

*The Amazing  
Adventure of  
Betty*

Once, in a little house on Mary Street, there lived a small dolly made completely out of delicate china. She had china arms and china legs, a china head and a china body, and china arms and china feet. Her beautiful, watery-blue glass eyes were perched above her tiny china nose, and her wonderful, red lips were smiling sweetly with her china chin under it. The dolly had elegant dresses made out of fine silk, and they swished and swayed. She loved the soft feeling on her legs. Her favorite was made out of pink silk, and it was quite a lacy dress, too. Unfortunately, her owner, Madison Marshall, did not have a good taste in clothing. She put on the most horrible dress, knitted with green yarn. The dolly wanted to wriggle out of the dress. Since she had china arms and china legs, she could only stand still wearing the disgusting clothes. Her mouth became tired of smiling all the time, but she had painted-on lips and they were always smiling, even when she tried her hardest not to. Her pink cheeks were rosy, and Madison would sometimes rub hers against the dolly's.

The dolly's name was Betty. All she really cared about was being fashionable, and she didn't love Madison because she was always treated like a two-year-old and she had to wear ugly dresses. She didn't care if she was being so arrogant. She just wanted to be pretty. She laughed inside her head as she passed neglected teddy bears wearing tattered old clothing worse than the knitted one she owned. Yes, there were the occasional domestic dramas. One day, Madison's mother announced that they were all going to a party, and that Betty could come, too. Since it was going to be a fancy party, Madison slid Betty's best dress over her head and put on her shiny black shoes. Well, at least now Madison was finally understanding that being pretty was what Betty needed most! Betty felt proud when other children gazed longingly at her as she and Madison and Madison's parents marched down the street. Sadly, when they got back, Madison took off Betty's dress and put on a tight T-shirt and baggy jeans for everyday use. Betty was so disgusted she thought she might actually cry out in horror.

And another time Madison had been kissing her goodnight at bedtime and her lips pressed painfully against her right eye. She had wanted to close them, but they were always open and could not be closed. Yes, these little things happened once in a while, and now Betty was used to it. A lot of things can happen to a delicate china dolly, Madison soon learned, but

most of them are good things. Madison's father, Bill, treated Betty as if she were his baby. Betty was highly irritable about this, and she just wished she could at least roll her eyes. She wished he didn't even exist. Bill would lean down and tell Betty a joke and he would howl with laughter, and even though Betty's ears were made of china, she could hear his loud howls.

When Madison went away to school, Betty sat perched up on the shelf in the living room, where she could see the couches and sofas, the coffee table and the green rug, and the cabinets and pictures of Madison and her mother hugging each other. It looked quite fascinating from up high, spread out neatly in front on Betty like a carpet. She usually wore a creamy white dress with puffy sleeves as she sat on the shelf. She thought she must look dashing, for yellowish-orange sunlight was streaming through the window and shining right on her dress, turning it into a whitish-yellowish-orange color. She thanked the sun inside her head for making her look even prettier . One morning Bill strolled into the room to get his bag before leaving for work. He glanced up and saw the doll. "Goodbye, Your Majesty." He gave a mocking salute to Betty, chortled, and walked out of the room merrily. Betty was embarrassed and angry. From then on she ignored Bill whenever he was there, and daydreamed through his jokes and stories and every word he said. All that mattered was being pretty.

Madison noticed after two long, boring years that her toy needed to be dressed fancily. She pleaded to her mother for more silk dresses. They arrived at her house on a bright afternoon on Sunday. Madison ripped open the package and squealed when she saw the clothing. Betty, who had been lazily listening to the children screaming outside, was delighted to see the present. One particular dress, made out of the finest silk, made Betty stare hungrily at it, gazing at its shimmery blue sleeves and its lacy edges. The body of it was crimson like the spring sun. She saw a necklace made out of real pearls next to the dress and thought, "Put it on, Madison! Put it on now!" And Madison did put it on. She also slipped Betty's china feet into a new black shoes which were also in the package. Madison put on the pearl necklace, and when she held Betty up to the mirror the doll was pleased with her wonderful look.

Betty didn't care about anything except beauty. She was arrogant and

so fond of herself she wanted to kiss her own cheek. But it is impossible for a human to do that, much less a china doll. She was selfish and mean. And she didn't care about her owner. She only cared about her looks. If Madison could see through her china head and see the burning hatred for Bill and Madison and Madison's mother, she would have thrown her out in horror as if Betty were a piece of bubble gum on the sole of her shoe.

On a dark night in December, Madison seated her dolly in a chair for dinner and sat down at her own chair. She had put Betty on the chair in an awkward way. Betty's forehead was leaning against the edge of the wooden table. Well! This was no way to treat such a wonderful doll with elegant dresses. Betty sat like that painfully through dinner. "This is the final straw!" the angry doll thought. "I've had enough of it! That girl puts the most awful clothes on me, she treats me like a baby, and now she is making me sit like this at her table! I've had enough of it, I've had enough of it!" She wished she could yell at her owner. Why couldn't Madison treat her like all other girls treat their china dolls? Why couldn't Madison put on fancy silk dresses instead of those knitted ones? The fury bubbled inside Betty, like lava bubbling inside a volcano.

So the days dragged on and on. Betty became old, but it did not show on her face. She still looked like a baby dolly with pink cheeks and red lipstick. She still had a china body, two china legs and arms, and china hands and feet, and a china face. Nothing changed at all, really. Except Madison and her parents grew older. Madison began to dress Betty in elegant, dashing clothes, like Betty's favorite dress and the new colorful one. Ah! This was more like it. Such a beautiful dolly like Betty should be treated well, just like this.

Now, I must tell you about the Smith boys, because they come in later in our story. They were bullies, and often got many fierce scoldings by their parents and other adults. They teased poor little kids. At the school Madison and the boys went to, they would yell and shout as they threw tanbark at children. Students screamed terribly as they roared with laughter, lighting a match and waving it in front of kids' faces. Madison had been told that they went to the principal's office five times every month. She was frightened of the Smith boys, too. They somehow knew about Betty and had once pulled her into an empty classroom, shoved their big faces right in front of hers, and swore that they would get Betty

someday. They were all in eighth grade. The meanest was named David, and the second-meanest was named Jake, and the third-meanest was named Max. Madison had whispered to Betty that the Smith boys were going to get her, her eyes wide with fear, but the dolly didn't care. She, like she always did whenever Madison or anyone else spoke to her, let the words slip through her brain and took it as nothing.

One day on Saturday, Madison was at the park with Betty. Madison sat her dolly on the swing, pulled the swing back, and let go. Betty's arms had been tied around the chains with string, and she didn't fall off. The wind seemed to spank her china face as she swung back and forth, to and fro. Betty's silk dress billowed out behind her, and her scarf was whipped away by the wind. It didn't matter. She loved going on the swing. Madison laughed happily and beamed. "It gives you the feeling of floating, doesn't it!" she cried.

