Presented for your consideration, another tale in our WEIRD WORDS 2 short story contest. This one is a macabre little number by Kurt Krause called..."Mamma's Dolly."

Mamma always wanted a little girl that she could dress up in frilly things. But she got my brother, Brian instead. That is, until I came. We've been in the Duplex for as long as I can remember, and I don't recall anybody ever living next door. In fact, after Brian left, it was just me and Mamma and, of course, the dolls. Mamma sure loved her dolls. They're how she made her living; it was her craft. And with her so preoccupied with them, it got lonely. What's more, since I was schooled at home, I rarely saw the outside of our cozy little house for two. I'm not sure how old I am. Mamma didn't believe in holidays, so I never had a birthday. Neither did Brian, when he was here. Perhaps that's why he was so resentful. They used to argue something awful too. See, Brian was a very sick boy growing up; and Mamma just had the hardest time keeping him from doing things that might bring harm upon him—things like going to regular school and playing with the other kids. It sure was quiet after he left.

I'm a young lady now, definitely not a little girl anymore, albeit Mamma still treats me like one. I don't remember our daddy. He and Mamma split up before I was born. Shortly thereafter, she had her accident. I don't know the details about it, just that it changed her. She was misunderstood by most; an aging beauty, pretty but scarred, polite but quick to temper. Moreover, there was a sorrow about her that made me want to stay, made me want to take care of her. And oh how sad she had been leading up to the days before Brian came back for a surprise visit.

It was just after Halloween, and we were visited by an early frost. Mamma lost her Aloe plants on account of it and was therefore in an especially sour mood. She coveted their healing properties and dubbed them her magic greens. Unfortunately, the frost's bite didn't stop at the plants; the sudden shift in temperature proved enough to snap one or more of the pipes in the Duplex as well, so not only did we have little to no water pressure for hygienic purposes, the walls had begun to seep moisture and in doing so, stain Mamma's pretty scenic murals—those which she painted when her and daddy were just newlyweds. Alas, the two unexpected losses were enough to put Mamma in one of her incensed spells. In fact, I hadn't seen her this cross since Brian left home. And when Mamma was in that way, it meant I had to be especially "Barbie-like" as to avoid being put in the box, a punishment mamma contrived when I was very young; kind of like time out or solitary confinement. That is, she would make me get into a giant box with a hole cut out in the middle, then wrap the front with cellophane and make me strike the pose of a pretty little girl who, according to her, should be "as sinless as an angel's

bottom." I'd have to maintain that pose until Mamma said, otherwise she'd fill two pots with water, bring them to a boil and dunk my hands in them. The more I screamed, the longer she would hold them in there. Brian used to try and stop her, but it only caused her to turn aggression toward him. His punishments were even worse than mine.

She tried to get Brian to come and look at the pipes for a week or two but finally gave up and turned to the phonebook, dialing the first plumber she came across. He showed up near dinnertime, and Mamma directed him to the problem in our tiny Duplex. She didn't introduce me, but she kept me near her side the entire time. He unhooked a big old wrench from his side and started tapping on the walls. Mamma giggled awkwardly and told him that it was the first time we ever had a professional in the home.

"Yeah, it looks it," he said. "Listen, lady… this is gonna be a pretty big job. Hope you got home-owner's."

"Actually," she snickered, sipping from her muddied coffee cup, "I wanted to talk to you about that. Being a single mom and all, money's uh… been kinda tight" She shuffled toward him, exploiting a gait I had never seen Mamma use before, unfastening the first few buttons on her flannel pajama top… "But I'm sure we can work something out."

The plumber cleared his throat, saying: "Lady, please don't do that. I'm not in the business of doing or accepting favors. I can check out your pipes and give you a free estimate. Whether you can afford the repairs is on you. Now, I notice this is a duplex. Do you have access to the adjacent home?"

Mamma said nothing at first, just gritted her teeth and gave the man her most wicked scowl just like she always did to Brian and I when we said or did something out of line. But it didn't faze the plumber. He just shrugged, clipped his wrench back in place and made his way for the door.

"It's…" Mamma cried out, "vacant. No body's lived there for well over a decade. I just use it for storage."

“Well,” the plumber grumbled, “Maybe we should take a gander.”

Mamma nodded hesitantly, then grabbed her keys and led the man away. They were gone ten minutes or so. I could hear them shuffling around on the other side of the walls. A couple of knocks, thumps and bangs. Then a bit of laughter; but it didn’t last long. What followed had the timbre of an argument, lots of yelling followed by screaming. I could only imagine what over. I knew Mamma would scold me but good if I interfered or acted out of role, so I waited with nervous anticipation. And waited and waited… Eventually, Mamma stepped through the door. But she was the only one to return. Shivering and painted red, she looked at me and then began to laugh hysterically.

“Gotta call your brother again,” she said. “He has to pick up this time, just has to. I won’t be able to clean this one up by myself.”

She spent hours dialing the phone, then hanging it up. Over and over…

At last, she got through. It sounded as though it was Brian, I couldn’t tell for sure. The conversation was short, tense and one-sided, but when it was finished Mamma hung up and offered up a grin, a genuinely happy one. Then, she went outside for a while. She let me look out the window like she always did when she left for a spell. It was dark out, but I knew she was the one who got into the plumber’s truck and drove it away. I fell asleep, waiting for her to come back again. The whole thing seemed like a bad dream. When I awoke, Mamma was on the couch in the living room; she had nodded off while knitting--a recent and worsening habit. She must’ve relocated me to my bed when I was out and neatly tucked me in. I called out for her to let me up. I hated when she tucked me in; she pulled the blankets so tight that the procedure could be used in prisons for unruly inmates. Mamma’s eyes eased opened with the urgency of a snail taking flight from a weed-whip; and once they were finally focused, she seemed to have little concern about my current predicament. She just sat there, staring.

