

Captain Kirk Wasn't a Doll Like That

By Scott Duncan

This was '79, maybe. I was four or five. I was young, I know that, but old enough to know certain things weren't done. It would have been different if I had wanted to, but that wasn't the case. Mom had just put my sister Clara's baby doll in my hands and said, "Play with this."

We were at my grandparents' in LA and it was too barrio for me to play in the front yard, but my aunt and evil cousin Nicki lived next door. At the end of the long drive way was a tiny convenience store where shady kids hung out. Grandma would grab my hand if I waved to them, and told me in Spanish they were street trash. The shady kids looked high, or as I thought in my too young mind to really know what high was, all sweaty. In between the houses, there was a square of yard hidden from the road, the only place I could play on my own.

I sat there in the shade from the roof where there was dirt and a spot for me. When we got ready for the trip back to visit California, Mom said I could bring one toy, and it was between Luke Skywalker and Captain Kirk, but Luke sucked without his X-wing, which I didn't have so it was Captain Kirk, the toy that I fixed the balding painted swirl of plastic hair with brown felt pen all the time. I also hand washed and inspected his uniform. I thought he might have been real and didn't want him to show up and see me with an unkempt plastic version of himself.

So mom put my sister's baby doll in my hands. I said I didn't want to play with it and got a slap. Mom went back to her baby talk like how the lady with the long frizzy hair spoke on Sesame Street. "I want you to be sensitive." I was mad. I knew my sister would be mad too if she caught me with her stuff, the one toy she could bring to play with all summer. I had no interest in baby dolls and it was an insult to Captain Kirk to have him replaced by a baby, even a giant mutant one in relation to his size. I put the doll on the side and said I'd play with it later and Mom pulled my ear. "Play with the goddamn doll now," she gritted. My ear hurt and I didn't want another slap, so I said okay. She left smiling, all high minded, having done some misguided hippy feminist duty by slapping me. I considered how one plays with a baby doll. I had seen my sister do so, but it seemed boring and lame. I bounced the doll up and down in case mom was looking and wondered how long I had to play with it and how long I could keep up pretending to play with it. All of a sudden, the doll disappeared and I got knocked hard on the head.

"Fucking faggot! What the hell are you doing?"

"Mom made me, Grandpa."

Grandpa never said anything and when he did it was either funny or scary. This was scary. I really hoped mom was about to get some of that head knocking when she showed up and he asked her why would she make me play with a doll. She whined she wanted me to grow up to be sensitive. Grandpa muttered, "Aw, fuck," and threw the doll against the wall. Mom cried and went away. I stared at my sister's doll, wondering if I still had to play with it. It was real quiet and I didn't move, didn't touch anything and then Grandpa and Grandma were talking loud in Spanish and mom started talking louder in English. I couldn't run to Grandma, what I normally did. I looked at Captain Kirk with his ready for all adversity knitted brow. I grabbed him and

went in through the other side of the house, where the chili peppers were hung. I slinked to a corner in the living room by the couch where my aunt was reading Grandma's *Inquirers*. She had her lips pressed together in a half smile. "You okay *m'ijo*?" I said nothing and wished I was on another planet or the Enterprise. My sister was about to slam open the front door and yell, "What did you do to my doll," and my evil cousin Nicki would call me a sissy for the rest of the summer and tell her friends that played Marco Polo with us that I wanted to be a girl. But, before any of that, my aunt twisted on the couch and looked over at me. "You know, Scotty, your Captain Spock is a doll, too."