

WARMER

By

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FADE IN:

INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - BATHROOM - DAY

Water flows from a faucet, filling a bath.

CHUCK DUNKER, mid 40s, thin arms sprout from his short sleeve shirt, a faded ink-stain on the chest pocket.

He squints at the TOY DOLL in his grasp --

This is HEIDI DOLL, 12 inches of cosmopolitan perfection, replete with miniature designer outfit, pearly white smile and oversize eyes.

Chuck CLICKS a button on the back of Heidi's head.

HEIDI DOLL
(bubbly female voice)
Hi! I'm Heidi, do you wanna play
hide and seek with me?

Heidi's head swivels slowly side-to-side, searching...

Chuck blinks, unsure.

He checks the door -- the bolt locked in place.

Heidi, still searching... Chuck tilts a tube of lube, coats her mop of perfect blonde 'hair'.

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)
Here I come, ready or not!

Chuck's underpants drop to his ankles.

INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

A closed bathroom door. Sound of RUNNING water...

CHUCK (O.S.)
(low)
Oh...shit.

INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - MAGGIE'S BEDROOM - DAY

MAGGIE, 7, cradles a headless Heidi. She's crestfallen.

MAGGIE

Mommy!

INT. CHUCK'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - DAY

Chuck sits at the head of a table, rigid, palms flat before him, a thousand yard stare.

LIZ DUNKER, mid 40s, flustered, enters with the decapitated Heidi in hand and a distressed Maggie in tow.

LIZ

I don't know, honey, it must have fallen off.

MAGGIE

I wanted to show it to Clara!

LIZ

Go look again, it can't have gone far.

Maggie races from the room.

LIZ

(to Chuck)

It's a prototype, right? They break all the time?

Chuck doesn't seem to hear her.

A flicker of panic sweeps his face as she waggles Heidi's headless torso in front of him.

LIZ

Chuck?

Liz sets Heidi on the table.

LIZ

It's just a head.

CHUCK

Nine months of R and D went into that head. I'm in line for a promotion because of it.

LIZ

Is she expecting you to bring it to dinner?

CHUCK
 She's expecting it to stay
 attached.

LIZ
 We could cancel? I'm sure the CEO
 of Morton's Toys gets cancelled on
 all the time.

CHUCK
 (not listening)
 It's a cast alloy weld, it
 shouldn't have--

He draws a troubled breath.

LIZ
 Have one of your minions fix the
 design. You should get ready. I'll
 see if I can track down the
 business end of this gal' before
 the sitter gets here.

She gives him a consoling hair ruffle and marches away.

LIZ
 Always the last place you look.

INT. ELAINE'S HOUSE - DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Seated at a dining table is ELAINE MORTON, late 40s,
 sharp-eyed, no nonsense. Already several drinks deep.

ELAINE
 --I find it best to just leave the
 cucumber out, it overpowers
 everything else. Don't you find?

Chuck and Liz smile politely from across the table. They're
 dressed smart, casual.

LIZ
 A cucumber does tend to focus a
 salad's flavour.

SKIP (O.S.)
 Refill?

SKIP MORTON, early 50s, heavy-set, enters with two beers. He
 cracks one for Chuck, places it on the table and eases into
 a chair beside Elaine.

ELAINE

Well, like I said before I'm glad we could finally have you over. I realise I've been working you hard lately.

CHUCK

Christmas came around quick.

ELAINE

Santa works one day a year, we take care the other three-hundred sixty-four.

Elaine raises a glass.

They all join in the toast.

ELAINE

To Hide and Seek Heidi.

Chuck smiles, abashed.

ELAINE

I thought dolls went the way of the spinning top. Chuck, I was wrong.

CHUCK

Please, the board lost faith in the project with the initial Spanish speaking line. It was only your support that kept the design alive.

Elaine waves him off with a smile.

ELAINE

We'll take the market one language at a time.

FOOTSTEPS from the hall. PATTY, 6, charges into the room in excitement. She races to Skip, hugs his side.

ELAINE

Patty, are you gonna say hi to our guests?

Patty gives Chuck and Liz a shy smile before thrusting a doll at Skip.

PATTY

Daddy, make it work!

Chuck stretches for a breadstick, freezes, fixes on the doll. It's an ABBY DOLL, Heidi's brunette counterpart.

Elaine looks to Chuck, blushes.

ELAINE

I have Nicholson sneak me out a
prototype every now and again, hope
you don't mind..?

It's a moment before Chuck can find the words.

CHUCK

You're the boss, right?

ELAINE

Good answer.

Skip searches out the 'on' switch.

CHUCK

They don't really work on their
own, more as a pair, a duo.

SKIP

Tell that to the six year old.

