



Escaping to magical dollhouse world

A few months before COVID set in, Life in the Boomer Lane had a client who was holding a big estate sale. The attic was filled with toys. LBL couldn't resist. She bought toys for when the grandchildren would come to visit.

Among the items was a dollhouse, circa 1980, state-of-the-art for the era when Reagan, puffy sleeves, and The Mullet haircut reigned supreme. The dollhouse was plastic, brightly coloured and battery operated. With the advent of COVID-19, the dollhouse sat in LBL's attic, along with all the other toys now no longer used by visiting grandchildren.

On one of LBL's Facetime calls with her three-year-old granddaughter in Charleston, her granddaughter asked if she could see Ne Ne's (aka LBL) toys. She had never asked that before. LBL carried the iPad up to the attic and started a tour of the walk in closet. Her granddaughter immediately cut in when she spotted the dollhouse. "That one! Can I see that?"

LBL pulled the dollhouse out. Her granddaughter wanted to see every part of it. She asked where the people were (There was only a small boy and grandparents). She asked Ne Ne to play dollhouse with her (Tough to do when the only other "people" in the attic were Batman, Superman, and a variety of scary warlike creatures that

delighted LBL's Brooklyn grandsons.)

Over the next couple weeks, the dollhouse was brought downstairs. LBL felt that a dollhouse with only a small boy and grandparents seemed to indicate some kind of tragic backstory, so she ordered a new family and a dog. The new family now meant that the core family had two little boys and four grandparents.

To that, over the next couple weeks, she added a kitchen table and chairs, fridge, sink, stove, a set of pots and pans, a flat screen TV, a second baby, a giant teddy bear, and backpacks for the little boy and girl (Her granddaughter normally goes to daycare, uses a backpack, and so is obsessed with them.) She also added items that had nothing to do with dollhouses: a horse, an alpaca (Don't ask), an elephant (Again, don't ask) and a mouse.

To say that LBL had fun doing this would be an understatement. The dollhouse became more than a way to entertain her granddaughter. It served the same purpose for LBL as dollhouses did for her when she was very little. It gave her a way to exert control in a world that was, more often than not, mysterious and out of her control. She could create whatever family she wanted in whatever environment she wanted, and could have them behave however she wanted them to behave.

Now, LBL is forced to live in a world that is, if not mysterious, then maddening and inexplicable. It is also, like the world of her childhood, out of her control. If, for a very short while each day, she concentrates on the daily antics of the dollhouse family, she can block out the scary antics of those whose endless supply of flawed decisions impact on her life.

For her granddaughter, their daily sessions are magical. She is delighted to have an online playmate who seems to be every bit as excited to play with the dollhouse as she is to watch and make suggestions (Pretend the little girl goes to school. Pretend the mom makes spaghetti for dinner. Pretend the baby takes a nap.) LBL does her own thing, as well. Grandma sometimes sits on top of the house. The baby sleeps on the microwave. The alpaca is at the dinner table or sleeping in Sister's bed. Someone's head is always in the potty. Her granddaughter loves those even more than the routine dollhouse comings and goings. "Do mistakes!" she demands at each session. LBL is only too happy to comply.

Two days ago, her granddaughter asked to see more toys in the attic. She fixated on a castle, from the same client's house. The castle is now sharing the coffee table with the dollhouse. In residence are a new royal



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family and two royal horses. Now Husband didn't say a thing.

The dollhouse family and the Royal Family are now friends. They visit back and forth. The dollhouse Sister and the castle Princess play together. The horses and the alpaca play together. And for an hour each day, LBL and her granddaughter make all the decisions about their tiny world. Then they go back to their real worlds, in which forces greater than them call the shots.

LBL finds herself glancing at the dollhouse throughout the day. Sometimes, she even rearranges things, just as she does with her own house. And, when she reads something about president Trump, a member of the GOP or an unnamed person who wreaks havoc in public against mask-wearing or Black Lives Matter, she comes back to the dollhouse and pretends that one of the dolls is that person. She then sticks their head in the toilet and walks away. It helps.

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