Just then, there was a voice in Madison's ear she knew only too well. Betty saw three big mean-looking boys come up to her, sniggering. They were the Smith boys. Their faces were freckly and their mouths were grinning evilly. Betty's heart almost stopped. They looked so vicious. The swing stopped swinging. The chains creaked. Betty was surprised that she didn't scream out loud. She would have if she hadn't been a china dolly. Betty was terrified. She was positive these boys would rip her dress apart, and the one she was wearing right now was her colorful new one. She didn't care if Madison was punched or kicked—she just cared about her dress being safe and that was all. Also, she hoped the boys wouldn't smash her china head to smithereens. Madison was standing stock-still with her mouth hanging open, as if she were trying to shriek but couldn't find her voice. Betty sat and Madison stood, waiting.

They had both expected David to tackle Madison and pin her to the ground, but he didn't. He simply stepped forward and laughed, a high, cruel laugh. Then he sneered sarcastically, "Well, look who's here—Madison and her dolly. Remember how we said we were going to snap its head off and crunch it up with our feet, Madison?" He folded his thick, pudgy arms across his chest and grinned at his friends. Jake did a violent gesture in midair that made Madison shrink two sizes. Betty was as scared as could be. The dress didn't matter anymore. Now Betty's head did.

Madison opened her mouth to speak, but closed it again. She couldn't

talk, because she was just too frightened. She kept quiet. If she didn't say anything, maybe the bullies would go away and find another kid to pick on. They didn't go away. They stayed, standing next to the swings. Their green eyes were more like horizontal slits below their frowning eyebrows. Jake cracked his knuckles threateningly. Their nostrils were flaring. They wanted Madison to speak. She didn't. Max pointed at Betty and then pointed at the ground. Even though Madison was getting more and more terrified with every motion they did, she still stayed silent.

Betty stared at the boys and instantly thought they were ugly. David's boring white T-shirt and his jeans ripped at the knees, Jake's smudged face and his pudding-bowl haircut, Max's sharp, yellow teeth and his squashed nose—there was only one word for them all, and that was ugly. Betty glanced down at her own beautiful dress she was wearing. She gazed at her new pearl necklace and her dainty little blue high heels. If she was going to die any moment now, she might as well have one last look at her clothes. *Bye, the dolly thought miserably. I loved wearing you.*

David had begun to talk again. “You remember, don't you, Madison?” Madison didn't say anything. She didn't even nod her head. David continued, “I'll take that as a yes. Anyway, Jake, Max, let's crunch this girl's dolly and get over with it. If we can't make her talk, it doesn't matter. Any last words to your precious dolly, Madison?”

Madison's eyes were alive with fury. Her fists were clenched. She wasn't going to let Betty die before her eyes. She had first been scared, but now she was determined to save Betty. She had had enough with these boys bullying her and everyone else. She was going to tackle them and fight until they ran screaming for their parents. “She is not going to die!” Madison yelled, jumping on David and wrestling him to the ground. They fought. They struggled. Madison had a black eye and a cut lip, but she didn't stop fighting. David seized Madison's hair and pulled. She shrieked with pain as she grabbed a stick and hit David on the head with it. Jake didn't fight. Instead, he untied the dolly from the swings and threw her with all his might into the air. Madison screamed, “BETTY! Come back! BETTY, BETTY!” But Betty couldn't. She sailed through the air and landed in somebody's front yard.

The front yard was owned by a young man named Dan Jones, who had a

kind, gentle wife and two children. They had the most charming smiles that could light up the whole town, and the brightest eyes you could imagine. Mr. Jones lived happily, snug and cozy in his small house, with his cheerful children always at his side. One of the children happened to be a girl, about the same height and age as Madison, and her name was Annie. She was rather clumsy. Her father and her mother and her brother all kept her company, but Mr. Jones was gone most of the day to work and Mrs. Jones was busy with her other child, who was teething. Annie had a dog named Lucky. He was old, so he wasn't much fun anymore. Annie was a little lonely. She needed a friend.

Well, Betty landed right in the Jones' family's front yard with a soft thump. Lucky, the dog, raised his head sleepily from the front porch, glanced at the dolly, and laid his head on his front paw again. The door creaked open and Annie stepped out, wearing a frilly white dress. "Hi, Lucky," she smiled, patting her dog on the back affectionately. "I'm going to see if I can capture a butterfly today." She held up a small net and skipped over to a sunflower in the middle of the front yard, where a yellow butterfly was fluttering. Annie swiped with her net, the butterfly flew away, and she stumbled backward and tripped, falling over. Instantly she scrambled to her feet and saw Betty lying on the ground.

"Wow, a china dolly!" she squealed excitedly. She picked Betty up and hugged her tightly. "I'm going to show Momma when she comes back from her shopping! She'll love you!" Betty, her eyeball pressing painfully against a button, wanted to run away, but she couldn't. Annie stroked Betty's hair and kissed her cheek. "My momma loves china dollies! She has a whole shelf of them. She doesn't allow me to play with them. But now I have my own china dolly, and I can play with it if I want to." She laughed, jumped high into the air, and landed on a rock. Betty fell out of her arms and crashed onto the ground. Oh, no. She could tell Annie was one of those clumsy children who always dropped everything they were holding, tripped every time they went out for a walk, and bumped into delicate things and made them shatter. Betty glanced at Annie, disgusted with her.

"Ouch! That hurt." Annie sat up, rubbing her head. Betty was feeling dazed and slightly dizzy, too. China dollies are very delicate and fragile, especially their heads. When they get dropped by careless little girls like

Annie, their head sometimes crack. Betty was a very lucky dolly indeed. She landed on soft grass. If Annie had dropped her on a hard tile floor or on a concrete road, her head could have cracked. But it didn't, because she had fallen onto sweet-smelling, moist grass. Betty was so glad about this that, for a few brief seconds, she didn't notice her dress was smudged with mud and an earthworm was wriggling its way across her chest, and that two ladybugs were crawling around in the palm on her hand.

Lucky had moved himself and was now dozing quietly in front of the door. He rolled around on his back, his tongue hanging out with a string of saliva dangling on the tip of it and his belly showing. He seemed to be trying to impress Annie, but she wasn't looking. Lucky lay on his back for a few minutes, and then barked loudly. Annie glanced at him and turned back to her dolly. Lucky turned a bit to the right and accidentally tumbled down the steps. He got to his feet, steadied himself, and slowly stood up on his hind legs. He put on his cutest expression, the one that he used when he was begging for treats, and barked. Annie turned her head and looked at him. She giggled. Not wanting to lose his audience, he made his eyes as big as he could and put on his "poor little doggie" expression. Annie smiled and cooed, "Aw, little Lucky wants some attention, does he, huh? Why don't you come over here and talk to this dolly?" Betty thought, "Oh, no, not a dog! Please, please, no, don't come here, go away, go away, I don't want you to rip my dress." She had met a dog once when she had been with Madison and did not hope to meet one again. Her heart skipped a beat when Lucky bounded over to Annie and her and put his front paws on Annie's knees. *Uh-oh*, thought Betty.

