

CutBank

Volume 1
Issue 24 *CutBank* 24

Article 39

Spring 1985

Let's Pretend

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Recommended Citation

Seiferle, Rebecca (1985) "Let's Pretend," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 24 , Article 39.

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Let's Pretend

In her daily games
I am always the bad guy, the wicked witch, the ogre,
the one who hunts her down.
Against me her magic is useless.
She is practising how to defeat death,
how to recognize horror when it comes
like the old woman who crawled into a car
at a convenience market and wasn't an old woman at all
but a young man disguised in thrift store clothes,
his right hand shading an axe.
I worry too much. I believe the statistics.
When I read that one of every 4 girls
and one of every 10 boys will be assaulted
before 14 I feel a disproportionate terror.
The children were always right, knowing
how an old man with a toothsome smile might wish
to devour them, to lick them up like sweet candy,
as if the flesh of children were a gingerbread house.
Go right inside.
Don't say a word.
She admonishes a doll she tucks into a pillow.
Speech gives away her hiding place. She is cultivating
silence.
You should not take the bread of the children
and feed it to dogs but in this century
it is the children who are eaten, ashes
raining on Bavarian towns, clouds for good Christian people.
Sometimes when she realizes her power of escape
and not the threat is the game, she shakes with fury.
grinding her knuckles together,
glaring tigers at me. She runs down the hill
and sulks in the sagebrush and hides her face
in the ruff of her dog and when I see how far she
has gone from the house and remember the two rattlesnakes
we killed last summer and the tarantulas inching along

the path to the animal pens and the black widows
that go hunting at night
I call to her. Be Careful Watch out Pay Attention
to where you are Going
But she cries back
what
what
I can't hear you
Already out of range.