

DOLLHOUSE

Screenplay by

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Based on the Short Story "Dollhouse" by JC Bratton

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INT. JOHN & MYRA'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

Dim lighting casts a modest kitchen in shadow.

JOHN (30s), dressed in a muted black suit, collects one of the half-picked-over casserole dishes from the counter and stores it in the fridge. He turns back to the counter, surveys the remaining dishes and gift baskets and flowers with exhaustion -- remnants of a post-funeral repast.

He gives the clutter a cold shoulder and moves to the table instead, where MYRA (30s) is lost in somber thought, also dressed in funeral attire. John gives her a comforting hug.

JOHN

Did you want to try eating something?

MYRA

(absently)

No. I'm not hungry.

He doesn't force it.

MYRA (CONT'D)

I just don't understand. And now I'll never understand. I should've seen this coming. Even when we were growing up, I knew there was something... secret, hidden, that I could never --

JOHN

Please don't do that to yourself. Your sister's life was her own. Her choices were hers to make. You offered all the help you could. She didn't want it. That's not your fault. Sometimes people just get lost.

MYRA

She wasn't lost, though. That's the worst part. She embraced it. All that dark shit she was into... that was her whole world.

JOHN

You still loved her. And I'm sure on some level she always knew that.

MYRA

(unconvinced)

Yeah.

JOHN

Why don't you try to get some rest?
Close your eyes for a minute? I'll
finish cleaning and be right up.

MYRA

Okay. Thank you. For everything.

He kisses her on the forehead and she departs. John then returns to the clutter on the counter. As he continues to put things away --

DING-DONG. He's suddenly startled by the doorbell. He stalks toward the front door with a wary frown, clearly not expecting visitors at this hour.

INT. JOHN & MYRA'S HOME - FRONT DOOR - SAME

John cautiously puts his eye to the peephole. There's no one there. His frown turns suspicious.

He carefully opens the door and looks down to find a plainly-wrapped GIFT BOX waiting on the doormat. He takes it inside.

INT. JOHN & MYRA'S HOME - KITCHEN - SAME

John inspects the package on the table. The large box is wrapped in twine, which is tied over a SMALLER PARCEL and a CARD in an envelope which reads: "*Dear Sister.*"

John opens the card first. The handwritten note is brief:

"M, This belongs to you now. - B."

His curiosity is piqued. He carefully unwraps the smaller parcel to reveal a small, unlabeled LEATHER-BOUND BOOK.

Then he tears open the larger box. He opens the top delicately, revealing an ornate DOLLHOUSE. Hand-crafted. Aged. Painstakingly-detailed.

And inside, a similarly elegant DOLL with long dark hair.

John doesn't know what to make of any of this. He turns back to the book for answers. Flips through the initial pages. Finally lands on a page with a drawing of the doll and a header that reads: "*BUFFY.*"

He absent-mindedly takes a seat and begins to read:

"Once upon a time, in quiet suburban town, there was a little newlywed couple..."

And as he reads, we FADE TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - DRIVEWAY - DAY

A clean sedan pulls to a stop in front of an inviting suburban HOUSE. A for-sale sign stands at attention at the edge of the manicured front yard.

INT. SEDAN - SAME

Newlywed couple MIKE (30s) and AMBER (30s) take in the view of the facade.

MIKE

This is it. 333 Hobby Road.

AMBER

It's gorgeous! Is this really in our price range?

MIKE

Close enough.

AMBER

What's that mean?

MIKE

(playfully)

It means... close enough. Let's have a look first. We can worry about the money if it matters.

AMBER

Okay. Well I'm in love with the yard already. Don't you think it'd be perfect for the -

MIKE

(playfully scolding)

Amber.

AMBER (CONT'D)

- little ones?

MIKE (CONT'D)

I thought we agreed on one step at a time?

AMBER

We did. The house is the first step... to our family-of-five plan.

MIKE

Our plan? I don't remember signing off on that.

AMBER

I forged your signature. Sorry, I guess you're locked in for life.

MIKE

Wow. Do I get any perks, at least?

AMBER

Oh I negotiated for some *great* bedroom privileges for you.

MIKE

You're so thoughtful.

They share a laugh and a sweet kiss.

AMBER

Come on! I wanna see inside.

Amber opens her door just as Mike's phone buzzes in his pocket. The smile he was just wearing melts away as he checks the ID. The call is from "BUFFY," and there's a contact photo of a DARK-HAIRED WOMAN with a striking, penetrating smile.