The dog's horrible, disgusting breath reached Betty's nose. It smelled like raw meat and other types of food. Betty couldn't stand it. She wished, oh, how she wished, that this stinky dog would go away, get out of her sight, and she would never, ever see him again. Annie saved Betty's life. "Down, boy," she ordered firmly. Lucky paused, and then reluctantly obeyed. Betty took a huge gulp of beautiful, fresh air. "You could have made this dolly fall out of my hands, and I would lose her forever. Oh, and what should we name her?" Annie asked her dog. Lucky bared his teeth and barked. He looked up at Betty and snarled. That dolly looked like a great toy to chew on. "Now, now, Lucky!" Annie scolded. "You be nice to—ah!" Lucky had leaped forward and tackled Annie to get Betty.



Annie fell to the ground, still clutching her dolly, as Lucky jumped onto her chest and tried to grab Betty's dress with his teeth. Annie pushed Lucky off, but Lucky jumped on her again. Betty's head was spinning. She could hear short, piercing barks from Lucky and terrified, high-pitched screams from Annie, and she could see the two struggling together. Annie held Betty high out of reach, above her head, so Lucky couldn't get her. Lucky was hopping up and down on Annie, trying to get Betty. Betty could feel his wet nose brushing her dainty little feet (the shoes had fallen off). Annie seized the dog's collar, making him not able to jump. He bit Annie's hand, and she let go with a wail of pain. "GET OFF! Get off!" she shrieked, as several thin streams of blood trickled slowly down her arm. One last time, she grabbed the dog's collar. Lucky was determined to get Betty, and he sank his teeth again into Annie's arm. Annie shouted in pain, but didn't let go. She held on to the dog's collar. Lucky bit Annie once again. Still, she didn't let go. Lucky gave up and sadly slumped back to the porch, his tail drooping.

Annie's arm had never hurt this much before. She burst into tears when she saw her arm. She hugged Betty. Great, big teardrops rolled down her cheek and landed on Betty's head. Betty, for the first time in her life, was feeling sorry for Annie. She had a burning hatred for Lucky. She wanted to comfort Annie, to tell her everything would be okay. She had never felt this way before. She had never felt sorry for Madison. Why? It was because back then she had been arrogant and she had never cared about Madison. Now she knew it had been wrong. Betty felt terrible. Because she had been so arrogant, Madison was gone. And it was all Betty's fault.

Betty thought about how black her heart had been when she had lived on Mary Street with Madison, and felt worse. She tried to make herself feel better. *That was the past. Now I have a warm heart and I care about Annie. I really, really do care about Annie. I feel so sorry for her. I have fixed myself.* Then another voice in her head said, *You were the most horrible, arrogant little thing when you were with Madison. You had no feelings for anyone and anything.* Betty pushed the bad thoughts out of her mind, but they sprang right back again and whirled around her head like an endless tornado. *You were so arrogant. . . . You were even worse than the Smith boys. . . . You were so careless. . . .* Betty couldn't stand it. She was in so much pain, dying of

guilt. She tried to stop thinking, but failed.

But then, as the mean voice in Betty's head began to say more, a young, pretty woman wearing a red cloak and a lovely hat with a feather on it interrupted Betty's terrible thoughts. The woman's purse swung in her hand as she hurried down the sidewalk, coming closer and closer, her high heels clink-clanking as she ran. Betty could just make out her face, so beautiful yet full of worry. She was holding a bag of groceries in her other hand. A can of fruit fell out, and with an "oh!" the woman bent down to pick it up hastily. She shoved the can inside the bag and continued to dash on. She was panting and breathing fast, but she did not stop running. Annie glanced up at the woman and gave a squeal of happiness. "Momma!" screamed Annie.

Mrs. Jones turned and went down the path that led to the Jones' house. She slowed down as she got closer to the house, and when she had climbed up the steps of the front porch she dropped her bag of groceries on the doormat and rushed over to Annie, who was still weeping in the yard. "Hush," whispered Mrs. Jones soothingly, hugging her daughter. "I'm sorry that I got home a little later than I said I would. I couldn't find the tomatoes in the market." Mrs. Jones seemed to be thinking Annie was crying because she had gotten home late, and Annie had been worried about her.

Annie let out a loud, pitiful sob. "I'm not crying for that reason," she said to her mother. "I'm crying because Lucky . . . bit me!" She showed her mother her bleeding arm. Mrs. Jones gasped. She was surprised, shocked, and mostly angry with Lucky. A ferocious fire danced in her eyes, and her nose flared and her face was alive with fury. She got up and stormed over to Lucky, who was whimpering nervously on the porch. He scrambled under the table and cowered there. Betty, who was sitting on Annie's lap, saw that Mrs. Jones had a queer look on her face. It was a mixture of anger, worry, and shock.

"Lucky." Mrs. Jones' word came out like one growl. Her face was redder than a strawberry. She was so angry that she took a few deep breaths first before saying to Lucky, "I am not happy with you right now. You understand that, don't you, Lucky?" Now, she no longer was growling. She talked as if she were having a pleasant conversation with a friend. The dog's reply was a violent shiver and a soft, terrified bark, as if

he were pleading, "Don't scold me, Master. I didn't mean to bite Annie."

Mrs. Jones chose to ignore her dog's noises. "As usual, there will be consequences. And this one will be a major consequence." She still talked pleasantly, or rather, dangerously calmly. *Exactly how David talked*, thought Betty, and suddenly she remembered the awful feeling of being roughly thrust into the air by Jake. She managed to squish that thought out of her mind and continued to listen to Mrs. Jones. Lucky gave a sort of half-squeal, half-bark. "Lucky," continued Mrs. Jones. "What do you think this consequence should be? Ah! I know." She narrowed her eyes and snarled, "For the rest of the year, you won't be allowed to come inside the house, not at night, too. And tonight it's supposed to rain. I hope you have a great time." She smiled evilly and walked away, down the steps and over to Annie, who was still weeping. "Does it hurt a lot?" asked Mrs. Jones worriedly, and she uttered a kind of soft scream when Annie nodded. She started to ask Annie many questions, and softly screamed every time Annie answered. She did not notice Betty sitting in Annie's lap.

This was boring, listening to Mrs. Jones talk to Annie. Betty stared sadly at her colorful dress. It was ripped and torn, and smudges of dirt were everywhere. Worst of all, there was a giant hole right in the middle of the dress. Betty's black shoes were lying on the grass, with several slimy brown worms were wiggling around inside it. She hated to admit it, but she was terribly . . . ugly. Just thinking the word made Betty feel like crying even louder than Annie, but of course she couldn't. She wished she could. She might feel better if she did.