Finally, she glanced my way and said, “Well little girl, don’t ask mother how she did it, but your brother’s on his way. We’re going to have ourselves a family reunion.”

She left the front room and me trapped beneath the blankets. I could hear thumping in the walls and knew Mamma was running the hose outside. The last couple of days she had been

cleaning herself up with it; it made a hell of a racket.

Shortly thereafter, there was a faint knock at the door. Then, someone stepped inside. It didn't startle me though. I knew who it was. Brian always entered that way. He lightly stepped through the front room and then made his way toward me. He said nothing, just quietly helped me from underneath the covers and carried me over to the couch.

The both of us sat still and quiet, just like we did when we were kids. After some time, he glanced over his shoulder and then back at me, muttering, "Same old Mamma, huh?"

"And what's that suppose to mean?!"

Both of us nearly jumped out of our seats. It was Mamma, of course. She always knew exactly where to be so she could catch you doing or saying something that might offend her in some way.

"Nothing, mother!" Brian popped off defensively. "You're the one who all but begged me to come here, remember. I don't have to stay."

He got up and stepped toward the door.

Mamma's disposition immediately shifted, and she was all smiles: "Now, there's no reason to start things off on such shaky ground. Why don't you sit back down, and mamma will put on a new pot of coffee."

Brian turned to her, annoyed: "Just tell me what you want me to do. I gotta get back by six. Robin and I have plans tonight."

“Still with her?!” Mamma spouted.

Robin was Brian’s childhood sweetheart, the girl down the street. They used to sit out front on the porch because Mamma wouldn’t let anyone come inside. One day she got angry and chased Robin off. By and large, that’s what prompted Brian to take flight under the moonlit sky one sticky summer night.

“Unlike you, Mamma,” Brian hissed, “some of us can hang on to those we love.”

Mamma slapped him across the face, but Brian didn’t flinch.

“You can’t hurt me anymore Mamma. I’m not afraid of you anymore.”

Mamma started crying and came over to me for comfort. She held me tight and vigorously rocked us both on the couch.

“Just tell me what you need me to do for you so I can do it and get back home to my wife.”

“But you are home, son,” Mamma sobbed. “Don’t you see that?”

Brian shook his head with disgust, storming toward the door. Mamma ran over and grabbed hold of him. He tried to pull away, but she wouldn’t let go, wrapping her arms around him like a Bull Constrictor. She whispered something in his ear that I couldn’t make out, and then he freed himself of her grasp and left outside. Mamma stood in the doorway. Her back was to me, and though she was utterly silent and motionless, I knew she was weeping.

An hour or so went by before she sat back down beside me and started knitting again. That’s when Brian returned, but this time he was different from before; this time he oozed from his

pours… the burden of rage.

“You twisted witch!!!”

Mamma covered my ears, but I could still hear their muffled conversation:

“Don’t talk like that in front of your sister.”

“She’s not my sister, Mamma. She’s just another one of your dolls.”

“How dare you!”

“How dare me? I’m not a killer! I’m not the one who killed father and the lady next door and her teenage daughter!!!”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. Your father left us when you were just a little boy.”

“I may have been young, mamma--but I remember it. I finally remember it all.”

Mamma picked me up and scurried the two of us away from my enraged brother. He rushed after us, shouting horrible things:

“You were jealous because father’s affection was being given to Ms. Dalia. That was her name. You found them in bed together. But you weren’t alone. I was with you. You killed them both with…”

Mamma shook her head in denial, and with a Grrr pushed Brian back. The next thing I knew she put me in time out and covered her own ears. She may have tried to block him out, but I heard him loud and clear:

“We were raking the leaves, and you saw dad’s truck parked down the street. Curious, you went and peaked through Ms. Dalia’s window. You squeezed my hand so tight I thought you were going to break it off. Then you fetched a shovel from the toolshed and dragged me inside Ms. Dalia‘s home. You hit dad with the shovel when he was still on top of her. Then, you drove the sharp end of it into his throat, almost took his head clean off. Ms. Dalia… God, you tortured her for hours before you killed her. And her daughter…”

He looked over to me, then to Mamma.

“Is that why you killed the plumber? Because he found the skeletal remains of two people in the walls? You need help mother! You convinced me that I was the sick one all those years. You made me drink your awful elixirs and wouldn’t let me go to school. And all along, it was you. Well, no more.”

He turned and stepped toward the phone. Then, Mamma, who had all but curled up in the corner like a frightened little girl, raised her knitting needle in front of her face and ceased her tears. Brian picked up the phone and started dialing. Quivering and with clenched teeth, Mamma rushed Brian like a tribal huntress, jumped on his back and plunged the tool, with which she made her living, into her son over and over again--until he, at last, found the strength to push her off of him. She hit the kitchen wall like a hamburger-patty getting slapped by a spatula, dropping to the floor at once.

Brian was bleeding something terrible. He cried out Mamma’s name and staggered over to her. She was limp in his arms. Her eyes were wild and crazed. He held her for a spell, and then gently set her to rest on the floor.

He tried to make it over to the phone but tripped and fell in front of the coffee table on which I stood in my box. He reached up toward me, his hands trembling and dripping blood. He tried

to talk, but what mostly came out was the gurgling semblance of: “Help Me…”

But I knew not to move a muscle. Mamma would be back. We were family. We would always be family. Somewhere she was watching. My brother’s bloody fingers stained the cellophane on my box as he begged for his life. Mamma wouldn’t like that; she always expected me to be my best: pretty, quiet, perfect. Her little Dolly.