lord Fauntleroy is about his emotions and his sex life. Soon, dear reader, all too soon, I shall encounter that ill-fated boy doll.

Enough, though, of memories and anticipations—today's a red letter day. Today is the day I get to buy the Kathy Acker™ doll that has just come onto the toy market. I've been saving for weeks, in secret. Kathy Acker™ will be just my secret, my very own.

She stands a full 12 inches tall, with tiny tattoos and tinier piercings. She's as buff as Lara Croft but a much better role model for little girls—or boys—who are interested in the arts as an action-adventure career. She's a talking doll, thanks to a voice box and a cord in the back of her neck. Her legs stand firmly, challengingly, apart, her arms rest akimbo, her face set in a doll-mask to confront impersonality. She's a speaking likeness of Kathy Acker™, the original. I've dreamt of Kathy Acker™ so often that I know I'll recognize her anywhere, especially here in Toys-R-Us on 28th Street, in doll-form, the doll dream of a doll child.

She has that trademark buzz cut, the one long dangly earring, even tiny bits of finger armor on each hand. And she comes with four costume changes—

Kathy as O, plus corset, chains, and telltale ring with name-tag disk under her skirt, Kathy in full-body fetish armor as Don Quixote the sexual warrior, Kathy as Pip, in a floppy velvet Victorian-gothic number, then, Kathy in swaggering corsair's boots and hat, all twelve inches the swashbuckler, plus an eye patch with skull and crossbones, as Pussy King of Pirates, complemented by a miniature parrot. She retails for \$24.95. Each of the outfits and sets of accessories sells for \$14.95.

Were Kathy never to be removed from her box, she'd be bound to be a collector's item—a challenge from the art world to the corporate greed of generic toy makers inundating us with their Barbies, their Skippers, their Furbies, their Bratz. She's at least as good as an Ozzy Osbourne figure. I worry that my grown-ups would complain if I bring one of those miniature metalheads home. But what am I saying? My grown-ups can't tell the difference between metalhead and World Wrestling Foundation dolls. Stupid as they are, they don't expect Kathy and me to have a pact, a secret mission.

Or perhaps a Jim Morrison Lizard King adventure doll? No, I'm just distracted by totalitarian capitalism in the Toys-R-Us store on 28th Street. It's Kathy Acker™ or nothing. I've dreamt of this moment for weeks. Kathy's an art doll, ideal for a doll girl like me. I don't think I ever could never-remove-her-from-her-box. When I get through the towering rows of metal shelving, tilting bullyingly inwards as I look upwards, like perspectives in *The Toyshop of Dr. Caligari*, to the aisle with the Kathy Acker™ display—not at all as spectacular as I'd expected but at least that keeps attention away from me—it's love at first sight. She's my new favorite toy and I want to hug her to my chest forever, she's that cute with her buzz cut, her finger armor, her little tattoos, and that single earring.

I gather her up with the four outfits and accessory cases in my plump childish arms and rush to the checkout. I pay the money in dollar bills,