AMBER (CONT'D)

Who is it?

He buries his sudden unease, declines the call and pockets the phone before Amber can catch a glimpse at the screen --

MIKE

Just work. I'll call them back later. Let's go check it out.

And he steps out of the car, perhaps a bit too quickly.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - SAME

Mike stands behind Amber, and she doesn't see him tapping his pocket anxiously as she retrieves the key from the lockbox and opens the door.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - FOYER/LIVING ROOM - SAME

They step through, and Amber is immediately taken by the home's open floor plan and natural light. Her eyes light up like she's already mapping out the furniture layout -

AMBER

Mike... this place is stunning.
Don't you think?!

While Mike feigns interest as best he can:

MIKE
Yeah it's great.

Amber's too enthralled to notice. We stay with Mike as she moves ahead to the kitchen.

AMBER (O.S.)
Kitchen is gorgeous -- look at
these burners!

While she's out of sight, Mike quickly opens his phone, scrolls to the call log from "Buffy" and blocks the caller --

AMBER (O.S.) (CONT'D)
Earth to Mike?

He looks up and sees her staring expectantly.

AMBER (CONT'D)
Everything okay?

MIKE
(pocketing his phone)
Yes. Sorry... Let's go check out
the bedroom?

She looks past his cryptic expression and smiles, before grabbing his hand and leading him towards the hall --

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - SAME

Amber takes in the spacious room with an elated spin:

AMBER
Okay... the money's gonna matter.
Because this is it. This is gonna
be our first home together.

Mike dons a lively mask just as she turns back to him --

AMBER (CONT'D)
What do you think?

MIKE
I think if you're happy, I'm happy.

AMBER
And you love it too?

MIKE
And I love it too.

She lets out a gleeful yelp and grabs his cheeks for a kiss.

AMBER

We need to call the realtor right
away. I mean just look at all this
closet space --

Mike walks off distracted as Amber slides the closet open --

AMBER (O.S.) (CONT'D)

And all this built-in shelving...
Whoa. That's kinda creepy though.

Mike turns to see open closet... and the DOLLHOUSE that rests
on the center shelf. The DOLL's beady eyes stare out at him
as it sits in its miniature home.

AMBER (CONT'D)

I'm guessing that isn't part of the
staging. Sellers must've left it
behind.

(moving on)

But looks like they have kids! That
bodes well for us, right?

But Mike isn't listening. He's slowly approaching the doll,
because something about it seems... *familiar*.

Amber has already moved on to the bathroom as Mike stops in
front of the closet. He studies the doll's features: its dark
wavy hair, its tilted little gaze...

Buzz-buzz-buzz. His phone's ringing again. He looks down,
checks the screen, sees "Buffy's" smiling contact photo
staring back at him... and now we can see that the woman in
the photo SHARES A STRIKING RESEMBLANCE WITH THE DOLL.

Mike looks back up... to find that the doll's head is now
tilted the other way.

His breath catches. He's shuddering now. He slowly turns to
Amber, who's busy checking the bathroom drawers...

MIKE

(carefully)

It's... it's work again. Must be an
emergency. I'll be right back.

AMBER

Okay. Should I try the realtor? Let
her know we wanna make an offer?

MIKE
(leaving, distracted)
Yeah. Great. Go ahead.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - DAY

Mike steps through the doorway. The phone's still ringing in his hand. He regards the photo of Buffy like it's staring through his soul. He finally steels himself and answers:

MIKE
Who is this?

No response.

MIKE (CONT'D)
This isn't Buffy. Buffy's dead.

VOICE (V.O.)
You sure about that?

Mike JUMPS. *He knows that voice.*

MIKE
Who are you?!

VOICE (V.O.)
Happy wife, happy life. Right, Mikey?

The voice bursts into a *sinister laughter* --

Mike drops the phone -- the screen shatters against the ground. He fumbles for it before desperately hanging up, as --

ARMS WRAP AROUND HIS NECK -- Mike stifles a scream --

But it's just Amber, wrapping him in a hug from behind --

AMBER
Thank you for finding our dream house.

She nuzzles his neck affectionately, unaware of the fear dripping down his face... as we CUT TO:

EXT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT (ONE MONTH LATER)

Same spot, different night. Amber stands alone in the doorway now, waving to the MOVING TRUCK as it rolls out of the driveway.

