



The Creepiness of Dolls

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Kat Yeh is the author of the award-winning middle-grade novel *THE TRUTH ABOUT TWINKIE PIE* and the picture books *YOU'RE LOVABLE TO ME*, *THE MAGIC BRUSH*, and *THE FRIEND SHIP*. <http://www.katyeh.com>.

Talk it Out

Read the following definition:

Manipulate: verb (used with object), manipulated, manipulating
To manage or influence skillfully, especially in an unfair manner;
to manipulate people's feelings.

Now discuss:

Do you think that Kat's sister manipulated her? Explain your answer using examples from her story where applicable.

Could Kat have done anything to prevent her sister from manipulating her? Brainstorm reasonable steps she might have taken other than going downstairs.

Have you ever manipulated someone to get him or her to do what you want, or have you ever been manipulated by someone else? Or can you think of one or more examples of someone you know being manipulated by someone else? How do you think the manipulator felt, both immediately and later on? How do you think the person being manipulated felt, both immediately and later on?

Brainstorm a list of things that cause fear in you, someone you know, or a character you've read about. Discuss possible reasons for the fear. In the memory you just listened to, for example, why might the interviewer (Julie Sternberg) be frightened by the idea of a puppet coming to life in a girl's bedroom?

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Pick one fear, real or imagined. For example, you might choose a fear of spiders. Now write a “you don’t scare me” letter to that fear. For example, the letter to the spiders might begin, “Dear Spiders, You think you’re scary, but you’re not.”
- Pick a fear, any fear. Now write a list of “Keep Calm and ...” steps you could take in the face of that fear. For example, if you selected fear of thunder, one step might be “Keep Calm and Put on Noise-Cancelling Headphones.” Come up with at least 10 steps. (You could also choose 2 fears and write 5 steps each.)
- Often when we’re scared it’s because we’ve let our imaginations run wild. Imagine being scared of something that actually couldn’t hurt you (for example, a doll or a puppet). Now write up an imagined “worst case scenario” involving this fear. Be sure to use dialogue and describe setting and emotions.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY

Kat Yeh: I do remember the meanest thing she ever said to me. We were both upstairs, and she wanted to go downstairs. And she said, you know, “Please come downstairs with me. I’ll give you ten dollars, blah, blah, blah, blah.” But no matter what I wouldn’t do it. And then she turned to me, and she poked at my deep-seated fear. And she said, “Fine. Stay here with all the dolls staring at you.”

And dolls of that generation were terrifying looking. It’s not a physically mean thing. It was like a psychologically really cruel thing to do to me. I’m terrified of dolls. And I will never forget when she said that with a little hand on her hip. That could have been when it started. I mean, I’d always been scared of them but to have her put it out there like that. I cannot be in a room alone with dolls.

Julie: She used her knowledge of you. That was pretty sharp of her.

Kat Yeh: She went to the tender, vulnerable part of me, and she stabbed at it.

Julie: Did you go downstairs?

Kat Yeh: I probably ran ahead of her.

Julie: I have to tell you, I love that that's your fear. I remember when I was a kid I was a huge reader. And I read all of the grown-up--I'm going to call them grown-up Nancy Drews but, of course, they're not. They're sort of teen Nancy Drews. And I was fine with all of them. Although, they're pretty--if you look at them now, you know, Nancy will be in a closet with men with weapons outside and she'll be hiding. There's plenty there to be scared of. And I was completely fine with all of those.

But I remember after having read many, many of those, I picked up a book that was intended for children, a Nancy Drew story intended for children. It had much larger font, and it was many fewer pages. It was supposed to be geared for children. And it had to do with a doll-like puppet that she had in her room that came to life. And I was terrified. Terrified. I mean, the truth is, the only reason I remember any of the plots of the older Nancy Drews is because I read some with my daughter fairly recently. I remember that puppet Nancy Drew like it was yesterday. It scared me so badly.

Kat Yeh: I get it. I totally get it. That's the kind of book that I would read it and then I would have to hide it somewhere where it couldn't get me after I went to sleep.

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