

chapter ONE

The Doll

I remembered Jims description of the woman who made her.

How could a woman like that make a beautiful doll?

My name is Stephen Amony and I am a doctor. I live and work in London, and I have a house by the river Thames. Everything in this story happened because of a doll. It is a strange story, but true.

It began on an October day three years ago...

I can remember it clearly. The early morning sun was shining on the river when I left my house. I went to buy a copy of The Times, as usual.

There was a flower shop on the corner of the road where I lived. I could see the brightly-coloured flowers as I reached the corner. I turned into Abbey Lane and continued walking. I was enjoying the warm October sun.

After a few minutes, I arrived at the newspaper shop. Suddenly, I remembered that it was a niece's birthday the next week. So I stopped and looked in the shop window.

There were games and toys, paper and pens, books and sweets in the window.

'Most of it has been in that window for years,' I thought to myself.

I almost decided that there was nothing in the window for my niece. Then I saw a doll.

She was half-hidden in the corner of the window. She was made of cloth and she had a painted face. The face was special. It had a lovely gentle look, but sad eyes.

Suddenly I felt sorry for her, sitting in that crowded window. I know that this sounds strange. But I decided to go inside and to look at her more closely.

The shop was owned by a man named Jim Carter.

'Good morning, Doctor Amony!' he said brightly, when I walked in. 'Do you want The Times, as usual?'

'Yes, please, Jim,' I replied. 'And I need a present for a little girl. It's her birthday next week.'

'Is it?' said Jim.

'Yes,' I said. 'I was looking at that cloth doll in your window.'

'Oh?' said Jim.

'The one that's half-hidden in the corner,' I said.

Jim looked surprised. 'That doll?' he said. 'She's a little unusual.'

'Can I see her?' I said.

'She's also very expensive,' he said.

He took the doll from the window and gave her to me - and I nearly dropped her in surprise. She was beautifully made - she seemed almost alive! Her dress and other clothes were hand-made, not made by a machine. And her face was hand-painted - I could see it clearly now.

'She's lovely!' I thought. 'She was made with a lot of love.'

I could see this love in the doll's face.

I put her down gently. 'How much do you want for her, Jim?' I asked. 'Twelve pounds, Doctor Amony,' he answered. He saw the surprise in my face and continued, 'She's expensive. I did say that, didn't I?'

'You did,' I agreed.

'Dolls like this cost as much as twenty pounds in the centre of London,' said Jim. 'But I'll tell you what I'll do, doctor. I'll sell her to you for eleven pounds.'

'Who makes them?' I asked. 'I'd like to know something about the person who can make beautiful dolls like this.'

'The woman has lived in Hardley Street for some years now,' said Jim. 'She sometimes comes into my shop and she brings me the dolls.'

'What's her name?' I asked.

'I'm not sure,' Jim answered. 'It's something like "Callamy".'

'What's she like?' I said.

'She's a tall woman with red hair, and she wears very expensive coats and hats,' replied Jim. 'But she's got a very serious face. She never says very much when she comes into the shop. I'm honestly always glad when she leaves.' He stopped for a minute and then said, 'And I've never seen her smile.'

I couldn't understand this. How could a woman like that make dolls as beautiful as these?

'I'll buy the doll,' I said at last.

Eleven pounds seemed a lot of money for a doll. As I counted out the pound notes, I felt a little silly. Yes, the doll was a present. But I knew the real reason for buying her - I didn't want to leave her in that shop window.

I took the doll home and put her in my small bedroom. She seemed to fill the room with her loveliness. I carefully put her into a box. Then I covered the box with brown paper. Later, in the afternoon, I went to the post office and posted it to my niece.

In the following days, I could not stop thinking about the doll, or about the gentle face and the sad eyes. I remembered Jim's description of the woman who made her. How could a woman like that make a beautiful doll? It was difficult to believe.

So who was she? I wanted to know, but the weather got cold and wet. Children in the area became ill, and I was suddenly very busy.

I soon forgot about the woman - and the doll.

One day, a few weeks later, my telephone rang. A woman's voice said, 'Is that Doctor Amony?'

'Yes, it is,' I said.

'Do you visit people who can pay for your visit?' the woman asked.

'Yes, sometimes,' I replied.

'How much does it cost?' she asked.

The voice sounded unpleasant. The woman seemed to think that money was more important than the sick person.

A visit will cost five pounds,' I replied.

'Oh,' she said.

'But if you really can't pay, then I don't ask for the money,' I said.

'That's all right,' she said. 'I can pay five pounds.'