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM/HALLWAY - NIGHT

The room is a maze of moving boxes and disassembled furniture. Out-of-place lamps cast shadows on the walls.

Amber navigates through the mess as she organizes her things in the closet.

And just barely visible behind the half-open door... the DOLL. Where we left it. In its home. *Watching Amber.*

Amber's phone rings --

AMBER

Hello, my love. Almost done over there?

MIKE (V.O.)

Yeah, almost. Sorry. Dealing with a really tricky client.

AMBER

Remember that family-of-five plan I signed you up for? Well if you read the fine print, you'll see that part of your duties include helping your wife with the unpacking.

MIKE (V.O.)

I know. I wish I was there, too. Slow going?

She finds a rolled-up hallway runner rug poking out of one of the boxes. She shoulders the phone and retrieves it --

AMBER

It might go a little faster if I had a bottle of wine.

MIKE (V.O.)

I'll pick one up on the way home. Just needed to... ask you something. Really quick. It's a little awkward.

AMBER

Uh oh. We getting a divorce already?

We follow Amber as she takes the runner to the hallway just outside the bedroom door --

MIKE (V.O.)
(courtesy chuckle, then)
No. But do you remember... that
doll we found? In the closet?

AMBER
You mean that creepy little antique
that kinda looks like your ex?

Amber kneels down and unfurls the runner, with her back
turned to the room, and as she does so...

A shadow starts to grow on the wall across from the closet...

IN THE SHAPE OF A FIGURE...

MIKE (V.O.)
(nervous breath, then)
Yeah. Is it... still there? In the
house?

And just as Amber lifts the rug into frame and whips it down
across the floor --

AMBER
I think so. Why?
(realizing)
Ohhh, I get it. Is my big strong
husband afraid of the scary doll?
Want me to throw it away so you
don't have to see it?

THE SHADOW WALKS ACROSS THE WALL AND OUT OF SIGHT --

MIKE
You think you could?

Now Amber thinks she feels something over her shoulder --

She spins -- but there's nothing there. Just the shadows from
boxes and clutter. She laughs it off.

AMBER
Consider it done. Now hurry up and
get your butt over here. And I
wouldn't say no to Prosecco!

MIKE
Sounds good. Be there soon.

AMBER
Bye.

And just as she hangs up, we SMASH TO:

EXT. SECLUDED WOODS - NIGHT

Mike, crouched down in the dark, streaks of *dirt and sweat* stained across his face, along with a look of aggravation.

He fumbles with something in his hand. A handle. To a SHOVEL.

And we finally ANGLE ON what he's peering down at:

A shallow HOLE in the dirt. Hastily dug up...

Which contains an open PLYWOOD BOX. The box is vacant. Save for a rusty KNIFE caked with dried blood. And more dried blood smeared and soaked across the plywood.

A secret grave. *An empty grave.*

Mike wipes the filth from his brow. He does his best to wipe the distress away too, but fails. Finally, he unsheathes the shovel from the dirt and starts hiding the hole, bringing us back to:

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - NIGHT

Amber returns to the bedroom, makes her way through the mess and goes to the closet. Slides the door all the way open --

And finds the dollhouse *empty*.

Curious. She scans the room. Doesn't find the doll.

She bends down, checking the closet floor. No dice. She stands back up, spins around to see --

BUFFY'S GORE-CAKED FACE SNEERING RIGHT AT HER --

BUFFY
Hey, doll face.

Amber WAILS as Buffy clasps her cheeks with her soiled hands, smearing mud and blood into Amber's skin and --

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - FRONT DOOR - NIGHT - LATER

The house is pitch dark. Headlights cut through the gloom and swing across the windows before cutting off.

We hear footsteps approaching outside. The door unlocks and opens, and a hesitant Mike pokes his head through, a bottle of sparkling wine in his hand:

MIKE

Hello?

He locks the door behind him and tries the lights. Nothing.

MIKE (CONT'D)

What's with the lights?

No response. Mike looks spooked now.

MIKE (CONT'D)

Amber?

Nothing. Mike stalks towards the hall...

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - SAME

Mike wields the bottle defensively now as he peers through the dark bedroom doorway. The lamps are off.

He steps across the newly laid out rug and enters the room --

MIKE

Amber? Where are you?

