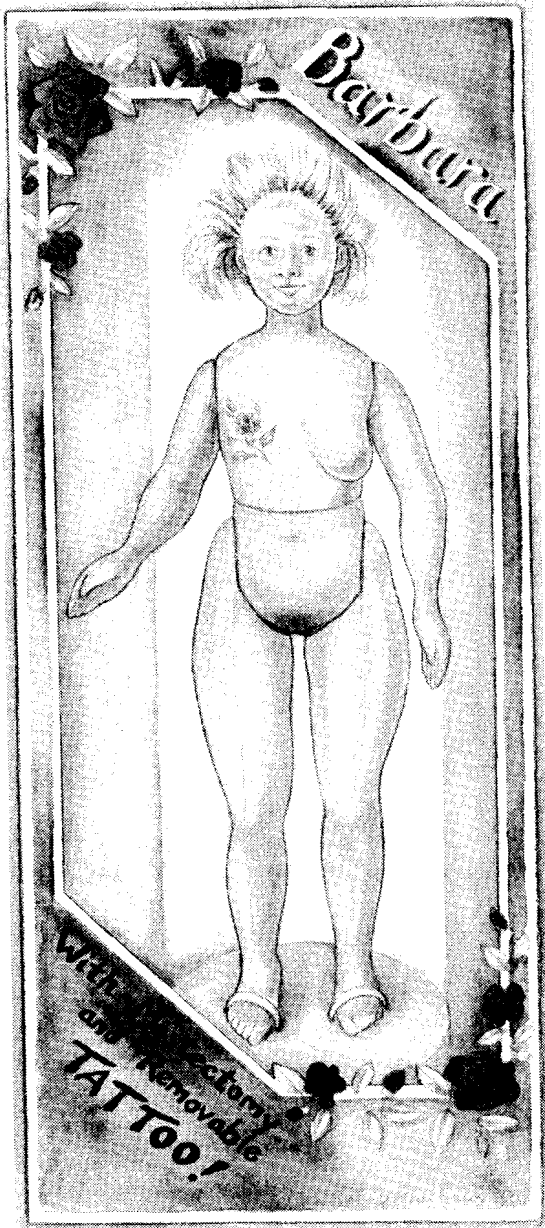


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Tamara Thieboux, Barbie Series, 1993

Part of the exhibit "Breaking Through the Stereotypes" held at Mt. Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Aug. 1993

I Dream As A Warrior Does

by Tamara Steinborn

Suite à la perte d'un sein dû au cancer, l'auteure relate sa propre expérience ainsi que celle de sa mère et comment elles ont réagi face à leurs corps respectifs.

The one breasted woman was my mother. Often, I see her face in my dreams now, as if she were still here I waken, feeling alive with the need to cup her breast, caressing its importance. But this might shame her. I know this because she spent years of wasted dreams, scared into silence by her scarred emptiness. To make (w)hole she would cover this taut, child-like skin with a roundness meant to delight the eyes. She would undress in the dark, having long given up her gypsy dance in front of the mirror. She would melt into the shadows, locked behind bathroom doors, playing games with her mind, trying not to look.

So often now, I dream of the scar, so uniquely hers, as I remember helping her wash herself. Her trembling, imprisoned muscles unable to function, she wanting to scream in the frustration and agony of it all. It seemed raggedly beautiful to me, as it protested loudly from the regions of her skin. This testament to survival was quickly covered up, she not being comfortable with my naive vision of her body as some form of performance art. I fell in love then, with her weakness and her strength.

We went to specialty shops. The sales clerks flocking like protective matrons out of a health info documentary. They clipped their speech, impersonal being the best defense against weakening constitution. Many accommodating styles, we were told. And, my mother bought all this comfort, this acceptance, readily, hopefully. Later, every time she would wear these clothes, I could feel her eyes question me, and I grew embarrassed at the sight of so much need at once. I wanted to reach around, unclasp, unhook, and set free this lovely, timid woman.

I brought her pamphlets on self confidence. Fierce, passionate words meant to inspire, to replace the false comforts she wore. But, I think I saw her eyes become sad, as she gave up fighting me, and drifted away to a different space.

Waking, I come up from my dream to once again realize that I am now the one-breasted woman. And She before me has gone, leaving me unable to ask for help. She has left, having taken with her the chance for me to explain my sudden understanding, my shifting awareness. I have searched, but can find no beauty in this staple pattern, only an alien, red ugliness. I am unable to look at my one remaining breast properly. Everything seems to lean too heavily to one side. I have long since forgotten how to touch myself. Sometimes in the grey, hidden morning, I dare myself to sneak on a tight T-shirt and go out. Then, I catch a glimpse of myself, my half self, in the mirror and retreat back to turn off the lights.

Tamara Steinborn is completing her Master of Arts in English at the University of Manitoba. Her work focuses on women, sexuality, and the geneology of the body within the text. Her poetry has been published in Prairie Fire.