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Gals and Dolls

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Gals and Dolls

Author Bio

I am an avid reader and writer, and interested in pursuing academia and scholarship. A fusion of real-life experiences, my quirky imagination, and wicked wit, these pieces exude my essence.

Gals and Dolls

SASHA STRELITZ

Symbol [sim-buh l]

6th Grade English

Mrs. Teitzmann

A **symbol** is something used to represent something else. Sometimes symbols are **tangible** or physical, and sometimes they are words, **phrases**, or even images that have a meaning **associated** to them. Our names are symbols of our **essences**. Write 3-4 paragraphs about your name and how it represents who you are. (Remember the **bold** words for next Friday's vocabulary quiz.)

I was named after Barbara Streisand because both my dads love her. They call me Barbie, but I actually think "Barbie" is childish. I've been trying to convince them to call me "Barb" but they insist on adding the "ie". Barb sounds way more mature.

Also I don't resemble the doll at all. ~~Luish~~

What do I say now? This assignment is harder than I thought – "Barbie" doesn't symbolize me. I look around the classroom and my gaze lands on Dee Shapiro, who'd be more suited as a "Barbie," since she looks exactly like Mattel's doll.

After English is lunch, and I'm in a corner of the cafeteria reading *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when I see a shadow eclipsing page 108. I look up and it's Dee; the hideous plaid uniform jumper we have to wear on Fridays actually looks good on her. She sits next to me and nonchalantly informs me about our plans this weekend, as if we're best friends.

"I've been putting notes that say, 'Can I please sleep over Barbie Dershowitz's?' in my mom's drawers like all week. And guess what? She *finally* said 'yes!'" she gushes, as if she hadn't terrorized me for five years. The latest was last month when she

ridiculed my very convincing witch costume at Cher's Halloween party.

I'm totally shocked, so "cool" is my only response.

That night, after we bless the candles, wine, and bread, I blurt out, "I need to move into the blue room *tonight*." Pure amusement on both my dads' faces, so I explain further, "Dee Shapiro is sleeping over tomorrow, and my pink room is filled with dolls."

Silence.

Daddy pours two glasses of Merlot and hands one to Dad, who absentmindedly swishes his glass around to let the wine "breathe." (How does wine *breathe*?)

After what seems like a few minutes, Dad speaks: "A friend will like you for you, and not the room you sleep in. You happen to love your pink room, and if she's your friend, she will too. Besides, there's nothing to play with in the blue room—"

Daddy finishes his sentence, "Except for our masks, which—"

"I solemnly swear never to touch/play with/spill on any antiques, the Haynes furniture, or your masks. Amen," I repeat like a mantra, with my right hand over my heart. But I see their faces, so, "I didn't mean to sound so sassy, but you *don't* understand. This is Dee Shapiro, and she CANNOT know that I play with dolls. She'll tell everyone, and—"

"That's ridiculous," Dad says. Daddy puts his hand on my Dad's shoulder and gently says, "I'll help you move some things to make it look lived in after some de-ca-dent tiramisu."

I wake up in the blue room (Daddy said it would have a more lived-in feel if I slept in here). My stuff is everywhere, so Dee has no reason to think this isn't my room. I stare at the beautiful masks that decorate the four walls of my temporary-new

room. I can't resist, so I take my favorites off the walls to play with (quietly and very gently, of course).

It's almost sunset, and I'm stoked. Sunset means she's almost here, which means hello malls on weekends with Dee, Cher, and the rest of *the* crowd. I'm wearing my best outfit: jeans and my favorite Indian tunic.

A red convertible zooms into our driveway, squeezing between both Priuses. As I open our door, all I notice are Mr. Shapiro's tattoos and farmer's tan. (I know what my dads are thinking: cancer, cancer, CANCER!) Polite "hellos" are exchanged, but the three men look at each other as if they were from different tribes.

Dee is wearing sweatpants (that I wish I had) – with a homemade, bedazzled "PINK" on the butt – and her nails are red like her dad's convertible ("hooker nail polish red," Daddy harps for weeks). Her carefully crafted messy blonde ponytail is perfect (my hair is messy too, but frizzy-messy, not cute-messy). I see a quick snarl on her face when she notices my outfit, but maybe it's just my imagination.

I lead her past the closed door of my room, and into the blue room.

"What are *those*?"

I don't have enough time to analyze her tone, so I reply truthfully: "They're my dads'." I point to each wall as I explain, "Those are Venetian, those are African tribal masks, those are ceremonial masks from Oceania, and these are burial masks from South and North America."

On Sunday afternoon, Dee proposes another sleepover, so while noshing on some cinnamon schneckens and tea, I start the begging/convincing scheme: "We have tomorrow off because of teacher workday, remember?" but Daddy makes eyes at me. Even so, I continue to plead: "Please?"

