

Another Barbie Gone by Allison Ash

"How about right here?" I asked.

"Mmmmm, I don't know, we don't want anyone to see us from the road, what if a CHP drove by?"

"But were in the middle of the Mojave Desert, its flat for hundreds of miles, we'll be seen anywhere unless you want to drive for another three hours."

"You've got a point, uh OK this is fine, but lets walk in a ways, away from the car."

I rolled my eyes and popped the hood. We had to stay *close* to the car to have access to the battery. Why even pretend to be secretive or safe? We were going to destroy another Barbie doll. Its not as if anyone would care, not as if its against the law.

"I'll get the camera set up, you get the fuel and the fuse out of the trunk."

So I sat on the sandy desert earth with Total Eclipse Barbie and began to set up the photo. I really liked this Barbie. Total Eclipse Barbie had survived lots of stuff so far. This may be the end of the road for her. I wasn't sure, no one could know how *this* one was going to turn out. Making Total Eclipse Barbie was fun, even though I had major arguments with Cynthia because she had done it wrong. It had to be done *my way*. MY WAY. I am no fun to be around when I am like this; when I have a creative, destructive vision.

It was such a small beginning, you know. We all remember our parents' warnings during an eclipse "Don't look at the sun or you'll go blind-- your eyes will burn up". As kids we imagined that it could really happen. It'd be so gross; your eyeballs could burn right inside your head with the neighbor kids and your pissed-off parents watching. We tried to warn Barbie. Actually, we may *never* have warned her, we just tell the story that way. You know: "...and we *told* her not to look at the sun but she did and look what happened; her eyes caught on fire" It didn't happen like that. We never warned her. We were in total production mode. We were doing it for the *photograph*. The 'story' was for the viewers of the Album. That came later.

I argued with Cyndi over Total Eclipse Barbie because it was the *BIG* matches I wanted to use. How could I photograph a Total Eclipse Barbie with the puny little matches Cyndi brought? Really! Use the big kitchen ones. Cut slits in Babs babyblue-and-violet eyes and shove the wooden match-stick part into her head up to the hilt -- you know, till just that red part sticks out of the eye -- and light them. It was great. The thrill of actually doing this to Barbie was intoxicating and spectacular. Take a million photos: so great, that beauty queen sitting there during the eclipse (of course there was an *actual* eclipse that day) so pretty, still smiling, while flames poured out of her eye sockets and the plastic around her eyes from the bridge of her nose to her forehead started to blister and burn and turn black. So great. Such a great photo. Yep, your parents were right about that eclipse crap, and Barbie should have listened. Now she sits, permanently disfigured, but still smiling.

On the desert salt flats, as I test the focus for a macro shot, she is smiling still, and everything from her nose to her hairline is either missing or burned. This one has been with me for so long. The total eclipse deformed her but didn't destroy her. Not like Madam Pele Barbie. Nope, there is not much left (Christ there is nothing left!) of a Barbie sacrificed to Madam Pele on the Kilowea lava field. God the lava flowed directly down onto the beach, we could walk right up and lay Barbie in it. Hot Lava. Molten Magma, at least 2000 degrees Fahrenheit. A *ton* Fahrenheit. No chance for poor Babs. I imagine that this was Pele's first Barbie. Pele is the Goddess of Fire in Hawaii. I hope Goddesses like Barbies. That was the beginning, actually. Our first kill. We loved it. It was sacred and Cynthia and I bonded. We had *found* something here. Something *Powerful*.

"Hey you better take the photo from further back", Cynthia says, "when this thing goes off you might get hurt."

Fuck her girl scout safety-first crap. It drives me bonkers. She should know by now that I know what I'm doing.

"Yeah, O.K." I said, showing uncharacteristic restraint. "You know", I continued, "this one's been in the Calistoga mud baths and to the Grand Canyon, and Saint Patrick's day when we got caught in that Sobriety check point. Its a shame to lose her."