'What's your name?' I asked.

'Rose Callamit,' she answered. 'I live in the house next to the cake shop in Hardley Street. My rooms are on the second floor.'

'I'll be there soon,' I told her.

I arrived at the house next to the cake shop in Hardley Street ten minutes later, and went up the stairs. They were narrow, dirty, and badly lit.

As I reached the top of the stairs, a door opened.

'Doctor Amony?' said the unpleasant voice.

'Yes,' I said.

'Please come in,' she said. 'I'm Rose Callamit.'

She was a tall woman, between forty-five and fifty years old. She had red hair, dark eyes and a bright shiny-red mouth.

We went into the front room. It was a cold, ugly room, and the furniture was cheap and badly made. On the cupboard in the corner were a lot of small glass bottles.

Then I saw the dolls.

They were hanging from the walls and were thrown carelessly across the bed. Each doll was different, but each one was as beautiful as my doll. It seemed impossible that this rough, unpleasant woman could make them.

Rose Callamit looked closely at me. 'You're a very young doctor,' she said.

'I'm older than I look,' I said coldly. 'You think that I'm too young. Shall I go away again?'

She laughed at me. 'You don't need to be angry, doctor!' she said. 'You're very good-looking for a doctor.'

'And I'm a very busy doctor,' I said. 'Are you the person who's ill?'

'No, it's my niece,' she replied. 'She's in the back room. I'll take you to her.'

Before we went in, I had to know about the dolls.

'Do you make these dolls?' I asked.

'Yes,' she replied. 'Why?'

I felt very sad. 'I bought one for someone's birthday,' I said quietly.

She laughed. 'And I'm sure that you paid a lot of money for it,' she said.

She took me to a smaller room at the back and started to open the door.

'Mary, it's the doctor!' she shouted.

Then she pushed the door open wider to let me in.

'Don't be surprised when you see her, doctor,' she said loudly. 'Her left leg is twisted!'

The girl, Mary, was sitting in a chair by the window. She heard the woman's words. A look of unhappiness crossed her pale face, and there was pain in her large dark eyes.

I was angry at the red-haired woman. The words were unnecessary. She wanted to hurt the girl.

Mary was not more than twenty-five years old. But I could see immediately that she was very ill. I looked again into those dark eyes.

'Something inside her is dying,' I thought.

After that first visit I always remembered the sweetness in her sad face, her poor, thin body and her dry, unhealthy hair. But something filled me with happiness. Around her were three small tables - and on them were all the necessary things to make the dolls! Brightly-coloured paints, and pieces of cloth of many different colours and shapes.

I soon understood that her twisted leg was not the reason for her illness. I noticed the way that she sat. If I was right, I could make that leg straight. I was almost sure that I was right.

'Can you walk, Mary?' I asked after a minute.

She looked at me, then looked away. 'Yes,' she answered, quietly.

Please walk to me,' I said, gently

'Oh, don't,' she said. 'Don't ask me that.'

I didn't want her to suffer. But I had to be sure that I was right.

'I'm sorry, Mary,' I said. 'Please try and walk. It's important.'

She got up from her chair very carefully and moved slowly towards me. I looked closely at her left leg. Yes, I was right!

"That's good,' I said. I smiled at her. I wanted to show her that I was pleased.

I held out my hands to help her. She looked up. Again, I saw the pain and hopelessness in her face. She seemed to be crying out silently to me for help. She lifted her hands towards mine - and then they fell back to her sides.

'How long have you been like this, Mary?' I asked.

Rose Callamit answered for the girl. 'Oh, Mary's had that twisted leg for nearly ten years now,' she said. 'But I asked you to come for a different reason. She's ill. I want to know what's wrong with her.'

'Oh, yes, she's ill,' I thought. 'Perhaps she's dying. I knew that immediately.'

I wanted Rose Callamit to leave the room, but she didn't. She laughed and said, 'I'm staying here, Doctor Amony. You look at Mary. Then you can tell me what the problem is.'

When I finished my examination of Mary, I went with Rose into the front room.

'It's possible to make her leg straight,' I said. 'Did you know that? With help, she could walk in-'

'Stop!' she shouted loudly. I jumped. 'That's enough! You must never say anything about that to her. The best doctors cannot help her. No stupid young man is going to give her hope. If you ever do, you won't come here again.'

I want to know what's wrong with her. She can't eat or sleep and she isn't really working. Now, tell me. What did you learn from your examination of her?'