He thumbs the switch, CLICK!

ABBY DOLL

(playful female voice)

Hi! I'm Abby, wanna play hide and
seek with me?

Abby's head WHIRS to life. Her big doe-eyes sweep the room.

Chuck chews on his bread-stick. He watches the doll, wary.

ABBY DOLL

Ready or not, here I come!

The head swivels to rest on Chuck. He tenses, coughs as a
morsel catches in his throat.

SKIP

A little funion dip there, Chuck?

Chuck smiles, takes a bowl of dip from Skip.

Patty flits around the room with Abby Doll. Wherever she
goes Abby's head turns to focus on Chuck.

He watches nervously, doing his best to ignore it as the
others talk...

ELAINE (O.S.)
Liz, I understand you were born in
Cleveland?

LIZ (O.S.)
We moved away when I was nine.

ELAINE (O.S.)
Skip was born in Middleburg, not
that you'd ever guess.

...Chuck glances around to see if anyone else has noticed.

He relaxes as Patty moves towards the hallway.

LIZ
No way? Chuck did you know that?

ABBY DOLL
Hey, Heidi, am I warm or am I cold?

MUFFLED GIGGLE.

It's not Abby's.

Chuck tightens.

The others look up from their conversation. Elaine tilts her
head, what was that?

ABBY DOLL
I can hear you! Lets go over here!

MUFFLED GIGGLE.

ELAINE
Well that's the damnedest.

They watch Patty stalk the room, following Abby's lead.

ELAINE
Thought they only worked in pairs?

Chuck shrugs. Sweat beads on his forehead.

CHUCK
Likely a minor glitch in the
software. We've still some data to
run before the launch--

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)
(muffled)
You're getting warmer!

Patty closes in on Chuck. He reaches for the bread-sticks, grasping for something, anything to divert attention.

CHUCK

So, Elaine, what else would you avoid putting into a salad? This dip is fantastic.

ELAINE

Well--

ABBY DOLL

Gimme a clue, Heidi!

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)

(muffled)

I'm in a secret place.

Awkward glances in Chuck's direction, trying to place the source of the second voice.

ABBY DOLL

Describe it to me!

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)

(muffled)

It's very dark.

SKIP

Fennel can be obtrusive...

CHUCK

Fennel..?

Patty stands between Chuck and Liz. She waves the doll around like a metal detecting wand, the head constantly correcting to stick with Chuck.

ELAINE

(amused)

Nicholson, that son of a--

Elaine glances around at the others, impressed.

ELAINE

Did you plan this? This is the concept, right here. Look at this, kids love this.

Patty ducks under the table.

SKIP
Honey, we have guests.

Patty stays hidden. Just Chuck's reaction. Awkwardly gnawing on his bread-stick...

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)
(muffled)
Getting colder!

SKIP
Patty, it's past bedtime.

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)
(muffled)
Getting warmer!

ELAINE
Let's see the thing, Chuck. That child's relentless, you've no idea.

Chuck looks to Elaine, mouth open, imploring. The look of a man with company property lodged in his anus.

CHUCK
(whispered)
I...can't.

Skip's eyes narrow slightly.

Liz shrinks into herself.

HEIDI DOLL (O.S.)
(muffled)
Looking hot Abby!

ABBY DOLL (O.S.)
I found you!

PATTY (O.S.)
Sir, is Heidi in your pocket?

GIGGLES followed by MUFFLED notes of SHE'LL BE COMING ROUND THE MOUNTAIN pipe out in victory.

Elaine gently takes the doll from Patty. CLICKS it off and places it on the table.

The SONG continues...

Skip ducks a frosty look from Elaine, avoiding her eye. She stands, holds out a hand to Patty.

ELAINE

Time for bed, sweetie.

Patty rounds the table to Elaine. She looks back at chuck with a frown -- a child scorned.

Skip thumbs his beer.

Chuck and Liz stare straight ahead, not knowing where to look as the MUSIC plays out...

EXT. ELAINE'S HOUSE - PORCH - NIGHT

Chuck grips the rail. Coiled with humiliation and internal discomfort.

He winces as the door opens behind him. Doesn't turn to see who it is.

TSST! Skip sets an open beer on the rail, an offering.

Chuck stares at the beer, wary.

Skip sips his own beer, leans against the rail. They gaze out into the night. No eye contact between them.

SKIP

I know a guy...doctor. Very
discreet. Surprisingly busy...

Chuck looks up, is this a put-on?

Skip stiffens. Gives his own backside a healthy SMACK.

JUAN DOLL(O.S.)

(muffled)

Ola amigo, donde estoy?

MUFFLED strains of LA CUCARACHA drift into the night...

FADE OUT