She grosses so many people out. From a distance it looks like she's wearing a Lone Ranger mask but as you get close and see that vacant, black and blistered cavity where

her eyes used to be (where *your* eyes might have been); its just plain gross. My step-daughter wont allow me to have it in the house when ever she visits. She's six, you'd think she'd understand that it is just a doll.

"You may not lose her. This is a totally survivable experience. You'll see. Got to set up the launch pad closer to the car cause the fuse wont reach to the battery."

"O.K. You know, I didn't mind losing Metro Barbie nearly as much ."

Its hard to build up much attachment for a Barbie without an history. I had only had her about 3 weeks before she laid down on the tracks in Vienna. She should have looked *both* ways before crossing the tracks, or so the 'story' goes. Boy, but that was one great outfit to lose.

"Remember that Pretty-in-Paris number you got for her before I went to Europe? That was sure a great outfit."

I can remember looking up and down the tracks for all her parts after ... well ... after she became Metro Barbie. I had even put a real penny (not a *real* real penny, but a Viennese penny) in her shoulder bag. The penny filled the entire bag. The train had sliced through the purse and the penny. I was so impressed.

"Hey, she's gonna be too heavy for this thing to lift off. It'll never get off the ground. Maybe we can just strap on her head."

"What size motor did you get? It HAS TO get off the ground."

It has to. I start to feel that pressure for the photo well up in side me. I can turn demonic, become ruthless to those I love when an Album photo is at stake. Don't panic, be nice. At least be nice about it *this* time. Try. I want this photo to be great. It can be great. Only one shot. Its got to be great. We have to set it up perfectly and I want a WHOLE BARBIE strapped onto that rocket!

Not that I was the only one who could take great shots for our Barbie-noire Album. Cyndi had contributed at least half. Like the photo of Buckshot Barbie she got on the weekend she went hunting for gophers on her friends ranch. Cyndi is good with a shot gun. She and her friends spent hours looking for all the *parts* to include in the photo. We were learning a lot about how Barbie is put together. The body can be totally destroyed and that face keeps smiling. Oh yeah, and then there was the Barbie she brought back

from Australia. God. I'll never be able to show my step daughter *that* one. It even shocks *me*. Gotta hand it to those Aussies, they sure know how to have a sick time! What they created was both pornographic and satanic. They went through a whole pack of cigarettes burning a hole through her back, and softened the plastic at her elbow enough to twist off her lower arm like taffy. There was graffiti and chunks of "flesh" missing from most body parts including a radical mastectomy. But the most disturbing thing was the hole carved into her eye (not to mention the crevice through her skull and forehead) into which they shoved the severed lower arm. Aussie Barbie has an arm protruding out of her eye. Hard to photograph that one. It is better in the flesh, so to speak. You just can't capture the gruesome totality of the thing in one still photo. But I came close. I'm pretty good at Album Shots.

There were many shots, the best shots were a collaboration like the Christa McAuliff Barbie we were working on. Crucifixion Ken was a collaboration like that. The only *male* in our Album so far. I remember how pissed I was at a friend and 'crucify him' came to mind as the only reasonable punishment option. Can't *really* do it but that's where Barbies come in. (Can't *really* look like that but you can have one.)

We started in my garage. Want to build, fix or glue something? My garage is the place to do it. I live with a man who could host his own "This Old House" show. He reads the how-to books cover to cover: "Hey Honey, it says here that...", I just roll my eyes and go off and eat something. As Cyndi and I started building the cross he walks in and offers to help 'us gals'. We just stared him down. He backed away realizing that our eyes had glossed over with the anticipation of another kill. Maybe the froth in the corners of our mouths scared him off, I don't know. He has seen me like this before. He went back inside, probably to think of what he could fix next in our home.