“But Barbie, remember we’re supposed to go to Avi’s gallery opening tomorrow?” Daddy argues.

I keep on whining, while Dee repeats, “Pretty please?”

“Well, as long as long as they can fetch you—” Dad concedes for them both, and makes a “let it be” motion to Daddy.

“Of course!” Dee quickly replies, as she dials home.

“Thanks, dear. We’ll bring some whole wheat scones for your parents when we pick Barbie up tomorrow,” Dad says.

While Dee is on the phone, I mouth, “Barb not Barbie!”

Dee lets me sit up front, since it’s my first time in a convertible. I politely ask if we could turn the radio to 105.9. Mr. Shapiro blasts it.

As he turns it up, he remarks, “This was so trippy when it came out.” He taps his tatted arm along with Ringo, and only sings the “coocoo cachoo” parts.

The Shapiros don’t watch old Bette Davis movies with snacks made up of seasonal fruits; instead, they watch reality TV and eat delivery pizza. At 7p.m, Dee’s mom comes home from work, and an hour later, her dad goes to a bar.

“They can’t afford a divorce,” Dee whispers to me.

Dee’s mom paints our nails, and while we let them dry, she does our hair. Eventually, she goes to her room, and Dee falls asleep on the couch; but I just lay there. I try so hard to meditate just like my dads taught me, but I keep thinking of all the Mountain Dew I drank. I tiptoe to the bathroom and look around: Pantene Pro-V, strands of fake, multi-colored hair, and Nair (*she’s* allowed to wax *her* hair?)

I squat and gaze at the wall in front of me as I relieve myself. Instead of patterned wallpaper, it’s filled with doodles, no doubt scribbled by all of Dee’s friends – so cool. My eyes follow

a sexy doodle of Edward Cullen all the way to the floor when I notice it: pinkish-red spots on my panties.

Panic.

I unroll the remaining toilet paper, wad it up, and tuck the cotton bulge safely between my legs. I replace the empty roll with a new one that I found under the sink, so no one notices. I scan the washroom to make sure that there is absolutely no evidence, and I tiptoe back toward the couches where Dee is.

I toss and turn, wondering when I'm going to start to turn into a "bitch on wheels," Daddy's worst nightmare.

I must have fallen asleep, because I wake up to some loud cocoo cachooing. I try to stay as frozen as possible, but I manage to half-open one eye. I see him stagger over to kiss Dee – he nearly trips as he approaches the couch. I smell something horribly acid-ic, which fades just as he wobbles away like a sick penguin. (For a while, some weird banging noises come from the master bedroom, then some shouting, a SLAM!, some noisy footsteps, and then SLAM! again.)

I wake up to Mrs. Shapiro's face inches from mine, "Honey, you gotya pe-r-iod, and bled all ova the cowch," she croaks in the same exact tone she had explained the intricate drama of the *Real Housewives of New Jersey* last night. Then, to my horror, Dee wakes up; she starts to chuckle uncontrollably as she takes in the scene. (The most embarrassing moment of my life, but instead of crying, I tell myself *Barb doesn't cry; only little Barbie would.*)

"Dee, ya little reta'd, don'tchya laugh atya friend. Her bubbies will be big soon, and you'll still be flat like my iyan." That shuts Dee up.

We all walk into the kitchen to find an old My Size Barbie. "I'm gonna show Barbie howta wear a tampon, using Barbie as a mawdel" she giggles through her nose. As I learn about applica-

tors and strings, I'm no longer able to stomach the ketchup and eggs, so I push them around politely.

"Ya bleed so ya know ya not knowcked up." Mrs. Shapiro pulls a bottle from her robe pocket, and pours an amber liquid into her coffee. (If I never hear the word "tampon" again, I'll be happy.)

I look outside and see Dee's dad on a hammock hiccupping in his sleep. As I turn my head back to the mortifying breakfast scenario, Dee is wearing a face I've never seen on her before – humiliation.

I'm silent all the way home. When we arrive, I run past the blue room with its masks, and into *my* room. I absentmindedly prepare some papier-mâché to make one of my dolls a costume. After what seems like both a minute and a year all at the same time, my dads come in and sandwich me. Daddy has a bag from Whole Foods in his hands, filled with pads and some rose oil extract, and Dad has a steaming mug of cinnamon tea.

They take turns hugging me, and Dad says, "Barbie, we don't want you using tampons yet, because the research says you're still too young."

A wave of relief: I'm still a girl, still Barbie.

Tuesday morning is more regular than I thought it would be. As soon as I see her, I'm surprised that Dee seems embarrassed, but maybe that's because I saw behind her mask. Even more surprisingly, she invites me to sit with her, Cher, and the others for lunch. We both smile and laugh, pretending: I'm pretending I'm not the first sixth grader with pads in her backpack, and Dee is pretending her family isn't cracking at the seams.