The living doll.

Lisa opened her eyes and smiled. The sweet smell of blueberry pancakes… It was Christmas! She quickly left the warmth of her bed and ran down the stairs. “Hey mom, hey Jimmy, merry Christmas!” she said, ignoring the pancakes for a moment and running towards the big, shining tree which was standing in the middle of the living room. “Good morning, honey. Oh, dear, can’t you wait until breakfast’s over to open your present?” complained her mom. It was too late. “Oh mom, thanks! Thank you, thank you, thank you, I love it!”. “You’re welcome, honey. It’s been a tough year for everyone, with dad being away in Germany and everything.” “What’s that? Oh mom, I told you I wanted a television! Tim’s dad bought him one!” said 10-year-old Jimmy, holding in one hand his present, the new toy gun Dangerous Colt 44, and trying to reach Lisa’s present with the other. “It’s a ventriloquist doll! Don’t touch it!” said Lisa to her brother, looking at the silent, motionless, unexpressive dark-haired doll, who was elegantly dressed with its little red bow tie and white gloves. “His name’s Billy”, declared Lisa, smiling.

“Ok, are you ready?”. Lisa did not feel ready, but she tried to stay calm. It was her first time performing with Billy in public (except for mom and Jimmy), even if it was just for a dozen of Jimmy’s classmates. “Lisa, it’s my birthday, come out, we want to see the show”, screamed Jimmy. She took a deep breath, grabbed Billy and walked into the living room. “Hi kids, I’m Lisa, and this is my friend Billy. Say hi, Billy!” she said, putting her hand behind Billy’s back, so that she could move his face and arms. “Hi everyone!” said Billy, with a raspy, low voice, moving his hand to say “Hello”. “So, Billy, how have you been? Do you have any new joke to tell us?” asked Lisa, coming back to her normal voice. “Well, yes I have. Here it is: -If there’s a room full of children and a puppy named Billy, what’s gonna happen then?-”, asked the puppet, his voice becoming slightly disturbing. Some of the children started to look around, nervously. “He will get a teeny tiny knife from the kitchen and start to cut their teeny tiny throats, and blood will splatter all oooover the walls! It’s gonna be a blooooood bath!” said Billy with a horrific laugh, his voice now terrifyingly acute. “Lisa! Stop it! What’s wrong with you?”. Lisa heard her mom’s words, covered by the crying of the children, but she was too horrified to react. Billy stopped laughing, turned his head and looked at her in the eyes. His eyes were no more still and dead. His eyes looked tremendously real and bloodshot.

“Yes, it’s been tough, but I hope things will get better. Lisa, especially, has gone through a difficult patch, but how can we blame her? Her dad is at the front against those terrible Nazis… He said he’ll probably come back within six months, but you never know…”. Lisa hated it when her mom was speaking about her with others, like if she weren’t actually there. “Yes, of course we gave that stupid doll away just right after that birthday party, it was not healthy for Lisa having it there. Oh, it’s starting!” said Lisa’s mom to her friend, turning her head towards the stage. Lisa was not in the mood for the circus that day, but her mom forced her to go. Now she never wanted her to be alone. “Welcome, boys and girls, mesdames e messieurs, to the Wanderlust Circus! Are you ready to have some fun?” screamed a fat, smiley, colorful clown, while the crowd was applauding: “Our first performer tonight is an international acclaimed, spectacular, unbelievable artist! Let me introduce you, Johnny, the living doll!”. And there he was. A wooden figure with a red bow tie and white gloves. Lisa hold her breath, her eyes wide open with terror. Then a low, fearful, raspy voice: “Hi everyone! I am Johnny and I have a little joke I wanna tell you…”