'I don't know what's wrong with her yet,' I replied. 'But something is slowly destroying her, I know that. I shall want to see her again, soon. I'm going to give her some medicine - it will make her feel stronger. Then I'll call again in a few days.'

'Don't say anything about making her leg straight,' she said. 'Do you understand? If you do, I'll get another doctor.'

'All right,' I said. I wanted to be able to visit Mary again, and I thought to myself, 'Perhaps, when Mary's feeling better, I can talk to her about her leg.'

I was ready to leave. I picked up my bag.

'These dolls,' I said.

'Yes?' she said.

'I thought that you made them,' I said.

'I do,' she said, in her unpleasant way. 'I draw them. Mary makes them. It stops her thinking about her leg. I don't want her to think about the fact that she'll never marry. She'll never have children.'

I walked out into the bright October sunshine. I knew that Rose Callamit was lying. I now knew the sweet person who made those special dolls.

I was happy about this, but I was also worried about Mary. I had to discover what was wrong with her. I had to know before she died.

chapter TWO

The Doll

'Without Mary and the dolls, the money will end.' But what was killing Mary? I still did not know.

I discovered more about Mary during my next few visits. Her name was Mary Nolan. When she was fifteen years old, she was in a bad car crash. Her mother and father were killed and Mary was very badly hurt. The car crash was the reason for her twisted leg.

Rose Callamit offered to look after Mary. The law finally agreed because there was no other person to look after the young girl. Rose always thought that Mary's father was a rich man. Then she learned that there was only a small amount of money. After that she was unkind to Mary. She made her very unhappy.

Mary was never able to forget her leg. Her aunt seemed to say: 'No man will love you. You will never get married and have children. No man wants a wife with a twisted leg.'

The years passed, and Mary began to believe her aunt. She stayed with her. She did what her aunt wanted her to do. She could see no reason to leave her aunt. So she lived an unhappy life, without hope.

Then Mary started to make the dolls.

Rose Callamit saw how lovely the dolls were. She soon realized that she could sell them for a lot of money. She was right. After she sold a few, she decided. Mary must work on them every day of the week, from morning until night.

Rose did not love Mary, but the girl produced hundreds of dolls over the years. Rose was happy to take the money for them. But now Mary was ill and Rose immediately said to herself, 'Without Mary and the dolls, the money will end.'

But what was killing Mary? I still did not know.

I could see that she was afraid of her aunt. But it wasn't that. And I couldn't ask Mary, because her aunt was always with us. Mary found it difficult to say anything to me with Rose in the room.

I did not tell Mary that perhaps I could make her leg straight. It was more important to discover why she didn't want to continue living.

I told Mary to stop working on the dolls, and I brought her some books and some chocolates. For ten days she seemed to get better.

During my next visit, she smiled at me for the first time.

'That's better!' I said. I was very pleased to see her happy face. 'You must leave the dolls alone for another ten days. I don't want you to work. I want you to rest, sleep and read. Then we'll see.'

But I could see that Rose was unhappy at these words.

When I called again, she was waiting for me in her room.

'You don't need to come any more, Doctor Amony,' she said, coldly.

'But Mary must not-' I started to say.

'Mary is much better now,' she said quickly. 'Goodbye, doctor.'

My eyes went to the box in the corner of the room.

There were three new dolls lying on top of it.

Their faces were as lovely as ever, but they had the look of death on them.

Suddenly I was frightened for Mary. I knew that Rose Callamit was lying. I wanted to push this woman out of the way and crash through the door and see Mary. But I was a doctor. When doctors are told to leave, they have to go.

I still did not know what Mary's problem was. But I guessed that Rose was asking another doctor to call.

So, sadly, I left. But I couldn't forget Mary. I continued to worry about her in the days that followed.

Not long after this I became ill. It wasn't much at first. But as the days passed it seemed to get worse. I visited a doctor friend.

'I can find nothing wrong with your body,' he said. 'Perhaps you work too hard.'

But I knew that this wasn't the reason.

I continued to get worse. I didn't want to eat and I lost weight. I began to look thin and pale. I felt tired, but I didn't sleep well at night. I sometimes dreamed that I saw Mary. She was calling to me for help, while Rose Callamit was holding her in her ugly arms.

I thought about Mary all the time. 'I wasn't able to help her,' I thought.

'She wanted me to help her and I did nothing.'

One night I couldn't sleep at all. I walked up and down my room, thinking about myself and my illness. It seemed that I was suffering from the same illness as Mary.

Suddenly I knew what was wrong. I was in love with Mary Nolan! And because I couldn't look after her, I felt ill and unhappy.