Just then, Mrs. Jones gasped for a reason Betty did not know. "What is that, Annie?" she whispered to her daughter, pointing her finger at Betty. "It's beautiful. It would look even better if its dress wasn't ripped." *Is she talking about me?* wondered Betty. Well, if Mrs. Jones *was* talking about her, then Mrs. Jones definitely understood how pretty Betty was. Annie proudly threw out her chest and grinned at her mother.

"Momma, this is . . . um . . ." Betty hesitated, thinking of a name for Betty. *My name is Betty*, thought the china dolly. But Annie said, "*Carrie!* Yes, Momma, this is Carrie the China Dolly. When you were out at the grocery store, I was trying to catch a butterfly and then I fell down and saw Betty lying next to me. It hadn't been there thirty minutes ago, so I

knew it had just come. But how? I don't know.”

Mrs. Jones smiled, but it only lasted for a second because then she frowned. “Throw it away,” she ordered sternly. “It might have germs. Look how dirty it is.” She looked disgustedly at Betty.

“No!” cried Annie. “Momma, the mud on the ground made her all dirty. When I dropped her onto the grass, she got a bit of mud on it. I'll clean her later, Momma. Please. Let me keep Carrie. I love her. Please, please, pretty please with a cherry on top.”

“I'll think about it,” said Mrs. Jones, smiling at Annie.

“But that means no!” shouted Annie. “No fair!” She crossed her arms and pouted.

“Let's see what Daddy says,” suggested Mrs. Jones.

“But what if he says no?” asked Annie.

“Then you can't keep Carrie,” replied Annie's mother.

“No!” Annie scowled and hugged Betty tighter. “I won't throw her away! I love her. She's a china dolly. They are very expensive and if I throw Carrie away, you won't buy me another one because they cost too much.”

“I'll give you one on your birthday,” said Mrs. Jones.

“NO! My birthday is months away. I can't wait that long,” yelled Annie. She was stubborn. Mrs. Jones gave up.

“Fine, you can keep it,” sighed Mrs. Jones. “Now, come inside with me. I need to call the doctor.”

Several days had passed since Annie had found Betty. Mrs. Jones ordered from a store a few new dresses for Betty, who liked them even better than her colorful dress. Her favorite new dress was the elegant sea-blue one, with puffy sleeves and lacy edges. It also came with dainty shoes, a silk scarf, and a hat with a feather on it, all of which were sea-blue, even the feather on the hat. It came with some dye to dye your hair sea-blue, and lipstick to make your lips sea-blue. Annie smeared the lipstick on Betty's lips, dyed her hair sea-blue, put on the dress, the hat, the shoes, and the scarf, and when Annie showed her mother, Mrs. Jones nearly fell off the couch in surprise. Betty looked more like the sea than a china dolly, but Betty was happy. The other dresses were pretty, but Betty liked the sea-blue one the best. “It fits her well,” Annie often muttered to herself as she

stared at Betty, who was wearing her sea-blue costume again, and Betty agreed.

One arid Sunday evening, Annie called up her friend Maria Peterson and asked her to come over. "Maria has a dog, too," said Annie to Betty after she had hung up, "so watch out. He really likes playing with toys, like shaking them around in his mouth. He'll just grab any toy he sees. I promise I'll keep him away from you, though, so don't worry." Betty was startled. Another dog? With a smelly breath? A dog who liked to play with toys and was going to attack Annie to get Betty again? Oh, great. Annie's last words comforted Betty, but only a little. Betty looked at Annie's bandaged leg where Lucky had bitten her. It was healing slowly, and soon Annie would be able to walk without difficulty or pain. But Annie could not, simply could not, afford to get another bitten leg. Betty had to save Annie from getting bitten again. But how? Betty was only a delicate china dolly who couldn't even move her eyes. How was she going to get the dog to not bite Annie? It was impossible. *At least I care about Annie now*, thought Betty grimly. *Annie, who is going to get another bitten leg.*

Then Betty realized something. It was her fault that Annie was going to get bitten, because the dog would want Betty, and Annie would be holding Betty, so in order to get Betty the dog would need to knock Annie down, or rather, attack her. Betty wished she hadn't existed. If she hadn't, Annie would not be attacked. *Watch out, Annie*, Betty thought desperately, *your friend Maria's dog is coming to attack you. Throw me away, listen to what your mother said a few days ago, I have germs, throw me away so you won't be attacked by Maria's dog. Please.*

Five minutes later, there was a timid knock on the door. "Maria!" cried Annie, and she jumped off the couch, hurried over to the door, and opened it. She had left Betty lying, face down, on the couch, so the dolly could not see anything. She could only hear Annie's voice squealing, "Hi, Maria! You've brought your dog! Lucky is outside next to you on the porch, and the dogs can play together in the yard." Then Betty heard a soft, smooth voice, quiet and gentle. It belonged to Maria. "Oh, but Annie, I must bring Skipper inside. He likes to be around me." *Skipper must be the other dog's name*, thought Betty. She heard Annie's voice, which sounded worried. "No! My mother made a new rule, no dogs in the house. Skipper has to stay outside. Sorry." Now Maria's voice. "Please! Skipper must come

inside, please, Annie.” Betty heard a loud thump, which meant Annie had stomped her foot. “No!” she yelled. *Whew*, thought Betty.

Annie walked over to Betty and picked her up. “This,” she announced proudly, “is my china dolly, Carrie. Isn't she beautiful?” Annie rubbed her cheek against Betty's. Betty looked at Maria, who had an angry expression on her face. Maria was wearing a purple dress and tights. She had straight brown hair and a sharp face. Maria sighed sadly and told Skipper to go outside and play with Lucky in the front yard. Lucky picked his head up and barked happily at the sight of Skipper. He bounded over to Maria's dog and together they raced over to the front yard, barking and chasing their tails. Maria watched them, wishing she could let come Skipper inside. She was interrupted by Annie. “Hey!” Annie shouted. “Maria? Are you looking at Carrie?” Maria turned and nodded.

“Oh,” was her simple, unexcited comment. *Um, hello? Maria, don't you see how wonderful I look? No? Then you don't have any sense of fashion*, thought Betty irritably. She was glad that she hadn't ended up in Maria's front yard. It didn't matter if Annie was a bit clumsy. At least she knew about fashion. Betty scowled inside her head at Maria. “I have a collection of china dollies. I have many of them. It's not surprising to see another china dolly. And my dollies don't have smudges of dirt all over them,” Maria said, glancing carelessly at Betty, who was very embarrassed.

Annie's face turned red with anger. “NO!” she yelled. “Carrie has no smudges of dirt on her. She is clean. I washed her yesterday. Your dollies are hideously ugly! They wear the most disgusting clothes and their hair isn't golden and curly like Carrie's. Their hair is brown and short. They look like upside-down slices of watermelons!” Annie started to giggle. She collapsed onto the floor and rolled around, roaring with laughter. Betty fell out of her hands and landed on the floor. But Betty didn't mind. She was laughing so hard inside her head that she didn't care.