Obviously the dimensions of the cross had to be just right. Cyndi used to be a Born Again so she was a big help here. She was also great at the finishing details: Crown of thorns, swaddling cloth 'diapers' and a spear hole in his rib cage. (Gads. Imagine, getting speared *and* crucified! Ooo Ouch, poor Jesus.) I was clueless about such things, thank God. Our biggest problem, obviously, was Ken's anatomy (isn't it always?). His arms wouldn't move into a crucifixion configuration--so we broke them off. Most people don't know that if you pound a nail into Ken's hand it will shatter. We knew this, so we heated a nail and melted it *through* Ken's hand and then pounded it into the cross. The melting process also made it look like real flesh accumulated around the nail, a great effect. Once

we attached Ken's body and nailed those hefty legs on -- Voila! Crucifixion Ken -- *TOTAL* Taboo. We offended lots of people with this one. Even people who usually understood, couldn't. Cyndi and I had crossed some invisible line. Others could see it but we couldn't. Hell, not only couldn't we see it, we didn't even *care*. We liked it. We were *proud* of it.

Most people don't understand us, Cynthia and me. . . and . . . uh, of course . . . Barbie. The "Barbie thing" seems to be a phase others think we are going through. In fact, we aren't "going through" this, we have arrived. It is not Art, it is art. It communicates. Some people get it. They laugh. They're in. Most ask questions. Usually its an inarticulate "huh, why?" or my favorite: "Umm, this is supposed to be funny right?" We hate Barbie, we hate Barbie's gestalt, her image, her hair. It bothers me that my thirst for destroying Barbies only causes me to purchase more--thus adding to Mattel's coffers and encouraging them to continue producing this maligned icon of the ideal woman. Someday I'll publish the album. Someday when I'm ready to face Mattel's copyright lawyers. I'm sure Mattel won't like the pictures we took, won't like what we *did*. I worry about Cyndi sometimes. She's starting to *accumulate* Barbies. She likes them way too much, especially the ones with the big gowns. When we have a falling out, I buy her a gown for her current Babs. Strangely, it seems to help. Me, one doll's enough. I keep using the same one till there's nothing left. Literally.

There were lots of things we did that were great photos but didn't destroy Barbie. Humiliate or mutilate, yes. Destroy, no. The Album is filled with things like Wolf Bait Barbie, Goat Bait Barbie, Damsel in Distress Barbie, Trans-Siberian Railroad Barbie, Of Mice and Men Barbie, Popo Barbie, Combo Plate #5 Barbie, Armed Services Barbie, Ceremonial Orange Hand of Vienna Barbie, Ovulation Barbie, Bar-B Barbie and over 50 others. The killings were the best. Best to do. Best photos.

"I know, lets take her legs off! That should get rid of half the weight and this stupid dress is long enough no one will notice."

This was a *totally* Brilliant Idea. Cynthia should never be underestimated. I mean really, as Barbie leaves the bonds of earth who is going to notice that you can't see those fucking ridiculous little feet peeking beneath the shimmery plastic gown? It is my favorite gown. So we yanked those gams from their sockets in Barbie's plastic pelvis and strapped what was left of Barbie onto the fuselage by her waist. We raised her arms over her head so

that she looked like Wonder Woman ready to take flight. It was very still for a moment as Cyndi and I surveyed the launch site: The desert salt flats expanding for miles in all directions, the silhouette of the Este rocket strapped to the effigy of a woman dressed to kill, and those little black and white wires ominously snaking back to the 12 Volt car battery fifteen feet away.

"Perfect. Is it on good? Can you think of anything else we should do? Do you think she's light enough? Wait. Wait! Let me get the camera lined up.

I groveled on the desert floor with my face pressed into the salty dirt. I will endure any humiliation or discomfort to get an Album shot. Got to assume that as soon as we get ignition that I'll snap the shutter. It'll happen fast. Plan for travel, aim above the ground.

"You got a chute packed in that rocket?"

"Yeah."

"Lets take it out."

"Why?"

"For Christ's sakes, we don't need her back and it will lower the weight of the payload." Bummer. Ba-bye Total Eclipse Barbie, you probably aint gonna make it back from this one babe. This is going to be a great Album Shot.

"O.K."

"Ready?"

"Ready."