'I know why Mary's dying!' I thought. 'She's dying because nobody loves her. Nobody in the world is giving her hope for the future. Her mother and father are dead. Her aunt only keeps her because she makes money from Mary's dolls. Mary has no friends and she feels ugly because of her leg. Her life is empty - except for the dolls.'

'I have to see her! I have to speak to her for a few minutes, alone - or she'll be lost to me forever!'

I thought about this all through the night, and the next morning I telephoned Jim Carter at his shop.

'This is Doctor Amony, Jim,' I said. 'Will you help me?'

'I'll do what I can for you, doctor,' Jim said. 'You saved my son's life last year, and I'll never forget that. How can I help you?'

'Thanks, Jim,' I said. 'Do you remember Mrs Rose Callamit, the doll woman?'

'Yes, of course,' said Jim.

'When she comes into your shop again, I want you to telephone me. Then have a long conversation with her,' I said. 'I need twenty minutes. All right?'

'All right,' said Jim.

'Good,' I said. 'Thanks, Jim. I'll remember this for the rest of my life.'

I was worried about a telephone call while I was out. So each evening I put my head round the door of his shop. But he just shook his head. There was no news.

Then one day, at five o'clock in the afternoon, the telephone rang. It was Jim.

He just said, 'She's here.'

I ran to the house where Mary lived. When I got there, I ran up the stairs. Luckily, the door was not locked, and I hurried through into Mary's room.

She looked so thin now, and very ill. She still had the paints and pieces of cloth around her.

I thought, 'She wants to make one more doll before she dies.'

She looked up when I came into the room. Her eyes opened wide in surprise when she saw me. She thought that it was Rose.

She said my name. But she didn't call me 'Doctor Amony' - she called me 'Stephen'.

'Mary!' I cried. 'I've come to help you. I know what's making you ill.'

'Does it matter now?' she said, quietly.

'There's still time, Mary,' I said. 'I know your secret. I know how I can make you well. But you must listen to me while I tell you.'

She just closed her eyes and said, quietly, 'No. Don't say anything, please. Leave me. I don't want to know. The end is near now.'

I sat down and held her hand.

'Mary, please listen to me,' I said gently. 'When children are growing up, they receive love from their family. Then, when they're older, they can give that love to other people. They give love, and at the same time they receive kindness, happiness and hope. Then they have more love that they can give. But you've given your love, Mary, and you've received nothing. Now you have no love that you can give.'

I was not sure that she could still hear me. But I wanted her to live so much.

I had to continue.

'It was your aunt,' I said. 'She took away all your hopes for love and happiness. And later,' I continued, 'she did a worse thing. She took away your children.'

I looked at Mary. 'Have I killed her?' I thought. 'The one person who loves her?'

Then I felt her small hand move in mine and her eyes slowly opened. She seemed almost glad to hear these words. This gave me hope.

I talked gently. I tried very hard, because I wanted her to understand.

'Those dolls were your children, Mary,' I said. 'You thought that you couldn't be a mother. So you made those beautiful dolls. Into each one you put some of your love. You made them gently and carefully, and you loved them like your own children.'

'Then your aunt took each one away and she gave you nothing. You continued to use all your love. People can die when they have no love left inside them, Mary.'

I finished speaking and she moved. She seemed to understand what I was saying.

'But you won't die, Mary,' I cried, 'because I love you! Do you hear me? I love you and I can't live without you.'

'Love me?' she said quietly. 'But I have a twisted leg. How can you love me?'

'That doesn't matter to me, Mary. I still love you,' I said, gently. 'But Rose lied to you. I can make your leg straight. In a year you'll walk like every other girl.'

I saw tears of happiness in her eyes. She smiled and put her arms out to me.

I took her up in my arms and she held me. I put my coat round her to keep her warm. Then I carried her across the room.

Suddenly we heard the front door shut and the sound of running footsteps. Then Mary's door crashed open as an angry Rose Callamit came into the room.

Mary started to shake with fear. She hid her face in my neck.

But Rose was too late. She could do nothing now, and she knew it. She did not speak a word when I walked past her. I held Mary close to me. I went out of her front door, down the stairs and into the street.

Outside, the sun shone and the sky was blue. Children played happily and noisily in the street as I carried Mary home.

That was three years ago.

As I write this, Mary is playing with our son. Our second child will arrive in a few weeks.

Mary doesn't make the dolls now. She doesn't need to make them. But I silently thank the day when I first fell in love with the beautiful doll in Jim Carter's shop window.

- THE END -

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