“NO!” bellowed Maria, so loudly that Annie's mother called, “Is anything wrong, dears?” upstairs. “They do *not* look like upside-down slices of watermelons! They look beautiful.” She was about to say something mean about Betty, but her voice was drowned by Annie's loud cackles of laughter. The giggles inside Betty's head faltered as she saw the fire dancing in Maria's eyes. Her nose was flaring. She was scowling. She planted her hands on her hips and snarled, “I'm never, ever going to be

your friend again.” She scowled even darker when Annie said, “Okay.” Maria wanted Annie to feel ashamed, sad. But Annie only felt happy.

“And I’m going to leave, right now,” she said, leaning forward and shoving her face in front of Annie’s. “And I’ll never come back. And I won’t talk to you at school. And I’ll tell everybody all your secrets.” Betty could have sworn she saw a look of surprise in Maria’s eyes when Annie said with a grin, “Right-o. Go ahead.” Maria continued to try and make Annie sad. “And at lunch, I’ll knock your tray out of your hands and all your food will fall onto the floor.” Annie smiled and said, “Do that. I don’t care.” She giggled. “Have fun playing with your watermelon-head dollies.”

She shouldn’t have said that. Mrs. Jones’ angry voice came from upstairs. “Annie! Be nice to Maria! She is our guest.”

Betty heard Annie mutter under her breath, “Our guest who owns watermelon-head dollies.” Maria shot her a I’m-going-to-pay-you-back look and tossed her head indignantly.

“ANNIE! I heard that!” roared Mrs. Jones. “I am ashamed of both of you girls. Who started this fight?” Annie’s mother stormed downstairs.

Annie pointed at Maria, who shook her head and pointed at Annie. “She did,” they said at the exact same time.

“I want the truth!” yelled Mrs. Jones.

“She did!” cried Annie, pointing at Maria.

Maria shook her head. She didn’t want to get in trouble. She was a guest. Guests were supposed to be good. “No, I didn’t. Annie did.”

“Liar!” shouted Annie. “Momma, listen to me, I wouldn’t lie, Maria did it. I showed her my dolly and she said Carrie was smudged with dirt.”

“Yeah, but then Annie got angry and said my dollies’ heads looked like upside-down slices of watermelons,” Maria said.

Betty looked at Mrs. Jones to see her reaction. The dolly was quite startled when she saw Mrs. Jones’ face. There was no smile on her lips, but amusement lingered in her eyes. Luckily, Maria did not see this. Betty was sure that she would be very, very angry if she did. But Annie saw her mother’s eyes, and she smiled with pride. Then, Mrs. Jones did something bad. She sniggered. It was a soft snigger, slightly muffled because Mrs. Jones’ hand was covering her mouth. But unfortunately, Maria heard the snigger. Maria scowled her darkest. Her eyes were burning with hatred as

she screamed, "I'm leaving! This shall be the end of our friendship, Annie!" She went outside, called Skipper over, and together they left.

Annie suddenly realized that she had just lost her best friend. The proud smile faded slowly away, her happy face replaced by a look of shame. She had teased Maria, and now they had become enemies. Betty understood exactly how Annie felt. Both of them had done something terrible to a person, and because of that, they would never see that person again. Both of them were swimming in guilt and shame. Both of them felt like they had black hearts and careless feelings. Annie glanced up mournfully at her mother. "I feel bad," she whispered. "Maria will never like me again. I've betrayed her. I've been her good friend since we were in kindergarten and now we've become worst enemies."

The days dragged on. Annie did not find the courage to say sorry to Maria, who ignored her everyday at school. Betty was happy—mostly. I say mostly because sometimes, when Annie was away somewhere, Lucky would sneak into Annie's room, grab Betty's dress, and shake her around in his mouth. When he found it was hard to chew Betty's china body, he slobbered all over her. That was how Annie found Betty soaking wet in saliva one day after school, with holes in her frilly pink dress. Annie, horrified, screamed herself hoarse at Lucky and gave him a hard kick. Her mother forced Annie to throw the dress away and promised she would buy a new dress for Betty, which made Annie and Betty feel a bit better. But they were still angry at Lucky and Annie glared at him whenever he passed by. Mrs. Jones, who had started complaining how much the silk dresses cost, reluctantly ordered a long, lavender nightgown and a nightcap to go with it. Mr. Jones, Annie's father, often took out a dress for Betty to wear next. Once, Annie's baby brother, Matthias, had gotten a hold of Betty and sucked her left ear. When Annie found him, she scolded her mother for letting Matthias play with Betty. Then she had washed Betty thoroughly and dried her, and Betty was good as new. That, really, was all the bad things that had ever happened to Betty at the Jones' household. Actually, not all the bad things. There was one bad thing that happened every day. At night, as Betty was lying in Annie's bed beside Annie, the dolly thought about Madison. When she had been living on



Mary Street, she had never cared about Madison. She had only cared about her looks. As Betty thought about this, she felt ashamed.

Then one Tuesday afternoon, Betty was in Annie's room, sitting on a little chair, waiting for Annie to come home. She listened to the soft *tick . . . tock* of the clock and the sound of Annie's mother turning the pages of her newspaper and sipping her coffee. Betty hated waiting for Annie to come home. It was boring, and she liked to be hugged by Annie. It made her feel warm and cozy and safe. A few seconds later, Betty finally heard the sound of the door opening. But then she heard another noise that she should not have heard. The sound of crying. Betty was startled and worried. She hoped that Annie wasn't crying because she had gotten hurt. Betty listened as Mrs. Jones gasped and said, "Annie! What happened?" Annie didn't reply. Betty heard Annie running down the hall, and she appeared in the doorway. She grabbed Betty, dashed back down the hall, and hurried into the living room.

Betty couldn't see Annie's face because Annie's arm was covering Betty's eyes. Mrs. Jones repeated, "Annie, what happened?" but Annie still didn't reply. She seated Betty on the coffee table so it was facing the couch, and Annie sat down on the couch next to her mother. Betty was surprised when she saw Annie's face. Annie's nose was bleeding badly, and tears were streaming down her cheeks. "Mar—Maria," sobbed Annie. "At—at the e-end of the d-day, I—I came up to her a-and s-said sorry but sh—she p-p-punched me in the n-nose." She let out a wail of pain and despair. "I—I think I b-broke my—my n-nose," she added pitifully. Betty's face burned with anger. She was so mad, so angry. Maria had punched Annie and Annie had broken her nose. It was all Maria's fault. Annie thought of Maria and became even angrier.

