

Michelle Robin La

OPEN CLOSED EYES

Flying up in the air, laughing, I leap off my bed onto the toy-covered floor. Crack. Eyes stare out of a split-open head. A baby's face and brown painted-on curls fall away in pieces. It's not even mine. How can I take back a leap? My heart in a knot, I call my mother in to see her broken doll—I've only had it for a few days. She isn't angry, not even sad. Just oh well, things happen. I play with the pieces for a while, round eyes that don't close anymore, before she finally throws it out.

Years later, I'm married and about to have my first child. My mother is remarried and decorating her new home. She shows me a doll's red checkered dress that she's framed in a shadow box. Wide-open eyes in a broken doll head poke out of the corner of my thoughts. Did I break the doll that wore this dress or another? How many did she have? I have pictures from childhood of dolls and animals lined up around me. There are no pictures of my mother with toys. Does she remember my leap? She never said.

Time goes on. My mother visits and my children beg their grandmother for stories about her life. It amuses them that she was a child, the youngest of seven. I overhear a story about a doll she received one Christmas when most of her siblings were too old for toys. "My older sister told me I was spoiled," my mother says. "All she got at that age was a red crayon." My kids laugh with her. It's beyond belief that someone would get only one crayon for Christmas. I've never heard this story before.

After my mother's visit, eyes peek out at me from a doll in a red checkered dress. The gift a youngest child opened at Christmas that represented everything her older siblings never had. Crushed in a moment of play. No need to burden a child. Just oh well, things happen. A leap into my mother's love.