

# The Secret Lives of Puppets

by Sarah Totton

She worries, you see. My mother. I can tell she has something on her mind the way she taps so lightly on my bedroom door, like it's hot with the fires of Hell. I tuck Bobbo under my pillow and pretend to be writing my book report. The book's about the terribly exciting adventures of four women trying to find husbands in nineteenth-century England. Or something like that. Mom peers through the crack in the door. "Darling? Darling, you....Oh—" She falters. I follow her gaze and see that Bobbo's blue running shoe, untied as usual, is sticking out from under my pillow. I am so busted.

Mom sighs. She pretends to pick lint off the lapel of her two-piece ladies' circle suit. "Darling, I do wish you wouldn't...."

I decide to play stupid. "Wouldn't what?" I say. "Mow the lawn? Why? Do you think it's a *man's* job?"

Mom's nostrils get very large when I say that. It's like looking up the muzzle of a double-barreled snotgun. They're pretty expressive, Mom's nostrils, and they never have anything good to say to me.

"Oh, darling!" she says and looks toward heaven for guidance. She doesn't find it there, apparently. At least she leaves me in peace after that.

Once she's gone I take Bobbo out from under the pillow, and he cocks his head at me. His fur is pillied up with age, as *faux* fur will. I do love him so.

"Whaddaya say, Bobbo?" I ask him.

Bobbo says, "I *like* to mow the lawn, Stacey!" And he does, too. He likes to grip the lawnmower handle in his mouth and push it while the blades whirr like airplane propellers. And he likes to roll around in the grass clippings afterward.

So yeah, Mom's got a problem with my puppet. She's always had a problem with my puppet. I'm not sure why.

Here's the deal with puppets. The media flirts with them, but won't go all the way. Teen-agers love them to bits. You can buy puppet accessories at the Do-It-Yourself on Main Street. Loads of people have one, but for some reason, most people won't admit to it.

I got Bobbo on my fifth birthday from another kid, Steven. Steven had his own—Rocco—that he got from his older brother. I don't think many other kids had a puppet at that age. But I loved my Bobbo, the bobble-eyed, floppy-

eared little git.

I played with Bobbo for years, and then one day, Mom caught me and Bobbo polishing the halo on the Christmas angel in the window. Bobbo's mouth is soft felt, and I'll tell you, he could make that halo *shine*.

Funny though, Mom wasn't at all impressed. "Stacey!" she said. "If you do that, you'll get hairy palms."

Which is a silly thing to say really because that's the whole point of having a puppet. Anyway, she took the angel away, and I never saw it again. After that, she took me to church, and the minister there talked about how puppets were the work of Satan, and how people who played with them would go straight to Hell. I didn't play with Bobbo much after that, and at some point I put him in the back of my closet and didn't take him out for, I swear, like three years.

But, you know, I missed him. Hanging out with Bobbo was so much fun. One day while I was looking for an excuse not to do my homework, I heard a voice coming from the back of my closet.

"Psst! Hey, Stacey!" it said. Funny, the voice sounded exactly like the lead singer of Pop Goes the Weasel, and he is just totally *lush*. I dug around in my closet, and it turned out it was Bobbo. So I took him out, and we got reacquainted. And you know, it was like we'd never been apart. We've been fast friends ever since.

But now Mom knows I've got him out again. The next day, I'm in the cafeteria with my best friend, Ted, and I start telling him about it.

"Mom totally disapproves of Bobbo," I tell him.

"It's a mother's job to disapprove," says Ted.

"Do your parents disapprove of Amarantha?" I ask him.

"Jocantha!" says Ted. "Her name's Jocantha."

I know perfectly well what Ted's puppet is called, but he always goes off the deep end when I call her 'Amarantha.' Which is why I try to do it as often as possible. Jocantha isn't as slick as Bobbo, even though she's fancier. She's sequined, with fake pearls for eyes. She's plusher than Bobbo too, but only because Ted hasn't had her for as long as I've had Bobbo.

"I guess she's easier to hide in your bed, being off-white," I say.

"She's not off-white," says Ted. "She's champagne! Geeze! What are you, colorblind?"