"You think you broke your nose?" Mrs. Jones looked extremely worried. "Oh, dear, that Maria . . ." She hurriedly walked over to the telephone, pressed a few buttons, and held it to her ear. "Um, hello?" she asked. "Dr. Jenkins? Hi there. Annie—you know, my daughter—broke her nose." She paused as Dr. Jenkins asked her how Annie had broken her nose. "Maria," grumbled Mrs. Jones darkly. "Maria punched poor little Annie in the face . . . yes, quite hard . . . blood everywhere . . . mm-hmm . . . yes, okay . . . no, not *that* bad, Maria can't punch that hard . . . okay . . . yep, okay, thanks . . . bye." Mrs. Jones turned to Annie. "Honey," she

said, "we need to clean your nose and put a Band-Aid on it." Annie nodded pitifully, blood dripping off her lip and landing on the floor.

She and her mother went upstairs and returned minutes later, with a big Band-Aid across Annie's broken nose. ". . . should heal soon," reassured Mrs. Jones soothingly, glancing worriedly at Annie's nose. She cursed Maria and murmured, "Poor little Annie, first Lucky bit her and now this." She heaved a great sigh, picked Betty up, and handed her to Annie, who whispered between sobs, "Thanks," and hugged Betty tight. Betty felt sorry for Annie. *My, my, two injuries in a single week!* Betty thought, as a drop of blood plopped onto her head.

Annie seated herself on the couch with Betty on her lap. She glanced at her mother, who was busy making hot chocolate, and asked, "How can I ever prove to Maria that I am really sorry? What if I say, 'I'm sorry' and Maria punches me again? I have to give her something so she'll know I'm not lying that I'm sorry." Then Annie froze. Her eyes traveled slowly over to Betty, who was on her lap. "No, I will not give Carrie to Maria," Annie said. "No way. But what can I give her? Another china dolly for her collection? I mean, not Carrie. Like, a china dolly from the store. No, they're way too expensive." Annie looked hopefully at her mother. "Momma," she pleaded. "Can you buy me a china dolly for Maria?"

Mrs. Jones sighed. "Honey, you know how much they cost. I'm sorry, I can't buy a china dolly."

Annie got up, ready to beg. "Momma, please? Just one little china dolly. Please. Or else Maria will never know that I am sorry."

Mrs. Jones frowned. "No, Annie. You will just have to earn some money buy selling lemonade or cookies or something."

Annie nodded. "Okay. Can you make me some cookies?"

"I don't even know how to make cookies."

"Don't you have a cookbook?"

"Yes, but it doesn't say how to make cookies in there."

"Well, buy another cookbook."

"No."

"How about lemonade? Does it have the recipe for lemonade in your cookbook?"

"No."

"Fudge brownies?"

“No.”

Annie sat back down and scowled. “Dumb cookbook,” she muttered.

“Annie!”

“What?” Annie frowned at her mother. “I wasn't doing anything bad, was I, Carrie?” *Well, apart from calling the cookbook dumb, you weren't really doing anything bad,* Betty thought.

“Annie, what has gotten in to you lately? First you refuse to throw that dirty china dolly away, and then you call Maria's dolly upside-down slices of watermelons,” Mrs. Jones scolded.

“Carrie isn't dirty!” Annie shouted indignantly.

“Don't yell, Annie!” Mrs. Jones said.

“I wasn't yelling!” shrieked Annie angrily, so loudly that a few children outside glanced at Annie's house in surprise.

“Well, now you are yelling!” roared Mrs. Jones.

“So? You're yelling!”

“You're grounded, Annie! Don't you ever speak to me like that again!”

“Fine!”

“Fine!”

And with a final “humph,” Annie stormed away to her room with Betty, muttering about unfairness.

The days turned into months, and the months turned into years. After being with Annie for two years, Betty had gotten used to all the events that happened in the Jones' household. Maria continued to ignore Annie, and sometimes she would knock poor Annie's lunch right out of her hands. Annie, in return, pushed Maria down and Maria chipped her tooth, and Annie found herself in big trouble. When Betty heard about this, she couldn't help feeling proud that Annie had managed to do some harm to Maria. But Annie wasn't so proud of herself. She was miserable. Maria sometimes kicked her hard in the shins, threw stones at her, and punched her. Annie tackled Maria and things got a little . . . nasty. Annie came home with a black eye and a cut lip, but there was a tiny smile on her face. “I kicked Maria in the nose,” she whispered to Betty when her mother was too busy pulling the weeds in the garden to hear, and Betty thought, *Great! But maybe you should stop fighting Maria, or you might hurt yourself badly. Why don't you give her something and say you're really sorry?* Betty

didn't want Annie to injure herself. She wanted Annie and Maria to make up. But that didn't seem very likely to happen.

Then one hot spring day, as Annie was prancing around the house pretending to be a ballerina and Mrs. Jones was washing the dishes, the phone rang. Mr. Jones, who had been lounging on the sofa, jumped up and picked up the phone. Annie stopped dancing and came into the living room. Betty listened to Mr. Jones' side of the conversation. "Hello?" he said cheerfully. "Oh! Susan!"

Betty didn't know who Susan was, but Annie whispered, "Susan is Maria's mother."

Mr. Jones continued. "Yes, yes, I know, the two girls are having a terrible fight. Annie came home with quite a few injuries. Oh! Dear me! Maria broke her foot? I'll be sure to ground Annie for that. How did that happen to Maria? Annie pushed her off the playground? Well, well, well. Annie came home with her nose broken. No, I'm not kidding. Maria punched her in the face. Hey, you know what? I think the girls should make up. If they don't say sorry to each other soon, they're going to end up murdering each other!" Of course, this was a joke, and Mr. Jones chuckled, but Betty had a violent vision of Maria and Annie using knives to ... no, it was too horrific to think about.

"Well, I'd better get going, so I'll see you next time. Bye." Mr. Jones hung up. "Annie," he said to his daughter. "You'd better say sorry to Maria for breaking her foot." Annie nodded, and before her father could say any more, she dashed out of the room and into her bedroom.

"Carrie," she gasped, holding Betty in front of her, and Betty, who recognized the solemn tone of her voice, listened. "Maria will keep punching me if I try to say sorry. I have to prove to her that I really am sorry. But how? I need to give her something. But the only thing that I think she would want is . . . you." Betty didn't think that was such a great idea. She had been with Annie for two years, and she loved Annie. She didn't want to part from her. But if she didn't get given to Maria, then Maria would keep hurting Annie. The decision was hard to make. Betty didn't want to leave Annie, but she didn't want Annie to get hurt, either. Betty thought for a few minutes, and she finally came up with a decision: She would go. She would allow herself to be given to Maria so she could

sit on a shelf all day next to other china dollies that had been collected. She would live a boring life, but at least Annie would be safe from getting injured. *Right. Bye, Annie. I'll never forget you,* thought Betty sadly.