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - MASTER BEDROOM - SAME

He steps through the mess... then he freezes. Remembers the closet. And what was once hiding inside.

Quietly, he stalks to the closet. Sees the door hanging ajar.

He reaches out... slides the door open to find...

The dollhouse. *Empty*. He's about to exhale with relief when --

BUFFY (O.S.)

*'Til death do us part, remember
baby?*

Mike flinches, drops the bottle and it EXPLODES on the floor.

He shrinks in terror before slowly turning to face...

BUFFY, lying across the bed, wearing a seductive smirk as mud slips down her chin. Sunken eyes delivering a penetrating gaze. Rotten flesh draped over bone. She's a corpse reanimated, but with the makeover of a handmade plaything.

BUFFY (CONT'D)

*Well it looks like I'm not so dead
anymore. Despite your best efforts.*

MIKE
(aghast)
It's not possible...

Buffy gets to her feet and strikes a beguiling pose against the bed as grime drips down her life-sized doll's clothes.

BUFFY
*I warned you. If I can't have you,
no one can. Now do you believe me?*

MIKE
Where's Amber?

BUFFY
*In her new house, of course. Where
she belongs.*

Confusion flashes across his already terrified face --

BUFFY (CONT'D)
Look again, my sweet.

She gestures over his shoulder with her eyes.

He slowly turns back around to find...

A new DOLL now sitting in the dollhouse. There's an anguished grimace stitched onto its face. *And it looks just like Amber.*

Mike hears AMBER'S TORTURED SCREAM ringing in his ears --

And as he gapes back at the doll in despair --

ARMS WRAP AROUND HIS NECK -- like Amber's did before --

But Buffy's grip is constricting. *Murderous.*

BUFFY (CONT'D)
Now we have forever.

She CHOMPS on his neck -- blood dribbles down her tongue --

Mike SCREAMS, staggers backward, slamming her into the wall --

He breaks free, bolts for the doorway --

INT. SUBURBAN HOUSE - HALLWAY - SAME

Mike bolts down the hall -- but Buffy is faster --

Just as Mike steps to the far end of the runner, Buffy yanks the rug backward, flipping Mike headfirst into the hardwood --

His skull *cracks* against the floor --

He rolls to his back in agony, blood leaking from his hair --

As Buffy *pounces* on top of him -- digs her nails into his cheeks -- he tries to squirm away --

MIKE

No, no, no, no --

BUFFY

I'm never letting you go, darling.

MIKE

NO!

But there's nowhere for him to go. Especially because her fingers are now in his mouth, her thumb at his chin, gripping his lower jaw like a vice, wrenching his face towards her --

Pulling with such force that his *jaw snaps off* --

Tendons tear and skin rips and his chin is yanked free from his throat and his tongue lolls out as he screams and --

INT. JOHN & MYRA'S HOME - KITCHEN - NIGHT

John *snaps* to attention and thrusts the book to the table.

He's shaking. Almost hyperventilating. *What the hell did I just read?*

He nervously looks over to the dollhouse --

AND SEES THAT THE DOLL IS GONE.

And now he's frozen. Pure, uncut fear needled straight into his bloodstream.

Carefully, he peers over his shoulder. There's nothing there.

He ducks his head under the table. Nothing there either.

He backs away from the table. Gives the dollhouse one more panicked glance before retreating...

INT. JOHN & MYRA'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

John stalks to the bedroom doorway...

JOHN
(cautiously)
Myra?

He sees her lying in bed in the dark, her back turned to him.
Breathing gently. She doesn't answer.

He steps toward the bed, fear overtaking his desire to let
her sleep --

JOHN (CONT'D)
Myra.

She doesn't hear him. He leans over to touch her shoulder --

JOHN (CONT'D)
Myra --

And as she turns around --

BUFFY
(sneering)
Myra's not home right now.

John GASPS in horror, screaming as Buffy clamps her fingers
around his face and yanks him towards her --

We pull away from the bed as she envelopes him in violence --

And all we can hear is carnage. Slashing, ripping, gurgling
mayhem as we're ripped back through the hall and return to:

INT. JOHN & MYRA'S HOME - KITCHEN - SAME

The kitchen table, where the dollhouse sits.

It's now occupied by a NEW DOLL.

And as we hear the climax of John's vicious demise in the
next room, we can see...

That this doll is wearing a funeral dress.

And it looks just like Myra.

BLACK.

END CREDITS.