

The Pink Fabric Clown

Category: Unvaccinated

written by Julie A. Dickson | July 12, 2022

I first saw the pink fabric clown from my perch on the windowsill of my hospital room, where I sat, against the wishes of the nurses and my mother, waving down two stories below to my father, brother, and grandmother.

The pink fabric clown was held by my grandmother, her brilliant white hair shiny with Aqua Net, as she stood with my father and brother in the hospital parking lot. My eyes traveled from the strange clown doll in her hand to my brother's hand—which held a red fabric clown, a twin of the pink one in all ways but color. Grandmother waved as she gave the pink fabric clown to my father, and he then made his way upstairs with it to my room.

I already hated the pink fabric clown, who was blameless but became the scapegoat for my anger.

At age seven, I had fallen victim to mononucleosis and the mumps, back before a mumps vaccine existed. The pediatrician had driven to our house, where I lay on the couch with a fever of 105 degrees. He scooped me up and drove us to the hospital in his own car, my mother holding me in the back seat. My brother got to ride in the front with the doctor. I was placed in a regular ward, as the pediatric beds were all occupied. I spent five days in that sterile hospital room, forced to drink orange juice until I was covered in hives. After that, I drank only water.

On the day I was admitted, my beloved brown stuffed dog, Po-Po, had been taken away from me and tossed into the incinerator, a casualty of my illness. Stuffed dogs couldn't be washed and were full of germs, my mother explained, as I sobbed piteously into my pillow. That first night, I fell fitfully to sleep in the strange bed.

I dreamed of my brown dog's sad demise while clutching the pink fabric clown in a choke hold, as if responsibility for the loss of my beloved stuffed animal could be attributed to the flat plastic face with painted eyes, to the arms and legs of quilted fabric. Some time during the night, in my sleep, I flung that innocent pink fabric clown onto the cold tile floor.

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