“What do you think, Carrie?” asked Annie. *Well, I'll go if I must,* answered Betty in her mind. “Yes? Betty, I really, really, *really* love you. But I need to be safe. I have to give you to Maria so she'll know I am sorry and she'll stop hurting me.” Tears began streaming down Annie's cheeks, and her eyes were full of misery. “Tomorrow, I'll bring you to school in my backpack and at the end of the day I'll give you to Maria. Okay?” *Right,* replied Betty, and if she hadn't been a china dolly, she would have cried, too. She loved Annie, and Annie loved her. They were best friends. Betty loved Annie because she was so kind and gentle. It didn't matter if Annie was a bit clumsy. Betty still loved her. She didn't want to go. But she had to.

“And I'll give Maria the dresses, too,” Annie said. She planted a kiss on Betty's cheek, and Betty was embarrassed. Annie gave a sorrowful smile and hugged her china dolly. She sobbed and wiped a tear from her eye. Soon Betty would be given away to Maria, and Betty might never see Annie again.

The next morning, Annie took Betty to school. She shoved Betty inside her backpack, where the poor china dolly had to wait for hours on the back of Annie's chair while Annie's teacher taught the students. It was pitch black dark inside the backpack, with Annie's thick library books pressing against Betty. Every once in a while Annie would peek inside her bag and smile sadly at Betty, and Betty would stare at her, thinking, *Thanks for the dresses and all the other stuff you bought me. I don't want you to go. How about you keep me for just another day? Okay? One more day won't do any harm, right?* Every time Annie checked on Betty Annie's teacher would say, “Pay attention, Annabelle! Why do you keep checking inside your backpack?” And Annie, blushing, would quickly turn around and murmur, “Sorry, Mrs. Brown.”

Then finally, Betty heard Mrs. Brown announce, “Class, it's time to leave. Please get your bags and line up.” Betty was thrown against the side of the backpack as Annie put the backpack on her back. The class marched outside the room and down the hallway until they came to where all the

parents were waiting to pick up their children. Annie quickly took Betty out of her backpack and tapped on Maria's shoulder. Maria turned and scowled at Annie. "What?" she growled.

Annie burst into tears. "Maria, I'm sorry I said your china dollies looked like upside-down slices of watermelons, I didn't mean it, and in case you don't believe that I really am sorry then—here." Annie handed Betty to Maria.

Maria was too stunned to speak at first. Then, at last, she said, "You're kidding. You are going to give me your china dolly?"

Annie nodded. "But promise me you'll stop hurting me at school," she said.

"I promise," Maria said. Her voice quivered, like she was about to cry, but somehow she managed to hold the tears back. "I never meant to say that Carrie was smudged with dirt. I was just jealous that you had a better dolly than mine. But when your mom laughed when you said my dollies looked like upside-down slices of watermelons I felt like nobody cared about me or liked me, and I got angry. Really angry. My anger lasted for days, and each day I got angrier. I—I'm sorry." Unexpectedly, suddenly, Maria threw her arms around Annie, who stumbled and almost fell backward. Betty, who was being held in Maria's hand, was happy—and sad at the same time. Annie and Maria had made up, but Annie would be gone forever.

After Annie and Maria had pulled apart, Annie asked, "Can I talk to Carrie for a second? I—I need to say something to her." Annie tried to stop her voice from breaking. Maria handed Betty to Annie and Annie leaned close to her dolly. "I love you," whispered Annie. "I love you." She handed Betty back to Maria. Betty, who was being held much too tight for her liking, wanted to cry herself. Even though Annie had only said three short words, they meant a lot to Betty. *I love you, too, Annie,* thought Betty. She looked at Annie for the last time. The soft blonde curls of hair, the pretty, loving smile, the twinkling eyes, and the dashing, fancy dress. *I'll never forget you, Annie,* thought Betty.

Annie reached out and touched Betty's golden hair. There were still flecks of sea-blue in it from the hair dye, but the hair was mostly golden. "I love you," breathed Annie. And she left, pushing her way through the crowd of parents and children. She glanced back many times. Betty

watched her hurry down the sidewalk until she arrived at her house and went inside. The door closed, and Betty knew that was the last time she might ever see Annie Jones.

Maria smiled down at Betty. "Don't worry," she said. "I won't put you on my shelf full of dollies." These words made Betty relax a little. Maybe living with Maria wouldn't be so bad after all. Maria started to walk home, talking to Betty as she went. "Well, I don't like the name 'Carrie.' I'm going to change your name to . . . um . . ." Maria thought for a minute. Betty became desperate. *Just call me Carrie! I'm used to being called that! Or, you could call me Betty. But don't call me something else!* Betty thought. But Maria cried, "Lizzie! Yes, I'll name you that!" *Lizzie!* Betty was disgusted. *That's a horrible name! Why can't you just call me Betty or Carrie? Not Lizzie! Yuck. What a bad name.* "Lizzie! Yes, yes! Don't you just love the name?" Maria asked joyfully. *Um, no,* replied Betty in her head. She didn't feel very happy anymore, even if she wasn't going to sit on a shelf all day. Lizzie was the worst name anyone could ever think of. It was terrible.

Maria arrived at her house. She fished around in her pocket for a second and pulled out a key. She fitted the key in the lock and the door clicked open. Maria stepped inside the house. It was very messy inside. Crumbs and candy wrappers littered the floors, jackets had been thrown carelessly on the ground, and there were muddy footprints all over the stained carpet. Maria sighed. "This mess was made by my two older brothers, Mike and Mathew." Maria scowled darkly and neatly put her jacket in the closet. Betty suddenly heard loud, rock and roll music upstairs. Maria groaned. "*Don't* tell me Mike's having a play date *again,*" said Maria. She shook her head sadly. "I hate my older brothers. They're so rowdy." Maria called to her brothers, "Hey, is Mom home?" The music continued. No answer. Maria hung her backpack on a hook on the wall. She rolled her eyes. "They listen to rock and roll music all the time, Lizzie," she said to Betty. "I wouldn't mind if they didn't turn it so loud, but they do. I keep telling them to turn it down, but of course they don't listen." Maria balled her fists as if she wanted to punch her brothers. "I hate Mike more than Mathew. Mike's in middle school, and Mathew's only in fifth grade. And well, you know, kids in middle school are really rowdy, and kids in fifth grade aren't so rowdy. But that doesn't mean fifth graders are sweet and gentle. Most fifth graders are still pretty bad, but

not as bad as the kids in middle school. It's hard dealing with my brothers." Maria gritted her teeth angrily. Betty listened as she heard yells and shouts from upstairs, and laughs. *Yep, rowdy, all right*, Betty thought.

Maria smiled and kissed Betty on the nose. Her eyes were twinkling and she looked really happy, but Betty was sad. She knew she would never, ever see Annie again. But even more, she wanted to see Madison, her original owner. She wanted to say that she was sorry that she had been so arrogant and careless. She even wanted to see Bill, Madison's father. It didn't matter if he treated her like a baby. At least he had a good sense of humor. But the idea of ever seeing Madison again was hopeless, almost impossible. Madison lived streets away, and now she would have already forgotten Betty. Madison was already ten years old, and it would seem too babyish to be playing with a china dolly at that age. Sometimes Betty wished that china dollies would die like humans do, but china dollies live forever, except when they get smashed or broken into a million pieces. Betty would rather die than live a boring life with Maria.

