

Chris Drangle

ANIMATION

Howard Day worked at the Disney Store. The ink had barely dried on his Bachelor of Fine Arts in Illustration and he thought that being able to list company experience on his resume might strengthen his application to the Animation Studios in Burbank. *The Lion King* had been in theaters for two weeks and he had seen it three times. He liked it, though it was no *Little Mermaid*. The store carried stuffed animals in a variety of sizes, the largest being floor-display models that were technically for sale but which no one ever bought. They had a three-foot-tall Simba that cost two hundred dollars, a six-foot-long Rajah that cost three. Though never purchased, they were popular with younger shoppers who liked to sit, lie, hug, stomp, jump, roll, and chew on them. This treatment inevitably left damage, and store policy held that a sufficiently damaged extra-large plush doll had to be removed from the front of the house and disposed of in the back room, which was actually a concrete hallway that linked all the stores on the west side of the third floor of the mall. This disposal policy was intended to prevent employees from acquiring and selling the merchandise themselves, which could lead to improper profiting and a dilution of brand quality. Retail staff was instructed to take the tarnished item to the garbage receptacle in the back hallway and use a box cutter to finish the job begun by unattended children.

It was not a task he looked forward to but Howard needed a strong recommendation from his manager, so, on the first day it was required of him, he carried a gigantic Baloo into the hallway and leaned it against the cinder-block wall. He extended the blade from his box cutter and made an experimental incision on the arm. After a few more strokes, his reticence faded, and he felt the intuitive pleasure of destruction. He hummed "The Bare Necessities" and slashed like a furious painter. Down the hall, another back door opened to emit a Payless employee and her young son, who burst into tears on seeing the cotton that had exploded out from the lacerations on the bear. The shoe saleswoman, knowing the policy of her neighbor store, had thought to rescue the toy before it was entirely destroyed and figured that bringing her child would increase the chance of an exception being made, but

this particular timing resulted in wails from the child that raised the hair on Howard's neck. He was so embarrassed and ashamed that he decided the policy was right and the woman and her son were stupid. But at home that evening he avoided the gaze of a Mickey Mouse doll in a Santa Claus outfit that sat on his bookcase. It had been given to him when he was an infant, and as a preschooler, he had prayed ardently for God to bring it to life so that it could be his brother. He felt its eyes on him even after he turned it to face the wall, and he burned his dinner and slept fitfully. In the morning he moved the doll to a shelf in the closet, apologizing out loud to no one in particular as he reclosed the door.