The days turned into months, and the months turned into years. Nothing exciting happened. Betty got used to Maria's older brothers, Mike and Mathew. Mike had orange hair and a spray of freckles across his mean-looking face, and Mathew looked exactly the same, if you didn't count the fact that he was about three inches shorter. Maria's dog, Skipper, didn't do any harm to Betty, but once the dog managed to get a hold of Betty and started ripping up the knitted sweater Maria had made. Frankly, Betty didn't care, because she had never liked that sweater, but Maria burst into tears when she saw yarn and pieces of the sweater lying all over the floor. Maria's parents admired the fact that their daughter was using her imagination and pretending the dolly was a real, live baby, and on Maria's birthday, they gave her a fifteen new silk dresses. Betty was delighted. Her favorite dress was the purple one. It has fancy, lacy edges, short, puffy sleeves, and glitter on it. Unfortunately, Mike ripped it in half and blinked innocently when Maria screamed, "Who ripped Lizzie's dress?" Betty knew it was Mike because she saw him smirking with Mathew the next day. Well, I think you get the idea of what happened in the Peterson household. Betty was miserable and Maria was happy. At night, sitting on



the bedside table next to Maria's bed, Betty gazed out the window at the stars, and recognized all the constellations Madison had taught her: Orion, Sagittarius, Sirius, and all the others. Life became boring for Betty.

Then one warm Sunday afternoon, the phone rang. Maria grabbed it and asked, "Hello? Who is this? Oh, Madison!" Betty was suddenly wide awake. Maybe, possibly, Madison was her original owner, Madison Marshall. "Oh, I haven't heard from you for a long time! What? Really? Next door? No way! Did you have a fun time in Australia last summer? That's good. You're coming over? When? Oh, today? Let me ask Mother. Hang on for a second, please. Mother!" squealed Maria. "Can Madison come over tomorrow?"

Maria's mother, who was making dinner, frowned. Betty's heart nearly stopped when she said, "You mean Madison Marshall?" Maria nodded, her eyes filled with excitement. "Okay," said Maria's mother. "Sure." *Oh my gosh! Madison Marshall is coming over tomorrow! Madison Marshall is my original owner! I can't believe this! Maria knows Madison, and Madison is coming over tomorrow and she will finally see me again and—* Betty stopped. Madison Marshall would see Betty again, but would Maria be kind enough to give Betty back to her? Maria really loved Betty, and it didn't seem very possible that she would *ever* give Betty to Madison.

"And I have the most exciting news in the world!" squealed Maria, clapping her hands together. "Madison moved to a new house!" *That isn't very exciting, thought Betty. I'm sick of it. There's never, ever, ever anything exciting happening in this house. No one says anything exciting, no one does anything exciting. I'm sick of it. I wish that I could just run away. But I can't, because I'm just a stupid, dumb china dolly that can't move at all! Even I am not exciting. And Maria's brothers, who are the only exciting people in this family are always out at parties or dates with their girlfriends, and they leave the rest of the family to just sit down and read a book or something THAT'S NOT EVEN EXCITING!* Betty was angry, really, really mad. This was all Annie's fault for giving her to Maria. Betty hated Annie and Maria and the Smith brothers, because they had all made her miserable and sad and bored.

"A new house?" asked Maria's mother. Maria's answer was a loud, excited squeal. "Where?"

"NEXT DOOR!" screamed Maria, twirling around and falling onto the couch with a happy sigh. "And Maria is coming over tomorrow and she

will GET TO SEE LIZZIE! And she'll say, 'Oh, that china dolly is beautiful,' and I'll say, 'I know, it is.' Oh, I am so excited!" She was talking so fast Betty had difficulty understanding her.

"Oh, really? They moved next door?" asked Mrs. Peterson, cutting up a few carrots with a sharp knife and tossing them into a small cauldron full of boiling, bubbling hot water. Maria hopped around happily and tossed Betty into the air. But as she reached forward to catch Betty, she missed and Betty shattered onto the floor with a loud CRASH! Maria and her mother gasped. And that was all Betty saw or heard before the world went black.

"B-Betty?" asked a familiar voice. Betty was so groggy that she didn't even remember whom the voice belonged to. She felt dazed and very, very tired. Her vision was blurry. She saw a fuzzy outline of a girl with long black hair and a worried face leaning over her. Betty was furious with herself when she couldn't remember whose face that was. All she knew was that the face was familiar, vaguely familiar. "Betty!" wailed the girl. "Are you okay?"

"Madison, I think we should attach the body, too," said another familiar voice. The girl leaning over Betty stood up and walked over to little pieces of white china lying on the floor. She picked up a piece and began rummaging through the other pieces. Finally she stood up and shook her head.

"It will take too long," she said sadly. She threw the piece back into the pile. Betty looked down at her neck and realized that her body wasn't attached to it! She was only a china head with no body, no arms, no legs, nothing! "What should we do?" asked the girl with black hair.

"I don't know," shrugged the other girl. "Throw her out?"

Tears came into the girl's eyes. "Yes," she said at last.

"Why are you crying? She's not even your dolly."

"She is. I mean, she *was*. Her name is Betty."

"What?"

"She used to be my dolly. Until the Smith boys . . ."

Suddenly, Betty understood. This girl who said Betty was her dolly was Madison, and the other girl was Maria. Maria blinked. "Huh? What Smith boys?"

“You will never understand,” said Madison. “Can I have Betty?”

“No!” yelled Maria. “She's mine!”

“No, she's mine,” said Madison calmly.

“How could Lizzie possibly be yours? Annie gave her to me, so therefore she is MINE!” shouted Maria.

“Ah, but who gave it to Annie?” asked Madison. She smiled when Maria just blinked and shrugged. “In a way, I did,” Madison said. “I was at the park when the Smith boys came up to me. Jake threw Betty into Annie's backyard, and Annie gave her to you. And now I have come to take her back.”

“Yeah, right,” said Maria, rolling her eyes. “Like I believe that. You're just making up that story so you could have Lizzie. BUT NO! You will not have her, never, ever!” Madison glared at Maria, and Maria scowled back at her. “Lizzie is mine!” yelled Maria.

“No, she's mine,” corrected Madison.

Maria glared at her.

Madison picked up Betty's head. “What are you going to do with a cracked head anyway?”

“What are you going to do with a cracked head?” asked Maria.

Madison shrugged.

“Fine!” said Maria. “You can have it. Happy?”

“Yeah,” said Madison. She opened the door and left.

Betty couldn't believe she was back with Madison. *Madison? Is that really you?* thought Betty.

“Betty,” said Madison.

*That must be her, if she knows my real name,* decided Betty.

“Betty,” repeated Madison. “I love you.”

Yes, thought Betty.

*I love you too.*